Patrick Bade | Music, Nationalism, Resistance, and the Struggle for Freedom

As some of you have already recognised, this is a still from a very famous scene in the 1943 film Casablanca, when the clients in Rick's joint spontaneously burst into a rendition of the French National anthem, "La Marseillaise". This is really based on reality. There are many accounts of this actually happening in occupied France during the Second World War. "La Marseillaise" was a real thorn in the flesh for the German occupiers and also for the Vichy regime. They tried to suppress it, they tried to replace it with a new anthem called "Maréchal, nous voilà" – "Here we are for you, Marshall". Pétain had a very jaunty tune, which was actually stolen from a Polish Jewish composer called Casimir Oberfeld, who was later murdered in the Holocaust. It really is a jaunty tune but it was no competition for "La Marseillaise". "La Marseillaise", let's face it, is the best national anthem ever. It's totally thrilling. The words and the music are completely thrilling. We know that it was composed overnight, although we're not sure exactly which night. It might have been the 25th or 26th of April, 1793. It was composed by a young soldier called Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle. He was asked by his commanding officer to come up with a patriotic song because France was threatened on all sides. Louis XVI and Maria Antoinette had just been guillotined, and Austria was threatening to invade from the East. The song was an instant success and it was actually published in Marseille. It inspired a group of volunteers to march from Marseille to Paris in defense of the motherland. And that's why it's called the "Marseillaise." It's got some pretty inflammatory words and I'll give a chance here to read them:

> "The bloody flag is raised! (repeat)
> The roaring of these fierce soldiers
> They come right to our arms to slit the throats of our sons, our friends
> Grab your weapons, and citizens!"

Well it's certainly a song that would be very handy in Ukraine at the moment, even more of these words:

> "Sacred love of France
> Liberty, beloved Liberty..."

And so on and so on. I'm going to play you first all of "La Marseillaise" as it sounded when it was first published.

(An audio clip from the French National anthem "La Marseillaise")

A bit more exciting I would say than "God Save the Queen". Now I'm going play a version that will probably sound a bit more familiar to you with a brass band and with the great French tenor Georges Till.

(An audio clip from another version of the French National anthem "La Marseillaise")

It was adopted as the official French national anthem, then later suppressed of course when the Bourbons came back again, and reintroduced under Louis Philippe in the 1830s. But it wasn't the only inflammatory popular song of the Revolution. There were others. And the one that was most popular with the bloodthirsty mobs who cheered the carriages taking people to the guillotine was "Ah, Ça Ira". It's a jaunty tune that apparently was a popular dance tune before the revolution with none of these kind of connotations and even popular with Marie Antoinette herself. She actually used to tink it on her spinet or harpsichord. But the so-called 'sans-culottes', the working class mob, adopted it and they added these really rather terrible words, inciting people to hang aristocrats from the lampposts.

(An audio clip from the song "Ah, Ça Ira")

So as you can see, yes, Despotism will die and liberty will triumph. And it's a song that Umberto Giordano made very effective use of in his opera about the French Revolution, "Andrea Chénier", in the second act and the revolutionary mob. He uses it brilliantly, I think to give us that sense of exhilaration that comes with a revolution, a dangerous, destructive exhilaration.

(An audio clip from the song "Ah, Ça Ira" in the opera "Andrea Chénier")

If there's one composer who is particularly associated with the concept of liberty and struggle against tyranny, it must be Ludwig van Beethoven. He was of course a very political man, although he accepted the patronage of the aristocracy and princes. He was a great believer in liberty and the rights of the common man. When Napoleon came along, initially Beethoven hero-worshiped him. He thought, "Yes, this man is going to overturn all the old tyranny, all the old certitudes of the ancient regime. He's going to bring freedom." But as it became increasingly clear that Napoleon was actually a megalomaniac who was more interested in self-aggrandizement than he was in the rights of the common man, they even turned against him. In 1804, when Napoleon declared himself Emperor Napoleon, Beethoven was absolutely disgusted. He had just completed his heroic symphony, one of the key works of romanticism, and he dedicated it to Napoleon. But when he heard about Napoleon's declaring himself emperor, he furiously, you could just see, look what he's done to the paper, he's absolutely broken through the surface of paper in his rage, crossing out his dedication to Napoleon. So there are a number of pieces by Beethoven that express this longing or exhilaration for freedom. The piece I've chosen, because I think it's just such an exciting piece, is the "Overture to Egmont". This was written to go with a play that Goethe had written in

1788. On the eve of the French Revolution, Goethe wrote a play about a 16th century Dutch hero, the Count of Egmont, who was a leader of the Dutch revolt against the Spanish. I'm going play you the last section of this tremendously exciting piece of music.

