

# The Sound of Austria in Films about the Shoah and National Socialism

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## Abstract

In the following article, I will show that Austrian music plays a very particular role in international film and television productions, as well as in Austrian TV productions, that explicitly address the Holocaust and National Socialism, especially when National Socialist violence and perpetrators are represented. On the basis of this observation, I argue that irrespective of the general question of a perceived difference between Austria and Germany, a specific “Austrianness,” which is mediated in many ways via the sound level, has developed into a global pop cultural stylistic device in the characterization of Nazi violence since the late 1970s. This development is analyzed against the background of the role played by Austrian music in the first Austrian films dealing with National Socialism. From this point, I also set off in search of “The Sound of Austria” in Claude Lanzmann’s nine-hour documentary *Shoah* and the two Hollywood blockbusters *Inglourious Basterds* and *Schindler’s List*. What role does the image of Austria as a “country of music” play in these very different films and film genres that deal with the Shoah? How does the approach develop historically and geographically?

  
[previous article](#)

  
[back to index](#)

  
[next article](#)

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# Introduction

In his essay “‘Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland’: Nationalsozialismus als musikalisch vermittelter Subtext filmischer Gewaltdarstellungen,” (“Death is a master from Germany”: National Socialism as a musically mediated subtext of filmic depictions of violence), Frank Hentschel discusses the use of “German art music” (“deutsche Kunstmusik”) in the characterization of villains in Hollywood films.<sup>[1]</sup> As the title of the essay suggests, he interprets this kind of musical depiction of villains as a reference to the crimes of National Socialism. The title of the essay contains a direct quotation from Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge.” By quoting from Celan’s poem, Hentschel places his observations on Hollywood films in the context of the discourse on the contrast between the cultural achievements of German culture, especially music, and the barbaric acts of the Shoah, which culminated in Theodor W. Adorno’s famous and often-quoted dictum that “poetry after Auschwitz is barbarism.” The connection suggested by Celan’s poem between the perfection of a (German) musical composition such as the fugue and the meticulousness of the (German) mass murder of European Jews was also adopted in a scene from *Schindler’s List* in which a raid on the Cracow ghetto is accompanied by the diegetic piano playing of a Wehrmacht soldier playing a prelude from Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*.

However, the term “German art music,” placed in quotation marks by Hentschel as well, also refers to works by W. A. Mozart and Franz Schubert that have been used as film music to characterize villains. In a footnote, he explicitly points out the ideologically shaped, that is, the constructed character of the attributions “German” and “art music.” In her article “What is German Music?” from 1992, Celia Applegate works out how closely the formation of the concepts of art music and absolute music are intertwined with German nationalism of the nineteenth century. She also makes it very clear that music—in contrast to the political developments in the nineteenth century—always evoked a “Greater Germany,” for which Vienna played just as significant a role as Berlin.<sup>[2]</sup> Hentschel states that a deconstruction of these aforementioned attributions is irrelevant for the scope of his essay and refers to a reception history in which all these works were simply understood as “German.” The reception history meant by Hentschel is in line with the nineteenth century dynamics described by Applegate but is not explicitly attributed to it. In the context of Hentschel’s text, the implication is that this perspective, which does not differentiate between Austria and Germany, is quite similar to, among other things, the hegemonic American view of “old” Europe regularly expressed in Hollywood blockbusters. At first, it seems quite plausible that such an undifferentiated perspective informs the use of music in international film productions. In Austria, “Austrian composers” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries functioned as essential pillars of a national Austrian identity, mainly with the intention of demarcating an Austrian from a German identity, especially after the Second World War. But the question may certainly be raised whether composers such as Mozart and Schubert have been perceived as decidedly Austrian outside of Austria, especially in view of the reception history mentioned by Hentschel. In this article, however, I would like to show that in international film and television productions that explicitly address the Holocaust and National Socialism, Austrian music seems to play a very particular role, especially when National Socialist violence and perpetrators are represented. On the basis of this observation, I argue that irrespective of the general question of a perceived difference between Austria and Germany, a specific “Austrianness,” which is mediated in many ways via the sound level, has developed into a global pop cultural stylistic device in the characterization of Nazi violence since the late 1970s.



*Ehrt eure  
deutschen  
Meister*

**Figure 1: Ernst Hegenbarth's relief on the Vienna Konzerthaus (built 1912-13), illustrating Celia Applegate's claim about the role of Vienna in the evocation of a Greater Germany through music in the late nineteenth century; by courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)**

The article is divided into three sections. First, I give an overview, without any claim to completeness, of the way in which Austrian music appears in Holocaust films, especially before *Schindler's List*, from the 1950s to the 1970s and 1980s. The starting point of this section is the image of Austria as a *Musikland* (country of music) and its significance in immediate post-war Austrian cinema, in which neither the war nor the holocaust was addressed at all. On this basis, I will show in a comparative perspective how music associated with this image was used differently in Austrian and international productions dealing with National Socialism and the Holocaust in the following decades. The most prominent and influential example of this section is the *Holocaust* miniseries. As a result of its popularity, the term "Holocaust" became established outside and within academia. Nonetheless, the series was perceived as trivialization in academic discourse.

It was a completely different story when Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary *Shoah*, which he had worked on for more than 16 years, was released in 1985. The film does without archival footage and is mainly based on oral history interviews with survivors, victims, and perpetrators, also showing the former killing sites in the present. In both the feature pages and academic discourse, Lanzman's work has been considered a non-trivializing, particularly authentic form of confrontation with the traumatic past.<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, in the second section I look at *Shoah*. In contrast to the widespread claim that Lanzmann does not use conventional methods of dramatization in his film, a song sung by the Austrian postwar entertainer Peter Alexander can be heard in a quite significant scene. An analysis of the sequence in question discusses the function of music in Lanzmann's film and whether it indicates something like an "Austrian identity."

Eight years after Lanzman's *Shoah* and 16 years after the *Holocaust* TV series, Steven Spielberg's blockbuster *Schindler's List* was released in 1993. The film, which is perceived as a key "milestone" in the popularization and Americanization of the Holocaust, was discussed in a much more differentiated manner than *Holocaust*.<sup>[4]</sup> Proponents consider the dramatic and popular form a necessary evil for creating awareness of the Shoah among the general public and praise the film's fidelity to the facts. Opponents see the dramatic form as a trivialization and not infrequently hold up Lanzmann's *Shoah* as a counter-example of an appropriate confrontation. Another 16 years later, in 2009, another blockbuster dealing with the Holocaust, Quentin Tarantino's counterfactual *Inglourious Basterds*, came to the theaters and triggered a similarly controversial discussion.<sup>[5]</sup> But here the line between praise and rejection is somewhat different: proponents enjoy the postmodern play with historical facts, while critics condemn it as an imposition and distortion of the truth. Despite these completely different assessments in the discourse, the two blockbusters have a few things in common. In addition to almost identical worldwide box office results, the main villain Nazi characters are Austrian in both movies. In the third section I pose the question as to how the "Austrianness" of the perpetrators may be reflected in their characterization via the soundtrack.

## "Austrian (or Viennese) Sounds" in the First Phase of

# Holocaust Cinema

As I demonstrate in this section, a great deal of the music that occurs at a diegetic level in stereotypical death camp scenes—such as at the arrival of the train, roll calls, or the “selection” processes, or while prisoners are on their way to the gas chambers—belongs to a repertoire of popular classical music composed by the most famous “Austrian” composers, namely Johann Strauss father and son, and, to a lesser extent, Mozart.

## The Image of the *Musikland* in Film in Postwar Austria

The music and persona of both composers play a central role in the construction of Austria as a supposedly unpolitical *Musikland*, which became a determining factor in the formation of a post-war Austrian identity.<sup>[6]</sup> Therefore, their music (and likenesses) may continuously be heard (and seen) in various media events, such as radio programs, news reels, feature films, or advertisements, which, combined with a nostalgic perspective on the country’s great landscapes and imperial history, construct an Austrian identity.<sup>[7]</sup> This projection was not only addressed to the inhabitants of the new republic but also served to create an international image washed clean of any participation in Nazism, feeding into the political strategy to portray Austria as the “first victim” of Nazi Germany. At the same time, it also served the economic agenda of once again making the country an attractive tourism destination. In their article “Wunschbild und Exportartikel” (Desired image and export article), Stefan Schmidl and Monika Kröpfl illustrate the way in which two Austrian film productions from 1955, *Sissi* and *Mozart*, played a decisive role in this process of rebuilding a national identity that could be sold internationally.<sup>[8]</sup> Stylistically, both films relied heavily on an Austrian tradition of cinema from the 1930s, which was deeply influenced by the operetta (a tradition that continued, of course, during German National Socialist rule).<sup>[9]</sup> Nostalgic historical films like these, as well as the “Heimatfilme” (homeland movies) in postwar Austria, may be understood as practices of distraction from the trauma of war and the country’s involvement in Nazi crimes.





**Figure 2: Romy Schneider starring in *Sissi* (Austria: Erma-Film, 1955); photograph by Heinz Czerwonski; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)**

Yet during the same period, there were also some films that dealt explicitly with the Nazi regime and the Second World War, such as G. W. Pabst's *Der letzte Akt*, an Austrian production released in 1955, the same year as *Sissi* and *Mozart*. Apart from Erwin Halletz's original score, no additional music by an Austrian composer is featured in Pabst's film about the last days of Hitler. The score for the film's opening title is comprised of the so-called Liszt fanfare, which served as a theme melody for the German news reels during the war. At a diegetic level, waltz rhythms are played on an accordion in a sequence that shows an escapist party of ordinary soldiers, members of the SS, and nurses in the cantina of the bunker.<sup>[10]</sup> The accordion accompanies collectively

sung German *Schlager* songs such as “Du kannst nicht treu sein” (You can’t be faithful) and “Es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehen” (One day a miracle will happen), or the folk song “Droben im Oberland” (Up in the Oberland), all of which were popular songs during the Second World War. Three-quarter time is not played in the slurred manner typical of the Viennese waltz but instead rather straight, in order to encourage a collective *schunkeln*.<sup>[11]</sup> “Du kannst nicht treu sein” was composed by Hans Otten and written by Gerhard Ebeler in the early 1930s, and belongs to the typical repertoire of *Kölsch* (that is, Cologne) carnival; it is thus decidedly *not* associated with Austria and Vienna. In this sequence, there is a particularly interesting moment when the party—and the music—stops for a few seconds, as the “party crowd” notices that Heinrich Himmler is watching them. As Himmler leaves, they continue singing “Es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehen” in an ironic manner. So, even though the music is not connoted as Austrian at all, it serves to emphasize a demarcation of “normal people” from “the real Nazis”: the “normal people” (in this case including SS members), who neither believe in a German victory nor want to continue to fight but “just wanna have fun,” from obsessed Nazis such as Himmler, who seemingly condemns the actions of these “normal people.” This staging of “normal people” not interested in politics but in (Viennese) coziness fits perfectly with the image that Austria aimed to construct for itself in German-language audiovisual media in the second half of the twentieth century, for example in the genre of the so-called *Heimatfilme* or in TV shows like *Musikantenstadl*.



