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Frank Mehring

The Soundtrack of Liberation

Praeludium

Ein gut vorgetragenes Gedicht leistet bereits zwei Drittel der interpretatorischen Arbeit. So lautete das Motto eines Proseminars von Ulrich Horstmann, das ich in meinem dritten Semester an der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen im Wintersemester 1992/93 besuchte: „Gesprochene Literatur“. Theatralische Inszenierungen waren ebenso willkommen wie musikalische Vorträge. Ich griff daraufhin in die Saiten und reichte eine vertonte Hausarbeit „Zur wechselseitigen Beziehung zwischen Musik und Byrons Lyrik“ ein. Seitdem habe ich nicht mehr aufgehört, dem Soundtrack von Lyrik kreativ mit Gitarre und Gesang nachzuspüren. Der Nexus von Literatur und Musik blieb auch für meine weitere akademische Arbeit bestimmend. Bis 2001 betreute Ulrich Horstmann meine Dissertation zur Manifestation transzendentalistischer Ideen im Werk der musikalischen Querdenker Charles Ives und John Cage. Nur wenige Wochen nachdem sich Ulrich Horstmann als professoraler ‚Singvogel‘ in seiner Abschlussvorstellung im unnachahmlichen Horstmann-Sound aus den fensterlosen Vorlesungsräumen verabschiedete, trat ich meine Professur in Nimwegen mit einem musikalischen Vortrag an. Ich widme meine Antrittsvorlesung „Soundtrack of Liberation“ meinem Doktorvater Ulrich Horstmann, der mir nicht nur den magischen Notenschlüssel zum Öffnen literarischer Tore in die Hände legte, sondern auch eindrucksvoll vorlebte, wie man Geistesblitze produktiv ableitet und von Standbein zu Spielbein tanzend in Bewegung bleibt.

Inaugural Speech

Radboud University Nijmegen/NL (19. Sep. 2014)

Exposition

We all recognize the images of victory and liberation from World War II. In the US, the iconic snapshot of the homecoming sailor kissing a nurse at Times Square in New York at V-J Day comes to mind, or: the liberation of Paris with

crowds of French patriots lining the Champs-Élysées to view Allied tanks and half tracks pass through the Arc du Triomphe on 25 August 1944, the flag raising by Soviets over the Berlin Reichstag during the Battle of Berlin on May 2, the liberation of concentrations camps in Auschwitz, Dachau or Buchenwald (by the US Third Army in April 1945), as well as photos of civilians greeting home coming soldiers and the liberators of the Allied forces. In the Netherlands, the picture of a Canadian Seaforth Highlander on a motorbike with two laughing girls on the backseat on the Amstellaan in Amsterdam (after the war the name of this street was changed into Vrijheidslaan/Freedom Lane) became one of the most popular images of the liberation. These scenes have entered our collective memory of the liberation and have been remediated in newspapers, magazines, documentaries, feature films, and on social media platforms and innumerable Internet sites. I recently came across a remarkable image from my new hometown Nijmegen, which was liberated during Operation Market Garden in September 1944. Here, we see people gather in front of a large brick building, singing and dancing. The photo was taken the following year on that fateful 5 May when the liberation of the Netherlands became official.

The feeling of being free again becomes visible in seemingly spontaneous, improvised performances. A piano has been pulled from a nearby house to the space in front of the Nutsschool at Hertogplein. The piano player sings and flirts with a woman standing next to him. Children sit on the piano observing with many other bystanders the lively scene at the public place at the intersection of Gerard Noodtstraat and Van der Bruggenstraat in downtown Nijmegen: young men and women dance with each other celebrating the end of the war. What is expressed here are gratitude for the new-won sense of freedom from occupation, a vital approach to deal with loss and the destruction surrounding the scene. However, the image remains silent. The question inherent in the photo is: "What kind of soundtrack accompanies the scene?"

