

## **Smashed Hits: Overview**

### **Julian Petley**

Bring up the subject of censored music and one generally encounters the response ‘I didn’t know there was any’. And yet music is no less subject to censorship than other forms of artistic expression, and the methods by which it is achieved are exactly the same. These run the whole gamut from killing or imprisoning artists through to banning the works of certain composers and performers, and thence into that more nebulous domain in which ‘taste’ and market forces are the engines of restriction and constraint.

One of the best-known musicians this century to have encountered the ultimate form of censorship - state-sanctioned murder - was the Chilean folksinger Victor Jara. Politically-infused popular song (‘nueva cancion’) emerged in Argentina in 1962 but soon became a potent force in the liberation movements then sweeping South America. Indeed, it even found echoes in a Spain still labouring under the Franco dictatorship. But it was in Chile, thanks to Jara and others such as Violeta Parra, that it reached its peak; ‘nueva cancion’ played a key role in the campaign that led to the election of the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende who, after the election, appeared surrounded by musicians with a banner proclaiming ‘there can be no revolution without songs’. Jara was deeply committed to political change; for him ‘the authentic revolutionary should be behind the guitar, so that the guitar becomes an instrument of struggle, so that it can also shoot like a gun’. His songs were subject to considerable censorship before Allende was elected, and it is hardly surprising that when the democratic government was violently overthrown, Jara should have been one of the

earliest victims of the brutal, American-backed dictatorship which succeeded it. Indeed, 'nueva cancion' was so identified with Popular Unity that the military regime banned as subversive even the traditional instruments on which it was played; the works of all musicians associated with it were banned, and it was made an offence even to mention Jara's name.

Chile may now be mercifully free of Allende but explicitly political persecution of musicians is by no means confined to that example. Elsewhere in South America, the Brazilian military coup of 1964 ushered in 20 years of military rule and, with it, strict censorship of broadcast music - and especially of 'musica popular brasileira'.

Numerous musicians during that period spent time in exile, including Chico Buarque, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso. Another military coup, that by the Greek colonels in 1967, saw the imprisonment and torture of Mikis Theodorakis. Eventually he was released as a result of international pressure and went into exile, but other, less well-known musicians were not so fortunate. Theodorakis also wrote a national anthem for the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and popular music which has taken up the cause of Palestinian statehood has encountered censorship not only in Israel but also in Syria and Jordan. Similarly in Turkey, music associated with the struggles of the Kurds is banned, and it is anyway illegal to broadcast in Kurdish (**check!** In fact the ban on the Kurdish language may be even more far-reaching than this). Some of the finest Kurdish singers, such as Sivan Perwar and Temo, are now in exile.

On the African continent, an obvious example of the censorship of music was provided by the apartheid regime in South Africa. But, unfortunately, there are other, less obvious, ones too. For example, Fela Kuti has encountered difficulties with almost every Nigerian government since independence. At various times his records have been banned, his mother killed, his communal family, the Kalakuta Republic, destroyed, and he and his musicians beaten up. At one point in the 1970s he went into self-imposed exile in Ghana, and in 1985 the military government prosecuted him on trumped-up currency charges, for which he was given a five year gaol sentence. After huge protests both at home and abroad, he was released after two years. In Ethiopia, the Mengistu regime, which finally came to an end in 1991, drove many musicians into exile. Not only did a 10pm curfew effectively curtail much musical life but, as the invaluable Rough Guide to World Music puts it: 'to these restrictions was added a censorship as pedantic as it was bureaucratic, that picked through song lyrics before recording sessions could be licenced to go ahead, and put overseas visitors through painstaking inspections and rubber-stamping of locally bought cassettes before allowing them to leave the country'. Meanwhile in Zaire, one of the greats of Congolese/Zairean music, Franco Luambo Makiadi, the leader of OK Jazz, was gaoled on a number of occasions and had several records banned by the Mobutu regime, even though he was a crucial part of its 'authenticite' programme.

