



**Boris von Haken.** *Der "Reichsdramaturg": Rainer Schloesser und die Musiktheater-Politik in der NS-Zeit.* Hamburg: von Bockel Verlag, 2007. 234 pp. EUR 35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-932696-64-0.

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## Music, Bureaucratically Speaking

Von Haken's monograph aims at the "institutional history" of the office of *Reichsdramaturg* (dramaturgy) that Rainer Schloesser held in the Third Reich's Ministry of Propaganda and People's Enlightenment (p. 8). In nine chapters, Von Haken chronicles how, in Schloesser's hand, this office struggled to become an executive arm of policymaking in Third Reich culture.

Von Haken favors a more traditional focus on the higher levels of totalitarian policymaking and enforcement rather than the many "subsystems of the NS regime" favored by investigations of recent decades (p. 10). Recognizing well that these higher levels often worked in improvised and even conspiratorial ways to give National Socialism its trademark "system of lacking a system" (p. 11), Von Haken documents their hand at play in even trivial matters on local levels. Diligently researched, the study reconstructs numerous individual instances of Schloesser's interventions in playbill programming, the office's main area of influence. Von Haken describes Schloesser's leadership style as reliant on internalized self-leadership (i.e., self censorship) rather than as a military-type chain of command.

In principle, the focus is well taken, as it may show both the individual signature a person can add to an office and the individual's insignificance in the larger scheme of things even when invested with an upper-hierarchy office. On the other hand, in following the archival record of Schloesser's office faithfully, the text at times becomes frustrating, dull, and even incoherent. For example, records turn out to be incomplete (as duly noted by Von Haken), the matter at hand seems trivial, or, due to administrative red tape, remained unresolved despite lengthy follow-ups and exchanges between the involved parties.

Incidentally, Von Haken's claim that reconstructing the history of Schloesser's office is essential to understanding musical theater in the Third Reich (p. 10) is con-

tradicted by the evidence itself. Repeatedly, and justifiably so, Von Haken's account loses sight of Schloesser entirely where other individuals pursued their own plights. For instance, we learn about Roland Freisler, infamous president of the People's Court, intervening with German stages trying to enforce an adequate representation of the legal profession, which for centuries had been stock inventory for satirical abuse (pp. 35-37).

More generally, power struggles between party leaders or local and state agencies were intertwined with cultural trends and their concomitant social dynamics that went beyond questions of administration and bureaucracy. As such struggles often expressed themselves in questions of taste, the more interesting sections in Von Haken's book touch on the culture wars of Third Reich Germany. For instance, Schloesser declared Mozart operas to be "historically important," enough as to make the participation of Jewish librettists therein "irrelevant" (p. 99). On a similar note, Schloesser's office rejected attempts at a more propagandistic music culture (e.g., storm troopers staging *Führer* operas) for being both politically inappropriate and musically unsatisfactory. At the same time, popular sentiments might trump bourgeois values and NS ideology alike. Operettas written by "non-Aryan elements," and hence considered "poisonous" for German audiences, might be permitted because they were popular with the audiences and hence financially viable. Julius Streicher, notorious "leader of the anti-Semitic movement," even intervened with the self-serving argument that operetta music was originally "Aryan" anyway, and hence popular preference for "non-Aryan" productions might be considered cultural re-appropriation (p. 100). Another noteworthy excursion in the book shows how the rapid expansion of the Strength through Joy program turned high-culture music into a populist tourism industry, not always in accord with Schloesser's office. Thus, "serious" opera by flaw-

lessly “Aryan” authors, such as the 1933 performance of Richard Wagner’s *The Meistersinger of Nurnberg* at the Bayreuth Festival, became the centerpiece of a successful rest and recreation program for “simple and unproblematic people” (p. 191).

In the end, one wishes for a more comprehensive dis-

cussion of this particular cultural landscape beyond the self-imposed bureaucratic dryness of institutional history. That is, the topic would be better treated as an account in which individuals and institutions, and textbook ideology as well as more amorphous popular sentiments each have their say. Von Haken’s study is a piece of a mosaic still to be put together.

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