Abb. 2

People dancing on Liberation Day on Hertogplein in front of the local school (Nutsschool) between Gerard Noodtstraat and Van der Bruggenstraat on 5 May 1945. Photo montage Hertogplein in May 1945 and May 2013. © F. Mehring

Historians have been surprisingly quiet about the sounds and soundtrack of history. In retrospect, the sounding signature for the Dutch liberation has become American jazz, in particular swing music and the close harmonies associated with the Andrews Sisters as the annual performances on the 5 May in major cities from Nijmegen, via Utrecht and Rotterdam to Amsterdam testify. But we do not have original audio recordings to accompany the clips of singing and dancing people that have been remediated in documentaries and news clips about the liberation. Rather, a commentator and pre-recorded music are usually added in postproduction in the studio. Most often, we get to hear music that creates associations with American jazz. The academic discussion on the persuasive power of a reference culture such as the United States suggests that – and I quote from a recent conference theme in Utrecht – the “interplay of political and economic supremacy with the ‘soft power’ of cultural attraction and reputation plays a crucial role in how certain cultures establish guiding standards for other cultures”.²

The medium of music represents a pioneering force of crossing boundaries on cultural, ethnic, racial, and national levels (Wilfried Raussert, *Travelling Sounds*, 2008). During and after the liberation of Europe by the Allied forces, popular music and jazz played a crucial role as a sounding signifier of new beginnings producing a shared *lingua franca*, which shapes our cultural memory. How did music transform the imagery of destruction, despair, and hope into a new emotional landscape? How can we critically analyze, map, and evaluate the nexus between sights, sites, and sounds of memory? In how far can we trace processes of cultural flows (William Uricchio) and (re)mediation (Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin) in the musical culture of the liberators and the liberated nations? And in how far deviates our cultural memory of music from the experiential memory (in the sense of Aleida Assmann), namely the sound of the songs performed and heard in 1945? The triangular perspective combining the United States (as a reference culture) with the bordering countries of the Netherlands and Germany represents a revealing case in point to approach instances of cultural contact, transfer, and contested memories of liberation. The soundtrack of liberation encoded in the so-called liberation sheet music, the elaborate cover designs, the multilingual lyrics, and references to novel dances offer a new opportunity to approach the politics and cultures of liberation from a performative perspective. My talk today focuses thus on the intersection of media studies, memory, and comparative cultural history.

What do I mean with the term “soundtrack of liberation”?

I am not so much interested in the general notion of “sound” which the soundscape theoretician R. Murray Schafer describes as the “sonic universe” – the totality of sounds produced by anybody or anything (*The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 1993). My focus lies with an exclusive rather than an inclusive definition of music. While the avant-garde composer John Cage argued that our traditional conception of music is too narrow and that “music is sounds, sounds around us whether we’re in or outside concert halls,”³ I am interested in the kind of songs and their musical performances, which emerged at the end of the war and the “magical summer of liberation” in 1945. But how can we find out what kind of music was actually played and heard at the time of liberation?

And here the National Liberation Museum 1944–45 in Groesbeek comes into play. When the archivist Rense Havinga contacted me in the spring of 2013 to inform me about a new collection of sheet music, I recognized that now we might finally have been given a lost key to add a soundtrack to the otherwise silent photos depicting dancing people in the summer of 1945. Hugo Keesing, retired adjunct associate professor of Psychology and American Studies at the University of Maryland, had donated his collection of Dutch sheet music, which dealt in some form or another with the experience of liberation. Keesing was born in Den Haag and emigrated in 1951 with his parents to the US. He had been interested in the political function of music during the Vietnam War as well as World War II. His dissertation *Youth in Transition: A Content Analysis of two Decades of Popular Music* from 1972 is an early example of critical academic analysis of the kind of popular music which then was considered “an unpleasant manifestation of youthful rebellion, including a lack of good musical taste, which most teenagers would inevitably outgrow”⁴. His Dutch sheet music collection of almost 300 songs provides a unique perspective on the soundtrack of liberation combining elaborate cover designs, musical scores and in many cases multilingual lyrics. Astonishingly, hardly any of the songs are familiar to Dutch audiences apart from exceptions such as *Trees heeft een Canadees* or *Lili Marleen*. This is a curious surprise, which demands explanation.

