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Three Masters.

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THREE MASTERS

By

K l a u s M a n n
(of The Stars and Stripes)

During the past few days I have paid visits to three artists who have at least three things in common. All three of them are world-famous. All three of them deserve their universal prestige in virtue of their extraordinary talents and solid craftsmanship. All three of them remained in Germany and prospered under the Nazi regime, although it would have been easy for each of them to leave the country and make a good living abroad.

The three masters ~~whom~~ I interviewed were Richard Strauss, Emil Jannings, and Franz Lehár.

Richard Strauss lives with his family in the Bavarian village of Garmisch-Partenkirchen -- in pre-war days one of Germany's most fashionable winter- and summer resorts. Our conversation with the master took place in front of his stately villa, under the beautiful trees of his large, well-kept garden. There were five of us, seated in comfortable garden chairs: the composer, his son, his daughter-in-law, a friend of mine with whom I was making the trip, and I.

We introduced ourselves as "two American correspondents." I thought it wiser not to disclose my identity; our host might have been embarrassed or irritated if he had known my name. One of the first public gestures Richard Strauss made in 1933, after the estab-

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lishment of the Third Reich, was directed against my father. The composer was among those German artists and intellectuals who signed a Nazi-inspired manifesto denouncing a Richard Wagner essay by Thomas Mann as "an insult to the nation's greatest musical genius." When later asked what he had found so "insulting" in this psychological eulogy and praising analysis of the Wagnerian style, Strauss shrugged the question off with this cynical remark: "I really couldn't tell you; I haven't read the stuff."

Unaware of the fact that he was receiving the son of a man whom he had once irresponsibly slandered, he was all smile and gracious cordiality as he shook hands with us. His health was just fine, he assured us, -- and in fact he looked surprisingly well-preserved for his eighty-three years. His face of pinkish complexion beamed serenely under his silver hair. His gait and motions were not without a certain measured grace and dignified elegance. There was nothing senile about him.

Yet when we asked him about his musical plans, he shook his head with philosophical resignation: "No plans for me anymore! I have written fifteen operas, not to mention my symphonic pieces and my many songs. That's enough for one lifetime. Don't you think I have deserved some rest?"

We agreed, then listened respectfully to his complaints about the way in which the defunct Nazi regime had been dealing with his recent opera, Die Liebe der Danaë (Danaë's Love). This new musical drama was scheduled to open at Salzburg, last fall, but the production had to be postponed because of the "most total mobilization" then ordered by Dr. Goebbels. The master resented such lack of consideration on the part of a government with whom he had otherwise been on correct, if

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not friendly, terms.

"Of course," he said, "this was not the first disturbing incident. I have had two rather serious conflicts with the Nazi administration."

One of these "conflicts" developed only last year when Herr Strauss was supposed to take a bombed-out German family into his spacious villa. Such a nuisance was too much for him to bear. He protested, appealed to Hitler. The Fuehrer remained adamant. Every citizen, he replied, had to make sacrifices in a time of national emergency; Herr Strauss could not be exempted.

This decision -- the only sensible one, to my knowledge, Hitler has ever made -- seemed outrageous to the selfish old man. As he remembered now the scandalous incident, he got very annoyed again. "A bunch of strangers in my house!" he cried. "Imagine! A family with children, if you please! I didn't know what to do. Really, I thought of leaving Germany and moving to Switzerland. But how could I afford to lose my main market? We have about eighty opera houses in this country; that's where most of my royalties come from."

"You had about eighty opera houses," I ventured to interrupt him. It took him some time to understand what I tried to say. Exclusively concerned with his own affairs, he seemed hardly aware of such trifling occurrences as the destruction of German cities.

The second, or rather the first, collision between the master's interests and Nazi policy took place more than ten years ago, during the initial phase of the "Thousand Years." At that time, Strauss had based one of his operas, Die Schweigsame Frau (The Silent Woman), on a libretto written by Stefan Zweig. The rehearsals at the Dresden Opera

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House -- the institute which had the privilege of presenting most of Strauss' works for the first time -- were already well under way, when Goebbels interfered on account of Zweig's racial background. In this case, however, Hitler proved more tolerant, or more diplomatic, than his Minister for Propaganda and Enlightenment; he allowed The Silent Woman to be shown a few times in Dresden, whereupon the opera disappeared from the repertoire and remained buried for the duration of the Nazi regime.

