

Annegret Fauser. *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xv + 366 pp. \$41.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-994803-1.

Reviewed by Allison Abra

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Early in *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II*, Annegret Fauser notes that for most Americans the “sonic imaginary” of World War II is the big band jazz of Glenn Miller, or the vocals of the Andrews Sisters (p. 3). However, in this book she convincingly demonstrates that popular music was only one part of the rich musical history of the war and that classical music also played a critical role as propaganda, as an expression of national identity, as an instrument of alleged social and racial uplift, and of course, as entertainment. Eager to dispense with distinctions of “highbrow” and “low-brow,” she argues that the war years were in fact distinctive for the “significant role assigned to classical music” and that for Americans in the 1940s it had a “cultural relevance and ubiquity that is hard to imagine today” (p. 4).

The book is divided into five substantial chapters, each focusing on different aspects of the production of classical music in wartime. Chapter 1 describes some of the personal histories of different musicians who waged the war as “cultural combatants” (p. 3). The size of the American military enterprise in World War II, and especially the draft, brought thousands of musicians and composers into the armed services, and Fauser is attentive to the range of factors—including race, gender, age, and prewar celebrity—that shaped

their wartime experiences. The war years also witnessed a considerable expansion of the musical activities of the different service branches and provided a unique launching pad for military-aged musicians. For instance, pianist Eugene List saw his postwar career given a “major boost” from the tours and broadcasts he was a part of while in uniform, including concerts before world leaders at the Potsdam Conference in 1945 (p. 32). Classical music creators also discovered ways to serve in civilian organizations, like the United Service Organizations (USO), or governmental agencies, like the Office of War Information and the State Department. The activities of these institutions—especially their efforts to put classical music to work as propaganda—are the subject of chapter 2. More so than popular music, classical music was seen to be a crucial tool through which to present the United State as a “cultivated, forward-looking, powerful, and democratic nation” to audiences at both home and abroad (p. 85). This chapter also includes a fascinating discussion of some of the early efforts to employ music therapy in the physical rehabilitation of wounded servicemen.

The first part of the book is thus mainly concerned with the individuals and institutions who created classical music, while in part 2 Fauser turns to the actual musical compositions of

wartime and the multiple meanings attached to them. Chapter 3 argues that in the face of the devastation ravaged upon Europe by the war, American musicians sought to establish the United States as the new “stronghold of world culture” (p. 138). At the same time, composers drew on themes and styles that were believed to be intrinsically American—such as folk music and traditions from important periods in the nation’s past, like the Revolutionary War—to create new music that expressed and celebrated American culture and identity. Chapter 4 then turns to the foreign musicians who fled war-torn Europe to live in exile in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. In a particularly compelling discussion, Fauser shows that their experiences—and their musical output—were strongly shaped by their countries of origin, and whether they were ally or enemy to the United States. Composers like Darius Milhaud, from France, or Bohuslav Martinů, from Czechoslovakia, felt comfortable incorporating national themes from their home countries into their work, such as when Martinů wrote *Memorial to Lidice* in 1943 to honor the victims of a Nazi massacre in the town. In contrast, musicians from Germany or other Axis countries faced registration as enemy aliens and sought to write music that would specifically appeal to the audiences and critics of their host nation. Regardless of their country of origin, however, Fauser notes that writing and performing helped many musicians to negotiate the “complex and competing demands of exile” (p. 223). Finally, the last chapter of the book returns to the relationship between classical music and American national identity construction, looking specifically at music as a vehicle for commemoration or celebration. The chapter also analyzes several “war symphonies” and their ongoing resonance as a major part of not only wartime but also the national sonic imaginaries, so much so that a piece like Aaron Copland’s *Fanfare for the Common Man* (1942) was prominently featured at the inauguration of President Barack Obama.

Sounds of War is an ambitious, meticulously researched book, which provides a nuanced analysis of the multiple ways in which classical music was repurposed as a “weapon of war.” A recurring point concerns the construction of classical music as a path to moral and spiritual “uplift,” a vision that was not surprisingly underpinned by contemporary understandings of class and race. The book also makes a strong contribution to a growing literature on the part played by different cultural forms in helping the Allies to construct and express the ideals upon which they were fighting the war. In explicit defiance of Nazi propaganda that represented the United States as a “barbaric country without culture or taste” (p. 86), classical music became an important symbol and expression of American democracy. In establishing the various cultural meanings that surrounded wartime music, the book is thorough and convincing in its treatment of musicians, officialdom, and other musical producers. However, one place where Fauser might have expanded the analysis is with respect to reception. While she includes a great deal of evidence from professional critics, voices from the classical music audience elsewhere in American society are less present—with some notable exceptions. In chapter 2, Fauser includes several wonderful letters from marines on active service that described dozens of men crowding into military tents in order to listen to records. While undoubtedly hard to find, a little more reception evidence of this variety would have strengthened her claims for the critical influence of classical music beyond its established constituencies. Nonetheless, *Sounds of War* is unquestionably an impressive study, from which scholars of wartime culture will have much to learn and future research can continue to build.

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