The collection suggests that there was a genre called “Bevrijdings Liedereren” – Liberation Songs. A photo of an advertisement in the front window of an Amsterdam music shop suggests that liberation songs have been in high de-

mand in 1945. Underneath the headline “Bevrijdings Liederen” in capital letters, the expression “alhier verkrijghbaar” with a large exclamation mark (most likely in the color orange, the photo, alas, is only in black and white) indicates a sense of urgency and desire: Yes, we do have Liberation Songs available here! The collection offers a fascinating opportunity to explore, describe, and hear the soundtrack of liberation and hopefully find an answer to why most of the songs in the collection have been more or less forgotten.⁵

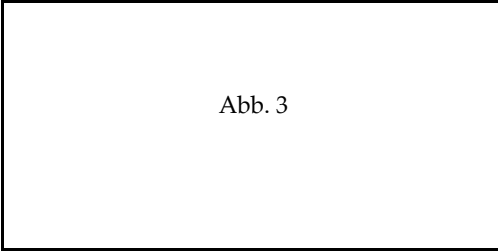


Abb. 3

Photo by Boris Kowadlo. Advertisement of liberation songs in a music store shop window in Amsterdam. (1945). Nederlands Photo Museum Rotterdam.

The term “soundtrack of liberation” is obviously borrowed from the world of cinema. Since nineteenth-century lantern shows and the origins of film in the 1890s, music has been played in order to both enhance the emotional impact and to overcome the gap between the technical projection of a fictitious world and the illusion of the real. However, the theme of liberation, music and songs goes back further in time. Indeed, they form part of the oldest parts of the Bible. For example, when Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, led them through the desert, parting the sea and a fire in the sky showing the way to the land of freedom – Israel – Moses sings the song of liberation and deliverance. The King James Version in Exodus, chapter 15, 1–2 says: “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation.”

For my project of analyzing the function of music in the socio-cultural and political context of liberation from any kind of oppression, I find Siegfried Krauer’s description of film music particularly helpful. He argued that music provided a “meaningful continuity in time” thus helping the audience to perceive “structural patterns where there were none before”.⁶ This observation is crucial if we look at the effects music has on the perception of liberation point-

ing towards the cultural imaginary that is framed, channeled and controlled by sounds before entering into the collective memory. Concerning the function of music as a kind of glue between potentially confusing confrontations, between different visual shots, angles, narratives, and jump cuts in the editing, a soundtrack fulfills a compensatory function. In his work on *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, the influential French film theorist Jean Mitry explains: “It is all too apparent that the editing of a series of fixed shots establishes a *feeling of continuity* but is unable, unlike moving shots, to create the sensation of the continuous, since this *sensation* is reconstructed intellectually and not perceived as such – which means that reality appears as though it were an idea or memory; or, to put it another way, it appears *restructured*.”⁷ From this basis, I would like to distinguish between four different types of liberation music:

1. Liberation songs that have formed the basis of Western culture from the bible via poetry first in oral culture and later in print (poetry from the US Wars of Independence, the French Revolution, the German Wars of Liberation, the two World Wars, etc.)
2. Musical soundtracks based on the work of film music composers for feature films or documentary films. For the period of the end of World War II and the early postwar years, such films include *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Memphis Belle*, *The Best Years of our Lives*, etc.
3. Concert music composed for socio-culturally and politically decisive moments in history ranging from the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the German Wars of Liberation, via the two World Wars, Vietnam, the seminal year of 1989 with the newly won freedom of Eastern European countries, and beyond to themes of liberation in global conflicts. For the period of the end of World War II and the early postwar years, the following artists and works are of importance: compositions such as Arturo Toscanini’s *Hymn to the United Nations*, Dimitri Shostakovich’s *United Nations March* (featured in the MGM war-time musical *Thousands Cheer* from 1943; also: the American composer and conductor Leopold Stokowski created a new orchestration), Kurt Weill’s *United Nations Song* as part of the song cycle *Songs of the Free*, or the so-called father of American music,

Charles Ives, whose work *They are There* expresses the notion of liberation and freedom in terms of classical and avant-garde music.

