Patrick Bade - The Fall of France

- [Judi] Well, hi, Patrick. Good afternoon, everybody, or good morning, depending on which country you're in. It's just gone one minute past the hour. So, Patrick, I'll hand over to you.

Visual slides and audio clips are presented throughout the lecture.

- Thanks, Judi, and apologies for our multiple meltdown on Sunday. I'm reliably informed it was partly due to overuse of the internet on Mother's Day, so we can all blame Mother. So we're starting off in 1939 in Paris, and the spring and summer brought gorgeous weather. Of course, Paris is a magical, wonderful city any time of the year, but April to June is a particularly wonderful time to be there. I'm desperately hoping I can get back before the end of the white asparagus season. People carried on as normal with their usual pastimes and pleasures despite the increasingly menacing political situation. And next, please, Judi. The great couturier Elsa Schiaparelli brought out her usual spring collection, but as you can see, it was given a military and a patriotic flavour. And next, please.

So the French felt reasonably safe behind the supposedly impregnable Maginot Line that ran all the way from the Swiss border to the Belgian border. Next, please. It was equipped for soldiers to live in it for months or even years at a time. You can see French soldiers here getting their vitamin D deep underground. When it came to the crunch, of course, the Germans could just walk around it by invading Belgium. And the next, please. So now I'm going to, we're going to, hope we're going to be able to play you a lovely sound excerpt. This is a very jaunty song, "Ils Ne Gangeront Pas" "They Won't Get Through," famous last words. And this is a record made by the great French tenor Georges Thill. He was the Jonas Kaufmann, really, of France in the 1930s, a very handsome man with a very beautiful voice. And can we have that please, Judi?

Song plays.

So that was recorded at the end. Go to the next image, please. That was recorded at the end of 1939, and it not unsurprisingly had a very short shelf life, and nobody really wanted it after May 1940. So although Thill sold huge numbers of records, that is a rare one. Now on the screen we have the great Russian harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, and she was almost handedly responsible for the revival of interest in the harpsichord as an instrument that you could hear in the concert hall rather than being in a display cabinet in a museum. Some of you probably know the famous Beecham comment that the sound of the harpsichord reminded him of two skeletons copulating on a tin roof. And that would've been most people's attitude to the harpsichord before Landowska. So she had been living in France since the First World War, and she was something of an institution there. She built up a famous collection of historic keyboard instruments. And in January 1940, she was in the recording studio in Paris recording "Scarlatti," and I'm going to play you a little bit of one of her recordings of a sonata where you can hear the sound of anti-aircraft or the boom of anti-aircraft in the background. She continues imperturbably. Yes, please.

Song plays.

As of a woman of Russian Jewish origin, she had to flee. She was saved. She was one of those saved by Varian Fry. I will probably mention her again when we get to Varian Fry in a week or so. She had to leave behind her wonderful collection of keyboard instruments, which was pillaged by the Nazis, and she never got most of it back again. So here is Paris as it was, and thank God, as it still is. The centre of Paris at least was untouched during the Second World War. But most people thought in following the film, "Things to Come" that came out in 1936, people thought that when the next war came that the great cities of Europe would all be reduced to rubble within days. So my next sound excerpt is of an air-raid warning in early 1940 and then this eerie sound of the sirens over the city.

Sound plays.

- So next image, please. So in the early months of 1940, nothing much happened. Can we have the next image, please? Oh, well, that's fine. We'll just stay where we are. And until the 10th of May 1940 when the German hordes, well, the 9th of May, they'd already invaded Denmark. 10th, they invaded Holland and Belgium and very quickly broke through the Ardennes into France. Here you see people, worried people, in the streets of Paris reading the news. And the next image, please. On that morning of the 10th of May 1940, the doyenne of French pianists, Marguerite Long, she was a favourite pianist of Faure, who's portrait, charcoal portrait, by Sergent, you can actually see framed on her piano. And she also was a favourite pianist of Debussy and Ravel. So she was in the recording studio that morning with the Pasquet trio recording the first piano quartet of Faure. So I sort of wonder what was going through their minds. They must have heard the news before they went into the studio, and they sat down and played this wonderful, very French music, but I would say with an extraordinary intensity that may have been a reaction to the news. And the next sound excerpt, please.

Sound plays.

