

Music and Nation on the Eastern Front
(undergraduate lecture course)

Course Description

The popular memory of World War I, especially in French and English, has long been dominated by the Western Front and the spectacle of trench warfare. The conflict on the Eastern Front, more fluid and complex in its tactics and geography, is regularly overlooked, despite the unusual circumstance that, by the end of the war, all three of the front's main belligerent powers—the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian Empires—had ceased to exist. In this clash of empires, many of the myriad linguistic and ethnic boundaries contained within Russia and Austria-Hungary would ultimately become national borders. In the global discourse on national self-determination that preceded and followed the war, cultural practices like music—especially music in any way considered “folk” or indigenous—played an important role. In addition to the national traditions of composition and performance that underwent massive upheavals during the war, there were a number of less well-known projects to document and identify the music of different groups living on the lands of these multiethnic empires. The most striking of these, which form the centerpiece of this course, were the two “phonographic commissions” led by scholars in Germany and Austria-Hungary, which recorded hundreds of folk songs from prisoners of war from the Allied Powers, often combined with humiliating nude photographs and other documentation of ethnic and racial type.

In this class, we will make use of a variety of historical and ethnographic sources, including primary documents like diaries, sheet music, and sound recordings from the war years and immediately after. Through regular listening assignments and responses, we will trace the themes of national and ethnic identity as they find expression in the lyrics and melodies captured on the still-new technology of sound recording. Other themes to be covered in the class include military applications of audio technology, techniques of nationalist propaganda, circulation networks of printing and gramophone records, and the changing role of women as consumers and producers of music. The final project will involve both a writing component—a microhistory of a single song or composition—and a creative component. Taking inspiration from the UK's *14–18 NOW* commission series, students will work together in small groups to devise commemorative installations or performances, working with the musical material encountered during the class to experiment with questions of memory, mourning, recognition, and collective identity.

Unit 1: Concepts and Contexts

1a: Introduction to the Peoples of the Eastern Front

1b: A Colonial War Fought on Home Soil

2a: Listening to War: Belliphonic Sounds and the Violence in/of Music

Fairley – Sample Syllabus (proposed course)

2b: Snapshots of Musical Life Before 1914

3a: Music of the *Volk*, from Herder to Bartók

3b: Techniques and Technologies of Folk-Song Collecting

Unit 2: The Army and POW Camp, Laboratories of Nations

4a: The Prussian Phonographic Commission to Record Prisoners of War

4b: The Austrian and Hungarian Commissions

5a: Race and Nation in the POW Camps

5b: Colonial Subjects of Britain and France in German Camps

6a: What the Soldiers Sang and Why

6b: National Separatist Movements and Musical Propaganda

[Midterm Essay Question: In the cases we have studied thus far, how was music used to determine who belonged to a particular nation and who didn't?]

Unit 3: Composers and Musicians Respond to the War

7a: Austria and Germany (Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg, Fritz Kreisler, Rudi Stephan, Paul Wittgenstein)

7b: Hungary and the Czech Lands (Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Alois Hába, Leoš Janáček)

8a: Russia (Sergei Rachmaninoff, Arthur Lourié, Thomas de Hartmann, Nikolai Myaskovsky, Igor Stravinsky, Feodor Chaliapin)

8b: Russia: Exiles, Revolutionaries, and Newly-Independent Nations, 1917–1920

9a: Soon-to-be-independent Poland (Ignacy Paderewski, Karol Szymanowski)

9b: Briefly-to-be-independent Ukraine (Mykhailo Haivoronsky, Levko Revutsky, Mykola Leontovych and the “Carol of the Bells”)

Unit 4: Conclusions and New Directions

10a: Domestic Music-Making

10b: The Gramophone Industry Before and After the War

11a: Sonic Technologies On and Off the Battlefield

11b: Multimedia Memory Projects at the Great War’s Centenary

12a: Why Is the Eastern Front Commemorated Differently?

12b: Final Presentations [Sound art/installation with accompanying essay, incorporating and remixing audio material introduced in class]

Selected readings

- Watkins, Glenn. *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War*.
- Kappeler, Andreas. *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*.
- Kann and David, *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526–1918*.
- Roshwald, Aviel. *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires*.
- Kreisler, Fritz, *Four Weeks in the Trenches: The War Story of a Violinist*.
- Evans, Andrew D. *Anthropology at War: World War I and the Science of Race in Germany*.
- Scheer, Monique. “Captive Voices: Phonographic Recordings in the German and Austrian Prisoner-of-War Camps of World War I.”
- Lange, Britta. *Captured Voices: Sound Recordings of Prisoners of War from the Sound Archive 1915–1918*.
- Johler, Reinhard. “The War, the Soldiers, the Prisoners, and the Folklorists in Europe: A Comparative Research Summary.”
- Ross, Jaan. *Encapsulated Voices: Estonian Sound Recordings from the German Prisoner-of-War Camps in 1916–1918*.
- Das, Santanu, et al., eds. *Colonial Encounters in a Time of Global Conflict, 1914–1918*.
- Chew, Geoffrey. “The Enchanting Music of Blades and Bullets: Visions of Violence in Janáček’s World-War Symphonic Poems.”
- Trumpener, Katie. “Béla Bartók and the Rise of Comparative Ethnomusicology.”
- Mitchell, Rebecca. “Music and Russian Identity in War and Revolution, 1914–22.”
- Szabó-Knotik, Cornelia. “‘Mit Herz und Hand fürs Vaterland’: Staging the Fighting Heroes for Propagandistic Purposes.”
- Ouzounian, Gascia. “Powers of Hearing: Acoustic Defense and Technologies of Listening during the First World War.”
- Hand, Richard J. “The Sound of War: Audio, Radio and the First World War.”
- Rayfield, Donald. “The Soldier’s Lament: World War One Folk Poetry in the Russian Empire.”
- Healy, Maureen. “Entertainment, Propaganda and the Vienna War Exhibition of 1916-17.”
- Lang, Zoë. “Creating a War Repertoire: *Musik für Alle* and Domestic Music during the First World War.”

Selected listening

- Imperial War Museum, “Listen to the Moments the Guns Fell Silent”
- Wiener Phonogrammarchiv, *Recordings from Prisoner-of-War Camps, World War I*
- Berlin Phonogrammarchiv, *Echoes from the Past: Georgian Prisoners’ Songs Recorded on Wax Cylinders in Germany 1916–1918*
- Igor Stravinsky, *Histoire du Soldat*
- Feodor Chaliapin, selected arias
- Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*
- Leoš Janáček, Violin Sonata
- Karol Szymanowski, *Król Roger*
- Mykola Leontovych, “Shchedryk” (Carol of the Bells)

Fairley – Sample Syllabus (proposed course)

Early-twentieth-century gramophone and wax-cylinder recordings of folk songs from throughout Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire

Selected viewing

Andrea Gschwendtner, *Rudolf Pöch: Als Anthropologe im Kriegsgefangenenlager*