4. A genre that can be described in the sense of Kurt Weill and Ernst Krenek as *Gebrauchsmusik*: music of use created for a specific purpose. During World War I and II, this meant songs published as sheet music and performed by soldiers or civilians to celebrate the liberation and newly won sense of freedom. They are composed, written, published and performed for a specific time frame in a particular socio-cultural and political environment. Thus, they had a built-in expiration date, a kind of “best used before” liberation has been fully completed and established. I would like to put my academic search-light on this kind of popular genre.

As far as the soundtrack of liberation is concerned, the function of Dutch sheet music to express the feeling of liberation, freedom, and hope for a better future serves as a revealing case in point to complicate the all too easy explanation regarding the triumph of American (popular) culture in the Netherlands beyond theories of manipulation or cultural imperialism based on economic supremacy.

The Soundtrack of Liberation as a Performance Culture of Imaginary Self-Empowerment

The popular sheet music I describe as the “soundtrack of liberation” is marked by its expressive potential meaning that the cover art, the lyrics, the music, and public performances emerge as a means of self-expression and self-fashioning in comparison with one or several reference cultures of the liberators. The sheet music allows for the articulation and representation of the imaginary. I am using the term imaginary following Winfried Fluck’s definition as a concept to “describe the unstructured and decontextualized stream of images, associations, sensations, and feelings that constantly feed our cognition and interpretation of the world without having a tangible form of their own”.⁸

The performance culture of Dutch liberation songs is not based on exhibiting special skills, musical talents, bodily attractions, technological or other sensational feats. Rather, they are a form of *Gebrauchsmusik* (music of use) created for a specific national audience during the narrow time frame between the liber-

ation beginning in the September 1944 offensive “Operation Market Garden” and the time surrounding the official liberation of the Netherlands and capitulation of Nazi Germany in May 1945. At that time, popular sheet music had not yet entered into competition with the most important mediator of culture: the US American movies and record industry. Before Dutch audiences could engage in the immediate experience of American sights, sounds, and fantasies, absorbing their illusions of reality, popular sheet music offered a welcome means to celebrate and express feelings of joy, pride, and gratitude. The exuberant feeling of being free again had not given way to the dire reality of destroyed cities, war casualties, torn families, and uncertainty regarding lost friends or family members. The state of exception, of expecting to be liberated and the experience of being free again created the magical feeling of the summer of 1945. When it was over, the usefulness of most of the songs had expired. That is the reason why hardly any of them were recorded and entered the collective memory.

How can we describe the music, which filled the streets, bars, and public spaces? The blue print for the Dutch liberation songs are the US American sheet music publications since the 1910s when the cultural craze of jazz and later swing swept over Europe. These publications themselves built on the 19th century popular sheet music, in particular those based on minstrel songs. In the early 20th century, the Dutch soundtrack of liberation is mediated via the rich archive of World War I sheet music, the interwar years and then the songs, which the Allied forces brought with them or which circulated in the underground and were copied – often secretly – in and outside the Netherlands.

The World War I sheet music combined colorful designs, which formed a first visual gateway into the music and lyrics. The manifold themes can be categorized into songs

- 1) celebrating the belief in American liberty with the colors of the flag and icons such as the Statue of Liberty
- 2) mediating the value of democracy
- 3) emphasizing the need to fight for American core values
- 4) commemorating crucial battles at Verdun, Flanders, or Berlin
- 5) identifying and satirizing the enemy
- 6) idealizing the life of soldiers and finally
- 7) expressing feelings of love and longing for loved ones.

In World War II, the media situation became more complex. Soldiers listened to the radio, watched films, played records, and enjoyed live performances. Nevertheless, sheet music continued to play a decisive role. The sheer number of songs published in the United States indicates that this 19th century medium served its purpose of rallying up support, fostering a spirit of community among soldiers, stirring patriotism, and ridiculing or stigmatizing the enemy. No other country involved in World War II produced more songs than the United States. The themes, which I identified for the period between 1914 and 1918, all continued to inform the productions of the 1940s.

