Beat and Terror — Music, March and Perpetration in the Nazi Camp System

A Transdisciplinary Study

Thomas Schüller

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0 Framing

0.1 Research questions

1. What function did music, and march music in particular, serve in the operation of Nazi concentration camps?
2. From which military-music traditions did this repertoire derive?
3. What do music and rhythm psychology contribute — and where do they stop being load-bearing?
4. Can an independent contribution of music to perpetrator disinhibition be demonstrated?

The fourth question is the most delicate. This study answers it **differentially**: for *camp music* no such contribution is documented. For the *military music of the SS*, however, there is a perpetrator finding that reframes the question (section 5.2). That this finding has never been incorporated into camp-music scholarship is itself a result.

0.2 What changed from v0.1

Point	v0.1	v0.2
Perpetrator question	music as disinhibitor undocumented	differentiated: undocumented for camp bands, but an SS music corps is on record as party to a massacre (Błonie 1939)
Repertoire	treated as a research gap	partly filled: Auschwitz (Szczęśniak 2017, Hall from 2016), Buchenwald (Oeser 2023), Sachsenhausen (Brauer 2009)
Historiography	not treated separately	new section 1.2: from Lammel 1962 through John 1991 to Petit 2023
Research gaps	six named	eight examined, four confirmed as blank, two defused
Literature base	German and English	plus Czech (Kuna), French (Petit), Polish (Naliwajek-Mazurek, Szczęśniak)
Neubacher line	absent	added as a connecting hypothesis, explicitly marked as this study's own (6.3)

0.3 Method

This is historical-critical foundational research combining five approaches — camp history, musicology, military-music history, music and social psychology, cultural and social theory — and treating their contradictions as findings rather than as noise to be smoothed over.

Three methodological commitments shape the text:

First, the separation of victim and perpetrator perspectives. The effect of coerced music on prisoners is extensively attested. The effect of the same music on camp personnel is not. Treating both in one sentence produces pseudo-evidence.

Second, camp and phase specificity. Statements about “camp music” in general are consistently unusable. Every claim is broken down by camp, ensemble, period and source type.

Third, the separation of camp band and SS music corps. Both are musical practice within the Nazi system, but they differ institutionally, in personnel and in function: the camp band consisted of prisoners and played under orders. The SS music corps was a formation of the perpetrator organisation. Scholarship has so far treated them separately without justifying the separation — and has barely treated the second at all.

0.4 Scope limits

This is not an applied text. It describes mechanisms in order to make them analysable, not available. References to active far-right scene structures are omitted; section 9.4 works exclusively from scholarly and journalistic secondary literature. Apologetic veterans’ and association literature is identified as self-presentation, never as evidence.

0.5 Source status of this version

This version rests on systematic literature research, not on original archival work. Several details derive from portals, catalogues or survivor accounts and are marked as such. Verification against primary holdings is required before publication; the verification plan ordered by leverage accompanies the full version.

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1 Core finding and state of research

1.1 Core finding

Music in the Nazi camp system was neither marginal nor an island of humanity. It was first of all an instrument of SS domination.

Three functions are well documented:

- **Timekeeping.** Prisoner bands played for the departure and return of labour columns and at roll call.

- **Humiliation and punishment.** Forced singing served discipline and provided a pretext for violence.
- **Staging.** Music accompanied executions in documented individual cases and served representation towards visitors.

Alongside this, self-determined music-making existed as a survival and self-assertion practice — under conditions open only to a privileged minority, and at the cost of the moral ambivalence Primo Levi described as the “grey zone”.

The dual structure of ordered and self-determined music has been well established since Fackler (2000), Brauer (2009) and Gilbert (2005); Petit (2023) gathers it under the concept of *musique contrainte*. Considerably weaker is the popular thesis that camp music systematically disinhibited the perpetrators. For alcohol, celebration and punishment rituals, the evidence is incomparably better.

New in this version: the perpetrator finding must be split. An SS music corps is on record as party to a mass shooting (section 5.2). This does not concern the camp bands, but it shifts the question: not “did music disinhibit the perpetrators?” but “what did the musicians of the perpetrator organisation do themselves?”

1.2 Historiography: how the field arrived at its readings

The history of interpretation explains why certain readings are so persistent.

Phase	Agents	Interpretive frame
from 1962	Inge Lammel, Workers' Song Archive, Academy of Arts of the GDR	camp songs as a continuation of the workers' song; series title "The Song Born in Struggle"
1990/93	Milan Kuna	person-centred survey from a Czech perspective; music as "defiance and hope"
1991	Eckhard John	first systematic research survey, naming the desiderata
2000–2009	Guido Fackler, Shirli Gilbert, Juliane Brauer	music as a technique of domination; critique of the resistance reading
2016–2023	Patricia Hall, Hubert Szczęśniak, Christine Oeser, Élise Petit	return to the material holdings: scores, song collections, programmes

Lammel's GDR edition collected material that would otherwise scarcely survive — and simultaneously framed it so that ordered music and the music of non-communist prisoner groups receded. Fackler later criticises this reading explicitly as far too narrow. Today's redemption debate (section 9.5) is therefore not a new problem but the echo of an editorial practice that helped shape the canon.

> **Gap in the record.** No study in the history of scholarship on Lammel's editorial practice was found. The Workers' Song Archive is held at the Academy of Arts, Berlin, and has not been evaluated for this question.