**Figure 3: German students and partners swaying (*schunkeln*) at a table at a party in Leipzig; photograph by Roger Rössing and Renate Rössing (November 14, 1953); by courtesy of [Deutsche Fotothek](#)**

A much more explicit example of how Viennese coziness (*gemütlichkeit*), expressed by means of Viennese music, was explicitly stylized in direct opposition to “German” Nazis may be found in the 1963 television play *Der Bockerer*, directed by Michael Kehlmann. The main character, Karl Bockerer, played by Fritz Muliar, is an unpolitical Viennese butcher, and the only member of his



family who is not enthusiastic about the Anschluss and Nazi ideology in 1938. One of the main reasons for his negative attitude towards the Nazi regime is the fact that his Tarok card game round can no longer take place. A regular participant, Bockerer's Jewish friend and neighbor Dr. Rosenblatt, had to flee Vienna after the Anschluss and the ongoing riots against the Jewish population. Notably, the television play was one of the first Austrian productions to show violent actions of Viennese people against their Jewish fellow citizens. In one scene, Bockerer sits with friends, one of them a socialist resistance fighter, at a *Heurigen*<sup>[12]</sup> after a walking tour in the Vienna woods. Also present is a group of Nazis, clearly recognizable as German because of their accent. Their rude und drunken behavior is shown in stark contrast with, and thus as harassment of, the idyllic atmosphere at the *Heurigen*. When the Germans pass Bockerer's table, he sings the popular *Wiener Lied*<sup>[13]</sup> "Pfiat Gott alte Zeit" (Good bye, old times) together with a zither player whom he brought to the table. Unsurprisingly, the song is played in a three-quarter time and has a waltz rhythm. Bockerer only sings the chorus line, with slightly altered lyrics: "fremde gsichta, fremde leit, Pfiat Gott alte Zeit" ("foreign faces, foreign people, goodbye old times"), while looking grudgingly at the Germans.<sup>[14]</sup> In his version, Bockerer replaces the word "andere" (other) from the original version of the song, which was written in 1889 by Carl Lorens, with "fremde" (foreign or strange). In the context of this scene, the expression "foreign faces" is explicitly intended to address the annoying "German" Nazis. Thus, music and lyrics give expression to Bockerer's perspective. The "classical" Viennese song, which in itself carries an overly nostalgic message, paired with the sound of the zither, which, at least since the soundtrack for *The Third Man*, is portrayed as a typically Viennese instrument, conveys the image of an old Viennese identity. This identity, which relies heavily on nostalgia and Viennese coziness, is threatened by the "foreign" Nazis, who proceed to devalue Bockerer's song—and with it the atmosphere at the *Heurigen*—with their harsh comments and behavior.<sup>[15]</sup>



**Figure 4: “At the Heurigen”:** a typical garden of a Heurigen restaurant in Vienna; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

In 1981, a much more popular remake of this television play was produced for the cinema. It was directed by Franz Antel, who had been a member of the Nazi party in Austria since 1933, but nevertheless had built his career as a director of *Heimatfilme* in the 1950s. The discussed scene is rather similar in the remake, but there is one significant difference from the 1960s version, in that the Viennese song is already being sung at another table, and Bockerer only joins in on the chorus.<sup>[16]</sup> Thus, in the remake the song is not exclusively aligned with Bockerer’s individual perspective. Also, the words of the chorus, the “foreign faces,” are less explicitly addressed to the group of German Nazis. In the cinema version, the song thus becomes a more collective but

also more implicit form of criticism directed at the “German occupiers.” Unlike in the television play, the group of German Nazis in Antel’s adaption answer to the Viennese song by singing a popular German soldier’s song entitled “Westerwaldlied.” This ties in with the overall musical depiction of Germans in the cinema version of *Der Bockerer*, who are portrayed as occupiers of Austria. The opening sequence consists of archival footage of the so-called invasion of Austria by German troops, which is accompanied by military marching music.<sup>[17]</sup> In the closing sequence, the war is over and Bockerer is sitting in his living room together with his friends—including Rosenblatt, who has returned to Vienna as an American soldier—playing Tarok. In this scene, the image of the *Musikland* Austria is immediately present through the nondiegetic soundtrack: after a warm welcome, the main theme of the “Blue Danube” (“An der schönen blauen Donau”) waltz begins to play.

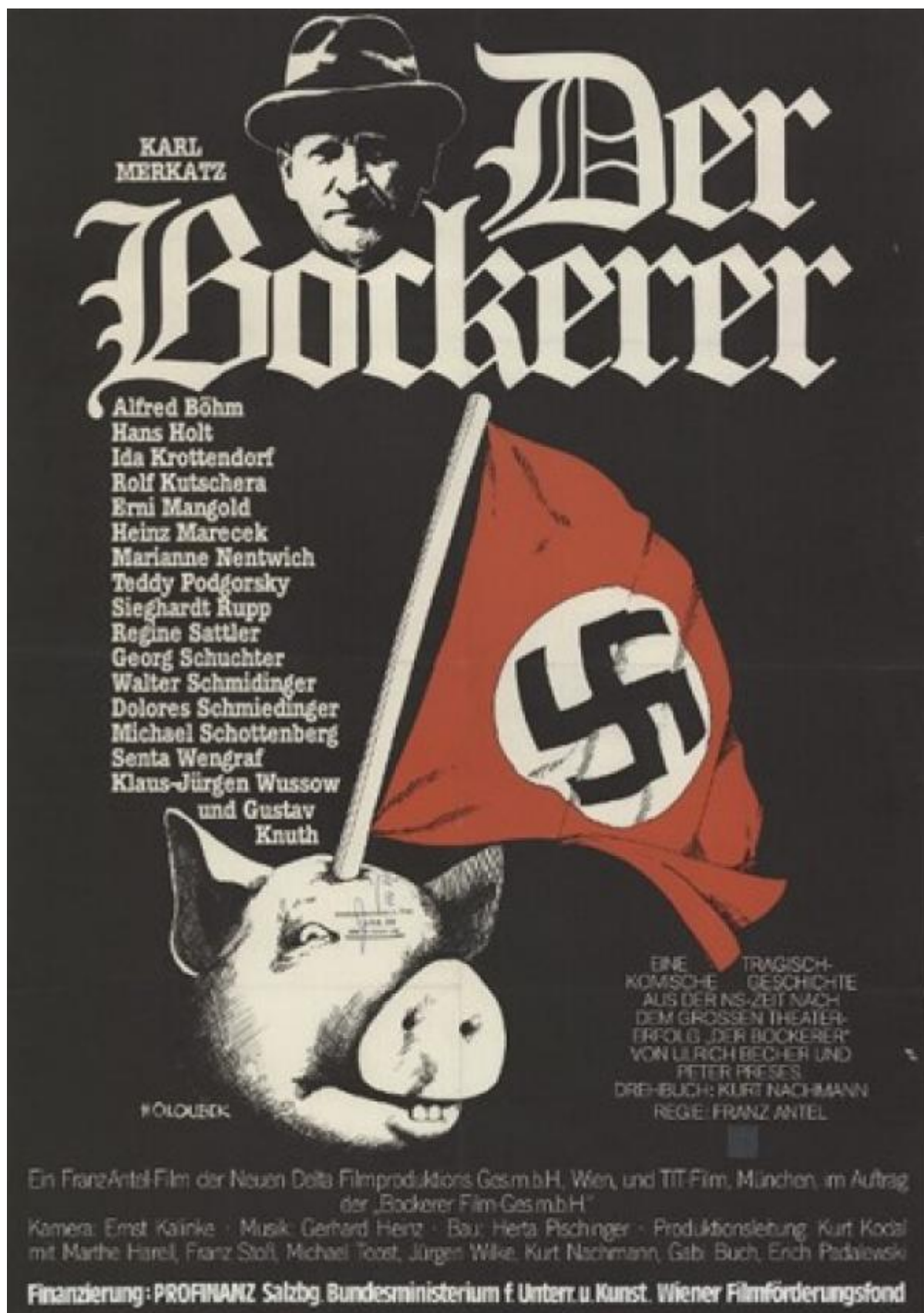


Figure 5: Film poster *Der Bockerer*, directed by Franz Antel (Austria: Wien-Film, 1981); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

## The Sound of the *Musikland* in Concentration and Death Camp Scenes

The role of music in concentration and death camps was addressed in feature films much earlier