In spite of the fact that many Islamic countries have magnificent musical traditions, music and Islamic fundamentalism are all too often unhappy bedfellows. To take but one example, when the National Islamic Front came to power in Sudan in 1989 there appeared to be a deliberate campaign against musicians. Some, such as Sherhabeel Ahmed and Abu Araky al-Bakheit lapsed into silence; others, like Mohamed Wardi and Mohamed al-Amin were branded 'communists' and fearing for their lives, fled to Egypt. Meanwhile Mahjoub Sharif was gaoled, and indeed became an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience. Nor was the censorship purely political: even seemingly innocuous love songs were banned from the radio, as well as those containing references to alcoholic drink. As, unfortunately, is all too often the case in such countries (*vide* Iran and, more recently, Afghanistan), women musicians were especially badly hit, and singers such as Hanan-Bulu-bulu, Gisma and Nasra were regarded by some as no better than prostitutes, and on occasion subjected to physical violence.

During this century, the most thoroughgoing and systematic attempts to censor music occurred in the Soviet Union between 1932 and 1953, and in the Third Reich. These, undoubtedly, are the only instances of musical censorship to have received substantial critical attention.

In Stalin's USSR the chief enemy was modernism, or 'formalism' as it was usually known. From 1932 the doctrine of Socialist Realism, which had been developing for some time, became the party line. In 1934 the newly formed Composers' Union stated that:

the main attention of the Soviet composer must be directed towards the victorious progressive principles of reality, towards all that is heroic, bright, and beautiful. This distinguishes the spiritual world of Soviet man and must be embodied in musical images full of beauty and strength. Socialist Realism demands an implacable struggle against folk-negating modernistic directions that are typical of the decay of contemporary bourgeois art, against subservience and servility towards modern bourgeois culture. (Quoted in Boris Schwarz, Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia 1917-1970).

But it was not until 1936 that the storm really broke over 'formalism' (once defined by Prokofiev as 'music that people don't understand at first hearing'). The target was Shostakovich's opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. The attack was mounted, unsigned, in Pravda, thus giving it the status of an official policy pronouncement and signalling a drastic intensification of the campaign against 'formalism' in *all* of the arts. Headed 'Chaos Instead of Music', the article fulminated that 'the listener is shocked by a deliberately dissonant, confused stream of sound ... here we have "leftist" confusion instead of natural, human music' and argued that the reason why it had enjoyed success abroad was that it 'tickles the perverted tastes of the bourgeoisie with its fidgety, screaming, neurotic music'. The opera was hastily withdrawn, and Shostakovich also put his recently completed Fourth Symphony in the bottom drawer. Both works are now considered to be among his very finest, but the symphony had to

wait until December 1961 for its premiere, and the opera, now revised by the composer as Katerina Ismailova was not performed again in the USSR until December 1962. Ironically, at that time Shostakovitch was again in trouble - this time over his Thirteenth Symphony, Babi Yar, which had touched some still raw ideological nerves.

The end of World War II saw a further tightening of ideological and artistic control. In charge of the cultural purges was Andrei Zhdanov. Music's turn for the flame-thrower came in January 1948 when Zhdanov, chairing the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Composers in Moscow, identified 'formalism' with 'decadent Western influences' and 'bourgeois cultural decay'. His onslaught was eagerly joined by musical conservatives such as Vladimir Zakharov, Tikhon Khrennikov and Ivan Dzerzhinsky. In February 1948 the Party's Central Committee published its Resolution 'On the Opera Velikaya Druzhba by Muradeli', which also attacked Miaskovsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovitch, Shebalin, Popov and Khachaturian. This defined 'formalism' as 'the cult of atonality, dissonance and disharmony' and 'confused, neuro-pathological combinations that transform music into cacophony, into a chaotic conglomeration of sounds'. The Resolution was debated and endorsed by the Composers' Union, and the musical 'new order' was inaugurated in April by the First All-Union Congress of Composers. This marked the complete hegemony of Socialist Realism; Khrennikov, now Secretary-General of the Union, dismissed almost everything by Shostakovitch and the other composers named in the Resolution as 'alien to the Soviet people'. The consequences for them were devastating in every sense, in some cases undoubtedly

contributing to their premature deaths. The contagion also spread into those countries under Soviet domination, restricting the early careers of composers such as Witold Lutoslawski in Poland and Gyorgy Ligeti in Hungary.