2 Music in the camp system

2.1 Overview

Camp	Ensemble / form	Period (as documented)	Note
Auschwitz I (main camp)	prisoner band	January 1941 – January 1945	Jews effectively excluded until autumn 1944
Auschwitz II (Birkenau), men’s camp	orchestra	August 1942 – autumn 1944	conducted by Szymon Laks; 34 members in July 1944
Auschwitz II (Birkenau), women’s camp	women’s orchestra	April 1943 – autumn 1944	Czajkowska, from August 1943 Alma Rosé
Auschwitz III (Monowitz)	orchestra	August 1943 – January 1945	
Buchenwald	camp band, camp song	from 1938	seven song collections survive, 164 songs
Sachsenhausen	at least eight prisoner choirs	1936 – 1945	over 20 songbooks, 122 compositions in seven languages
Dachau	forced singing, “Dachaulied”	from 1933	Soyfer / Zipper 1938
Mauthausen	camp band, brass band at the gate	summer 1942 – January 1945	c. 30 members in 1943, later over 60
Gusen	small band	1941 – 1945	led by Heinrich Lutterbach (Jehovah’s Witness)
Ravensbrück	largely clandestine music-making		over 140 women musicians documented
Theresienstadt	“leisure activities”		propaganda instrumentalisation 1944
Treblinka	camp orchestra	from January 1943	founded by Artur Gold on Kurt Franz’s order

The table reflects the state of the literature; figures and periods are partly approximate.

2.2 Auschwitz

According to Jacek Lachendro (Research Centre of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial), the prisoner band in the main camp first played in early January 1941 with seven musicians. The initiators were camp elder Bruno Brodniewicz and kitchen kapo Franciszek Nierychło; camp leader Karl Fritzsch approved the ensemble after an audition in March 1941.

The memorial describes its principal task as playing military marches to whose rhythm prisoners marched out to and back from work. Witnesses stated that the SS wanted to accelerate the morning departure — the function was operational and control-technical, not aesthetic.

A surviving list from July 1944 names 34 prisoners in the Birkenau men’s orchestra: 28 Jews, four Poles, one Russian. Jews were effectively excluded from the main camp orchestra until autumn 1944 — the bands reproduced the camp’s racial hierarchy.

Lachendro reports that prisoners experienced the marches very negatively, having to march to buoyant music while exhausted, injured, or carrying the bodies of murdered comrades. The Sunday concerts were in part remembered positively. This difference between functional music and concert is analytically central.

The women’s orchestra was formed in April 1943 on the orders of SS chief overseer Maria Mandl and Franz Hössler. Its first conductor was the Polish music teacher Zofia Czajkowska; from August 1943 the Viennese violinist Alma Rosé, Gustav Mahler’s niece, who died in the camp on 4/5 April 1944.

> **Controversy — Fénelon.** Fania Fénelon’s memoir (1976) and its film adaptation *Playing for Time* shaped the public image. Other orchestra members criticised the account sharply, particularly its

> portrayal of Alma Rosé. Richard Newman and Karen Kirtley (2000) and Susan Eischeid (2016) correct Fénelon's version. For scholarly purposes Fénelon is usable only with cross-checking.

Szymon Laks, conductor of the men's orchestra, published *Musiques d'un autre monde* with René Coudy in 1948. His text is deliberately anti-sentimental: the music often sounded poor, served SS needs above all, and offered no consolation. At the same time Laks records that the orchestra post saved his life. In Poland his account was initially rejected as too lenient towards the perpetrators — an indication of how strongly expectations about form governed reception.

2.3 Buchenwald

In late 1938 protective custody camp leader Arthur Rödl ordered a camp song. The Jewish Viennese prisoners Fritz Löhner-Beda (lyrics) and Hermann Leopoldi (music) created the "Buchenwaldlied"; the Jewish authorship was concealed.

According to the Buchenwald Memorial, Rödl had it rehearsed insistently and sung at roll call; the camp band played it for the entry and exit of labour columns. A commandant's order of 22 August 1939 lists it alongside the Esterwegen camp song and the so-called "Judenlied" as permitted. From around 1942 it no longer belonged to the official programme.

Eugen Kogon describes how Rödl, heavily intoxicated, made prisoners sing in the snow for hours in December 1938. This is among the earliest documented instances of the coupling of alcohol, music and punishment ritual — a configuration treated systematically in section 6.2.

Löhner-Beda was beaten to death in Auschwitz-Monowitz on 4 December 1942.

> **Ambivalence.** The Buchenwaldlied became an anthem of resistance commemoration after 1945, though it originated on SS orders. The lyrics permitted an oppositional appropriation that overlaid the circumstances of its creation. Classifying it as a "resistance song" is therefore not wrong, but incomplete.

2.4 Sachsenhausen

Juliane Brauer's dissertation (FU Berlin 2007, Metropol 2009) reconstructs the musical practice of six prisoner groups: German communists, Czech students, Poles, Norwegians, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses. She draws on over 20 songbooks and documented 122 song compositions in seven languages as well as at least eight prisoner choirs.

For Jewish prisoners and Jehovah's Witnesses she works out the interrelation of music and violence. She develops her concept of "musical violence" in the volume *Paradestück Militärmusik* (2012) and in *Music & Politics* (2016).

Methodologically important: Brauer states herself that she must reconstruct the SS side almost exclusively from prisoner testimony. That is the limit section 6.2 takes up.

The Polish prisoner Aleksander Kulisiewicz, camp singer at Sachsenhausen, assembled the most extensive archive of camp songs after 1945; it is now held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

2.5 Dachau and the early camps

For 1933 to 1936 Fackler shows that forced singing belonged to the repertoire of humiliation from the outset and that music was a fixed component of camp life in all concentration camps. From prisoner culture come the "Moorsoldatenlied" (Börgermoor 1933) and the "Dachaulied" (Jura Soyfer / Herbert Zipper, 1938).

Fackler explicitly warns against reading camp music wholesale as part of illegal political resistance — a reading widespread in anti-fascist publishing and traceable to the editorial tradition described in section 1.2.