"The whole affair was indeed most tiresome," Richard Strauss told us. "I hated to lose Stefan Zweig -- the best librettist I've ever had since the death of Hugo von Hoffmannsthal who, by the way, was also partly Jewish. Well, what could I do? I had to find another man for the job. Do you know Joseph Gregor? He wrote three librettos for me -- Capriccio, Friedensfest (Celebration of Peace), and Daphne. Not a bad fellow at all -- and reliably Aryan."

Anti-Semitism, or any other manifestation of Nazi madness, irritated Strauss only when it affected his own interests. Never has he said a word against the diffamation of his Jewish colleagues. On the contrary, when Bruno Walter was forbidden to conduct the Berlin Philharmonics, it was Richard Strauss who replaced him -- thus helping the Nazi authorities who would otherwise have been forced to cancel the concert or to have it performed by a second-rate conductor.

My companion mentioned the Bruno Walter incident, but the master remained unruffled. "Why shouldn't I take over the concert?" he asked with a naivete which struck me as at once provocative and disarming. "It wouldn't have done my old friend Walter any good if I had refused to replace him. Yet it seems that I've hurt his feelings -- I really don't

understand this kind of touchiness. When I was him in Salzburg, some time ago, he didn't even say Hello to me. We've known each other for so many years, and now he just cut me, in front of a lot of people! Now if that isn't silly!"

It would have been senseless to explain to him why Bruno Walter resented his action, and why all decent people shared the conductor's justified indignation; he wouldn't have understood. Nor did he understand why my friend and I exchanged bewildered glances as he referred to Baldur von Schierach, former gauleiter of Austria, as an "unusually decent chap." The master was all for Schierach, because that Nazi boss had granted certain privileges to himself and his tribe.

"My daughter-in-law is Jewish," Herr Strauss remarked, pointing at the young lady who smiled uncomfortably as though embarrassed by this straightforward statement. "I daresay," the old gentleman continued, "that she was the only free Jewess in Greater Germany -- thanks to the gauleiter's generous and understanding attitude."

"Comparatively free, you should have said, Papa," Frau Strauss Junior corrected him, not without a certain ~~severe~~ bitterness. I, too, had to suffer and to bear humiliations. For instance, since 1938 I was not allowed to do any horseback-riding or hunting..."

My word of honor, that's what she said! While millions of Jews were hunted like wild animals all over the continent, the "only ~~free~~ free Jewess in Greater Germany" worried about her hunting licence.

That was about as much as I could stand. If it hadn't been for the master's venerable age, I might told him a few nasty things. But I kept quiet -- thinking: 'He is eighty-three! Besides he has produced

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some masterpieces....'

Herr Strauss said: "Some of the Party chiefs were indeed pretty good fellows. Take a man like Hans Frank, for instance: a musical connoisseur with exquisite manners and a fine sense of humor..."

Hans Frank -- that was the Governor General of Poland -- a criminal responsible for atrocities of truly appalling dimensions!... I concentrated my thoughts on Salomé and Rosenkavalier. 'Remember Don Juan and Till Eulenspiegel!' I told myself. 'He may be shockingly selfish and cynical, but don't forget that he happens to be a genius. It is true, there is something perplexing and even frightening about a genius without any moral consciousness; yet it would be futile and unsuitable to react to such a weird phenomenon with a rude outburst of indignation.'

I got up and asked to be excused. The daughter-in-law suggested that we stay for luncheon. "Not that I have much to offer," she ~~w~~ cooed apologetically. "Just a little snack."

I said that I wasn't hungry.

As we took our leave, my friend asked the master for an autographed picture. Strauss -- only too willing to fulfil this wish -- sent his son ~~into the house~~ to pick up two photos. "I presume you too would like to have one," he said to me, more debonair than ever.

I answered dryly: "Thank you, no. I am not a collector."

He glanced at me with casual surprise, then shrugged his shoulders. 'An ignorant little reporter who doesn't appreciate the value of my signature;' that's probably what he thought.

He didn't understand.