In the Third Reich the enemy was again modernism, plus 'musical bolshevism' and Jewish influences both real and imagined. Thus Alfred Rosenberg, one of the Reich's chief ideologues, declared in 1935 that 'the atonal movement in music is against the blood and soul of the German people', whilst the musicologist Herbert Gerigk in his Lexicon der Juden in der Musik argued that: 'the twelve-tone system in music is equivalent to Jewish levelling-down in all matters of life ... This represents the complete destruction of the natural order of notes in the tonal principle of our classical music'. The clearest example of this kind of 'thinking' was provided by the Entartete Musik exhibition in Dusseldorf in 1938; opening the event, its organiser, Hans Ziegler, stated that it 'presents a picture of a veritable witches' sabbath portraying the most frivolous intellectual and artistic aspects of Cultural Bolshevism ... and the triumph of arrogant Jewish impudence' (**Note:** I have a picture of the cover of the exhibition booklet, which would make a great illustration).

However, anti-Semitic and reactionary musicology well predated 1933. Wagner's essay *Das Judentum in der Musik*, which argued that Jews are capable only of imitation rather than true originality, had long ago helped to make anti-Semitism respectable in the music field (and also helps to explain why his music still cannot be publicly performed in Israel - **CHECK!**). For example it was not uncommon among

conservative music critics to argue that Mahler, by incorporating all sorts of diverse elements and influences in his work, was diluting national, 'Germanic' musical values in the same way that 'internationalism' was destroying the country's cultural identity. Specifically Jewish 'internationalism' was attacked in 1920 by the respected composer Hans Pfitzner, who also equated the 'atonal chaos' of modern music with 'bolshevism'. In 1925 the renowned journal the *Zeitschrift für Musik* was relaunched to campaign for the 'spiritual renewal of German music' and became openly anti-Semitic. Thus its editor, the Bach scholar Alfred Heuss, argued in the course of a diatribe against Schoenberg that the nation was 'dealing with a test of strength between Germanness - and now let it be said openly - a specifically Jewish musical spirit'. The *ZfM* was part of the growing right-wing campaign against jazz and, like other conservative musical forces, was particularly enraged by Ernst Krenek's 1927 opera Jonny spielt auf!. Altogether unsurprisingly, Alfred Rosenberg took up the same refrain in his paper the Volkischer Beobachter and in the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* which he founded in 1929.

A portent of things to come was glimpsed when the National Socialists won a majority in the local state elections in Thuringia in 1930; an 'Ordinance Against Negro Culture' was passed in order to rid the province of 'all immoral and foreign racial elements in the arts', all jazz was banned, and works by Hindemith and Stravinsky were removed from the repertoires of orchestras subsidised by the state. By now it was not uncommon for the Nazis to disrupt musical performances of which they disapproved; thus the Brecht/Weill **Mahagonny** encountered difficulties in Leipzig and Frankfurt in

1930. In 1932 an SS Untersturmführer, Richard Eichenauer, published a work aptly described by Erik Levi in his classic study Music in the Third Reich as ‘biological musicology’. This was Musik und Rasse, which was to be highly influential in the Third Reich and which, as Levi points out, was hinged on the overtly racist ‘theory’ that:

the development of European music was dominated by a struggle between the Nordic and Oriental races; a conflict between strong, diatonic and rhythmic music of Indo-German origin and a florid sensuous music of Oriental origin handed down by the Hebrews and early Christian heirs of a decadent Roman culture.

