

From film and music cluster lectures choose a theme movement or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice and interests and construct a 2500-word essay or equivalent critically assess primary themes key writers and relevant practitioners.

How has the Holocaust effected music and what effects have influenced you in your composition?

Research in Context

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Rob Jones

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Introduction

The Holocaust was a deeply troubling time that occurred less than one hundred years ago, which is far closer to modern day than most people imagine. Therefore, as a composer I wanted to be influenced by the holocaust's terrible events and its undoing's to create the best piece of work for the Copper Coast Film Festival I could. I hope to capture and acknowledge the pain and suffering that occurred during this heinous event.

The Holocaust was created by the Nazis during world war 2 and it was the

"Final Solution" - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkan-League-Europe-1866-1868>

to the exterminate the Jewish race. They had previously planned to send all imprisoned Jews to Madagascar, but they felt that this was a waste in resources and some also believed it to be too humane for them. Instead, the Nazis sent the Jews to concentration camps - death camps – to work as forced labour for the Nazi regime. More commonly, however, they were executed in gas chambers with a chemical called Zyklon B – Cyclone B in English – which is a cyanide based pesticide and was used without sympathy or regard. Although the Jews were the main target for the Holocaust, many other civilians were targeted too; Communists, homosexuals, Bolshevik activists, the disabled as well as anyone the Nazi regime considered an enemy of the Nazi regime.

This dire act of cruelty and anti-Semitism is why I have chosen it to research this historical event with in my area of study and to put into context what the holocaust did to music, composers and the legacy it left in the post war years.

Karel Burman – Reminiscences 1943

Karel Burman is a Jewish Pianist and Bass as well as a Holocaust survivor. He was put into three different concentrations camps, Terezin in 1943, Auschwitz and Kaufering - a sub-camp of Dachau. He narrowly escaped the death march in Auschwitz to then be transferred a few days later to Kaufering that was prominently a forced labour camp, however, murder still went on behind its chain fences. This must have been a colossal strain on him mentally, physically and creatively.

During his time in these camps he continued to compose. Thich I find to be incredible, given the time and mental effort it takes, let alone a in such horrendous conditions. He wrote three pieces that reference his time during the Holocaust – Reminiscences, Terezin and Poupata (Rosebuds) - and he finished them years later, post war.

This is a piano suite and is composed of 8 movements (in English);

Youth, Family and Home, March 15th 1939, Occupation, Factory Germany, Auschwitz Corpse

Factory, Typhus in the Kaufering Concentration Camp, Alone - Alone and New Life.

The movements I looked and listened to the most reflected his life (up to being released from Kaufering) and as listed are: Occupation, Factory Germany, Auschwitz Corpse Factory and New life.

The other movements are equally compelling, however, they either don't reflect the holocaust or are very similar to other movements.

The 4th movement (Occupation) immediately sounds dissonant and contains chaotic off beat notes.

However, the movement develops into quite a beautiful moment. Whatever part of his life he felt reflected this section must have been a dramatic event as the movement continues into a harsh section of imperfect chords hit consecutively clearly depicting tragedy. The most melodic pieces of this movement are still rather dystopian and when the speed increases I can feel the franticness and panic that he must of undergone during Nazi occupation.

The 5th movement (Factory Germany) is very similar to the 4th however, it is much shorter (as his time in a German factory was very limited) and has near none scalar melodies (chromatic scale). The start of the movement is not very rhythmic and could resemble a factory line and the drama of the melody afterwards shows that the factory was Nazi occupied and there will have been violence amongst guards and the workers. Then, immediately afterwards, the movement reverts back to the same unrhythmic sequence showing us that every day was the same monotonous, turgid grind whilst working in the factory.

The 6th movement (Auschwitz Corpse) is possibly the most haunting. It starts with soft (piano) notes but in a somber tone to create the eeriness and quiet he must have experienced there. Then the piece increases in velocity and becomes more melodic - but dissonant - and as the franticness develops further a marching chord pattern emerges leaving a frantic and scary feel to the movement. This marching chord pattern could be resembling the death march he narrowly avoided

in Auschwitz . This movement however was not written in Auschwitz but in Terezin. When he finished the suite in Prague - 1957 - he renamed this movement to Auschwitz, Corpse Factory as he felt the movement resembled his time there.