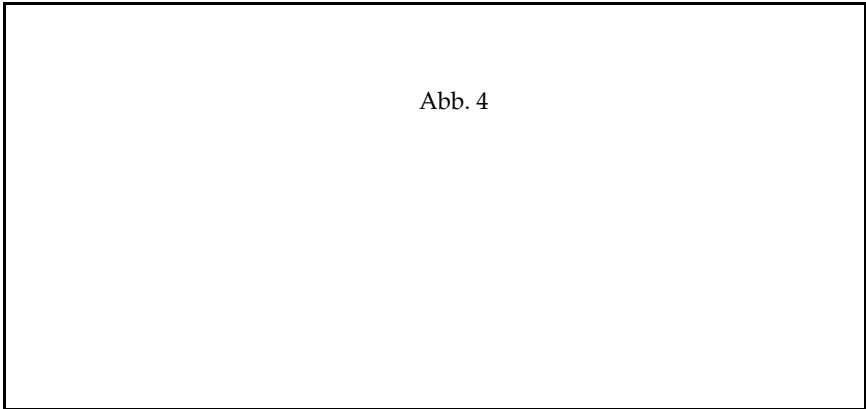


Abb. 4

Cover art of US American World War II songs. The US version of the song *Lili Marleen* is remarkable. Despite its German origin, the covers identifies *Lili Marleen* as “The Song-Hit of the Allied forces”.

The Dutch liberation songs embraced US marketing strategies through elaborate cover art as a first means for potential buyers and performers to get an idea of what the song was about. What kind of music can we identify in the collection of Dutch liberation songs? There are five categories:

1) *Marches*

It might come as a surprise that the very musical genre, which the National Socialists and the NSB (National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands) identified as the genre suited best to transport fascist ideas and aesthetics, continu-

ed to be popular: marches. In song collections such as *S.A. Liederbuch, Singendes Volk*, or *Kameradschaft im Lied*, as well as theoretical books such as Joseph Mueller-Blattau's *Germanisches Erbe in deutscher Tonkunst* (with a preface by Heinrich Himmler) or Richard Eichenauer's *Musik und Rasse*, National Socialists recognized that marching music could help to de-individualize people, form them into a controllable mass, which might be manipulated towards a specific political ideology. Youth groups were exposed to ritualistic singing traditions and marches as a kind of paramilitary exercises. In the Netherlands, the popular collection of marching and war songs *Zo Singt de NSB* (tweutig Marsch en Strijtliedereen) paved the way to use music as means to "educate" the young and transform them into a uniform mass of soldiers. Music and striking cover art created an aesthetic unity, which found its powerful expression in the marching and singing in public spaces and during ritualistic festivals. Examples include the silhouetted rows of soldiers on the covers of *Singend door alle Dietsche gouwen* or *Lied der Legionssoldaten* (Opgedraagen aan wijlen sijne Luitenant Generaal H.A. Seyffardt). Why would composers of liberation songs revert to the very musical genre, which became a blue print for the occupation and traumatic experience of censorship, loss of cultural identity, and national humiliation?

Abb. 5

Advertisement for the travelling exhibition *Entartete Kunst*, Dutch version of the National Socialist caricature of the US American attack on Aryan culture encouraged the viewer to read the Dutch Nazi-paper *Storm-SS*, Dutch marching music from the NSB.

Judging from the cover art and lyrics, marching music became an effective means of fighting back and recovering what was lost. Songs such as *We zijn weer Holland en we zijn weer vrij!*, *Vredemarsch* or *Vry Nederland (Vryheidsmarsch)* show how music can become a weapon to fight back. Now, the signs of the occupiers are replaced by the iconic Dutch lion unchained. The color codes revert to orange as a sign of freedom regained. At the same time, the references to Dutch history, language, the country's proud and strong people erase the five-year gap of humiliation and cultural colonization. Dutch marching music with themes of freedom, nationhood, and patriotism thus helped to come to terms with the traumatic experience of occupation and war.

