Research Grant – Spring 2009

Title or Proposal: ‘Creating a War Repertoire: Musik für Alle’s ‘Neue Kriegslieder’ (1915)’ – Conference Paper

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Abstract: As part of an ongoing project on music in Germany during World War I, I submitted an abstract for the conference ‘The First World War: Literature, Music, Memory,’ which will be held at King’s College, University of Cambridge from July 11-12, 2009 (http://ww1literatureandmusic.googlepages.com/). This abstract was accepted and I plan to present my paper, ‘Creating a War Repertoire: Musik für Alle’s ‘Neue Kriegslieder’ (1915),’ which looks at German compositions newly created for the conflict, a repertoire that has not been discussed in musicological literature. A CVPA Research Grant will allow me to travel to England and participate in the conference.

Proposal: Before demonstrating how my topic resonates with strategic goals and objectives, I would like to elaborate on the paper itself. At the start of the First World War, the Berlin-based serial Musik für Alle devoted four issues to soldiers’ songs. The first three volumes feature traditional pieces while the last (vol. 120) contains fifteen works written by contemporary composers. World War I and its atrocities are often considered the definitive break between the ‘long’ nineteenth century and the modernist era; in that respect, these volumes seem regressive, embracing a decidedly positive outlook on war. At the same time, this collection offers a fascinating insight into Hausmusik during World War I and the ways in which the home front was integrated into the war effort. My paper looks specifically at the pieces newly written for the First World War, which sought to create a repertoire appropriate for the conflict.

Several key themes underlie this volume of songs. Some of the compositions attempt to blend contemporary and traditional nationalist imagery, as in Philipp Gretscher's 'Ein neues Lied vom deutschen Rhein.’ Others discuss aspects specifically related to the First World War, such as Willy Boehme’s 'Hindenberg, Hindenberg, Laß keinen Russen durch!' or Bogumil Zepler’s ‘Das deutsche Schwert,’ with a text by Ernst von Wolzogen written from the trenches. A lullaby by Waldemar Wendland, ‘Wiegenlied 1914,’ demonstrates all generations of a family contributing to the war effort and protecting Germany from multiple threats. As a whole, this collection presents a forgotten repertoire that vividly re-creates the concerns of German society at the onset of the First World War.

The opportunity to present my paper at this conference supports two of the university’s strategic goals. Because my research has garnered interest from scholars in other disciplines, including history and German studies, it aligns with the university’s first stated goal of ‘expanding world-class interdisciplinary research, creative, and scholarly endeavors.’ Last year I presented a more general paper about this topic at the annual meeting of the German Studies Association, an interdisciplinary event. This conference will provide the opportunity to present a more sophisticated presentation at an international venue, thus ‘promot[ing] nationally and internationally distinctive and prominent research’ (subsection of the university’s first strategic goal).
As I continue investigating this topic, I foresee a way to integrate my research into my teaching, thus fulfilling the second of the university’s strategic goals: ‘promoting globally competitive…programs that support interdisciplinary inquiry, intellectual development, knowledge and skill acquisition…’ Since I am planning to make the Musik für Alle series a cornerstone of my research, I plan to offer a course about this topic as my work progresses; ideally, such a class would bring together students from a variety of disciplines, such as those in music, history, humanities, and world languages. I also hope that I will be able to collaborate with USF students to make recordings of these pieces, a process that I believe would be beneficial to both them and myself.