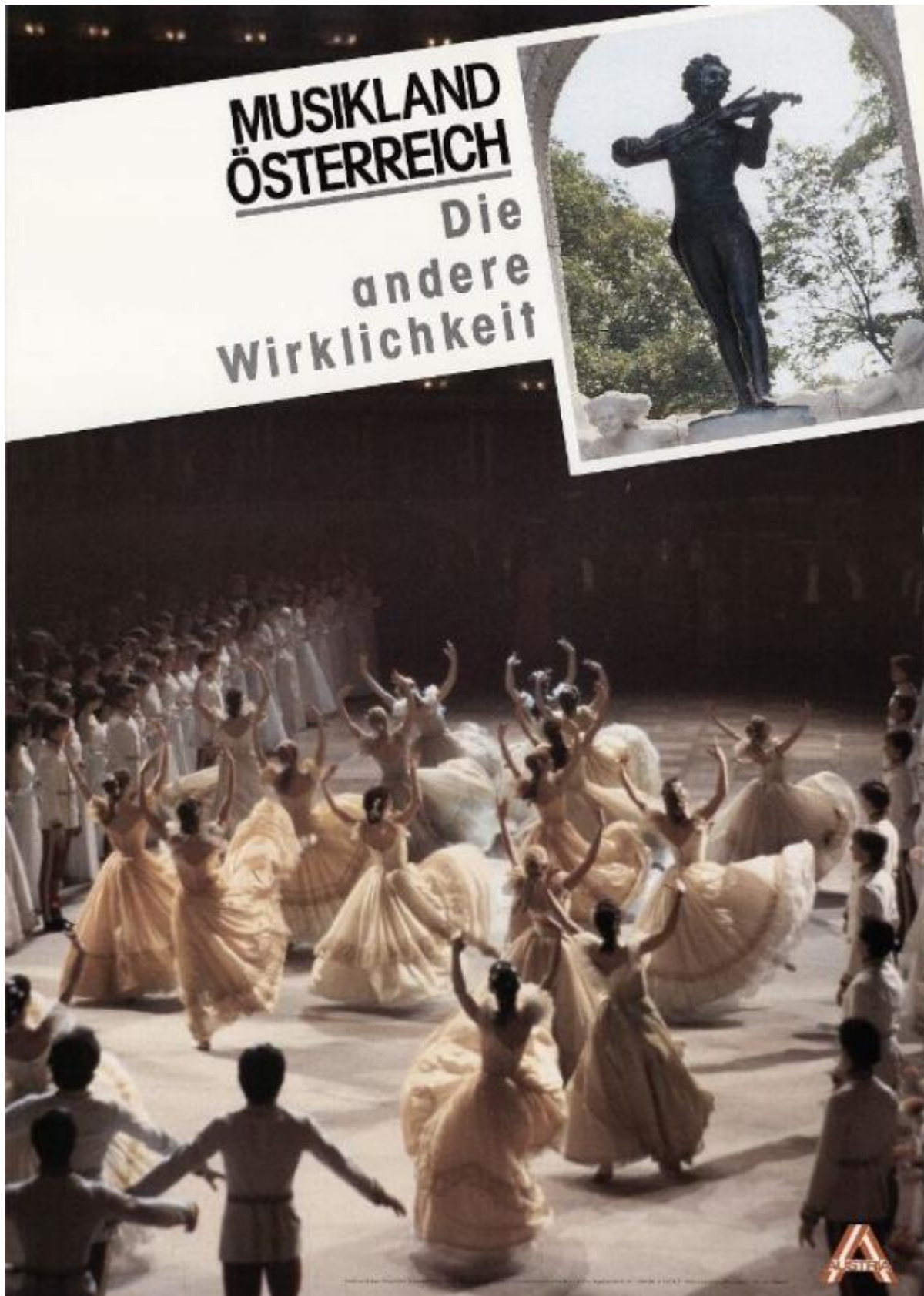
than in research. In her article “How Can Music be Torturous?” Juliane Brauer quotes the German music encyclopedia *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, which claims that the topic was “music-historical no man’s land” before the eighties.<sup>[18]</sup> Brauer says that despite this absence and ignorance in academic research, there were several public negotiations of the topic before the 1980s.<sup>[19]</sup> As one example, she mentions the Polish feature film *Ostatni etap*, directed by Wanda Jakubowska in 1948.<sup>[20]</sup> Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann emphasizes the enormous and ongoing influence of Jakubowska’s film on later productions dealing with the Shoah, especially with regard to the representation of the camps at a visual level, in that they either actually re-use the same material, as in a dream sequence in the *Diary of Anne Frank*, or use it as a model for similar scenes.<sup>[21]</sup> In 2018, Marek Haltof presented an entire monograph on this film, which in the immediate postwar period was one of the first to address the Shoah in such an explicit way. In his monograph, Haltof analyzes a lot of camp scenes in which music is present at a diegetic level: a camp orchestra playing “classical music” during the selection process for the gas chambers<sup>[22]</sup> and accompanying roll calls, forced labor, and abuse of the prisoners,<sup>[23]</sup> as well as music played on a phonograph in interrogation and torture scenes in order to drown out the screams of the victims.<sup>[24]</sup> When describing these scenes, Haltof speaks of “classical music” or “cheering music,” without analyzing its style in much detail. In a sequence in which the women’s camp orchestra plays while the prisoners are pushed to their workplaces by the *Kapos*, the music sounds like a military brass marching song.<sup>[25]</sup> This style of music is similar to that used in the cinema version of *Der Bockerer*, which symbolizes the “German occupiers” at an acoustic level and may generally be understood as an acoustic cliché of “Germanness.” Of course, music of this style is an important part of the so-called *Kirtag* (rural festivities) in Germany as well as in Austria and in Switzerland. Nevertheless, it certainly does not belong to the repertoire that is associated with the cliché of Austria as a *Musikland*. So while the engagement with music in concentration camps may, at a visual (and content) level, be traced back to one of the very first Holocaust films, it is only at a later point that we can observe a preference on the part of the filmmakers to include music in such scenes that is explicitly related to Austria’s *Musikland* image.



**Figure 6: Concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, photograph by Bill Hunt (February 12, 2011); source: [Flickr](#); license CC BY 2.0**

The TV soap opera *Holocaust* (1978) and its massive impact on the popularization of the historical event, as well as the accusations of trivialization, and particularly the series's critical reception in Germany and Austria, have all been well researched.<sup>[26]</sup> In a scene in which the systematic mass murder in gas chambers is discussed—described in detail, even—Austrian music is performed diegetically. In time with the visual introduction of the historical location, Auschwitz, during the fourth episode of the series, the second movement of Mozart's *Serenade in G Major*, K. 525, also known as *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, sets in.<sup>[27]</sup> In one of the next cuts, the visuals reveal that the music is diegetic and played by a quintet of camp prisoners. It accompanies a conversation between camp commander Rudolf Höß and the scientist Wilhelm Pfannenstiel, who came by for a visit.<sup>[28]</sup> Using very technical language, Höß explains to Pfannenstiel how the killings are carried out in the gas chambers. The soft and playful music is in stark contrast with the clinical way in which the murders are described. Although the piece certainly belongs to international popular culture, at the same time it is associated with classical music, which—at least from an American/popular culture perspective—is a symbol of (European) high culture. Thus, the music in this scene indicates Pfannenstiel's elitism and education. The association with elitism and highbrow culture also ties in with the fact that the gas chambers allowed the perpetrators to “keep their hands clean.” With regard to the music used to convey this layer of meaning, it is notable that many other less popular pieces of “classical” music would also work here; numerous other slow second movements would convey a similarly tender and calm character. However, the popularity of the piece, composed by one of the most famous composers in the world—and the central figure of the *Musikland* image—plays a particularly significant role here. Although no Austrians are shown in this Auschwitz scene, Austrian perpetration is subliminally suggested by the use of that famous piece. The fact that this piece is playing during the establishing shot makes Auschwitz, in a way, an “Austrian place.”





**Figure 7: “Musikland Österreich - Die andere Wirklichkeit,” tourism advertising poster displaying a statue of Johann Strauss II (1985); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)**

This practice of “implying Austria through music” while, at a visual level, death camps are introduced is a prominent feature of several film productions of that time. The Polish/American film *And the Violins Stopped Playing*, produced in 1988, tells the story of Romani musicians fleeing the Nazis from Poland to Hungary. They eventually get caught and deported to Auschwitz.

One scene shows the arrival of a train in Auschwitz; the wagon doors open and the prisoners are herded towards the camp along the “ramp” by armed soldiers.<sup>[29]</sup> Among the prisoners is a group of Romani. They still wear their civil clothes and are clearly distinguishable from the Jewish prisoners, who have to wear the yellow star.

The main character, violinist Dymitr Mirga (played by Horst Buchholtz), asks one of the SS guards monitoring the arrival what will happen to them. The SS guard responds in a calm and friendly manner that gypsies are considered Aryans—as non-Jewish people, they will be treated well in a special family camp. This soon turns out to be a lie. Yet at that moment, the friendliness of the guards, together with the solemn and cheerful character of the music being played, create the illusion of a supposedly harmless situation: the entire process is accompanied by the diegetic sound of Johann Strauss’s “Blue Danube” played through loudspeakers at the train station of the extermination camp. This waltz, which is also considered the secret anthem of Austria, draws a connection between Auschwitz and Austria that is even clearer than the *andante* of the *Kleine Nachtmusik* in *Holocaust* ten years earlier.

Another waltz by Johann Strauss, “Tales from the Vienna Woods,” plays an important role in another Holocaust film, namely the British TV production *Escape from Sobibor* (1987), in which the waltz figures prominently in the hypocritical masquerade with which victims in freight cars are “welcomed” at the death camp. Before the train stops, an SS guard turns on the phonograph.<sup>[30]</sup> At the same time, the *Kapos*, who guide the victims out of the wagons and line them up for the following “selection” process, are reminded by a SS commander to continuously smile while doing so. The sequence explicitly illustrates the strategy of the SS to lull the arriving victims into thinking they are safe. After the wagons are emptied, a friendly SS commander leads them into the gas chamber, under the pretense that they should take a shower after the long journey in order to prevent typhoid. The role of the famous Strauss waltz as part of the murderous strategy of leading victims to the gas chambers in a friendly manner may be conflated with the topos of hypocritical and, above all, malicious Viennese friendliness.<sup>[31]</sup> In the context of the history of the Sobibor death camp, this particular kind of music is also a reference to the high percentage of Austrians among the camp’s SS personnel, for example the camp commandant Franz Reichleitner and his deputy Gustav Wagner, who are also depicted in the scene in question. The cheerful character of the music is at odds with the state of the completely exhausted victims stepping out of the freight cars. It is clear that they are threatened, not only from the perspective of an audience informed about the Shoah but also through various elements at the visual level that indicate the lurking violence, such as the machine guns of the guards pointing at the group of arriving people from all directions, or the whips of the *Oberkapo* and the SS men, which are then repeatedly used to separate the victims into groups. At an acoustic level, it is the strong reverberation of the music that underscores this spooky atmosphere.



**Figure 8: A kingdom for the King of Waltz, photograph of a golden statue of Johann Strauss II in City Park Vienna, tourism advertising poster (1994); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)**

Yet in *Escape from Sobibor*, famous waltzes serve not only as a means of deceiving victims but also as background music while the SS men relax after work. While sitting in their own cantina, they are being served beer and extraordinarily large sausages; in the background, another famous waltz by Johann Strauss, "Roses from the South," is playing.<sup>[32]</sup> Although the lighting is far from cozy and the caricatures of sausages look disgusting, this is still a moment of relaxation from the perspective of the SS men. Thus, the association of the waltz with Viennese *gemütlichkeit* comes into play again. But unlike in the Austrian production *Der Bockerer*, in which this *gemütlichkeit*, as a Viennese peculiarity, was opposed to Nazism, which was associated mainly with Germany, a perverted kind of *gemütlichkeit* is part of the barbaric attitude of the perpetrators in *Escape from Sobibor*. While they enjoy themselves, listening to Strauss and eating disgusting-looking caricature food, their obscenity is expressed explicitly through their conversation: the SS men discuss whether it is unseemly to rape women before killing them, because as German men, they should not have sexual intercourse with Jewish women.