Thank you. Next image, please. This is Irene Nemirovsky on the right-hand side. On the left, you can see an image of people fleeing from Paris. It was an extraordinary event. Almost the whole population of this enormous city fled from the cities. They were terrified what was going to happen when the Germans arrived. The best description of this is in Irene Nemirovksy's novel "La Suite Francaise," which was published only very recently in the 21st century. Can I have the next image, please? I think this is one of the most moving novels that I have ever read, both the circumstances in which it was written and in which it was rediscovered. It has a kind of urgency, a kind of incredible vividness that it doesn't read like a novel. It reads like a diary as she's describing what happens as all the people flee from the city. She herself fled with her husband and her children, and she and her husband were denounced and seized by the Nazis, and they were deported and murdered. The two little girls escaped out of the back of the house, and they took with them this little case, this leather case you see on the right-hand side, which was full of this manuscript of their mother's. They didn't know what was in it.

They didn't even know it was a novel. And when one of the sisters died, the other one donated the papers she had to an archive in Paris. And somebody looked at this and thought, "Oh, this is interesting. This is a novel." And it was finally published. It caused an extraordinary sensation. It's the only time that a novel has won the Prix Goncourt by somebody who's been dead for 70 years. And it became an international publishing sensation, and it was published in pretty well every language. And as I said, if you haven't read it, you must read it. It is the most extraordinary book. I cried when I finished it. It was the thought that, you know, it was interrupted because only two parts were written, and she was intending to write three more parts of this amazing novel. And can I have the next, please?

Song plays.

So this is, of course, very much part of our national myth. At Dunkirk, this is the British Army collecting at the coast, waiting to be rescued. And the next, please. There's a very dramatic image coming up next of the British soldiers getting into these little boats, flotillas of little boats, while being bombarded by the Germans. And the next. So, France collapsed. The British Army by and large was rescued. No, go back to this previous one, please, the previous one. This is... Can we have the previous? Yes, this is a very tragic incident that I think still causes bitterness in Anglo-French relations. I've had this discussion about this many, many times with French friends, and they still feel angry and bitter about it. This was when the French Fleet of North Africa at Mers-el-Kebir, it was challenged. I mean, the French had already succumbed to the Germans, and the British said, "Look, we can't afford the risk of the second most powerful fleet in the world after the British fleet falling into German hands." So they gave an ultimatum to the French, "Please hand over your ships, or we have to fire on them." The French refused. Churchill very, very reluctantly gave the order for this destruction of the French Fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, and it was a terrible decision to have to make.

It seems to me that it was the only decision that he could make under the circumstances. And the next, please. So that led to a huge reaction against the English. And I think many people in France, they felt betrayed, and they felt more angry with the British than they were with the Germans. Here are the Germans marching into Paris on the 14th of June 1940. And the next, please. The next, of course, on the 21st of June, the French were forced to sign an armistice. And Hitler really wanted to turn the screw, so he insisted that the armistice should be signed in the same railway waggon that the armistice at the end of the First, the German surrender in 1918 had been signed on the 11th of November 1918. In order to do, this railway waggon was actually in a museum at Compiegne. So a side of the museum was demolished so that they could get the waggon out for this humiliating ceremony. And the next, please. So a couple of days later on the 23rd of June 1940, Hitler came to Paris for the one and only time in his life. He only spent a few hours. He arrived there in the early morning. His sightseeing tour of Paris was facilitated by the fact that Paris was completely empty.

There were hardly any people and certainly no cars. So they whizzed around the city. He

wanted to see... I mean, here he's posing for a kind of standard tourist photograph in front of the Eiffel Tower. He went to see Napoleon's tomb to pay his respects to Napoleon. He went up to Montmartre to get the view. It's that wonderful view you have from Sacre-Coeur of all Paris laid out underneath you. And he thought, "That's mine now." Can we have the next image, please? The next image is the other place that he insisted on going to on his trip, which was to the Paris Opera. They arrived there very early hour in the morning. It was locked up. There was only the concierge. They knocked him up at whatever it was, six o'clock in the morning. Can you imagine, you know, the door ringing? You open the door, and there is Adolph Hitler and Albert Speer on your doorstep, insisting to be taken round. He took them round very, very correctly. According to Albert Speer, Hitler knew every nook and cranny of this building. He was obsessed by this building, which is, of course, the most spectacular opera house in the world. He recognised where a door had been moved and so on, and the concierge confirmed that he was correct. At the end of the trip, they attempted to tip the concierge. He refused the tip very politely and said, "No, I've just done my duty." And a day or so later, he collapsed and died, as I think one might do under the circumstances. And the next, please. So, and, yes, on the 18th of June, so even before the official armistice, a renegade general called de Gaulle had fled to London. And he, over the airwaves from the BBC, he made a call for France to continue resistance. May we hear that please, Judi?