The final movement (New Life), is the stand out movement in this piece. It is the only movement that delivers us feelings of hope and beauty. There is no dark motif or chromatic scales in the beginning, even though it is in a minor scale. The use of jazz chords and changing the route note allow for a major scale, this is why the start is so beautiful and revealing. The beginning is when Burman is finally released from his incarceration. Later the piece develops and the movement begins to lose its tonality and diverts from the original scale to clashing, but eventually regaining its perfectness and completion. These imperfections could be his story of when he returns home and finds the large scale brutality of the Nazis inflicted on the Jews and Europe.

This piano suite tells a very personal story of Burman's time during the Second World War and it is obvious that movements of it are composed whilst in Terzin. They are unconventional in music terms and difficult to listen to as it is unpleasing and uncomfortable to the ear. Yet, composing in such dark times has its own elements of beauty. I believe that composing during such a terrible time would help keep his mind centred and reflective, shielding him from the horrors surrounding his terrible plight. This piece speaks about the holocaust sonically and this has influenced me to share my thoughts and feelings surrounding the Holocaust through music and to not follow conventional music schemes depicting pain.

Ben Hecht - We Will Never Die 1943

Ben Hect was an American film writer, novelist and playwright. The latter of them is the most interesting as he wrote – along with other playwrights and directors – We Will Never Die which was

his attempt to alert the American public of the mass genocide going on in Europe. He did this as he was born from Russian Jewish immigrants and was infuriated by a gallop poll in 1943 that stated.

"It is said that two million Jews have been killed in Europe since the war began. Do you think this is true or just a rumour? Although the Allied leadership had publicly confirmed that two million Jews had already been murdered by that time, the poll found that only 47% believed it was true, while 29% dismissed it as a rumour; the remaining 24% had no opinion." -

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/we-will-never-die-pageant>

This poll led Hecht to pursue ways to inform the general public and persuade the government to help the Jewish race. Therefore, he decided to write (alongside other producers) the "We Will Never Die pageant", which consisted of over 100 people onstage standing in front of two 40-foot-high tablets listing the ten commandments. They would sing about historical Jews of great importance who have helped civilisation as well as describe the horrors that the Jews faced in Europe. The music in this pageant is vital as it evokes emotion and penetrates the soul. Along with the use of visuals this makes the piece a work of Gesamtkunstwerk as it incorporates two visual arts to help deliver the message to an audience. The visual aspect was amplified as Hecht decided to have several children onstage, painted grey, dress in rags to resemble the dead.

Sadly, this pageant did not help Hect's cause as only the Jewish public felt affected by this, as he confided in the composer of the original score for the pageant.

"The pageant has accomplished nothing," Hecht told Weill. "Actually, all we have done is make a lot of Jews cry, which is not a unique accomplishment." - (Ben Hecht, 1943)

This pageant hasn't spoke to me as much as the piano suite Reminiscences, however, it has amplified the tragedy of what happen to the Jews during the Holocaust. So, I will incorporate a large section of my piece to be dedicated to the events surrounding the Holocaust. Less will be taken from this pageant to guide my composition as some of the most moving parts of the pageant are visual and as a composer, I'm interested in story through sonics.



Arnold Schoenberg - A Survivor from Warshaw, Op. 46 1947

Arnold Schoenberg did not practice his Jewish faith. Nevertheless, he felt so moved by the terrible events going on in Europe he created 'A Survivor from Warsaw' to commemorate their suffering. However, this piece has been criticised for being inaccurate. One example of such criticism was;

"the most infamous being the mention of gas chambers, even though none existed in the ghetto." -
(Amy Wlodarski, 2011)

I personally believe, that although this is based off Schoenberg's imagination, it is mostly accurate. It depicts the severe beatings that the Nazi soldier released upon the Jews. Also, the spoken lyrics (in German) harrowingly tell us:

"Faster! Start over! In a minute I want to know

how many of them I'm delivering to the gas chamber!

Count off!" - (A Survivor from Warsaw, 1947)

These words do not exactly state that there are gas chambers in Warsaw. Therefore, I believe critics have been unduly hard on Schoenberg because of his blasé attitude before he was exiled to America.