2.6 Mauthausen and Gusen

For Mauthausen, *Music and the Holocaust* (World ORT) reports that in summer 1942 a kapo was ordered to build a band. From seven Czech musicians it grew to around 30 by 1943 and to over 60 a year later. In early 1944, according to this account, 20 musicians of the Warsaw Philharmonic joined. Although the orchestra was officially dissolved in spring 1944, it still played during a visit by Himmler in January 1945. A separate brass band played at the gate morning and evening.

The musicological study for the Austrian strand is Kurt Lettner, “Musik zwischen Leben und Tod. Musik im Konzentrationslager Mauthausen und seinen Nebenlagern 1939–1945” (*Oberösterreichische Heimatblätter* 54, 2000, nos. 1–2, pp. 55–72).

The Bonarewitz case. On 30 July 1942 the recaptured prisoner Hans Bonarewitz was led to his execution accompanied by the camp band. Fackler describes him being led past the assembled fellow prisoners headed by the camp ensemble. The photographs were taken by SS-Oberscharführer Kornatz; holdings are at the Bundesarchiv (including Bild 192-249) and the French Archives nationales (88AJ/299–302), where the archival note names the piece played as “J’attendrai”. The photographs show the so-called “Zigeunerorchester”, including Wilhelm Heckmann (see Klaus Stanjek, *Musik und Mord*, 2008, and the project “Klänge des Verschweigens”).

Evidential status: the event and the band’s participation are well documented; the identification of the piece rests on survivor accounts and an archival note, not on a perpetrator primary source.

At **Gusen**, according to ORT, the Bavarian Jehovah's Witness Heinrich Lutterbach led a small band from 1941 to 1945, composed predominantly of Polish musicians. The Gusen and Mauthausen orchestras reportedly had no contact. No music-specific study of Gusen exists; Lettner covers the subcamps.

2.7 Ravensbrück

Ravensbrück is considerably less researched musically than the men's camps. Gabriele Knapp (2003) presents the biographies of more than 140 women who made music in the camp — predominantly in secret and self-determined. The basis was her research project "Music in Ravensbrück" (1999–2001); for a study of women's choirs she received the Hosenfeld/Szpilman Memorial Prize in 2005. No large formation comparable to the Auschwitz women's orchestra is documented.

No music-specific monograph after 2003 was found. Knapp does, however, contribute to the 2023 Paris catalogue, continuing the line.

This imbalance is itself a finding: scholarly attention followed the ordered large ensembles, not the dispersed practice.

2.8 Theresienstadt

Theresienstadt is a special case. The "leisure activities" programme enabled a rich musical life — Verdi's Requiem under Rafael Schächter, Hans Krása's children's opera *Brundibár*. The SS instrumentalised it in 1944 for the International Red Cross visit and the propaganda film *Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet*.

From 28 September 1944 the SS deported, according to the USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, around 18,000 Jews in eleven transports to Auschwitz, the last on 28 October 1944 — among them Pavel Haas and children from *Brundibár*.

Milan Kuna published **two** monographs on the subject, and they must be kept apart: *Hudba na hranici života* (Prague 1990), translated into German in 1993 as *Musik an der Grenze des Lebens*, and the later *Hudba vzdoru a naděje. Terezín 1941–1945*, confined to

Terezín. Only the first exists in German. It covers Theresienstadt within a person-centred survey of musicians from the Bohemian lands across the whole camp system, with a dedicated chapter on *Brundibár*. It is the richest source of biographical data on Czech prisoner musicians, but reads music within a frame of "defiance and hope" and must be used critically. Anyone working from the German edition has not read the Terezín monograph; references must distinguish the two.

> **Controversy — reading Theresienstadt's music.** The concert format *Defiant Requiem* reads the performances as resistance. Critical studies of *Brundibár* emphasise instead the social stratification within the ghetto and the embedding of performances in the Nazi propaganda agenda. Both readings capture partial truths; the resistance reading becomes problematic when it obscures the function the music served for the perpetrators.

2.9 Treblinka and occupied Poland

The Treblinka Memorial names Artur Gold as founder of the camp orchestra; Gold was deported from the Warsaw Ghetto in January 1943, the order came from Kurt Franz, the ensemble comprised ten musicians.

> **Needs precision.** The World ORT statement that musicians had to play near the gas chambers refers there to an earlier trio predating Gold's arrival, not to Gold's orchestra. Secondary accounts regularly conflate the two. See section 10.

For the Polish context as a whole, Katarzyna Naliwajek-Mazurek is the central voice. Her work covers Treblinka, the Janowska camp in Lviv and Kraków, showing music there in a double function: entertainment for the guard units and a means of psychological torture. Her survey (2016) argues that in the General Government music was a key instrument of propaganda and of the physical as well as symbolic appropriation of conquered space. She works with numerous interviews of her own with survivors.

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3 Forced singing and camp songs

Forced singing is ubiquitous in the sources: on the march to work, at roll call, as punishment, as derision aimed at particular prisoner groups — such as the Buchenwald “Judenlied”.

A prisoner account cited by Fackler captures the logic: whoever did not know the song was beaten. Singing was simultaneously test, discipline and pretext for violence. The impossibility of getting it right was not a side effect but the purpose.

The EHNE encyclopedia (Sorbonne) stresses that lyrics were deliberately selected during punishments and executions to construct humiliating situations. Alongside the Bonarewitz case it cites Sonnenburg, where communist prisoners had to dig their own graves while singing.

Systematically, four modes can be distinguished:

Mode	Description	Authorship	Example
Ordered camp song	mandated by the SS, institutionalised	prisoners under orders	Buchenwaldlied
Punishment singing	situational, as chastisement	SS selection	Sonnenburg, Buchenwald 1938
Functional music	timekeeping for work and movement	camp band under orders	marches at the camp gate
Self-determined singing	clandestine, within groups	prisoners	Moorsoldatenlied, Kulisiewicz holdings

The boundaries are permeable: the Moorsoldatenlied arose at an event tolerated by the camp administration and was subsequently banned; the Buchenwaldlied shifted from ordered composition to resistance anthem.