Sound plays.

- And the next image is a few days after that, Marshal Petain, who now became head of state in France, also spoke over the radio announcing the surrender and calling for . Here you see people standing around a radio set, and you see an image of Marshal Petain behind the radio set. Something that interests me very much, I mentioned last time, was it last time, time before, that how music and art can change its meaning according to political circumstances. I think I was talking about the song "Tout Va Tres Bien Madame La Marquise" and how it changed its meaning. And I think it's interesting how words change their meaning. Before the Second World War, the words appeasement and collaboration were totally positive. They didn't have negative connotations. Now both of those two words, if you call somebody a collaborator, it's not necessarily a nice thing to say. And if you say somebody's appeasing, that is definitely a negative thing to say. But in theory, there's nothing wrong about appeasing, making peace. So we'll hear the voice of Petain. I think that's coming up next, is it? Is it after this image? Yes, it is. Quavery, old senile voice. Let's hear it. So next, please.

Sound plays.

So this elderly man who'd been a hero in the First World War is hailed as the saviour of the nation, and a huge personality cult is built up around him. And he sets a government up, a so-called Free French government in the part of France that was not occupied by Germany, in the resort of, the health resort of Vichy. The only reason for that was that it was a town full of empty hotels, and they could house all the personnel he needed for his government. And next, please. So this is, as I said, huge cult of personality around him. This poster, you can probably

read it, most of you. "French people, you are neither sold, betrayed, or abandoned," but, oh boy, were they ever all three. And the next, please. Here is Petain shaking hands with Hitler. And the next. The French... The next, please. Yes, the French national anthem, "The Marseillaise," is, I've said several times, is without doubt the most stirring, the most exciting, national anthem that there is. And the Germans and Vichy realised that it... We've all seen the famous scene in Casablanca, how it was a song that could really arouse very strong feelings. So an alternative national anthem was created, "Marechal, Nous Voila," recorded by many people, but the most famous recording is by Andre Dassary accompanied by the Ray Ventura Band.

Ray Ventura was actually a Jew and very quickly fled, but I suppose when he recorded this, it wasn't really apparent what Marshal Petain really meant for France. I wanted to check out the recording details of this. I went onto YouTube this morning. You can do this if you're a bit masochistic. Just put Andre Dassary "Marechal, Nous Voila." What really shocked me, actually, is if you scroll down all the comments after it, and you think, "Oh my God, there are some really sick people out there." One of the comments, well, I don't think I'm going to repeat it. I'll let you find out for yourself. So, Judi, can we hear it please?

- [Judi] Sorry, Patrick, what number was, what track was that?

- Well, it should just be the next one from the one... I haven't actually got the numbers here. It should be after Petain, and so... Do you want to just try it out, and then you can flick on if it's...

- [Judi] Well, I only...

- It should come after this image. Oh, here it is, yeah. Oh, sorry, no.

- [Judi] No.

- Let me explain what this is. Pause that a moment, and I'll explain what this is. I think you must have got... This must be the one afterwards. Can you go back?

- [Judi] Oh, I seem to have lost a space, Patrick. We'll have to maybe just pass on from that one 'cause I don't-

- Yeah, well, nevermind. I'll just say something else about it. You can maybe...

- Okay.

- It's a kind of a jaunty tune. Now the great irony about "Marechal, Nous Voila" is that the people who claim to have composed it actually plagiarised the tune from a Polish Jewish composer called Kazimierz Oberfelder, who actually was murdered in Auschwitz at the beginning of 1945. So this so-called patriotic Vichy hymn, as I said, was actually written by a murdered Jewish composer. And then the next image, please. So this cult of Petain, I mean, the extraordinary

thing is that France really did effectively change sides for a big chunk of the war. I think you can say from June 1940 certainly until June 1941, there was hardly any opposition, hardly any resistance. It was only when Russia was attacked that the Communists then started to resist the Germans and only in November 1942 after the Americans landed in North Africa that the resistance got going in the wider population. The image you see on the right-hand side, astonishingly, is from June 1944 after the Normandy landings. And this is a crowd of a million people acclaiming Marshal Petain. Next image, please. Ooh. Oh, this is a very interesting document that I found in a street market in Tunis.