Consequently, any racial mingling posed a threat to the supposed ‘purity’ of Nordic artistic achievements and needed to be stopped at all costs.

What those costs were soon became clear after the Nazi ‘Machtergreifung’ (seizure of power). With the formation of the Reichsmusikkammer (RMK) as part of the Reichskulturkammer (RKK), whose President was Goebbels himself, it was relatively easy to purge the musical world. If composers and musicians wished to work they had to be a member of the RMK, and membership was simply refused to ‘undesirables’, and in particular to Jews, whose work was simply expunged from the broadcast and concert repertoire. Anti-Semitic measures were extended to cover Jewish music teachers and concert agents, and were greatly aided by the infamous civil service law of April 1933, which removed Jews from all areas of public administration, and the 1935 Nuremberg Laws which effectively banned mixed marriages. As part and parcel of the process of ‘Gleichschaltung’, critics, musicologists and radio personnel had also to join (if permitted, of course) the appropriate chambers of the RKK. The inevitable

early exodus included the composers Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, Arnold Schoenberg and Hans Schreker, and the conductors Fritz Busch, Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer and Hermann Scherchen.

It would be comforting to think that music censorship didn't take place in democratic societies. Comforting but, unfortunately, quite wrong. During the McCarthyite witch hunts, the Austrian conductor Joseph Krips was invited over by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, but refused a visa because he'd conducted in Leningrad and Moscow. Likewise Maurice Chevalier was barred because he'd signed the 1950 Stockholm Appeal sponsored by the World Peace Council and because, according to Secretary of State Dean Acheson, he'd taken part in pro-Communist entertainments. In 1947 the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) subpoenaed Hanns Eisler who, having been hounded out of his own country by similar people fourteen years earlier, must have suffered mightily from *deja vu*. Threatened with prosecution for perjury and illegal entry into the States, followed by deportation, Eisler left in March 1948. The folk singer Pete Seeger was summonsed in 1955; having denounced the proceedings as improper and immoral he was sentenced to a year in gaol. He appealed successfully, but the process took seven years, and he was blacklisted for ten. Another musical victim of HUAC was the composer, singer, conductor and authority on American folk music Earl Robinson; his major crime was to have composed the Ballad for Americans for Sing for Your Supper, the last production of the Federal Theatre. That this had been recorded by Paul Robeson made Robinson even more suspect in HUAC's eyes.

Robeson is undoubtedly the most censored of all American musicians. As Eric Bentley states in Thirty Years of Treason, he

‘provided the American Establishment with the opportunity to see if it, like the Soviet authorities, could make an unperson of someone. In American history it would be hard to parallel the blackout of Robeson imposed by the Government and the press during the early and middle 1950s. It was as if the “famous actor and singer” had never existed.

Robeson had toured the USSR in the 1930s and 1940s and, hardly surprisingly, had criticised the condition of black people in the States. In 1937 he sang to the International Brigade in Spain; in the 1940s he also began to speak favourably about the USSR at home, which made him increasingly unpopular in certain quarters. In September 1949 near the small town of Peekskill, N.Y., a mob of thugs, bigots and racists staged a violent riot in an attempt to stop a concert by Robeson, whilst the Westchester County police stood by, and indeed openly fraternised with the mob. In 1950 the State Department revoked his passport, and US officials also prevented him from singing in Canada in 1952. He was subpoenaed by HCUA in 1956 and put up one of the most spirited defences of any of those dragged through this charade, denouncing the proceedings as ‘complete nonsense’ and the Committee as ‘neo-Fascist’, before concluding that ‘you are the nonpatriots, and you are the un-Americans, and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves’. His passport was eventually returned, after strong international pressure, in 1958. There is no doubt, however, that like some of the Soviet composers mentioned above, the experience of political persecution left him a broken man.