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4 What was played? The material holdings

This section was listed as a research gap in v0.1. The situation is better than assumed there — though very unevenly distributed.

4.1 Auschwitz

The collections department of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum holds printed sheet music, predominantly from German publishers, handwritten arrangements and instruments (accordion, clarinet, tuba, violin). These holdings were first fully described by Hubert Szczęśniak (*Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykologów UJ* 32, 2017, no. 1), with appendices on instruments, works composed in the camp, and music prints.

Patricia Hall (University of Michigan) found hundreds of manuscripts of arrangements by the men's band of Auschwitz I in the same holdings from 2016. Via prisoner numbers 5665 and 5131 she identified the arrangers Antoni Gargul and Maksymilian Pilat. The repertoire is dance music and popular song: foxtrots, tangos, waltzes, including "Die schönste Zeit des Lebens"; Hall names Franz Grothe, Ludwig Siede, Josef Holetschek and Ludwig Schmidseder as original composers.

Fackler additionally names Beethoven's Fifth for the main camp band and an "Arbeitslagermarsch" composed in the camp.

Analytically central: a master's thesis at the Humboldt University of Berlin on the repertoires of the prisoner orchestras finds that typical Nazi songs barely appear in the repertoire. This independently confirms this study's thesis (section 5.3) that the camp bands played military-popular functional music, not a specifically National Socialist repertoire.

4.2 Buchenwald

At least seven song collections from the years 1938 to 1945 survive. They contain 164 songs, 51 of them composed in the camp, together with concert programmes, instrumental works, and signatures and dedications from 232 people of 14 nationalities.

Locations: Buchenwald Memorial (Max Göhrmann collection, Józef Pribula album), Deutsches Historisches Museum (Willy Jentsch collection) and Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Kazimierz Tymiński album, 1944).

Christine Oeser evaluated them in her dissertation (University of Osnabrück 2023, supervised by Stefan Hanheide), for which she received the 2024 dissertation prize of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung. The printed version has since appeared: *Liedsammlungen aus dem Konzentrationslager Buchenwald. Kontexte – Funktionen – Deutungen*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2026, 789 pages with 125 partly colour illustrations. It was not available when research for the present work closed, and is therefore the most extensive single study in the field that could **not** be drawn on here. An accompanying song booklet is announced.

4.3 Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, others

Camp	Holdings	Status
Sachsenhausen	over 20 songbooks, 122 compositions; Kulisiewicz collection at USHMM	evaluated by Brauer 2009; Kulisiewicz only partly
Mauthausen	no score holdings or programmes found; main sources are the Kornatz photographs and Maršálek’s interviews (including Josef Jira 1972)	thin
Gusen	nothing music-specific documented as surviving	blank
Ravensbrück	archive and interviews of the memorial	via Knapp 2003, nothing since

Fackler notes generally that only isolated scores, song sheets and songbooks survive in memorials and museums. For Mauthausen and Gusen this means the Austrian strand is materially the weakest, even though the event history there is well documented.

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5 March and military music: traditions and a perpetrator finding

5.1 Origins of the repertoire

Since the Armeemarschsammlung under Frederick William III, the Prussian march had been a state-canonised repertoire combining discipline, lockstep and representation. The Habsburg tradition is represented by the Radetzky March (Johann Strauss the Elder, 1848).

One example of cross-system continuity is the “Yorckscher Marsch” (Beethoven, 1808/09): to this day a traditional march of the Bundeswehr guard battalion and simultaneously a march of the East German NVA.

The Badonviller March (Georg Fürst, 1914) became Hitler’s entrance march as the “Badenweiler Marsch”. A police ordinance of 17 May 1939 permitted public performance only in Hitler’s presence — an indication of how deliberately the regime managed music as a sign of rule.

5.2 SS music corps: a research void and an archival perpetrator finding

No scholarly study of the music corps of the SS-Verfügungstruppe, the SS-Totenkopfverbände or the Waffen-SS exists. What exists is apologetic veterans’ literature: Fritz Bunge, *Musik in der Waffen-SS* (Osnabrück: Munin 1975), written by a former music leader of the Waffen-SS and published by Munin, the press of HIAG, the Waffen-SS veterans’ association. The book contains chapters on the Leibstandarte music corps, the “Deutschland” and “Germania” regiments, the music inspector Leander Hauck, and the Waffen-SS music school in Braunschweig. It is exclusively a source of self-presentation, never evidence.

The finding that shifts the perpetrator question: Hermann Müller-John (1894–1945) became music director of the music corps of the Leibstandarte SS “Adolf Hitler” in 1933, a Reich culture senator in 1935, and in 1936 the first music inspector of the SS-Verfügungstruppe. On 18/19 September 1939 Jewish civilians were shot

at Błonie near Warsaw — **with the participation of his music corps**. This is documented by a report in the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, RH 19-I/112, whose subject line names the shooting of Jews by the senior bandmaster of the Leibstandarte. An investigation file of the Central Office in Ludwigsburg (reference B 162/16610, unverified) names 50 Jewish victims. The episode is placed scholarly in Jochen Böhler, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg* (2006), and Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland* (2003).

What follows from this, and what does not:

Claim	Status
An SS music corps participated in a mass shooting	documented in the files
SS military musicians were not an uninvolved specialist branch	follows
Camp bands were involved in this	**no** — different institution, different people, prisoners rather than perpetrators
Music motivated or disinhibited the act	**undocumented**, here too

The finding therefore does not answer the disinhibition question. It shows something else: scholarship has barely treated the perpetrator organisation’s military music as a perpetrator subject. That this episode does not appear in camp-music scholarship, although it has been published since Böhler 2006, marks a dividing line between two fields that do not read each other.