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In the case of Jannings, I could hardly hope to get away with my convenient anonymity. Emil used to be a great friend of my family and myself; up to 1933, we saw a lot of him and his clever, attractive wife, formerly known under the name of Gussy Holl as one of Berlin's most sophisticated performers.

But the beginning of the Third Reich marked the end of our personal contact. Jannings continued to appear in German films and theatrical productions; he flourished under the Nazi regime as he had flourished under the Weimar Republic. To us whose main job and ambition it was to fight Hitlerism, he belonged to the enemy camp; his place was on the other side of the fence. There could be no connection between us.

So when I now entered his home again, after an interval of almost thirteen years, I did so, not as a friend, but in my professional capacity as an observer and interviewer. But I must admit that I didn't quite succeed in keeping up my reserved attitude; the ice of my distrust and disapproval gradually melted away as we talked and remembered.

Somehow I had expected to find the Jannings' changed -- visibly polluted, as it were, by the touch of Nazism. But instead, they looked exactly the way they used to -- just a little older, of course. Their house -- a lovely place on the Lake of St. Wolfgang, near Salzburg -- had a cozy, familiar ~~aspect~~ aspect; nothing had been altered since my last weekend visit. There were the same lion-headed chows -- or did they belong to a younger generation? -- and there was the same malicious, green old parrot^s. Of course, parrots live practically for ever and go on repeating the same bits of nonsense -- Nazism or not...

Miss Ruth Jannings, whom I remembered as a half-grown girl, now

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presented herself as an ~~earnest~~ earnest young lady. As for Emil himself, he appeared more portly and massive than ever, with some new wrinkles added to his large, expressive physiognomy.

Gussy -- well-preserved and indestructibly sparkling -- produced an album with photographs. There were snapshots taken in Hollywood, eighteen years ago. That was the time when I first met the Jannings' -- the time when he captivated the American public with his performances in films like "The Last Command," "The Patriot," and "The Way of All Flesh." One of the photos showed a Christmas party which I attended at the Jannings' home in 1927. Ernest Lubitsch was there, and Garbo -- then a newcomer in Hollywood, at the beginning of her career --, and the late Connie Veidt, Gussy Holl's first husband. Veidt's second wife was Jewish -- which was one of the reasons why he left Nazi Germany. But I suppose he would have acted the way he did, even if he had been married to a Germanic Valkyrie. He hated Nazism.

So did the Jannings', as they assured me again and again. Yet they prospered under the Hitler regime. "Why didn't you leave Germany?" I asked him. "Most of your friends preferred exile to life under the Nazi yoke. Why did you stay?"

He was embarrassed, apologetic. There were plenty of reasons, he said. To begin with, his home was not in the Reich but in Austria, which seemed as safe a place as could be found anywhere in the world. "Who would have expected the Nazis to annex this country against the will of Mussolini and the western democracies?" Jannings exclaimed, with a somewhat forced naivete. They annexed it all the same. "There I was -- trapped!" Jannings said. "What could I do? I had to be diplomatic;

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open resistance would have meant concentration camp."

"My record is clean," he insisted. "I've made as few compromises as possible. The only propaganda film in which I appeared was Ohm Krüger -- and that I did against my will, under pressure. When Goebbels first offered me the leading role in that anti-British picture, I refused -- whereupon he put it as an order. Don't you see that I had absolutely no choice? Goebbels didn't like me anyway and just waited for an occasion to ruin me altogether. I had hurt his morbid vanity when I impersonated a character with a clubfoot in a film based on Heinrich von Kleist's classical comedy, The Broken Jug. Of course, the clubfoot was not my invention; the character I played was crippled ever since Kleist created him, more than a century ago. But the touchy Minister for Propaganda suspected that I tried to poke fun on him. That was one of the reasons why I've always been in his black books."

There were other circumstances, according to Jannings report, which made him suspicious to the ruling gang. He was not a Party member, nor was his racial background quite satisfactory: a Jewish grandmother spoiled the purity of the Jannings scutcheon. Moreover, it was known in official circles that most of his friends were liberal intellectuals -- many of them in exile -- and that he had never renounced his own liberal views. In short, if it had not been for his nation-wide popularity and universal prestige, he might have gotten himself into serious trouble.