(An audio clip of "Overture to Egmont")

Now Beethoven, of course, was very, very highly revered by the Nazis. For the Nazis, Beethoven was the great national cultural figure more so than Wagner, I would say. Hitler gave a speech at the outbreak of the Second World War in which he claimed German cultural superiority over the English. He said, "What have the English ever produced in all their history? They've never produced anybody as great and wonderful as Beethoven." So it was particularly galling, I think for the Germans that the Brits, some clever boffin at the BBC who really should have got a medal at the end of the war that actually purloined Beethoven and took him over for the allied cause. He'd noticed that the motto theme that opens the 5th Symphony, "Da da da dum", is of course the Morse code for the letter V. And so the letter V and "Da da da dum" became the symbol of resistance against the Nazis and belief in eventual victory over them. And it was used in all the broadcasts for the BBC to occupied Europe. I'm going to play you now the opening of a broadcast on free French radio to the French resistance. You'll hear it starts with "ba ba ba bum, ba ba ba bum" and then the announcer says, "Ici Londres", "here we are London" and Lords have approved that they then play another piece of music by a great German composer that I think you will recognize.

(An audio clip of Beethoven's 5th Symphony)

I'm sure that sheer chutzpah that must have absolutely enraged Hitler and Goebbels.

In the 19th century, opera was not the luxury and elitist thing that it is today. I'm sure you'll be delighted to know that Trudy and her students are in New York at the moment and may, maybe even tonight, they're going to the Metropolitan Opera to see a performance of my favorite opera Elektra. I'm very jealous of them. But as as I said in the 19th century, opera was a popular art form and it had an enormous capacity for appealing to and rousing the masses. And it became very, very politicized. The potential of opera to rouse the masses became apparent on the night of the 25th of August, 1830 during a performance at the Chateau Monnaie in Brussels. Since the end of the Napoleonic wars, well, one of the things at the conference of Vienna that they had to say was what to do with the southern Netherlands, which had been Spanish and then later Austrian and then taken over by the French during a French Revolution, what to do with this place. It was decided rather arbitrarily to give the southern Netherlands to the northern Netherlands, but they'd been separated for centuries. The south was Catholic and the north was Protestant and they didn't get on. And the

people we now call Belgians were not happy. They were restive. And there was a performance at the Monnaie of a brand new French grand opera by Auber called, it has two names, it can either be called "Masaniello", after a revolutionary hero of 17th century Naples, or it's sometimes called "La muette de Portici", "The Dumb Girl of Portici". It has a very rousing, patriotic duet for a tenor and a baritone. And so it was all pre-planned actually that this duet would start a riot and the riot would spread through the theatre. I'm sure this was some sort of "acteur provocateur," who set all these up, and they started cheering wildly at the end of duet and shouting slogans and this spread through the theatre and then out of the theatre into the streets of Brussels, and from there it spread to other Belgian cities. That led to the Belgian Revolution and another conference in London and the Treaty of London, by which the country of Belgium was set up and created as a new country. So I'm gonna play you a historic recording that was made in Brussels in 1930 to commemorate the centenary of this performance that triggered the Belgian Revolution and the creation of a new European country.