> **Undocumented follow-up question.** The SS Division “Totenkopf” was formed at Dachau concentration camp from 16 October 1939; several thousand men were transferred for it from the Totenkopf units, that is from camp guard personnel. Whether their music platoons absorbed personnel from the camp regiments has not been investigated. Perpetrator studies of the camp SS do not treat musicians separately.

Further claims from hobbyist sources — music platoons of the Totenkopf units, an agreement between the Reichsführer SS and the Reich Music Chamber dated 4 March 1936 — are archivally un-

verified and recorded here only as items to check. No scholarly biography of Müller-John exists; the biographical data so far derive from reference works.

5.3 Personal connections at camp level

Many SS members had experience with march music and ensemble bands. The Auschwitz SS man Richard Böck stated that he joined the SS in 1934 only in order to keep playing in a marching band (reported by Hermann Langbein).

The repertoires of the camp bands — marches, folk songs, operetta, popular songs — reflect this military-popular musical culture rather than a specifically National Socialist repertoire. Section 4.1 now documents this materially: typical Nazi songs barely appear in the Auschwitz holdings. This is an important finding against the notion of a distinct “Nazi camp music” — what was played was what the bands already had.

5.4 The aesthetics of the march

The operative features are unspectacular and effective precisely for that reason: clear duple or quadruple metre, tempi in the range of walking pace, harmonic simplicity, high repetition density, penetrating instrumentation. The march is a technology of simultaneity — it makes movement countable, synchronisable and supervisable.

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6 Perpetrator research: where does music belong?

6.1 Positions

Approach	Core	Explanatory value for camp personnel
Arendt (1963)	banality of evil, bureaucracy, thoughtlessness	limited; rather desk perpetrators
Browning (1992)	conformity, group pressure, career	high
Goldhagen (1996)	eliminationist antisemitism	low; monocausal, heavily criticised
Welzer (2005)	frame of reference in which killing becomes work	high
Kühl (2014)	organisational membership, purpose binding, comradeship norms	high
Sofsky (1993)	absolute power as a distinct social form	high, including staging
Neubacher (2015)	camp regulations produce an appearance of “orderly normality”	high, see 6.3
Milgram (1974)	obedience to authority	limited after revision
Bandura (1999)	moral disengagement	moderate, as mechanism description

> **Controversy — Milgram.** The obedience paradigm has been substantially relativised by Gina Perry’s archival findings and the reinterpretation by Haslam and Reicher (“engaged followership”). Perpetrators frequently acted identificationally rather than merely obediently. Anyone still citing Milgram as evidence must carry this revision along.

6.2 The disinhibition question

Edward Westermann’s *Drunk on Genocide* (Cornell University Press 2021) shows alcohol as reward, disinhibitor and coping device. Westermann cites cases in which intoxicated SS guards expressly staged acts of violence with music.

It follows that **music appears as part of a celebration and humiliation ritual, not as an autonomous cause.** Music, alcohol and punishment ritual occur as a bundle — the Buchenwald case of the intoxicated Rödl is the prototype.

Whether music *additionally* lowered the threshold is methodologically hard to isolate, for an identifiable reason:

Source type	What it says about music and perpetrators
Perpetrator testimony in court	not specifically evaluated (see below)
Perpetrator ego-documents, diaries	no evaluated corpus documented
Victim testimony	describes the effect on victims, not on perpetrators
Scholarly literature	reconstructs the SS side predominantly from prisoner testimony

No one has carried out a systematic examination of the files of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, the Mauthausen trials, or the Bełżec, Sobibor and Treblinka trials for musical references in perpetrator testimony. Fackler lists court testimony among his source types but does not evaluate it as a corpus of its own. Brauer herself names the dependence on prisoner testimony as a limit of her study. Anno Mungen (Bayreuth) describes music as a "refuge" and ordering instrument for the perpetrators, citing Mengele and Schumann's "Träumerei", but documents this anecdotally.

The disinhibition thesis is therefore not refuted but **untested** — and testable: the tape recordings of the first Frankfurt Auschwitz trial are held at the Fritz Bauer Institute, the investigation files of the Central Office in Ludwigsburg (holding B 162). Neither has been evaluated for musical references.

Laks conversely reports an affinity for music among some SS men in whom momentary "human" impulses became visible. This demonstrates that love of music and readiness to murder could coexist — not that either caused the other.

> **On the question "How could they listen to Beethoven and murder?"** The question assumes that cultural education must immunise morally. That premise is itself the problem. Scholar-

> ship has largely inverted the question: what requires explanation is not the contradiction but the expectation that there should be one.

6.3 Connecting hypothesis: the band as a fiction of normality

Frank Neubacher argues criminologically that the bureaucratic regularity of the concentration camps produced among the perpetrators an appearance of "orderly normality". He has published nothing on music; his work addresses macro-criminality, international criminal law and the aetiology of genocide.

> **This study's own hypothesis, not Neubacher's.** The camp band at the march out and back can be read as a ritualised production of precisely this fiction of order: an operation that begins and ends with music looks like an operation. The timekeeping thus served not only control over the prisoners but also the assertion of normality towards the personnel themselves.
>
> This hypothesis is plausible but undocumented. It would have to be tested against exactly the material section 6.2 identifies as unevaluated. It is formulated here as a hypothesis, not a finding, and should not be cited onward in that form.

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7 Cultural-theoretical framing

Adorno. The dictum that to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric (1949/1951) and the critique of the "regression of listening" (1938) provide the backdrop for any scepticism towards redemption through art. Adorno's later qualifications of the dictum belong to the reception.