2) Hymns

A major theme of liberation songs is gratitude for being free again, for being still alive, and for the opportunity to participate in a new start in a future Europe. The musical genre, which many composers turned to were secular and religious hymns. Many songs such as *Het Vrij Nederland*, *Vrede*, *Holland een Hymne* and others build on traditional religious tunes in order to commemorate the new sense of freedom and to give praise to God for having liberated the Dutch people from evil: "Hallelujah! 't loflied rijze Hem, / Die onze banden slaakt! / Hij zal Isrel doen verrijzen! / Maar ook Holland vrij / Hij maakt! / Hij zal Isrel doen verrijzen! / Maar kook Holland vrij / Hij maakt!"⁶

3) Love Songs

Love songs have been part of wars and times of peace. However, during moments of crisis such as World War II, they assume a particularly important compensatory function. They provide a venue to express grief, sorrow, and longing for loved ones who are either dead or whose fate is unknown. In the collection, songs such as *Wees Maar Gerust* or *Just a Prayer Away* are examples of this genre. One song, however, stands out. *Onder do Lantaren* is the Dutch version of *Lili Marleen*, arguably the most famous song of World War II. Some call it a "Nazi song," others describe it as a transnational hymn of love and peace. How can a song be part of Hitler's war propaganda and at the same time define the soundtrack of liberation? The original lyrics by Hans Leip (1893–1983) and the

music by Norbert Schultze (1911–2002) underwent a remarkable transformation while travelling across national boundaries reemerging in different languages, new arrangements, and interpretations by different singers. In our collective memory, *Lili Marleen* is so closely tied to the sights and sounds of World War II that it is hard to imagine the song emerging from the experience of World War I.

Lili Marleen did not start out as a hit tune. In 1939, Electrola records wanted to record *Lili Marleen* with Lale Anderson. They accepted the new musical arrangement by Norbert Schultze who would soon make himself a name as “Bomber Schultze” due to his notorious Nazi marching music. The record, however, did not sell particularly well. Only when Radio Belgrad in Yugoslavia with its far broadcast range to the German troops in the Balkan and Austria included *Lili Marleen* in its *Wunschkonzert* series, did the song become a favorite among German troops. *Lili Marleen* was broadcast every night at 10 o’clock preceded by the military *Zapfenstreich* as a signal for the troops to retire. This way, the specific situation of media, occupation, and military musical rituals added a new sounding narrative to *Lili Marleen*.

The tremendous international success of *Lili Marleen* is tied to a legend in North Africa. When German soldiers listened to the song at night, the British corps were said to have yelled from the other side of the front to turn up the volume of the radio. In *Escape to Adventure* (1950), the British diplomat Fitzroy Maclean recalled the powerful emotions connected to hearing Lale Anderson singing *Lili Marleen* in the spring of 1942: “Husky, sensuous, nostalgic, sugar-sweet, her voice seemed to reach out to you, as she lingered over the catchy tune, the sickly sentimental words” (236). British officials asked writer Tommie Connor to add new English lyrics in order to veil the German origins. He provided the now famous title “Lili of the Lamplight” and deleted the final two verses with its references to death and the ghostly doppelganger. When *Time Magazine* featured an article about the propaganda film *The True Story of Lili Marleen*, Marlene Dietrich decided to record a new version. Like no other singer, Marlene Dietrich helped to de-Nazify the tune by turning it into a universal song of love and longing beyond time and space. At the Allied front, *Lili Marleen* lost its military identity as a soldier’s song emerging from Dietrich’s lips as a smooth, melancholy love song transcending nations and politics: “My love for you renews my might / I’m warm again, my pack is light / It’s you, Lili Marleen, It’s you, Lili Marleen.”