That is Emil Jannings' story as he disclosed it to me on the porch of his St. Wolfgang home. Fortunately, it isn't up to me to decide whether his version is quite accurate or not; all I can say is that it

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sounded fairly convincing to me. Clearly, this talented actor is by no means an anti-Nazi hero; but I am pretty sure that he isn't a Nazi, either. If he made compromises, he hardly enjoyed doing so and made just as many as was absolutely necessary for a man who wanted to protect his position and his considerable bank accounts under a totalitarian regime.

If I found it difficult to keep up my grudge against Jannings and to condemn him for his lack of anti-Fascist determination, I was even more disarmed by the smiling guilelessness of our next host, Franz Lehár.

From the Lake of St. Wolfgang it's just a ten-mile drive to Bad Ischl -- an old-fashioned spa where the Hungarian "operetta king" has been spending his summers for the past 42 years. It was not difficult to find his residence: every child in Ischl knows the Franz Lehár Quai where the master's house is situated.

Lehár and his wife look as quaint and old-fashioned as do their surroundings. The composer of The Merry Widow and The Land of Smiles might be a character from one of his own musical comedies: a handsome little gentleman of seventy-five -- rather agile, if somewhat frail after two years of constant ailment --, dapperly dressed in a green Tyrolian costume with a gay pink necktie. While he obviously enjoyed being interviewed, he got rather nervous as soon as I asked any questions that had anything to do with Hitler and Nazism. "No politics, if you please!" he begged. "All I can tell you is, that the past few years have been extremely difficult for all of us. Don't let us talk about it! Politics are ugly, and I hate to discuss ugly

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things."

But wasn't it correct -- I insisted, mercilessly -- that the Fuehrer adored Lehar's work?

"Yes, yes!" the grey-haired little gentleman cried, alarmingly irritated. "My Merry Widow was his favourite operetta! That ~~was~~ isn't my fault -- or is it?"

I agreed that he couldn't be blamed for Hitler's predilection. Everybody likes Lehar's music; if it was successful with the master of Berchtesgaden, it was also a hit on Broadway. The ^{composer} ~~little master~~ was right when saying, "After all, I've always been popular ~~with the~~ in Germany, just as I was in all the other countries. I don't owe anything to the Nazis; I haven't asked them for publicity or protection. I ~~have~~ just continued doing what I've always done -- writing music."

Lehar is not only one of the most popular but also one of the most prolific composers of our time. He has produced thirty musical comedies -- or rather, twenty-eight operettas and two operas. His last work, he told us, is one of his more ambitious achievements -- an opera called Caraboncias based on a Hungarian libretto. So far, it has only been shown in Budapest, "just before Hungary was forced into this terrible war by Hitler," as the composer put it.

He feels emphatically as a Hungarian, although he has spent most of his life in Vienna. But to him, Hungary and Austria seem still to form an inseparable entity. With a kind of obstinate nostalgia he clings to the world which he has so often musically described and glorified -- the fabulous, faraway world of the Habsburg Empire.

Whereever he goes, he will always carry this obsolete, enchanting sphere with him. He will never be able to leave the Vienna and the

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Budapest of his youth, even if he ventures on the trans-Atlantic trip for which he is now planning.

"I want to visit the United States," he told us. "You know, I've never been there. So if I don't go pretty soon, I might die without having seen New York. That would be too bad; for I'm really anxious to find out what's going on in America -- what kind of music they're now producing over there, what American girls look like, and other important things. Besides it is my ambition to have at least one of my works staged on Broadway under my own supervision -- exactly the way I want it. I suspect that the Americans have never seen a real Lehar production, so far; all they know is a kind of stressed ersatz, with too many girls, too much jazz, too much glamour, and not enough atmosphere."

Also, some of Lehar's oldest friends are now in the United States -- another reason why he is looking forward to his first overseas journey. There is, for instance, the famous playwright and wit, Franz Molnar -- once of Budapest (and Europe), not of Manhattan (and the world). "I've always wanted to collaborate with him," Lehar said, "but it somehow never worked out. Now I hope that we'll finally get together. In fact, I expect him to have a play ready for me so that I can start composing as soon as I arrive over there."

Molnar and Lehar -- that sounds like a promising team! Their combined talents may produce a masterpiece of wit and melody. And no politics, ^{if} ~~please~~ you please! Politics are ugly...

THE END
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