Benjamin. The "aestheticisation of politics" (artwork essay, 1936), culminating in war, explains march and parade as forms that give the masses expression without touching property relations. Directly applicable to the camp band as an instrument of representation.

Theweleit. *Male Fantasies* (1977/78) describes the soldierly body armour and the pleasure taken in formation and order. This touches McNeill substantively but argues psychoanalytically rather than evolutionarily — the two lines should not be merged.

Friedländer. *Reflections of Nazism* (1982/84) analyses the connection between kitsch aesthetics and fascination with death in Nazism and its aftermath. For assessing present-day commemorative aesthetics this is the sharpest yardstick.

Further lines: Norbert Elias on the rupture of civilisation, Zygmunt Bauman (*Modernity and the Holocaust*) on the modernity thesis, Giorgio Agamben on the camp as nomos. Sofsky's analysis of absolute power joins the sociological to the performative level and offers the most productive connection for the music question.

Music-political background. Eckhard John's *Musikbolschewismus* (1994) shows how the figure of "music bolshevism" turned new musical phenomena into political issues because they questioned the aesthetics of the masculine-heroic musical genius. His continuity thesis is decisive: the politicisation of music begins before 1933 and extends beyond it. Nazi music policy was thus not an invention but a radicalisation.

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8 Music psychology: rhythm, entrainment, synchrony

8.1 The evidence

McNeill (1995) traces group feeling in drill and dance to shared rhythmic movement ("muscular bonding") in *Keeping Together in Time*. Reception is divided: the *Wilson Quarterly* called the book intriguing but highly speculative, criticising that McNeill derives an ambitious theory from skimpy fossil evidence and inconclusive behavioural studies.

Synchrony experiments. Wiltermuth and Heath (2009) found increased cooperation after synchronous action. Wiltermuth (2012) showed in two papers that synchrony also increases compliance with requests to aggress against outsiders and destructive obedience, mediated by felt emotional connection.

8.2 What follows — and what does not

The obvious transfer to the camps fails on an asymmetry:

	Victims	**Perpetrators**
Movement in time	coerced, daily	rarely within camp music
Experienced effect	exhaustion, humiliation, control	not systematically attested
Cohesion effect	not discernible; synchrony was externally imposed	theoretically conceivable, empirically open
Evidence base	extensive (survivor accounts)	thin

Victims were forced into externally imposed synchrony by march music: acceleration, countability, control. This produced no cohesion but intensified suffering. A bonding effect among personnel would be sought more plausibly in drill, roll calls and comradeship evenings than in the camp band, before which the SS stood rather than marched.

The transfer of laboratory findings to SS personnel is therefore a **hypothesis, not a finding**. The experiments moreover use small student samples and harmless aggression measures; the distance from the object is considerable.

8.3 Music as coercion and torture

Suzanne Cusick analysed the use of music in US detention in the "War on Terror" (TRANS 10, 2006; *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 2008). In "Pathways to music torture" (*Transposition* 4, 2014) M. J. Grant distinguishes five pathways: sensory deprivation, military tradition, political communication, humiliation and performance of power. Forced singing and music combined with enforced physical activity are named explicitly.

Juliane Brauer has posed the question for the camps themselves ("How Can Music Be Torturous?", *Music & Politics* 10/1, 2016). Katarzyna Naliwajek-Mazurek's work on music and torture in occupied Poland (2013) is the most frequently cited case contribution.

The military-tradition and humiliation pathways describe camp practice precisely. The EHNE encyclopedia formulates that music participated in the process of torture. This framework carries the camp material better than synchrony research because it is built for coercive contexts.

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9 Afterlives since 1945

9.1 Germany

Friedrich Deisenroth, first head of the military music service, excluded the Badonviller March from the music corps' repertoire in 1956 by specialist service instruction. The piece is not banned in civilian contexts. In 2014 the NPD obtained a ruling from the Münster Administrative Court permitting it to be played at a rally.

Performances in local associational life still generate conflict: according to nordbayern.de, the "Knoblauchsländer Musikanten" played the march at the opening of the Schnepfenreuth village fair in Nuremberg. As early as 1955, according to *Die Zeit*, the Nuremberg district court heard the case of seven brass musicians who had played it at the Ziegelstein church fair and were reported for gross mischief.

The Bundeswehr songbook *Kameraden singt!* was halted on 12 May 2017; according to the ministry, some passages no longer corresponded to its understanding of values, among them the "Panzerlied", the "Westerwaldlied" and "Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss". In 2018 the ministry decided to issue no printed songbook at all. Notably, the 1958 and 1991 editions already carried a note on the Westerwaldlied that it was probably the best-known song of the former Wehrmacht and should be used with careful consideration. The burden was known and tolerated for decades regardless.

9.2 Personal continuities: a consistent research void

Sphere	State of research	Finding
Bundeswehr	Heidler 2005 (656 pp.) is the only overall account; the author was himself an officer in the military music service	institutionally close internal view **with no dedicated chapter on Nazi involvement or denazification**
KVP / NVA	no scholarly monograph	association literature states that the Kasernierte Volkspolizei hired many former Wehrmacht musicians; former bandmasters and staff bandmasters are said to have led the larger orchestras and shaped the NVA music regulations from 1956
Austria	Sollfelner / Glanz 2000 as the standard work	on the founding generation only association sources, with no information on 1938–1945; **blank** on the denazification of the Bundesheer's military bandmasters

Continuity at leadership level is documented: Wilhelm Stephan was music inspector of the Bundeswehr, Friedrich Deisenroth his deputy; both came from Wehrmacht music. So far this is documented only in reference works. A biographical study drawing on tribunal or personnel files on Stephan, Deisenroth or Hans Felix Husadel, head of Luftwaffe music 1935–1945, is lacking.

Simon Kotter's work on k.(u.)k. military music (2015, open access) reveals a further strand: military music *scholarship* itself had Nazi-implicated personnel, such as Georg Kandler. The disciplinary history is therefore also affected.