## Viennese Waltz Symbolizing Perpetrators

In *Boys from Brazil* (1978), a US thriller with science fiction and dystopian elements, Viennese waltz is clearly associated with the perpetrators' perspective as well. The plot of the film is set in the present of the time when it was made. The antagonist of the fictional plot is the historical figure of Josef Mengele, who hides in South America and, by means of a cloning experiment, intends to create a leader for a future Nazi world empire.<sup>[33]</sup> At one point, the "Blue Danube" waltz is played at a Nazi celebration in a ballroom decorated with swastika banners.<sup>[34]</sup> Mengele is accompanied by the diegetic music as well as the camera as he steps out of his limousine, down



the red carpet, and into the ballroom, where he is received as a special guest of honor and asks the daughter of a party comrade to dance. Yet the music is eventually interrupted when Mengele starts a fight, accusing another dancer and comrade of being a traitor.

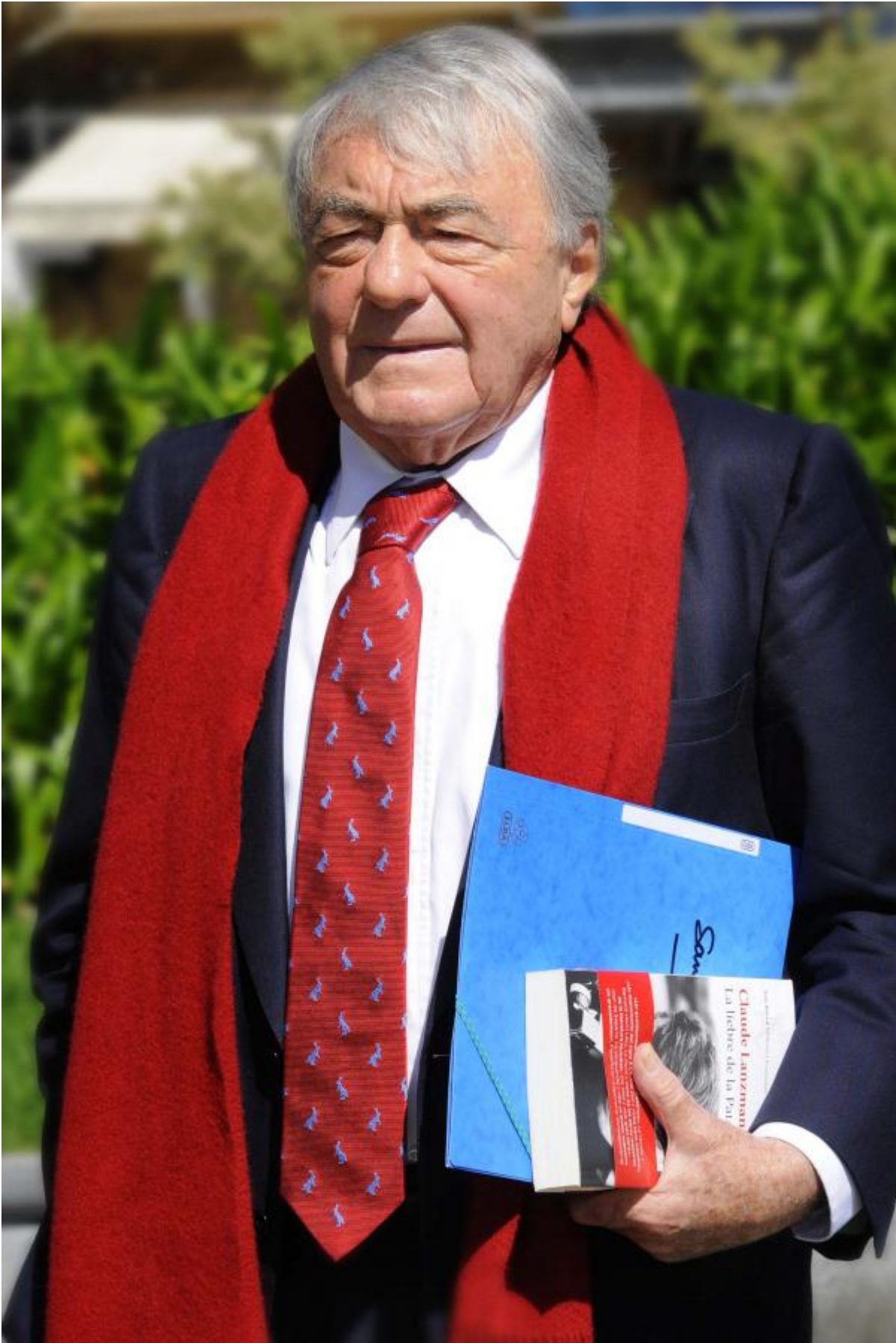
The scene implicitly—not only with regard to the audio, but also at a visual level—refers to the Viennese operetta film of the 1930–1950s, in which the ballroom is a central place. Yet in the operetta film, this place is rather unpolitical, whereas in *Boys from Brazil*, it is rendered highly political and potentially violent. This is symbolized by the swastikas, the lined-up members of the Hitler Youth, the BDM (Band of German Maidens), and Mengele's accusatory rant. In the case of *Boys from Brazil*, the waltz is not only present at a diegetic level but also clearly influenced the original score by Jerry Goldsmith. The soundtrack's main theme, which may be heard in the opening sequence, consists of a typical Strauss-like melody in the violins, which intersects with an "answering" trumpet line. Both elements are accompanied by a tuba, which continuously emphasizes the first beat.<sup>[35]</sup> The stomping downbeats of the tuba, reminiscent of marching music, have an alienating effect in the context of the joyful waltz melody, and the tune turns decidedly grotesque in its character when the main motif of the waltz theme is picked out and varied to a minor key.<sup>[36]</sup> While all embellishments and harmonizations by the rest of the orchestra are dropped, only the clumsy beats of the tuba remain, supported by other low registers of brass and the strings. This grotesque variation of the waltz theme plays a central role in the rest of the film's score, where it is used as a kind of leitmotif for Mengele. Composer Jerry Goldsmith thus combined the older cliché of characterizing Nazis by means of military march music—which is central not only in *Der Bockerer* but also in Nazi propaganda news reels—with the aforementioned sarcastic strategy of using the Viennese waltz idiom in order to express the sadistic and cynical methods that Nazi perpetrators used to harass their victims.

In its expressionistic distortion of a Strauss-like waltz, Goldsmith's soundtrack is notably reminiscent of Maurice Ravel's ballet *La Valse*, written and premiered in the early years after World War I. Ravel's contemporaries, as well as more recent analyses of the work, interpret the waltz and its distortions as a juxtaposition intended to depict the world on the one hand before and on the other hand after the horrors of war, thus expressing the lost ideal of Romanticism.<sup>[37]</sup> (Ravel himself resisted such a clearly narrative interpretation of his work.) The connection of Goldsmith's soundtrack to Ravel's ballet is not limited to the approach of distorting a waltz through compositional techniques, which in Ravel's work is done in a somewhat more delicate manner on a temporally more extended space. The similarities of the melodic material on the basis of which these distortions are made are so pronounced that an intertextual reference between the pieces can be interpreted, which in turn can be traced back to popular melodies of the Strauss waltzes "The Blue Danube," "Tales from the Vienna Woods," and "Viennese Blood." But it is decidedly not the mourning for lost ideals of Romanticism that is expressed when the soundtrack with obvious reminiscences to Ravel and Strauss is heard in *Boys from Brazil*. Ravel's arrangement and alienation of the waltz in *La Valse*, however, was still interpreted in a more abstract way that did not aim at a reference to a narrative *program* that would be expressed through the music. Just as in my analysis of Goldsmith's soundtrack, Jessie Fillerup's analysis of *La Valse* elaborates on the "grotesque" as the central characteristic and effect of the piece.<sup>[38]</sup> Fillerup attributes the grotesque precisely to the fact that the opposites in the music are not simply juxtaposed but rather united with each other in a single piece. This observation can be applied not only to Goldsmith's soundtrack but also to the aging Nazis in *Boys From Brazil*, portrayed with the help of music, who on the one hand revel in the past in a sentimental way and on the other hand dream of a National Socialist future. At a meta-level, "the grotesque"—as a

union of contradictory and shrill opposites—can in turn also be related to the image of Vienna and the Viennese, as is also suggested in the film. Vienna is established as a place in the film through the nondiegetic distortions of the waltz. On the one hand, it has the reputation of being a city of music lovers and nostalgic coziness that welcomes the whole world, while on the other hand, it has a history as a place of perpetrators and denunciators—personified in the film by the figure of the landlord—a tradition of anti-Semitism, and the fiercest persecutions of its Jewish inhabitants.

## Peter Alexander at the Gateway to Hell in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*

From an academic perspective, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* is often considered the “artistically superior” antithesis to trivializing representations of the Holocaust such as *Schindler's List*.<sup>[39]</sup> This dichotomy may, in part, be traced back to a written statement by Lanzmann himself, which he published in a French and German daily newspaper after the release of *Schindler's List*.<sup>[40]</sup> In it, Lanzmann states that it is “forbidden” to represent visually what happened in the Shoah. In his film, he lets survivors talk about the events and leaves the visualization of these events to the audience's imagination. His central criticism of *Schindler's List* is that it shows and fleshes out all that *Shoah* deliberately omits. In her book on films about the Holocaust, Cathrin Corell calls Lanzmann's film a “critics' choice” (“Kritikererfolg”) and acknowledges that it is popular “especially among intellectuals” (“vor allem bei Intellektuellen”).<sup>[41]</sup> The film's avoidance of representing the Holocaust at a visual level is considered—not only by Lanzmann himself—a defining feature of its demarcation from both documentaries and feature films. No archival material of death and concentration camps is used or replicated. Margaret Olin states that historical footage in *Shoah* is “replaced” by present-day geography.<sup>[42]</sup> Shoshana Felman writes that the film is “made exclusively of testimonies.”<sup>[43]</sup> With regard to the above-mentioned juxtaposition of *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*, it is interesting to note that regarding *Schindler's List*, the soundtrack has been identified as a trivializing element by its critics; yet in *Shoah*, the absence of film music, at least in the conventional sense of a score, has hardly been acknowledged. Felman considers the role of the voices of the witnesses and Lanzmann on the soundtrack, and she deals in great detail with the song that is sung by survivor Szymon Srebnik in the opening sequence, as well as its function for the memory process.<sup>[44]</sup> However, the diegetic music performed by Peter Alexander that will be discussed in the following section of this article has not yet received much theoretical or critical attention. Margarete Olin mentions the scene briefly and refers to a phrase from the lyrics, namely “Immer wieder das gleiche Lied” (Again and again, the same song), as very “telling” in the context of the Shoah.<sup>[45]</sup> I will return to her claim in my own analysis, after describing the scene in question. In the context of the film, the scene seems somehow mysterious and out of place. In it, an elderly couple dances to a Peter Alexander song in an empty bar. The music carries over into the following scene, which is shot out of a car on a drive through Berlin at night.<sup>[46]</sup>



**Figure 9: Claude Lanzmann, photograph by [Iñigo Royo](#) (2011); by courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)**

At the visual level, the dancing scene is composed of two shots: a long shot that shows the couple dancing alone in a bar, illuminated by several chandeliers, and a hand-held medium shot



that follows the dancers and shows their old, somehow stiff smiling faces in detail. Because of the shot composition and the fact that the dancers are all alone in the bar, the scene has a highly staged character and is thus quite different from the documentary aesthetics of the rest of the film. At that moment in the film, it is unclear who the dancing couple is—this will not be resolved, as neither of them re-appear in the movie. It is also unclear where the bar is located, yet the fact that the music is carried over to the scene of a Berlin night drive may indicate that the bar is in Berlin.