In the UK, meanwhile, it was American music which was causing problems for the cultural authorities and being rationed to the point of censorship. When rock 'n' roll arrived in Britain it encountered a strictly controlled popular music regime: of the three BBC radio stations only one, the Light Programme, played pop, and the BBC restricted its 'needle time' (i.e. programming consisting of records) to 22 hours a week across all three channels. Deeply uneasy about the growing teenage phenomenon and worried about the 'Americanisation' of British youth, the BBC consciously resisted rock 'n' roll and deliberately privileged less threatening British alternatives, such as skiffle and Cliff Richard. The attitude of the music press, which consisted of only the New Musical Express and Melody Maker, was equally censorious and was typified by a 1956 article in the latter by Steve Race in which he complained that 'viewed as a social phenomenon, the current craze for Rock-and-Roll material is one of the most terrifying things to have happened to popular music'.

The BBC may have given up patrolling the parameters of popular musical tastes, but the years since are nonetheless littered with examples of banned and marginalised records which suggest that, for the Corporation, music is still a potentially subversive force. At one time or another, worries about drug references have banished from the airwaves 'A Day in the Life', from the Sergeant Pepper album; Canned Heat's 'Amphetamine Annie'; The Byrds' 'Eight Miles High'; 'Have a Whiff on Me' from Mungo Jerry's maxi-single Lady Rose; and the Stones' 'Mother's Little Helper' and

'We Love You'. Various chapters of the 'Troubles' have seen the temporary disappearance of McGuinness-Flint's 'Let the People Go' and Wings' 'Give Ireland Back to the Irish' (whilst the Pogues' 'Birmingham Six/Streets of Sorrow' was censored by the IBA in 1988 under the terms of the Hurd Ban). Julie Covington singing 'Don't Cry for Me Argentina' and Alan Hull's 'Malvinas Melody' were casualties of the Falklands/Malvinas War. Sex was the problem with Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Relax' after a campaign against it by the BBC's own Mike Read; Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin's 'Je T'Aime'; Donna Summer's 'Love to Love You'; and Scott Walker's cover of the Jacques Brel classic 'Jacky', which was the first record banned by Radio 1. Other casualties of BBC sensibilities have included The Blow Monkeys' '(Celebrate) The Day After You', which was denied airtime in the run-up to the 1987 election because of its anti-Thatcher lyrics; Ian Dury's 'Spasticus Autisticus'; Heaven 17's 'We Don't Need This Fascist Groove Thang' (apparently on account of the line in which Ronald Reagan is referred to as a 'fascist guard'); Barry McGuire's 'Eve of Destruction'; and The Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen'.

This list of bans, however, is not only highly selective, but it also ignores a much more everyday, taken-for-granted form of control. As John Street puts it in Rebel Rock, 'what is of greater concern are the records that disappear before they even reach the public. It is radio's and TV's ability to act as a gate-keeper for public taste that identifies the real site of political control'. The key mechanism here, in the case of both the BBC and the commercial stations, is the playlist which, in selecting those records to be played, automatically excludes many others and thus plays a crucial role in

setting the musical agenda. Given the amount of records in circulation at any one time, some degree of selection is clearly inevitable, but if, as some have argued, long-term analyses of playlists reveals a consistent, structural bias against certain forms of music and types of labels in favour of others, then again we're in that shadowy but crucial area in which commercial imperatives can act as form of economically motivated censorship.

Radio and television are not, however, the only censors. In 1977 the title of the album Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols was the subject of an unsuccessful prosecution in Nottingham under the Indecent Advertising Act of 1899, and in London the Small Wonder record shop was raided for stocking it. In 1982, after pressure from Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association, the Anti-Nowhere League's 'So What' (the B side of their cover version of Ralph McTell's 'Streets of London') became the first record to be successfully prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act. Two years later this was joined by the 'Bata Motel' track from the album Penis Envy by Crass, whose sustained harassment by the police and unsympathetic treatment by the courts was presumably quite unconnected with the anarchist sentiments expressed in their records. Likewise the obsessive and vindictive campaign by Manchester police, which even included a private prosecution by their Chief Constable, James Anderton, against the record shop Eastern Bloc, which stocked records by anarchist bands among others. In 1991 the police upped the stakes by picking for the first time on a major label when they raided Polygram's plant in

Chadwell Heath and seized 12000 copies of NWA's Efil4zaggin album under the Obscene Publications Act; the subsequent prosecution was strongly contested, and failed.