Assessment for this study: the handling of burdened repertoire is documented — the handling of burdened personnel is not. This is the most conspicuous asymmetry in the entire complex of afterlives.

9.3 Austria: the Weninger case

The Vienna Philharmonic played the Radetzky March from the 1946 New Year’s Concert under Josef Krips in an arrangement by Leopold Weninger published by Benjamin (Leipzig) in 1914. The *Jewish Chronicle* documented on 17 December 2019 that Weninger joined the NSDAP in February 1932 and was responsible for arrangements of the Horst Wessel Song, Hitler hymns and SA marches.

In late 2019 chairman Daniel Froschauer commissioned the music archive to record in a dedicated Philharmonic version the alterations entered by hand over decades. According to the orchestra this version has been in use since, first on 1 January 2020 under Andris Nelsons.

> **Critical note.** Since the new edition essentially codified what was being played anyway, the audible difference remained slight. Observers asked why the original version rediscovered by Norbert Rubey in 1999, conducted by Harnoncourt in 2001, was not used instead. The New Year’s Concert itself originated in 1939 under Nazi rule; the Philharmonic addressed this officially only in 2013.

9.4 March aesthetics in the far right

Before the emergence of right-wing rock in the early 1980s, march music was the dominant sonic idiom of the far right and appealed above all to older adherents.

Christoph Schulze states explicitly for the field that studies on the role of music before right-wing rock are lacking — on soldiers’ songs, marches, choirs and singing groups as much as on völkisch youth groups and cultural events. Dudek / Jaschke (1984) remains fundamental for the cultural frame, covering cultural associations, publishers and “Stammkultur”. Agency publications note generally that before right-wing rock the ideology was transmitted above all in the form of homeland and soldiers’ songs.

One concrete strand is documented via this study itself: Munin, the press that published Bunge's apologetic book on music in the Waffen-SS, was the press of HIAG (section 5.2). Associational tradition-keeping and music literature were thus connected.

No scholarly study of songbook production, publishers or choirs of the post-war far right before 1980 exists. March aesthetics survive today less as a genre than as citation: drums, fanfares, lockstep rhythm, arrangements of soldiers' songs.

9.5 Commemorative culture and mediation

Mediation has increased markedly since 2018:

Format	Institution	Note
Exhibition *La musique dans les camps nazis*	Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, 20.04.2023–25.02.2024	catalogue by Élise Petit with contributions by Brauer, Bruttmann, Knapp, Maurer Zenck; Grand Prix du Livre France Musique-Claude Samuel 2024
Special exhibition "Lagerkapelle"	Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum	original scores, instruments, recollections by Helena Niwińska
Concert series *musica pro pace*	Buchenwald Memorial	"O Buchenwald, ich kann dich nicht vergessen"
"Music from Auschwitz"	Patricia Hall / University of Michigan	performances 2024 in Vienna and Kraków, 2025 including Wigmore Hall London, Auschwitz and Dachau memorials
Educational projects	Ravensbrück Memorial, bpb	Knapp's music projects, youth project

> **Controversy — redemption narratives.** Shirli Gilbert (2005) criticises a tendency towards reductive narratives of redemption and consolation and the trope of "spiritual resistance". Barbara Milewski countered that Gilbert's own account of a prevailing rhetoric of resistance is itself a rhetorical construct, since Kulisiewicz had already documented the variety of motives. The controversy is unresolved — and productive, because it makes the question of representation its subject. An early critical voice is

> **Guido Fackler**, with the contribution "'Musik der Schoa' — Plädoyer für eine kritische Rezeption" in John / Zimmermann (2004). The authorship has been verified, and it is what gives the warning its weight: it comes not from outside the field but from one of its founders. The caution against transfiguration is thus the camp-music scholarship criticising itself.

The unresolved problem of performance practice. Hall's project documents the ambivalence itself: listeners hesitated to applaud, and Hall had originally intended only to archive the material, considering it too painful to hear.

> **This study's own assessment.** The repertoire Hall performs is dance music played for the SS garrison. Sounded in a concert hall without framing, the perpetrators' listening position is reproduced — the audience occupies the place of those for whom it was played. This is not an argument against performance but one for a framing that names the listening position itself. No systematic study of the concert mediation of camp music exists.

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10 Source criticism: myths and controversies

Claim	Evidence	Assessment
Orchestras played at the ramp to deceive arrivals	Laks categorically denies it for the Birkenau men's orchestra; Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier testified at Nuremberg to the women's orchestra at selections in June/July 1944	Contested; both may hold for different ensembles and moments. Not documented as standard practice
Music drowned out screams from the gas chambers	Not documented for Auschwitz; Laks reports occasional playing while columns passed beyond the fence towards the gas chambers. For Treblinka the ORT statement refers to a trio preceding Gold's orchestra	Camp-specific; spatial proximity is not intent
Piece X was played at selections	Specific anecdotes about pieces mostly derive from single testimonies or feature films	Mark as anecdote without multiple attestation
"J'attendrai" at the Bonarewitz execution	Kornatz photographs and archival note document band and event	Event well documented, piece identification testimonial
The camp bands played Nazi songs	Repertoire analysis of the Auschwitz holdings: typical Nazi songs barely appear	**refuted** for Auschwitz; dance music, popular song, marches, operetta
Music was spiritual resistance	True for particular groups and situations; false for ordered music. The reading traces back to the GDR editorial tradition (1.2)	Differentiate (Gilbert vs Milewski)
The Buchenwaldlied is a resistance song	Created on Rödl's orders; lyrics ambivalent	Ordered song with oppositional appropriation
March music disinhibited the perpetrators	No robust primary source; alcohol and ritual far better documented. Trial records **not evaluated** for musical references	Untested, not refuted — and testable with existing holdings