4) Boogie Woogie and Swing

Contrary to the marching aesthetic of the National Socialists and the NSB, the African American genre of boogie woogie and in particular the emerging swing movement focused on individual expression of vitality through dance rather than paramilitary exercises accompanied by a steady beat. The mostly piano-based boogie woogie with its recognizable melodic bass lines and syncopated rhythms became most popular in the 1930s and were picked up by swing bands such as Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller. Mostly associated with African American musicians and improvisation, National Socialists responded with defamation. The Dusseldorf exhibition "Degenerate Music" (*Entartete Musik*) from 1938 identified blues, boogie woogie, and swing as a poisonous infiltration of so-called Aryan art. The Dutch version of the National Socialist caricature of "Liberators" encouraged the viewer to read the Dutch Nazi-paper *Storm-SS*. The cover identifies the United States as a racist robot out of control, covered in the hood of the Ku Klux Klan, with a torso of a cage in which an African American couple dances a jitterbug, legs made of bombs threatening to destroy iconic German cities. Musically, the references discredit the US as a country holding a gun in one and a drumstick in the other, ready to produce the rhythm of destruction. Destruction also comes from the alleged weapons the American war machine holds in his hands: a sack of American dollars and a record indicating the threat from the powerful connection between entertainment and capital. In awe of such an onslaught of acoustic terror, the little figure in the foreground can hardly believe its ears which have grown beyond reasonable proportions. The sign it is holding mocks the promise of the liberator: "De U.S.A. zullen de Europeesche Kultur van den ondergang retten" (the U.S.A. are supposed to save European Culture from Destruction).

The term "Verniggerung" became part of a large-scale prohibition of African American music in record stores or on radio channels. African American performers were banned from Germany and the occupied countries. This created a blind spot in the Netherlands and explains the particular interest of music publishers or performers alike to gain access to sheet music. However, printed scores can only provide a limited understanding of what makes the musical genre of boogie woogie and the use of improvisation so unique in live performances. Not surprisingly, early efforts of Dutch composers to utilize these novel genres produced an often awkward appropriation, similar by the way to the early efforts of experimenting with jazz by Ernst Krenek, Erwin Schulhoff,

Paul Hindemith, or Kurt Weill in the immediacy after World War I. For example, the Dutch liberation song *Ik kan niet swingen* points to the gap between the desire to participate in the new musical dance sensation from the US and the inability to do so shortly after the liberation. As a matter of fact, the song *Ik kan niet swingen* is composed as a foxtrot: “k kom uit heel gegoede kringen, / ‘k kweek exotische se ringen. / Ik zit vol betove ringen, / maar helaas, ik kann niet swingen” (I come from very wealthy circles, / I grow exotic flowers. / I am full of enchantments, / But unfortunately I cannot swing).

5) Foxtrot

The most popular genre of liberation songs is foxtrot. This is understandable considering that foxtrot had emerged from the United States in the 1920 and quickly became a transatlantic phenomenon in the 1930s. Artists from the United States were travelling across Europe, foxtrot music was the singing and dancing sensation of the inter-war years sold via records, sheet music, and broadcast on radios. European composers embraced the format and created songs for their respective national audiences. In the 1940s, Dutch composers drew on a rich history and experience in foxtrot music in the preceding decade in order to express humor and joy about the feeling of being free again. Many of the songs address the exciting atmosphere of intercultural encounters between Dutch people and the Allied forces from Canada, the UK and the United States. In a lighthearted manner they make fun of cultural misunderstandings or language problems. Examples include Jack Millar’s *White Stripes in a Sky of Blue* or Jack Bulterman’s foxtrot *Snoezepoes* in which an Allied soldier addresses every possible stereotype about romantic encounters with a Dutch girl on a bench, “by the old Dutch mill” wearing wooden shoes. Alas, not a single word was understood by either of them. The only word the soldier learned and remembers lovingly is the Dutch expression for sweetheart – “snoezepoes.” Many songs address the romantic encounters using a humorous mix of Dutch and English lyrics in songs such as *Geef mij mar en echt Hollandsche Mijsche* (Please give me a real Dutch Girl), *Little Holland Girl*, *Mamma, zijn naam is Johnny*, or *Mijn Tommy out Canada*. Others express gratitude towards the liberators in songs such as *Thanks Tommies!* or *Sing your Song of Thanks (to the Tommies and their Tanks)*.