It would've about 1990, and there were there were piles and piles of books that had been left behind by French who'd left in a hurry with the independence of Tunisia. This one really fascinated me by a well-known academician, a well-known radical, Jean de La Hire. And you can see the title is "Hitler, What Does He Want From Us?" And it praises Hitler as a decent, honest man. It says, "Our true enemies and not the Germans. Our true enemies are the perfidious British." And then the clinch argument is: "And actually Hitler's won the war, and France needs to be on the winning side." And then you can see he signs it. He started writing it in November 1941, and he finished it on the 8th of December. Of course, the irony of that is if he'd actually finished it on the 6th of December, Hitler had won the war. There was no real way he could be defeated as things were on the 6th of December. But on the 7th of December, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, brought the Americans in. So on the 8th of December, there was actually no way that Hitler could win the war against both Russia and America. You see the state of this thing.

When I bought it, it was fine, but I was staying with a friend in Tunis who had a very raunchy, temperamental cat, actually full of character, a delightful cat. And the day after I bought this, it was on my bed. The cat came into my bedroom, saw it from the other side of the room, shrieked, rushed across the room, and attempted to tear it to pieces. And you can see the claw marks on the cover. I think it's the only time in my life where I thought I might believe in reincarnation. I thought that cat had been somewhere some point before. Can I had the next, please? So this is the State of France with the Occupied France north of the border and west of the border and the so-called Free France or Vichy France in the South and the East. And the next. The next, yes, radio. Radio was one of the key weapons of the Second World War. It was very, very important for propaganda, for morale, and for military reasons as well. And the British television audiences know all about it from "'Allo 'Allo!"

A radio was a banned thing in France. The French were not allowed to have them. You were in big, big trouble if your neighbour denounced you for having a radio and for listening to the BBC. So once the resistance did get going, it depended very much on messages sent from the BBC. And I've got some excerpts coming up from one of these messages. And they're all in code. The code is really wonderful, these little messages, which presumably meant something to somebody in France, things like , "The villa is silent." I love that one: "The gardener's dog is crying." Gabriel remains anonymous. Can we hear those, please?

Sound plays.

- Yeah, more wonderful messages in there. I hope you caught them like, "The priest is nervous," "The ghost is not chatty," and so on. So, the Vichy France, very conservative and a great believer in family values. The revolutionary French slogan of liberty, equality, fraternity, which is to this day still really the great motif of French culture, was replaced by , work, family, and country. We've got the old democratic France completely undermined by all the negative qualities. I can see there: "Jewishness is one of the things that's called the collapse of France." And the next, please. We're going to go through these, Judi. I'm afraid I'm going to work you hard here. We're going to go through these pictures quite quickly. Germans put on these huge exhibitions to denounce Freemasons and to denounce Jews in France. And the next. You see a hideous caricature of a Jew inside the exhibition about the Jew in France. And the next.

This is a poster of the time, and it says, "Tuberculosis, syphilis, and cancer are all curable." And then it says, "We've got to finish with the worst of these plagues, which is the Jew." And the next, please. And these speak for themselves with this idea of an international Jewish conspiracy, that both America and Russia are ruled by Jews, and these heartbreaking photographs where you could see that, like this one, terrible, this playground for these children, which is forbidden to Jewish children. And the next, please. So this is something. This really permeates. And you see these colour photographs, and we'll talk a little bit more about that next time. Germans had a very superior colour photography, make these pictures seem so... And I find this painting, this photograph, incredibly poignant, you know, with the yellow star in colour on this woman. Did she survive? I very much doubt it. And the next, please. And so life carries on normal with a mixture of these gray-green uniforms of the Wehrmacht in amongst the population of the French. Next, please. In colour again.

And the next. Next, please. Yes, these signs in German in front of the Paris Opera. And the next, please, As I said, the normal life, people sitting in the cafes and the German uniforms mixing with the French civilian clothes. And the next, please. Now this is very interesting to me 'cause this is a newsstand in Paris. If you look carefully, you can see all these magazines like "La Semaine," "Signal", "Adler," and so on. These were magazines. These were quite lavish, heavily subsidised, illustrated magazines with a certain amount of political stuff, the military stuff in it, but mainly cultural and everyday life, fashion, music, films, and so on. And these were produced in every language of occupied Europe in great quantities. When I wrote my book about the Second World War, I made great use of them. I brought back suitcases full of these wartime propaganda magazines.