(An audio clip from a duet in the opera "Masaniello")

This really put the wind out of authorities in many parts of Europe, and spoke to those parts of Europe that aspired to nationhood or independence and felt oppressed. The authorities in all those parts of Europe, particularly Italy in the years before Italian unification and independence, the years of the so-called "Risorgimento". Later in this series, I'm going to do a whole talk devoted to Verdi's "Nabucco", which was his first great success in 1839. The thing that persuaded him to take on this opera and write it was a very beautiful text for a chorus of dispossessed Jews, the Jews in Babylonian captivity, mourning their lost homeland. And this really struck a chord with Verdi. And of course it struck a big chord with its audiences, 19th century Italians who longed to have a country of their own. They identified very strongly with Jews in their various diaspora. And so this of course is, in a way the unofficial national anthem of Italy. Nobody knows the actual national anthem of Italy, which is a very undistinguished piece of music. But everybody knows this and it always brings a tear to the eyes of any Italian, who hears it when they're outside their native country.

(An audio clip from "Va pensiero" in Verdi's opera "Nabucco")

Now in certain circles it's usually known as the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves". My favorite story about it is from the official trip that La Scala made to Berlin in 1937 to cement the formation of the new axis between fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Mussolini sent the entire company of La Scala to Berlin and they gave a fabulous performance of "Aïda" with Gigli, which still exists, a very exciting broadcast of that performance. But so the Italians were received with open arms by the Germans and they were given a tour of the city. And one of the

highlights of the tour was when they went to pay homage to a statue of Wagner. What did the entire company of La Scala do when they saw the statue of Wagner? They broke spontaneously into the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves". Must have been a slightly uncomfortable moment for their Nazi hosts!

So from this time from 1839 up until really quite late in his career, until 1870, Verdi was always playing a game of cat and mouse with the Italian censors in Austrian-occupied Venice. In the land in papal Rome and in Bourbon Naples, the censors were always looking for anything that could excite the mob and lead to a riot or a revolution. So it's rather extraordinary that in the new liberal atmosphere of the Habsburg Empire in the late 1860s, that Smetana was allowed to get away with presenting an openly revolutionary and incendiary opera like "Dalibor". I know I've played two excerpts before when I was talking about //Chekov Robert. Here is another, and it's a moment where the heroine Jitka decides to raise a mob to storm the prison where the patriotic hero Dalibor is being held.

(An audio clip from the opera "Dalibor")

If that didn't send you out onto the barricades, I don't know what would. It was another awkward moment really for the Nazis on 19 March 1938 when Hitler marched into Vienna and the opera that was due to be played at the state opera the following night was "Dalibor", a very unfortunate choice as far as the Nazis were concerned. So they immediately stepped in and said, "No, no, no, no you can't perform 'Dalibor'. Wrong message, wrong message." And they curiously substituted Beethoven's "Fidelio" for it, though that was not an opera that the Nazis would've been very happy with either. It hardly has a message that is sympathetic towards any kind of authoritarianism.

Now I want to play you a song that was composed by Hans Eisler to a text by Bertolt Brecht. It was written for a highly political play called "Die Mutter". It was premiered in Berlin in 1931. What's going on there? Berlin is totally polarized between extreme left and extreme right, and I think a lot of people felt like yes, they had to make a choice. What was the choice? Stalin or Hitler. It's a pretty grim choice to have to make. And I want to play this song called "Lord des Communismus", "In Praise of Communism". Some of you may be thinking, what is he on about? Why is he playing us this? I love this song. I find it really very touching. I think in 1931, as I said, you had this choice, fascism or communism. It looked like liberal democracy was really on the way out. Some people are saying the same thing now, which is a pretty scary thought. I know some people will probably say in the questions afterwards, "Well actually, if people really wanted to they could have already known that Stalin was a monster, and the communist experiment in Russia had already turned very sour and had many, many victims." But this is before the great show trials. I think after 1935 or 1936 there wasn't really any excuse for being starry-

eyed about Russian communism. But I like this piece for its innocence and in a way, its idealism. Of course communism like many religions, you can say like Christianity, it's a wonderful idea and it's a very beautiful thing. It's just that the way it's been put into practice, you could say exactly the same thing about the Catholic church, so it's said why communism is the answer to absolutely everything. But the final line, "It's a simple thing that's difficult to do", is of course the key line to the whole thing. It's sung here by Bertolt Brecht's wife, the actress Helene Weigel. That's another reason why I like this particular recording so much. We've had this discussion a few times in recent months, whether German is beautiful or not. I'm always arguing with people about it. People say, "Oh, it's an ugly language and it's guttural." It can be very beautiful. And I think it's very beautiful in this song, in the enunciation of German by Helene Weigel who came from Vienna. So there's a slight, for me, extremely seductive Viennese accent in her German.