What follows is an interview with a Jewish survivor from Berlin, Inge Deutschkron, who reveals that Jews were rounded up in a *Tanzlokal* (dance venue) for deportation.<sup>[47]</sup> It is thus implied that the previous location was the same *Tanzlokal* where the deportations began. The sequence as a whole, that is, the dancing scene and the Berlin night drive, must be placed in context with what happened before and after, if it is to be understood as establishing Berlin as the new location and marking a point in the film at which Lanzmann begins looking at perpetrators. In the more than 100 minutes before this sequence, Lanzmann has shown no German locations, and he has not interviewed a perpetrator. Besides the survivors, his other interviewees, at least in the first 100 minutes, are Poles who were witnesses and bystanders of deportations. Lanzmann shows death camps, or what is left of them, the surrounding countryside, and Polish towns that were Jewish before the Shoah. He visits survivors in Basel, Tel Aviv, and New York. A few cuts before the dancing scene in question, the iconographic Auschwitz camp gate and the “ramp” are shown, while survivors describe in great detail the “selection” processes they witnessed. In the interview with the above-mentioned survivor from Berlin, Inge Deutschkron, a core topic is the persecution of Berlin Jews and the proposition that the Germans “did not know.”

Afterwards, about five minutes after Peter Alexander’s song has faded into the street noise of Berlin, Lanzmann interviews Franz Suchomel for the first time in the film, who was involved in the extermination process in Treblinka as an *SS-Unterscharführer*. As in undercover investigation films, Lanzmann is equipped with a hidden camera and a team in a radio car. Suchomel does not know that he is being filmed and speaks openly about the gas chambers. Thus the song and the dancing scene mark a transition in the film from the survivors to the perpetrators. Referring to Lanzmann, who described the movement of the film’s narration as “circles of hell,” Olin speaks of the scene with Suchomel as hell’s center. Following this metaphor, the dancing scene may be interpreted as the “gateway to hell,” which makes perfect sense visually, considering the cave-like character of the dark bar. But why play a Schlager song, of all things, sung by Viennese entertainer Peter Alexander, at the “gateway to hell”?

Returning to Olin’s above-mentioned claim, I want to raise the question why this specific song is “telling” and, more importantly, what it tells us in the context of the described scene. This analysis does not only consider the narrative’s interrelation with the lyrics but also the song’s style, sound, and interpreter. First of all, it must be pointed out that the staged character of the scene is constituted by the interaction of the camera movement and the music. The song starts with a mandolin, playing semiquavers on the same note (G) for two bars, and then descends the C major scale stepwise to C before the beat starts. The descending line of the mandolin is imitated by the camera, which does a vertical pan from a close-up of the chandelier to a long shot of the dancing couple. The beginning of the long shot is synchronized with Peter Alexander’s voice opening the first verse. As he begins with the chorus, there is a (jump) cut from the long shot to the hand-held camera, following the dancers in a medium close up. A dominant element of the music in the chorus is a low brass instrument—probably a tuba—playing half notes in a typical 1-5 harmonic accompaniment. This is reminiscent of the stomping brass of military music,

which is often used as a sonic stereotype for Nazis, as in Jerry Goldsmith's score for *Boys in Brazil*, but also in German folk music (*volkstümliche Musik*). An accompaniment like this is conducive to the typical *schunkeln*, which was already described in the context of the first movie discussed in this article, *Der letzte Akt*, in the cantina of Hitler's bunker.

In combination with the shaky medium close-ups, the brass accompaniment creates the quite bizarre impression that the elderly couple is staggering through the image. The vocal line at the beginning of the chorus doubles the rhythmical phrasing of the brass, consisting of the name—and the song's title—"Pedro." This kind of phrasing is very similar to another famous German Schlager song of the 1970s, namely "Heidi." It may be understood as a typical Schlager chorus that, due to its rhythmic simplicity, allows a crowd, for instance in a beer tent, to sing along. It may be interpreted as a cynical—and possibly a bit snobbish—comment by Lanzmann to associate the sphere of the perpetrators with a stereotypical German Schlager party song. This interpretation is reminiscent of Hanna Arendt's concept of "the banality of evil." But just as important as the song's banality, in my interpretation of the scene as a staged "gateway to hell," is the fact that it belongs to contemporary German folk culture and is sung by the most successful Austrian entertainer of the second half of the twentieth century.



**Figure 10: Peter Alexander, awarded with the “Goldene Ehrenzeichen für Verdienste um das Land Wien” (Golden decoration of honor for services to the state of Vienna) in 1971; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)**

In his article on popular music as an expression of nostalgic emotions in postwar Germany, Fred Ritzel cites a statement by Kurt Tucholsky from the 1920s claiming that a Schlager song displays “the most complete expression of the German ‘Volksseele’ (soul of the people).”<sup>[48]</sup> Ritzel uses this observation as a starting point to analyze “how hit songs’ hidden feelings were expressed in

post-war Germany, and how 'jovial' music, despite its apparently harmless form, plays on base ignorance and confusion."<sup>[49]</sup> He then argues that songs from wartime Nazi propaganda films, among them Zarah Leander's "Davon geht die Welt nicht unter" (It's not the end of the world) or "Gute Nacht Mutter" (Good night mother)—which was interpreted by Alexander in the sixties—were still popular in post-war Germany and reveal sentimental feelings for a "more glorious" national past.<sup>[50]</sup> Moreover, Ritzel points out how newly composed songs from the postwar period melodically resemble hit songs of the Nazi period that played a central role in Nazi propaganda, such as the "Horst-Wessel-Lied" or the "Sie hieß Marie und treu war sie" (Her name was Marie and she was faithful).<sup>[51]</sup> Ritzel also convincingly interprets songs with supposed nonsense lyrics, such as "Wir sind die Eingeborenen von Trizonesien" (We are the natives from Trizonesia) from 1949, as a form of denial and sentimental self-victimization: Trizonesia was a curse word for the occupied zones in West Germany. According to Ritzel, in calling themselves "natives" from a land with this exotic sounding name, Germans ironically referred to the accusation of being barbarous, which, in view of their own self-image as the cultural nation par excellence, was regarded as a particular impertinence on the part of the "occupiers."<sup>[52]</sup>

If we were to apply Ritzel's interpretation of Schlager songs from the postwar period to Schlager songs from the 1970s, we would have to ask what the hidden feelings are that might be expressed in "Pedro," especially in the context of Lanzmann's film, which establish a positive emotional continuity with the Nazi past. The fact that a contemporary song was used, and not a historical one, for example, from the time of the Shoah, is consistent with the film's overall approach. The sound and style of the song, on the one hand—for instance the drum beat and the base line, which are influenced by rock and pop music of the 1960s—instantly frame it as modern, thus rendering the dancing scene as contemporary. On the other hand, the age of the dancers in the dancing scene seems to link the music to the past.

But it is also the genre of the Schlager itself, though it is a "modern" one, that is associated with being old-fashioned, attracting mainly the war generation. In this regard, the Austrian interpreter, Peter Alexander, plays a significant role. In 1973, when "Pedro" was released, Alexander was 50 years old and had been a successful singer for more than 20 years. But, as the dancers prove, his music did not only attract audiences of his age but much older ones as well. This may be partly explained by the fact that, at the beginning of his career in the early 1950s, Alexander sang a lot of cover versions of older songs that had been hits during the war.<sup>[53]</sup> Additionally, Peter Alexander became a presenter and entertainer on German TV in the early 1960s. His *Peter-Alexander-Show* was broadcast and produced by the German TV station ZDF in the 1970s and had immensely high ratings.

In response to the student protest movements of the late 1960s and 1970s in Germany, which formulated an explicit critique of the previous generation's Nazi past and led to riots in public spaces, ZDF ran Saturday night entertainment programs that constructed an unpolitical "opposite world" for those who were too old or too young or simply not interested in participating in the protests.<sup>[54]</sup> In general, ZDF's programming orientation tends to be conservative, appealing primarily to older viewers.<sup>[55]</sup> This also propelled Alexander's popularity as a singer. Together with Udo Jürgens, another singer of Austrian descent, he is considered one of the most popular singers and entertainers in the German-speaking world during the second half of the twentieth century. Having lived in Switzerland for several decades, Alexander returned to Vienna a few years before his death in 2011, and he received several awards from the city of Vienna and the Austrian Republic. At the same time, he is perceived as a *German* star due to the success of his TV show, broadcast on ZDF (even though most of his successful music and entertainment programs were

co-produced and broadcast on Austrian TV as well): the *Peter-Alexander-Show* had the highest ratings in all of Germany in the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>[56]</sup> and Alexander won several German TV and entertainment awards (the Bambi, for example, nine times). Moreover, Peter Alexander recorded a song with the German national soccer team before the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. In contrast to identity constructions of Austria through the image of the *Musikland*, which served to distance the country from its Nazi past, and thus from Germany, the case of Peter Alexander in the postwar period illustrates that—just like the Schlager genre as a whole and the entertainment music programs of ZDF, which were co-produced by Austrian and Swiss public TV—highly successful music offered a space where it was possible to construct and celebrate a collectively imagined “German” identity *beyond* national borders.

The example of “Pedro” shows that part of this construction is a sentimental look backwards and a massive othering process—through the singing of “Pedro,” the southern philanderer. In the context of the scene in question in *Shoah*, the “hidden feeling” that the song expresses cannot be reduced to sexual longing and bigamous fantasies projected on a stranger from the south but also incorporates the sentimental illusion of a lost world of the past, where Austria and Germany were “united.” An additional reference to Austria and Vienna, besides the origin of the song’s interpreter, is that, at least according to the DVD chapter overview, the bar in Berlin where the couple is dancing is called “Café Wien.”<sup>[57]</sup> Certain fragments of the lyrics, such as “Jede Nacht das gleiche Geschrei” (Every night the same yelling), or “Oh was hab ich schon mitgemacht” (Oh what I have been through), become particularly cynical comments in the context of the interviews before and after the dancing scene, which outline processes of deportation and mass killings. The position of the song within the film, at the “gateway to hell,” indicates that it is used to express the mentality of the perpetrators, which reaches from the past and into the present of the film. This mentality is rendered as typically and ordinarily German by the song’s genre, the Schlager. Austria and Vienna, in this case, are understood as part of this mentality—the music here is thus used antithetically to the “Wienerlied” in *Der Bockerer*.