I was a bit nervous that I was going to get stopped and people will wonder why I needed them. Next, please. Again, German soldiers mixing with French civilians. And the next, we come to the very thorny... Next image, please. Oh, no, fashion first to say something about fashion. So everything becomes... If you're in a situation like this, everything becomes political, and fashion became political. Fashion became a way for French women to resist and to protest. And two elements in French fashion were very important during occupation, where women, French

women, could really insist on their difference from the Germans, hats and shoes. Hats become incredibly extravagant, very inventive. And the next image, shoes, 'cause there was no leather for shoes. These shoes had to be made from wood and other substances. And there was really spectacular women's shoes during the Second World War, and there's songs about them. And I'm hoping later to do a whole talk about popular song in France during the Second World War. And there are several songs written about the sound of the streets were different because if you walk around in clogs or wooden shoes, it sounds different from leather shoes.

And the next, please. Ah, yes, now the very fraught subject to this day, really, in France of a lot of horizontal collaboration. There were huge numbers of relationships between German soldiers and French women, many tens of thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands of children born to these liaisons between German and French people. And the next, please. And of course, I think that to be stationed in Paris, the Germans regarded this as a licence for free sex. And the next, please. The next image, yes. So cultural life resumes incredibly quickly. The Paris Opera resumed just two months after the fall of France in August 1940. This shows the occasion. It was a gala occasion. It was the... Opera chosen was a very deliberate choice. It was "The Damnation of Faust" of Berlioz because that was seen as a good example of Franco-German collaboration because the music is by Berlioz, and the subject, of course, is based on the greatest masterpiece of German literature, Goethe's "Faust."

And the next image. So Berlioz, Berlioz was very much in vogue during the Second World War. And the first attempt at a complete recording of this enormous, enormous work "The Damnation of Faust" was a huge undertaking. It needs a vast orchestra and top singers and choruses and so on. The Marguerite, there were a number of great French sopranos who could have sung the role in the recording, Germaine Lubin, quite a few. But the soprano who suddenly was everywhere in the occupation was a Belgian called Mona Laurena. I've tried to research her. She interests me very much. I couldn't find any trace of her career before the war and certainly no trace after the war. And she seems to have owed her brief prominence, you know, she's suddenly on all the cast lists and all the recordings, to the fact that she was the lover of a German called Otto Zonnen, who is the head of Radio Paris that I'm going to talk about more next time. I'm going to play you a little bit of her and see what you think. I must say she was obviously not just good in bed with a German. I think she was a fine singer. I have no idea really what her political opinions were. But let's hear a little bit of her in this first ever complete recording of "The Damnation of Faust." Next, please, the next sound excerpt.

- [Patrick] So, many careers were broken by the Nazis, and hers was at least briefly made by the Nazis. And the next, please. Next image. Can we have the next image, please? Oh, we're stuck. We've frozen.

- [Judi] So, Patrick, you've frozen. I've gone on to the next image.

- [Patrick] Can you hear me?

- [Judi] We can hear you just fine, Patrick. So you're on the next image from that clip.

- [Patrick] No, my screen has frozen. Can you just tell me what it looks like?

- [Judi] It is "Pelleas et Melisande" and then an image of two people.

- [Patrick] Oh, right, well, I'll talk about that. That was the other really great important recording made during the Second World War. "Pelleas et Melisande", of course, is the most French of French operas. And a new production was put on in 1941 at the Opera Comique. And it had the ideal cast. I mean, critics, opera historians, still rave about this cast. It was perfect in every way. Jacques Jansen, Irene Joachim, they not only sounded perfect, they looked perfect in the parts of "Pelleas et Melisande." This became a legendary cast. When it was first put on, Irene Joachim said when the curtain went up, she looked out into the theatre, and she saw all these...

- [Judi] Sorry, everyone, we seem to have lost Patrick. We're just going to try and get him back. So sorry, everyone, He doesn't seem to be able to get back on. So I think it's probably best if we end it there and try pick up again when we can. So once again, everybody, I'm so sorry that we've had to, but I'm going to have to cut the short again today. And hopefully he'll be able to get to the questions a little bit later. So, so sorry everybody, but we will have to end this here 'cause it's been 10 minutes, and he can't get back on. So, sorry, everybody, and I'll have to say goodbye to everybody. Thank you so much for joining us this evening.