"he often boasted that its modernist structure would secure 'the hegemony of German music' into the next century" - <https://holocaustmusic.org/resistance-and-exile/schoenberg-arnold/>

The libretto is in English and German but the hymn in the piece is in Hebrew. It tells the story of the Ghetto, the hiding in sewers, the beatings and the carrying to the gas chambers. Leading up to the Jews singing the Shema Yisroel (the Jewish profession of faith), this sends a message of hope in the face of adversity and aggression.

The score for this piece is twelve tone (chromatic) and produces a dramatic scene by being dissonant. However, a lot of rests are used in this piece to allow for the libretto to be announced clearly. The score accompanies the libretto by playing glissandos and crescendos atonally to emphasize the negativity the story portrays.

Libretto is something I would like to include in my piece as a Libretto is a great way of telling a story precisely and even though librettos are scored, the scores are minimalist and can be discordant this would suit my flat vocal tones. Although this piece is based on the imagination of Schoenberg it is

powerful to listen and his message is absolute. His message has influenced me to bring components of the Holocaust together to tell a story using the style of Libretto.

Steve Reich - Different trains 1988

This piece was written by a Jewish composer (Steve Reich) Post war in 02/11/1988. he was influenced by his journey on the train between New York and Los Angeles with his governess whom he described as at times

“romantic and exciting” - <https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Steve-Reich-Different-Trains/2699>

However, as he grew older, he thought of what it must have been like to travel on a train in Europe during that time (1939 –1942). He thought he would have been likely to be on a train to a death camp, so he took recordings of his governess, reminiscing over their trips together. He collected powerful audio recordings of passengers on death camp trains in Europe for his piece. He also collected recordings of trains from the U.S.A and Europe between 1930 and 1949 for authenticity.

The violins have been scored to match the pitch of the voice recordings which repeats and then changes to the next recording, this is the creativity in piece. To create an atmosphere resembling that of the Nazi trains, the violins have been pitched again to match the onomatopoeic chugga-chugga of a train. The train horn recordings from the 30s and 40s are also repeated throughout in this piece

I think this piece gets brought to life by the recordings of holocaust victims, as they remind me how real the holocaust was and how close to modern day it occurred. The concept of creating a tribute piece and then including elements of what is being honoured is very powerful and a creative way of enhancing an atmosphere from a previous point in history.

Conclusion

The holocaust has had some markable effects on music, and compositions that were written during the troubled times and many tributes were written to the historical event. All the music is inharmonious and does not resemble traditional Jewish music - famous for using the Hava Rabbah scale. Other than the Jewish hymn in Survivor from Warsaw there isn't a lot of musical reference to traditional Jewish culture.

Although there are many references to the Jewish culture in "We Will Never Die", this again doesn't reflect traditional Jewish compositions. Therefore, I believe that their faith had been overwhelmed with pain and anguish, hence why all the pieces are so jarring. However, I do agree with that compositional technique as writing something beautiful and modal would not resemble the pain and suffering that occurred but not adhering to any scale is something I disagree with.

Steve Reich used technology to his advantage in Different Trains to bring the holocaust to life. This is the only part of his piece that influenced my piece. I find the repetitiveness of his piece to be lazy and the pitch matching to be mundane. Consequently, I will only include radio broadcasts from WWII centring on the holocaust to mark out certain points in time in my chronological sonic piece.

The same could be said for Reminiscences but I felt moved by this piece. Even though it is atonal for most of the suite, it still has movements that contain some pretty jazz chords and polite melodies.

Seeing as he wrote some of these movements during his time in the holocaust I feel like his music is the most honest and moving even though to listen to it is uncomfortable. Therefore the main points I will take and include in my composition will be the dissonance of no mode for large sections of my piece. The form of movements to tell the story of how the holocaust came to be and how it came to an end. Also a libretto mixed with instrumentals as they can accompany each other to tell the story of the Holocaust sonically and through speech for maximum impact on the emotions. To honestly

and brutally paint a harrowing, yet remarkable, story of the targeted horrors inflicted by Hitler's Nazi regime on the Jewish people.

Bibliography

Intro

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Karel Burman - Reminiscences

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Ben Hecht - We Will Never Die

"It is said that two million Jews have been killed in Europe since the war began. Do you think this is true or just a rumor? Although the Allied leadership had publicly confirmed that two million Jews had already been murdered by that time, the poll found that only 47% believed it was true, while 29% dismissed it as a rumor; the remaining 24% had no opinion."

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