## Austrian Nazi Villains in Contemporary Hollywood

In two of the most successful Hollywood blockbusters about the Holocaust, *Schindler’s List* and *Inglourious Basterds*, the villains are Austrian members of the SS. For *Inglourious Basterds*, Quentin Tarantino invents the character of *Obersturmbannführer* Hans Landa from the “Austrian Alps.” He is proud of his nickname, “Jew Hunter.” However, he is not characterized as a brutal butcher but interrogates his victims in the style of a distinguished, highly intelligent private detective of utmost politeness. Yet it is precisely from this politeness that a stark threat emanates. Landa is played by the Austrian actor Christoph Waltz. In the original version of the film, he is heard speaking four languages fluently. In German, he speaks with an upper-class Viennese accent. Landa’s first words in the film are clearly recognizable as Eastern Austrian, that is, from the region around Vienna, which contrasts sharply with the Prussian North German timbre of the subordinate Wehrmacht soldiers. Arriving in front of the farmhouse where his future victims are hiding, he checks with a lower-ranking Wehrmacht soldier in a distinctly Viennese accent: “Das ist der Hof vom La Padite?” (Is this La Padite’s farm?)<sup>[58]</sup> After a 15-minute interrogation of the farmer, La Padite, Landa has the farmhouse stormed and the Jewish family hiding under the wooden floorboards shot dead. Only one daughter, Shoshanna, survives and manages to run away. Landa notices her and points his pistol at her as she runs away across the



meadow. When he pulls the trigger, the significant click on the soundtrack reveals that the gun is not loaded and Shoshanna is able to escape. In time with the timpani, the noise of the gun ends the musical accompaniment of the scene. In the middle of the abrupt silence, Landa comments dryly and with a strong Viennese accent: "Bumsti!" (Boom!).<sup>[59]</sup>



**Figure 11: Christoph Waltz at the Viennale Film Festival in 2017, photograph by Manfred Werner; by courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)**

The music that accompanies the massacre of the Jewish family is taken from a film score composed by Ennio Morricone for a spaghetti western, *Il ritorno de ringo* (The Return of Ringo), directed by Duccio Tessari (1965). Stylistically, this kind of music is—contrary to the music in scenes from older productions that show Nazi violence against Jews—not at all reminiscent of the *Musikland* Austria cliché. Landa’s Austrian identity is conveyed on the soundtrack primarily through his speech, or, more precisely, through his accent and speech melody. But there is also a passage at the very beginning of the film in which Austria is referenced through music, namely by means of a fragment of Beethoven’s music. Even before Landa’s face is shown, and before he and his assistants appear on the horizon, gradually approaching La Padite’s farm on their motorcycles, the head motif of one of Beethoven’s most famous works in popular culture is played: *Für Elise* (WoO 59). The version cited in this scene is part of another original film score by Morricone for *La resa dei conti* (The Big Gundown), directed by Sergio Sollima (1966). In that original score, the motif accompanies an Austrian character in a spaghetti western, namely the villain aristocrat “Baron von Schulenberg” (played by Gérard Herter), who is a bounty hunter and a professional killer. The music borrowed for *Inglourious Basterds* is taken from the showdown duel scene of the film, between Baron Schulenberg and the protagonist Jonathan Corbett (played by western star Lee Van Cleef); in this scene, the Beethoven motif, played on the piano, is contrasted with Flamenco guitars. In his book on cinematic metafiction in Tarantino’s films, David Roche identifies fascist tendencies in the character of the baron in the spaghetti western, and he argues that through the citation of the music characterizing the baron, his fascist traits are transferred into the scene from *Inglourious Basterds* in which Landa is introduced.<sup>[60]</sup> However, looking back at how the same music is used in the scene in *Inglourious Basterds*, the motif stands less for Landa himself, who is not yet to be seen on screen, and more for the fear that he—as part of the SS—elicits among the French farmer’s family. The connection with Austria is less direct in this case, established vaguely through the cliché of supposedly typical Austrian music—to what extent Beethoven’s music, as a significant part of the so-called First Viennese School, can be called Austrian is not within the scope of this article—and more explicitly through a film historical reference. Landa is portrayed by means of music that, in another film, characterizes a figure as aristocratic and Austrian. In that western from the 1960s, there is no explicit reference to National Socialism, but the characterization of the villain as aristocratic and Austrian serves as an implicit reference to the history of National Socialism, emphasizing the cruelty of the villain. National Socialism as a “subtext” in the western is reactivated, revealed, and emphasized by the musical quote in *Inglourious Basterds*.



**Figure 12: Gérard Herter in his role as Baron Schulenberg; by courtesy of [Christoph](#)**



## Roos

Unlike *Inglourious Basterds*, Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, released 16 years earlier, claims to tell a true survival story about the Holocaust. The film's aesthetic, especially at a visual level, is designed to stylize the film into a historical document.<sup>[61]</sup> The figure of the antagonist is based on the historical person of Amon Göth, the Viennese camp commander of the Plaszow forced labor camp in Cracow. Robert Burgoyne states in his book *The Hollywood Historical Film* that the characters of Schindler and Göth are, dramaturgically, developed like a "dual portrait, a comic and tragic version of the same person."<sup>[62]</sup> They share a pronounced tendency towards a hedonistic lifestyle and an interest in luxury and young, attractive women. But whereas, in the course of the film, Schindler's character undergoes a catharsis, the violence and cruelty of Göth's character increase.

This development of the characters is indicated on the soundtrack from the very beginning. Schindler's introduction as a "bon vivant" and "gambler" is accompanied by diegetic tango music.<sup>[63]</sup> He is presented as a collaborator and beneficiary of the regime at a party, surrounded by high-ranking party and SS members. Shortly afterwards, their sphere is represented acoustically by German Schlager songs of the 1930s, such as "Im Grunewald ist Holzauktion," which they sing together.<sup>[64]</sup> Within this sonic atmosphere, the tango that introduced Schindler, with the violin as the leading melodic instrument, serves to distinguish him from the other, "ordinary" Germans. The "non-German" music presents him as an outsider and subliminally announces his resistive potential against National Socialism. With regard to the music that expresses Schindler's oppositional attitude towards the Nazis, a reference to Austria as a *Musikland* may surprisingly be found via detours. The main melody of the tango "Por una Cabeza" from the year 1935, which is played when Schindler is entering the night club, is a direct citation of Mozart's *Rondo for Violin and Orchestra*, K. 373.

The image of the *Musikland*, as a homeland for unpolitical lovers of art and amusement, may be applied to the characterization of Schindler as well. Schindler was born and raised in a German-speaking part of Moravia, which belonged to the Habsburg monarchy until 1918. In contrast to Schindler, Vienna-born Amon Göth remains largely unaccompanied by music in the film. When he is introduced, driving through the Cracow ghetto in the back seat of his luxury car with the top down, all that the audience hears is the sound of the engine humming. In general, machine and engine noises dominate the soundtrack whenever violence against Jewish victims is explicitly shown or symbolically anticipated. When a deportation train arrives at the famous Auschwitz camp gate, the shrill sound of the train braking takes up the entire soundtrack,<sup>[65]</sup> which stands in stark contrast to the older films discussed above, in which Strauss waltzes were heard in similar scenes. What is more, machine sounds are also mixed into the foreground during Göth's many explicitly depicted personal atrocities. These machine sounds and the absence of music are a symbolic reference not only to Göth's ruthlessness but also to the industrial character of the Shoah.

[10] In the aforementioned scene from *Inglourious Basterds*, too, the noise of an engine anticipates National Socialist violence, as Landa arrives at the French farmer's house with his motorbike. This is not the only point of consistency between the soundtracks of the two blockbusters when it comes to the acoustic depiction of perpetrators. In *Schindler's List*, Amon Göth is played by the British actor Ralph Fiennes, who speaks only English in the film, though largely with an imitated Viennese accent.<sup>[66]</sup> Without speaking German, the Viennese idiom is conveyed through speech melody and the pronunciation of vowels. German, however, is casually present in the background, when Wehrmacht soldiers or concentration camp guards talk to each