One element that was crucial for the success of the foxtrot were novel dances such as the Lindy Hop or the Jitterbug. Several Dutch sheet music songs from 1945 include more or less detailed information on dance moves, which were

supposed to accompany the music. Examples include the *De Hi Ha Holland Dans* or the so-called dance sensation from Great Britain *The Chestnut Tree*. One of the songs I enjoy most is *De Sten-Gun Walk*: a musical homage to the resistance fighter Pierre Zom, Jr. In his dance school, the pianist discovered a large number of British sten guns underneath the school's dance floor after the war. Recognizing the courageous role Zom played during the occupation, Leo Friedriks (aka Fred Riks) composed a song about sten guns and worked out an elaborate choreography for dancers to re-enact joyfully the liberation of Dutch people from their occupiers. Here, music and performance create a unifying experience of self-empowerment leading towards the special feeling of being free again in 1945. It would not take long until the light-hearted approach to intercultural encounters turned bitter sweet when more than 2000 so-called war brides embarked on ships across the Ocean in search of a better life beyond the war-torn ruins and sites of destruction in the Netherlands. More would follow suit to emigrate to join their sweethearts from Great Britain and the United States. Before these songs could be recorded and enter into the collective cultural memory, the magic of 1945 was gone.



Abb. 6

Examples of marches, hymns, loves songs, boogie woogie tunes, and liberation songs composed in the foxtrot genre.

Coda

The popular sheet music on the theme of Dutch liberation and a newly won sense of freedom function like a sounding memorial to the Allied forces. Before

the cultural productions of records, films, and the concert tours of US jazz ambassadors established American jazz as the soundtrack of liberation in retrospective view, the sheet music collection of liberation songs tells a much more complex story. One can talk about mapping, analyzing, evaluating and contextualizing music. If one wants to understand, feel, and appreciate the power of music, it needs to be performed, experienced and heard – and as far as dances are concerned also be seen. Therefore, I would like to invite you to go downstairs to the Anton van Duinkerkenzaal and enjoy the concert Soundtrack of Liberation by performers from both sides of the Dutch and German border.

Thanks for your attention.¹⁰



Abb. 7

Jens Barnieck and Frank Mehring in Action. Photo by Isabelle Girard de Soucanton.

Annotations

- (1) In the case of this image, ruins are carefully kept outside of the photographic frame. The building we see is intact while the area behind where the photographer stands has been destroyed in an allegedly mistaken bombing by US forces in February 1944.
- (2) An early version of this lecture was presented under the title “‘Let’s do the Sten-Gun-Walk’: Smart Power and the Euro-American Soundtrack of Liberation” at the conference *Reference Cultures and Imagined Empires in Western History: Global Perspectives, 1815-2000* (11-13 June 2014, Utrecht University, Netherlands) on 11 June.
- (3) I have traced Cage’s inclusive concept of music as “organization of sounds” to Thorau’s observations regarding unpremeditated sounds in his early diaries. See Mehring, *Sphere Melodies*, 123ff.
- (4) Hugo Keesing: *Youth in Transition*, p. 2.
- (5) I am grateful to the concert pianist and good friend Jens Barnieck who has played a pivotal role in researching and bringing the music to life.
- (6) Quoted in: Mervyn Cooke: *A History of Film Music*, p. 12.

- (7) Jean Mitry: *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, p. 162.
- (8) Winfried Fluck: *Romance with America?*, p. 244.
- (9) “Hallelujah! Praise to Him, / Who breaks our chains! / He will give rise to Israel! / But He also makes Holland free! / He will give rise to Israel! / But He also makes Holland free!”
- (10) Bringing the soundtrack of liberation to life would have been impossible without the concert pianist and good friend Jens Barnieck, who has played a pivotal role in researching and performing the liberation songs in the Dutch–German border region. I am particularly grateful to the support of and collaboration with Wiel Lenders and Rense Havinga from the National Liberation Museum 1944–45 in Groesbeek. I am indebted to personal conversations with Hugo Keesing, whose suggestions and contributions have been invaluable. A special thanks goes to Anja Adriaans who has been the heart and soul of many projects on the theme of liberation. I would like to thank the staff at the American Studies Department at Radboud University, in particular Hans Bak and Mathilde Roza. The book emerged with a series of concerts in Nijmegen, Groesbeek and Kleve where school children from the Karel de Grote College Nijmegen, Ganztagsrealschule Hoffmannallee Kleve, dancers from the Ludger Seidl Dance School, as well as solo singers Saskia Bak and Tom van den Heuvel performed many of the songs discussed in this inaugural speech. To all of them I owe thanks for their dedication, expertise, and joy.

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