(An audio clip of "Lord des Communismus")

Well, I'd love to know what you think of that. So moving on to Soviet Russia, the great composer Prokofiev, perversely, after living in the West since the revolution decided to go back to the Soviet Union just as things were really getting bad in 1936. And as Stalin's megalomania and his brutality really becoming very obvious to the world. Well, no doubt, wanting to please Stalin and his masters in Russia, Prokofiev set to work to write a cantata to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution. It's an exciting piece. I think I've only heard it once in London. That must have been many years ago, over 30 years ago. And I can remember that it's a real bombastic propaganda piece, very pro Soviet. A member of the audience, actually it was an American member of the audience, got up at the end and protested against the performance of the piece. Ironically, the Soviets didn't like it and they banned it and it was not performed in 1937 and it didn't get performed until a lot later after Prokofiev's death. Well, here's a taste of it.

(An audio clip "Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution")

This is an image of the liberation of Paris in August 1944 in which you can see wild outpourings of joy from people in the street after those terrible, terrible years of German occupation of the city.

My final piece is a musical setting of a poem, "Liberté", by the left wing poet Paul Éluard, as you can see. This was printed in vast quantities and there were planes flying over France leading up to the liberation of France on D-Day, scattering this poem all over France. And it was given this very beautiful choral setting by Francis Poulenc.

(An audio clip of "Liberté")

I can see we've got lots and lots of comments and questions in the chat. So let's go there.

Q & A and Comments

Q – Why was Beethoven sometimes referred to as Louis van Beethoven?
A – I suppose it was that French was the language of European civilization, so cultivated people in Germany, Russia, and England would've often used the French versions of things.

Yes, "La Marseillaise" is without a doubt extremely bloodthirsty, you're quite right. Thank you, Jennifer. Arlene says the Academy Award was for 1942, not '43. You're probably right about that. I'm glad you agree with me about the "Marseillaise" being the best national anthem. Oh, somebody's saying, I think it is '43 actually. Somebody else saying it got the Oscar in '44. Inflammatory words. Yes, Peter. Janet, they'd be marching into battle with it. Thank you Elliot. Yes. Well, I'm not going to argue with anybody about the exact dates of the Oscar.

Q – Have there been other versions of the “Marseillaise”?
A – Yes, there have been a number of arrangements of the "Marseillaise" by famous composers. There's one by Verdi, there's one by Stravinsky. I don't think there's one by Bizet. And there've been some naughty ones. The Beatles used it of course. And Serge Gainsbourg, actually, I was trying to find that for today's lecture. That caused incredible outrage in France when, when Serge Gainsbourg did a sort of updated version of it.

While the English national anthem is more of a dirge than anything else, Scottish and Welsh anthems are lovely. Do you know, I'm really ashamed to say that I don't really know them. I'll look them up.

Yes, Ivy, you're quite right. Beethoven was surely turning over in his grave about the Nazi admiration. And Hitler should have banned Fidelio. I'll give you a famous quote when I talk about Fidelio. Thomas Mann saying "It was an absolute outrage that Fidelio continued to be performed in Germany under the Nazis".

Q – Wasn't Count Egmont actually Belgian?
A – I'm not sure you can actually make that distinction about Count Egmont being Belgian and not Dutch. I'm not sure, because he's certainly in the era of the Dutch War of Independence but there simply wasn't a distinction between Belgian and Dutch in the 16th century.

And there is the exuberance of Fidelio or Leonore No. 3. I could have played that, that's a fantastic piece of music. No, the International.

Yes. You know what, you're right, I should have included it. I'm glad to say that with Lockdown University I'm never intimidated. Wendy gives us total freedom and total support. We're never intimidated. But thank you Mona, for a few kind comments.