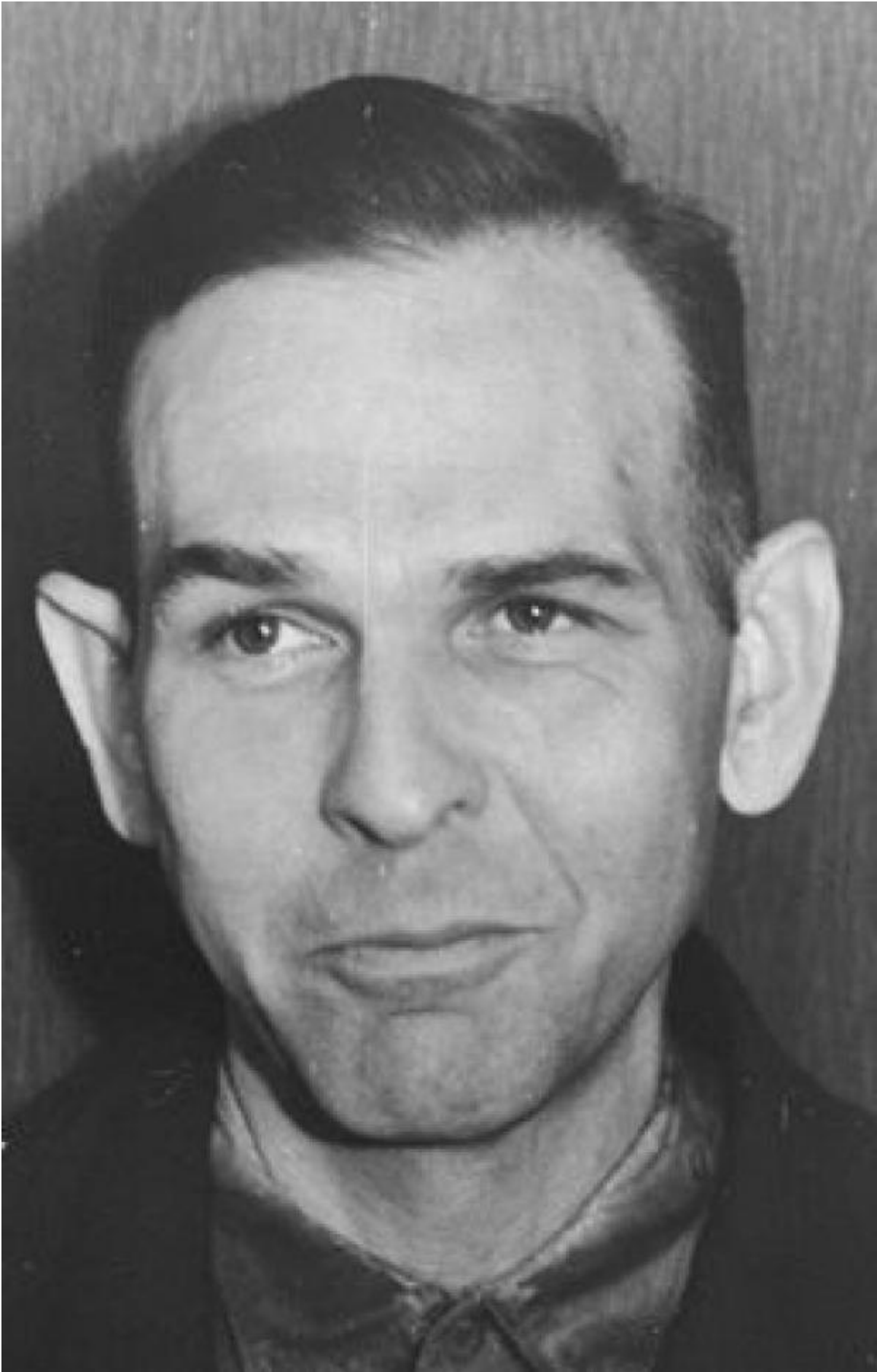
other or give orders to Jewish prisoners. In two scenes, a Viennese accent stands out. For the first time, it may be heard in a conversation between two German soldiers, while another soldier is playing the prelude of Bach's *English Suite No. 2* (BWV 807) on the piano during a razzia of the Cracow ghetto. Besides Bach's music, the diegetic soundtrack mainly consists of machine gun salvos. With a heavy Viennese accent, one soldier asks, "Ist das Bach?" (Is it Bach?), while the other one responds (with no Viennese accent), "Nein, Mozart!" (No, Mozart!).<sup>[67]</sup> Although the Austrian soldier's guess about the composer is right, the entire conversation is designed to emphasize the barbarous character of the perpetrators through their lack of knowledge about the famous "German" composer. The second crucial moment when the audience encounters a Viennese accent happens during the above-mentioned arrival scene in Auschwitz. As the train wagons' doors open, the camera shows a camp guard from the perspective of the women prisoners, yelling orders in Viennese. So even though, unlike in the older films, no waltz is played during the trains' arrival at the death camp, Vienna is still present on the soundtrack.



**Figure 13: Shellac record of the 1940s version of "Good Night, Mother," which can be heard in *Schindler's List*; by courtesy of [archive.org](https://archive.org)**

At the end of this section, I would like to return to the musical characterization of the Viennese perpetrator, Amon Göth. In the course of the film, there are only three diegetic musical cues when Göth is in the frame. Two of them sound distorted, played in "historical" sound quality from

loudspeakers. Due to their intentionally poor sound quality, these cues may be associated on the one hand with the film's "realist" aesthetic but on the other hand also with the machine-like, noisy sphere of the perpetrators on the soundtrack. One of the songs played via the loudspeakers is the above-mentioned "Gute Nacht Mutter," which is played while children are deported from the camp in Plazow to an extermination camp. It serves both to lure the children and to drown out the cries of the desperate mothers. According to the court record of the trial that led to Göth's death sentence in 1946, this procedure did take place, with the same song being played on the order of Göth.<sup>[68]</sup> The song was written by the German composer of Schlager and soundtracks Werner Bochmann and sung by the opera star and staunch National Socialist Wilhelm Strienz in 1940. The song belonged to the repertoire of the program *Wunschkonzert für die Wehrmacht* (Request concert for the German army), which was broadcast regularly on German radio during the war.<sup>[69]</sup> However, the same song was interpreted by Peter Alexander in 1969 and thus belonged to his nostalgic "good-old-times" repertoire that made him such a popular figure, especially among the war generation. Thus, the audiovisual interweaving of the cruelest Nazi violence with a Schlager song connects to the postwar period and, implicitly, also to the present, because the genre as a whole persists in modern-day Germany and Austria, and some of the above-mentioned songs are still part of a contemporary Schlager repertoire. Interestingly, it is this audiovisual interweaving that constitutes an unexpected commonality between *Schindler's List* and Lanzmann's *Shoah*.



**Figure 14: Portrait of Amon Goeth while in Polish custody as an accused war criminal;**  
by courtesy of United States [Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) and [Instytut Pamięci](#)

## Narodowej

What is more, the convention of associating perpetrators with the Viennese waltz, described in detail in this article, also surfaces in a rather incidental way in the depiction of Göth. The scene in question shows a live performance by camp musicians during one of the excessive parties in Göth's villa on the camp grounds. At least in the first 30 seconds of this cue, music is in the foreground of the soundtrack; to be more precise, we hear an instrumental version of Hermann Leopoldi's cabaret number from 1932 "Ein kleines Café in Hernals" (A small café in Hernals), which has a waltz rhythm.<sup>[70]</sup> Ostensibly, this waltz, which is played to accompany the images of an excessively partying, drunken, philandering Göth, refers to his Viennese origins. Yet the historical background of the song, its lyrics, and its composer also suggest, in a coded way, an identification with the victims of the Shoah. While the camera is focused on Göth, the diegetic music points beyond his perspective. Hermann Leopoldi, the composer of that song, was a Viennese survivor of the Shoah who was imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp; he also composed the famous "Buchenwald Lied" (Buchenwald song). The records of the Austrian journalist Walter Lindenbaum, who was killed in the Shoah in 1945, show that the song "Ein kleines Café in Hernals" was sung, with changed lyrics, by Viennese inmates of the Theresienstadt ghetto as an expression of their homesickness for Vienna. This historical background makes it plausible that forced labor musicians in Plaszow had the song in their repertoire, as some of them possibly had Viennese roots as well. As research on "forced music" in concentration camps has demonstrated, prisoners were often forced to perform music that was of prime significance for their own identity, as a means of abusing its symbolic power—even if this music belonged to a repertoire that was outlawed by National Socialism.<sup>[71]</sup>

The way Leopoldi's cabaret number is interpreted musically in that scene must also be put in context with regard to the rest of the soundtrack. Compared to Leopoldi's version, the tempo is clearly increased. The laid-back accents on the second and third beat, typical for the Viennese Waltz, are dispensed with in favor of a straight meter, which encourages the party guests to sing along. In this interpretation, an essential feature of the Viennese waltz has been lost, and the sentimental melancholic dimension of the song is also no longer perceptible. The music thus becomes part of dull entertainment, which also ties in with the auditory introduction of the SS members at the beginning of the film. Thus, Viennese music is portrayed, in this scene, as distorted by Nazi influence, which is reminiscent of Jerry Goldsmith's soundtrack for *Boys from Brazil* and the use of the waltz idiom to musically characterize Mengele and other Nazis in South America.





**Figure 15: Hermann Leopoldi in 1928; photograph by Hermann Brühlmeyer; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)**



# Conclusion

In summary, the use of waltz music in Holocaust films since the 1970s, and especially in concentration camp scenes, has resulted in a bitingly ironic treatment of Austria's international image as a harmless and friendly land of music. This represents a remarkable allusion to Austrian participation in Nazi crimes, which comes to light in these mass media productions so often described as trivializing even a few years before Austrian participation became an official international political issue in the course of the "Waldheim affair." In these popular productions addressed to a mass audience, the waltz is ironically used to mark a contrast between "fine society"—which is conventionally symbolized by the waltz—and the barbaric murders in the death camps. In Lanzmann's *Shoah*, however, music takes on a quite different function. Through the Schlager and the dancing couple, the perpetrators are depicted as "ordinary" Germans. What is more, the song implies that Austrians feel like "ordinary" Germans too: not only because the interpreter, the Viennese entertainer Peter Alexander, was one of the biggest Schlager stars in Germany after the war, but because Schlager was part of a TV entertainment program that helped construct a nostalgic "German" community that was imagined beyond nation-state borders. In this context, it must be taken into consideration that Lanzmann addresses an intellectual audience that responds well to rituals of distinction. In *Schindler's List*, the association of the perpetrators with average German mass culture via the Schlager genre is continued, yet the ironic subversion of the stereotypical *Musikland* Austria repertoire, which was so prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, hardly takes place. On the contrary, Austrian music in *Schindler's List* is instead associated with the figure of the hero and the Jewish victims. The characterization of Austrian perpetration in both *Schindler's List* and *Inglourious Basterds* has largely shifted from the level of music to language and, above all, to speech melody, and thus the participation of Austrians in the Shoah is insinuated more subtly. The older productions, on the other hand, attacked Austria's hiding behind its image of the *Musikland* in a much more direct way, by making extermination camp scenes sound like the internationally popular annual Viennese New Year's concert.



