

Joseph Goebbels, Ten Principles for the Creation of German Music (May 28, 1938)

Abstract

[...]

Like film, visual art, speeches, and slogans, music had played a defining role in the formation of National Socialist culture. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945) recognized the power of music to influence the population, but he also understood the importance of music’s entertainment value in maintaining popular satisfaction. In a speech delivered on the penultimate day of the “Degenerate Music” exhibition in Düsseldorf in 1938, Goebbels laid out his ten principles for the creation of German music. According to Goebbels, music needed to be accessible, above all, in order to appeal to the broadest segments of the population. Music’s value, he believed, resided not in experimentation, but rather in catering to mass appeal—relaxing, entertaining, and refreshing the public. These themes would become increasingly important during the war. Music, he argued, appealed not to the mind and intellect, but rather to the heart, as it was “the most sensual” of the arts. An emphasis on emotion, and the rejection of reason and intellectualism, lay at the heart of Nazi cultural and social critiques and played an important role in the Nazis’ celebration of “action” over discussion and debate.

Source

This festival of music is, for the first time, a review of musical culture in our time. It gives an account of what we have accomplished and sets forth the goals both for the immediate future and for the foreseeable future. May the fame of Germany as the nation of music be once again revealed and substantiated here on this occasion. And, above all, may the principles that have since time immemorial been the source and the driving force behind our German music again be set forth and recognized. They are:

1. The essence of music does not lie in a program or in theory, in experimentation or in structure. It lies in melody. Melody as such elevates the heart and revives the spirits; for this reason it is not trite or reprehensible because it is sung by the people on account of the ease with which it can be memorized.
2. Not all music is accessible to everyone. For this reason, the kind of popular music that appeals to a wide audience is to be preferred. This is especially so in an epoch in which the nation’s leaders are obliged to provide relaxation, entertainment, and refreshment for its people, who are confronted with today’s deep anxieties.
3. Like every other art form, music has its origins in the mysterious and deep powers that are rooted in the people. It can, accordingly, be shaped and formed in a way appropriate to the people’s needs and to their powerful drive to make music only by those descendants who are steeped in their nation’s heritage. Judaism and German music are opposites that, by their very nature, stand in stark contradiction to one another. The struggle against Judaism in German music, which Richard Wagner, alone and without any help or support, once took up, is for this reason still our great task today. This battle is no longer the battle of a knowledgeable genius, standing alone, but one that is being fought by a unified people.
4. Music is the most sensual of the arts and for this reason appeals more to the heart and the emotions than to the intellect. But where does the heart of a nation beat more strongly than in the masses, where the heart of a nation is truly at home? It is therefore the unavoidable duty of our musical leaders to let

the people share in the treasures of German music.

5. For the musical person, to be unmusical is more or less like being blind or deaf. Thank God that he graciously created music for us to hear, experience, and passionately love.

6. Music is the art form that moves the human spirit most; it has the power to soothe pain and to turn mere happiness into ecstasy.

7. If melody is at the source of music, then it follows that a music for the people may not be limited to pastorales or chorales. Music must always return to lively melody as the root of its being.

8. Nowhere are the treasures of the past so richly and inexhaustibly spread out as in the area of music. To hold them up and give them to the people is our most important and rewarding task.

9. The language of musical tones is sometimes more effective than the language of words. For this reason, the great masters of the past represent the true majesty of our people and are deserving of reverence and respect.

10. And as children of our people they are the true monarchs of our people by God's grace and are destined to receive the fame and honor of our nation and to multiply.

Berlin. 28 May 1938

Reichsminister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda
Dr. Goebbels

Source of English translation: Appendix G, "Ten Principles for the Creation of German Music," by Joseph Goebbels (1938). Translated by David Scrase, University of Vermont, in Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia, eds., *The Arts in Nazi Germany. Continuity, Conformity, Change*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006, pp. 183–84.

Source of original German text: *Amtliche Mitteilungen der Reichsmusikkammer* 5, Nr. 11.

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