So this is Joan. Yes, I know you helped arrange the tickets. They're going on Saturday. Oh, I'm so envious. It's such a wonderful piece, audiences go crazy after a good performance of Elektra. It's like heavy metal, it's a sort of operatic version of heavy metal.

The music after "Ici Londres" was actually Handel's "Water Music". I spend my life looking for fabulous old recordings, Estelle. Frida, she's giving us all the dates and of all of that. Yeah, thank you Frida.

Yes, it's perfectly true. Hollywood was absolutely full of these character actors like Peter Laurie and all those sorts of people who'd escaped from the Nazis.

I suppose you're talking about national anthems. Most of them are saying "We're good. They're bad. We kill them". Yeah. God bless America is a national anthem. Yes.

Q – If a republic was established in Britain to replace the monarchy, what do you think the new national anthem would be?
A – The big question is what will become of the monarchy. I'm sure our monarchy is safe as long as our dear queen is still with us. But at some point in the near future, it's possible that with the very likely breakup the United Kingdom, that we will be a republic. So what kind of anthem will we have? What should we have? We've got great tunes, we've got “Land of Hope and Glory”, “Rule Britannia”, but the words are unacceptable. I think my vote would go for Hubert Parry's "Jerusalem" on the words of William Blake.

Betty is saying once in a while there's a magic moment. Walking in a famous gorge in Tasmania we heard people sing the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves". That must have been really wonderful. That must have been a magic memory, I envy you that.

Viva Verdi. Yes. Victoria Emmanuel. I'll be talking about that. Obviously when I get to "Nabucco". Traditionally sung twice at Marseille several years ago, it was played three times and everybody sang along and wept. This is Myrna also saying she saw "Nabucco" at Masada.

Q – Have you come across a Croatian opera?
A – No, I haven't. There are so many of these operas to be discovered. There's a very good Georgian national opera, I think it's called "Daisy".

When the chorus sang "The Hebrew Lament" during the opera at the Met, the applause went for so long that Levine who was conducting repeated it, a rare event. Yes. A showstopper. It's one of those magic pieces. No one calls the Met, except when they do "Va, pensiero". Yes. And Judi also saying it moves there very much. And Iva, there's the most wonderful French version of that actually, which brings tears to my eyes. Ukraine, Odessa Opera sang "Va, pensiero" three weeks ago calling for peace. Suzanne saw "Nabucco" in Prague on the evening of spending a difficult day at Terezin step, an extraordinary day. That would've been a big combination.

Thank you for Margaret for saying she agrees with me about communism and the wonderful ideal, but it's probably true of every great creed and religion that people don't live up to them.

The painting accompanying the song about communism is a portrait, a sort of "Neue Sachlichkeit" portrait. I'm not sure who it's by, but it's a portrait of Helene Weigel when she was a young woman.

You think it sounds like a mockery. I'm sure that wasn't intended, maybe that's what later events I think might make you think that. But I assure you it wasn't a satire, it's totally sincere.

And Barbara saying how beautiful. Yes, that slight Viennese accent is so beautiful of Helena Weigel.

And yes, Prokofiev. I will be doing a talk in a month or so actually about Stalin's composers. Ron thinks that it's absurdly idealistic, and the last line could be read as ironic. Well, yes, I don't think it was intended to be, but I see what you mean. Split personality of Russia. Such gorgeous music. We'll be talking a lot about that in the forthcoming lectures on Russia.

Margaret saying what a beautiful song by Poulenc. What a wonderful composer. He's one of my heroes. Thank you, Vivian.

Thanks everybody. It gives me great pleasure that you have pleasure from these talks.

I don't know that song, it's presumably a South African song. I don't know it but I bet it's good. "Do You Hear the People Sing" from Les Mis. Gainsbourg's "Marseillaise" is available on YouTube. Thank you. Thank you.

And Handel's "Judas Maccabaeus", another interesting composition and oddly enough was one of the few things that Jews were allowed to perform. The Jüdischer Kulturbund in the 1930s. Adrian agrees with me that "Jerusalem" will be a good choice.

And I think I'd better finish here. Thank you all very, very much. And

I'm not talking on Sunday of course, because you've got the gala, so we'll be looking at "Nabucco" next week.