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Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits

Michael H. Kater

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How does creativity thrive in the face of fascism? How can a highly artistic individual function professionally in so threatening a climate? Composers of the Nazi Era is the final book in a critically acclaimed trilogy that includes Different Drummers (OUP 1992) and The Twisted Muse (OUP 1997), which won the Wallace K. Ferguson Prize of the Canadian Historical Association. Here, historian Michael H. Kater provides a detailed study of the often interrelated careers of eight prominent German composers who lived and worked amid the dictatorship of the Third Reich, or were driven into exile by it: Werner Egk, Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill, Karl Amadeus Hartmann, Carl Orff, Hans Pfitzner, Arnold Schoenberg, and Richard Strauss. Kater weighs issues of accommodation and resistance to ask whether these artists corrupted themselves in the service of a criminal regime--and if so, whether this may be discerned from their music. After chapters discussing the circumstances of each composer individually, Kater concludes with an analysis of the composers different responses to the Nazi regime and an overview of the sociopolitical background against which they functioned. The final chapter also extends the discussion beyond the end of World War II to examine how the composers reacted to the new and fragile democracy in Germany.

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