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2. Celia Applegate, "What Is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Art in the Creation of the Nation," *German Studies Review* 15 (1992): 30. [↑](#)
3. Journalistic articles (in German newspapers) in direct response to the release of the film: Simone de Beauvoir, "Das Gedächtnis des Grauens: Claude Lanzmanns 'Shoah,'" *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 1, 1986; Heike Hurst, "Der erste befreiende Film seit 1945: Gespräch mit Claude Lanzmann," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 1, 1986; Dorothee Solle, "Von Gott verlassen: Augenzeugen des Holocaust; Claude

Lanzmanns Film Shoah," *Die Zeit*, February 21, 1986; encyclopaedical articles: Ute Janssen, s.v. "Shoah," in *Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" in Deutschland: Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945*, ed. Torben Fischer and Matthias N. Lorenz (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007); Gertrud Koch, s.v. "Shoa," in *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur (EJGK)*, vol. 5, Pr-Sy, ed. Dan Diner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2014). ↑

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5. See, for example, Eyal Peretz, "What Is a Cinema of Jewish Vengeance?: Tarantino's *Inglourious Bastards*," *Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 56 (2010): 64–67; Charles Taylor, "Violence as the Best Revenge: Fantasies of Dead Nazis," *Dissent* 57, no. 1 (2010): 103–6; Robert von Dassanowsky (ed.), *Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds": A Manipulation of Metacinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012); Greg M. Colón Semenza, "The Ethics of Appropriation: Samson Agonistes, *Inglourious Basterds*, and the Biblical Samson Tale," *Adaptation* 7, no. 1 (2014): 62–81; and Frida Beckman, "Ambivalent Screens: Quentin Tarantino and the Power of Vision," *Film-Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (2015): 85–104. ↑
6. Cornelia Szábo-Knotik, s.v. "Musikland Österreich," *Österreichisches Musiklexikon Online*, accessed March 16, 2021. Szábo-Knotik points out that the image of the *Musikland* served, at times of crisis, as an important rallying point to construct a distinct yet unpolitical community. She uses the founding of the Second Republic as a particularly striking example in this context and refers to Mozart as well as the New Year's concert, which features predominantly music of the Strauss family, as central topics of this image. ↑
7. Stefan Schmidl and Monika Kröpfl, "Wunschbild und Exportartikel: Betrachtungen über die audiovisuelle Struktur von *Sissi*," in *Die Künste der Nachkriegszeit: Musik, Literatur und bildende Kunst in Österreich*, ed. Stefan Schmidl, Wiener musikwissenschaftliche Beiträge (Vienna: Böhlau, 2013), 78, 80–81. ↑
8. *Ibid.*, 79. ↑
9. Margaretha Saary, s.v. "Strauss, Familie," *Österreichisches Musiklexikon Online*, accessed March 16, 2021. In the part on Strauss junior, Saary describes the way in which Strauss's style of waltz composition influenced the Schlager of the 1920s and how the operetta influenced the cinema of the 1930s in Austria. ↑
10. *Der letzte Akt*, directed by Georg W. Pabst (Austria: Cosmopol, 1955), *YouTube*, October 10, 2021, TC: 00:19:47–00:21:58, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
11. *Schunkeln* is a practice of dancing collectively while remaining seated and holding each other's hands. The practice is especially widespread in Germany and Austria and has established itself there as a custom, especially at carnival and folk music events. ↑
12. A tavern that serves local wine, see: Elisabeth Hewson, "Heurigen," *Virtualvienna*, accessed May 16, 2021: "Heurigen have become a synonym for some of what is best in Vienna: hospitality, gemütlichkeit, joie de vivre mingled with a little melancholy, good solid food and refreshing dry wine. In fact, as a uniquely Viennese institution, a way of life, Heurigen are second only to coffeehouses. In them, you can

meet your friends, casually and with minimal obligations lovers young and old can sit in quiet corners in the midst of what is often a quite raucous atmosphere; you can mingle with strangers, yet remain anonymous; and if you like the kind of music played at Heurigens, you can beckon a group of musicians to serenade at your own table; or, if you prefer your Heurigens 'silent,' you seek out a Heurigen where music is not played." ↑

13. A song genre that has its origin in Vienna. See "[Geschichte des Wienerlieds](#)," [Wiener Volksliedwerk](#), accessed March 16, 2021. ↑
14. [Der Bockerer](#), directed by Michael Kehlmann (Austria: ORF, 1963), [YouTube](#), April 24, 2018, TC: 00:41:05, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
15. One of the group of Germans yells at Bockerer: "Schluss mit dem Schmus"—"Stop this nonsense [?]" ↑
16. [Der Bockerer](#), directed by Franz Antel (Austria: Wien-Film, 1981), [YouTube](#), April 13, 2017, TC: 00:36:20–00:37:35, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
17. [Antel](#), [Der Bockerer](#), TC: 00:00:00–00:02:17. ↑
18. Bernd Sponheuer, s.v. "Nationalsozialismus," in *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Ludwig Finscher, 2nd ed. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1997), Sachteil, 7:25–43. Contrary to what Brauer's quote suggests, Sponheuer's concept of no man's land in music history is not limited to music in concentration camps but to its general function in the Nazi regime. ↑
19. Juliane Brauer, "How Can Music Be Torturous?: Music in Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camps," [Music & Politics](#) 10, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 3. ↑
20. *Ibid.*, n12. ↑
21. Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Geschichtsbilder im medialen Gedächtnis* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 130–31, 201–2, eBook. ↑
22. Marek Haltof, *Screening Auschwitz: Wanda Jakubowska's "The Last Stage" and the Politics of Commemoration*, *Cultural Expressions of World War II: Interwar Preludes, Responses, Memory* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 3, eBook. ↑
23. *Ibid.*, 81. ↑
24. *Ibid.*, 85, 88. ↑
25. [Ostatni Etap](#), directed by Wanda Jakubowska (Poland: P.P. Film Polski, 1948), [YouTube](#), December 14, 2018, TC: 00:30:55–00:32:55, accessed July 13, 2022. To me, it is not quite clear if this piece belongs to the original soundtrack by Roman Palester or if a preexistent song was used. ↑
26. See, for example, Siegfried Zielinski and Gloria Custance, "History as Entertainment and Provocation: The TV Series *Holocaust* in West Germany," in "Germans and Jews," special issue, *New German Critique* 19 (1980): 81–96; Moishe Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to *Holocaust*," in *ibid.*, 97–115; Heidemarie Uhl, "Von 'Endlösung' zu 'Holocaust': Die TV-Ausstrahlung von 'Holocaust' und die Transformationen des österreichischen Gedächtnisses," [Historical Social Research](#) 30, no. 4 (2005): 29–52; Jürgen Wilke, "Die Fernsehserie *Holocaust* als Medienereignis," [Historical Social Research](#) 30, no. 4 (2005): 9–17; Marcus Stiglegger, *Auschwitz-TV: Reflexionen des Holocaust in Fernsehserien*, *Serienkulturen: Analyse, Kritik, Bedeutung* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2015),

35–45. ↑

27. [Holocaust, Episode 4](#), directed by Marvin J. Chomsky (USA: Titus Productions, 1978), [Youtube](#), May 19, 2019, TC: 01:10:18, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
28. The historical person, Wilhelm Pfannenstiel, was a hygienist, university professor, and SS member and founded the “German Society for Racial Hygiene.” Together with Kurt Gerstein, he witnessed gassings in the extermination camp Belzec in 1942. After the war, Pfannenstiel gave detailed testimony of the killings: “[Belzec: Testimonies of Belzec SS-Men](#),” [Jewish Virtual Library](#), accessed March 16, 2021. ↑
29. [And the Violins Stopped Playing](#), directed by Alexander Ramati (USA/Poland: Roberts/Davids Films, 1988), [YouTube](#), January 31, 2015, TC: 01:26:48–01:27:47, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
30. [Escape from Sobibor](#), directed by Jack Gold (UK/Yugoslavia: Zenith Entertainment, 1988), [YouTube](#), December 19, 2018, TC: 00:04:50, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
31. A very popular example of this typical Viennese trait can be found in Helmut Qualtinger’s fictive character “Herr Karl.” Asked about the difference between Austrians and Germans in Jimmy Fallon’s late night show, actor Christoph Waltz responded: “Austrians tend to make their lives easier, so first of all they are very polite, and second they don’t mean it.” “[Germany vs Austria: Christoph Waltz on the difference between Austrians and Germans](#),” [YouTube](#), October 30, 2013, accessed March 16, 2021. ↑
32. [Gold, Escape from Sobibor](#), TC: 00:37:55. ↑
33. At this point, it must be mentioned that the historical person of Mengele was still alive and hiding in Brazil at the time of the film’s release. He died only a few months later of a heart attack and was buried under a false name. His body was not discovered until 1985. ↑
34. [Boys from Brazil](#), directed by Franklin J. Schaffer (UK/USA: ITC Entertainment, 1978), [YouTube](#), August 28, 2017, TC: 01:16:00–01:18:10, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
35. [Ibid.](#), TC: 00:00:00–00:01:45. ↑
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37. Deborah Mawer, “Ravel and the Apotheosis of the Dance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 140–61. ↑
38. Jessie Fillerup, “Ravel, *La Valse*, and the Purloined Plot,” *College Music Symposium* 49–50 (2009–10): 345–55. ↑
39. Yosefa Loshitzky, “Holocaust Others: Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* versus Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” in Loshitzky, *Spielberg’s Holocaust*, 104–19. ↑
40. Claude Lanzmann, “Ihr sollt nicht weinen—Einspruch gegen ‘Schindlers Liste,’” trans. Grete Osterwald, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 5, 1994. Miriam Bratu Hansen criticizes this judgmental distinction as too one-dimensional in her article “*Schindler’s List* is Not *Shoah*: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory,” *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (1996): 292–312. ↑
41. [Catrin Corell, Der Holocaust als Herausforderung für den Film: Formen des filmischen Umgangs mit der Shoah seit 1945; Eine Wirkungstypologie](#) (Bielefeld: transcript), 118. ↑



42. Margaret Olin, "Lanzmann's *Shoah* and the Topography of the Holocaust Film," *Representations* 57 (1997): 1. ↑
43. Shoshana Felman, "In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," in "50 Years of Yale French Studies: A Commemorative Anthology, Part 2: 1980-1998," special issue, *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 104. ↑
44. *Ibid.*, 145-48. ↑
45. Olin, "Lanzmann's *Shoah*," 3. However, Olin neglects to explain why she considers this part of the lyrics "telling." ↑
46. *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann (France: Ministère de la Culture de la Republique Française, 1985), [YouTube](#), January 12, 2022, TC:01:53:30-1:55:23, accessed July 13, 2022. ↑
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50. *Ibid.*, 294-95. ↑
51. *Ibid.*, 300. ↑
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53. Monika Kornberger, "Zwei Stars von Morgen betreten die Schlagerbühne," in Schmidl, *Künste der Nachkriegszeit*, 70. ↑
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55. Julia Schröder, "Aufbruch der Mainzelmänner," *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, June 17, 2011, accessed March 16, 2021. ↑
56. Wolf J. Krauss, "Peter Alexander: Bei ihm schalteten 38 Millionen Menschen ein," [prisma.de](#), February 12, 2021, accessed March 16, 2021. ↑
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64. *Ibid.*, TC: 00:07:52–00:08:30. [↑](#)
65. *Ibid.*, TC: 02:32:16. [↑](#)
66. See, for example, *Ibid.*, TC: 01:19:10–01:21:37; TC: 01:59:30–02:00:15. [↑](#)
67. *Ibid.*, TC: 01:12:12. [↑](#)
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69. Fred K. Prieberg, *Handbuch Deutsche Musiker, 1933–1945*, 2nd ed. CD-ROM (Kiel: Kopf, 2009), 7.508. [↑](#)
70. Spielberg, *Schindler's List*, TC: 01:23:05–01:26:03 (after 40 seconds, the music can only be heard from a distance, while Schindler is talking to Itzhak Stern outside the villa). [↑](#)
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