Claim	Evidence	Assessment
SS musicians were an uninvolved specialist branch	The Leibstandarte music corps participated in the shooting of Jewish civilians at Błonie in September 1939 (BArch-MA RH 19-I/112)	**refuted**

Further source-critical notes:

- Fénelon's account is contested by other survivors.
- Laks's text is ironic in design and was initially rejected in Poland as too lenient towards perpetrators.
- Kuna (1993) is rich in material but interprets within a frame of "defiance and hope".
- Lammel's editions (from 1962) are indispensable material within a frame that lets ordered music recede.
- Bunge (1975), association literature on NVA military music and association sources on the Bundesheer are self-presentations, not evidence.
- Online sources frequently copy details from one another uncritically; biographical data on Müller-John, Stephan and Deisenroth so far derive only from reference works or association sources.
- Holocaust-denying publications instrumentalise the ramp controversy. This is no reason to suppress it, but it is a reason to conduct it precisely: the dispute concerns the role of one ensemble in one place at one time, not the fact of the mass murders.

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11 Synthesis and research gaps

11.1 Theses

1. Camp music was predominantly functional music in the service of control. Timekeeping for labour columns is its core function, not entertainment.
2. The camp bands reproduced the camp hierarchy. Those who played were more likely to survive — and thereby stood in the grey zone.

3. The repertoire was not specifically National Socialist but military-popular. The Auschwitz score holdings document this materially. This makes the post-war continuities explicable.
4. For disinhibition through camp music there is no finding — but also no examination. The claim is untested, not refuted, and the holdings for testing it are available.
5. The military music of the perpetrator organisation is a distinct and almost untreated perpetrator subject. The Błonie case of 1939 shows that it is one.
6. Music psychology supplies plausible mechanisms but no historical evidence. Its findings belong in the hypothesis section.
7. Commemorative culture has a representation problem, not a material problem — and the representation problem has an editorial history.
8. The handling of burdened repertoire has been addressed; the handling of burdened personnel has not.

11.2 Research gaps, examined

No.	Gap	Status after examination	Priority
L1	SS music corps and camp SS	**Blank.** No scholarly study; only apologetic association literature plus the single Błonie file finding	high
L2	Perpetrator sources on music	**Blank.** Trial records never specifically searched; holdings available (B 162, Fritz Bauer Institute)	high
L3	Personal continuities in post-war military music	**Blank** for all three spheres (FRG, GDR, Austria)	high
L4	March music of the far right before 1980	**Blank**, named as such by the field itself	medium
L5	Repertoire analyses	**Defused.** Auschwitz (Szczęśniak, Hall), Buchenwald (Oeser), Sachsenhausen (Brauer) treated; Mauthausen and Gusen open	medium
L6	Ravensbrück and Gusen	**Partly open.** Nothing new on Ravensbrück since Knapp 2003; Gusen blank	medium
L7	Concert mediation of camp music	**Blank** amid rapidly growing practice	medium
L8	Scholarly history of camp-song editions	**Blank.** Workers' Song Archive (Academy of Arts) unevaluated	low

11.3 Recommendations

1. **Argue camp- and phase-specifically.** Always name camp, ensemble, period and source type.
2. **Treat camp band and SS music corps separately** and justify the separation, rather than omitting the second.
3. **Analyse music in perpetrator research as a ritual component**, together with alcohol, comradeship evenings and punishment rituals — and finally examine the trial records for it.
4. **Present ordered and self-determined music separately in commemorative work**, and name the listening position at performances.
5. **Contextualise burdened repertoire transparently** rather than exchanging it silently — the lesson of the Weninger case.
6. **Verify against primary sources** before any publication of this work; the ordered verification plan accompanies the full version.

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12 Terms introduced by this study

Coinages introduced here. They are not ornament: each names a distinction that would be cumbersome to draw without a name. The full register with version references is in the bundle’s protection module.

Term	Meaning	Section
Fiction of normality (the camp band as)	the camp band as ritualised production of an appearance of order towards the camp personnel themselves; marked as hypothesis	6.3
The perpetrators' listening position	the position a present-day audience occupies when SS garrison repertoire is performed without framing	9.5
Untested, not refuted	the status of a claim for which the relevant sources exist but have never been consulted	6.2
Evidential grade G	apologetic source, citable solely as self-presentation	Methods 3
Two fields that do not read each other	military-music history and camp-music scholarship without mutual reception	5.2
Separation of camp band and SS music corps	methodological rule: prisoner ensemble and perpetrator formation are to be distinguished institutionally, in personnel and in function	0.3, 5.2

The first three are tied to hypotheses or status determinations and retain that marking until the respective question has been examined.

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13 Limitations of this version

- No original archival work; the state of the text rests on literature research.
- Several items were expressly unverified. The source check of 27 October 2026 resolved six of them and one in part; **six remain open** and require an archive or a library: the reference B 162/16610, the page references to Błonie in Böhler and Rossino, the agreement between the Reichsführer SS and the

Reich Music Chamber of 4 March 1936, the letter from Hoffmann to Honecker of 11 March 1964, the biographical data on Müller-John, Stephan and Deisenroth, and the instrument list for Mauthausen.

- Biographical data on Müller-John, Stephan and Deisenroth derive from reference works or association sources.
- Laboratory research on synchrony uses small samples and harmless aggression measures; transfer to genocide remains speculative and is marked as such.
- Many camp orchestras are documented by only a few testimonies; records were destroyed.
- Whether the Philharmonic version of the Radetzky March differs audibly remains open; sources conflict.
- Polish-, Czech-, French- and Hebrew-language scholarship is included via reports and translations, not worked through in the original.
- “Blank” means: not found in this research. Grey literature, such as unpublished theses, may exist.

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