By refusing to stock certain items, major record shops also act as censors, although doubtless they would argue that they were simply exercising 'normal commercial judgement' or something equally euphemistic. In 1987 the New Musical Express revealed that HMV had drawn up an Obscene Product list which included all records on the Crass label, all Dead Kennedy records, Conflict's 'Increase the Pressure', Microdisney's 'We Hate You White South African Bastards', and Ian Dury's 'Four Thousand Week Holiday'. At various times HMV have refused to stock Jello Biafra's

No More Cocoons and the Fuck Facts newspaper which came with the Dead Kennedy's Bedtime for Democracy (both of which are entirely concerned with censorship!), Big Black's Songs About Fucking, Flux of Pink Indians' The Fucking Cunts Treat us Like Pricks, and NWA's 100 Miles and Runnin' 12" single because of the track 'Jus't Don't Bite It'.

Of course, HMV are not alone in acting thus. Indeed, when Smiths banned the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' some branches effectively made it a 'non-record' by leaving a blank in their chart where it should have been! Records carrying stickers warning of 'explicit lyrics' put certain chain stores immediately on their guard and, according to Martin Cloonan in Banned: Censorship of Popular Music in Britain: 1967-92, which is *the* authoritative source on its subject, Boots refuse to stock such

product altogether as 'we do not consider it ethical to stock merchandise which would offend the families that shop at Boots'. Presumably they don't consider it economic good sense either, and this is where market forces once again enter into the censorship process. But whatever the case, it clearly demonstrates that the stickering of records, which originated in the States as a defensive response by record companies to campaigns by the Parents' Music Resource Centre, is not simply a matter of 'consumer protection' but actively contributes to the marginalisation, demonisation and, ultimately, censorship of certain kinds of records.

The suspicion that the treatment of such records is, in the broadest sense of the word, *ideologically* motivated is only intensified if one examines it in conjunction with the sustained and, on occasion, brutal persecution of the New Age Travellers in the 1980s, in whose culture music plays a central, defining role. The history of this shameful sequence of events, exemplified by the so-called Battle of the Beanfield in 1985, in which defenceless people, including children and babies, were subjected to the full force of a police riot, can be summed up by stating that the government did everything it could to legalise powers which the police had arrogated to themselves during the course of a series of 'mass trashings' of travellers' camps. Emboldened by their success, and drawing on their experiences of stopping flying pickets from moving about the country during the 1984/5 coal dispute, they then proceeded to abuse their powers once again by arresting or turning back those on their way to free festivals. Thus while groups such as Liberty were demanding public enquiries into police

behaviour the government were busy urging local authorities to use all available existing legislation, however arcane, against the travellers, and enacting new measures such as the 1986 Public Order Act, the 1990 Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act and, most importantly, the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. Crucially, this last contained a number of clauses relating specifically to music which, as Matthew Collin points out in the seminal Altered State:

defined and proposed to outlaw - when played in certain circumstances - a genre of music: house. It stated that “ ‘music’ is defined as sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats”, and for the first time the word “rave” appeared in British legislative language. Although other youth movements had inspired new legislation, never before, over years of post-war moral panics about the activities of teddy boys, mods, hippies and punks, had a government considered young people’s music so subversive as to prohibit it. John Major’s government, unlike many pop commentators, obviously didn’t consider dance-drug culture to be either meaningless or apolitical.

And nor should anyone concerned about music censorship today, let alone broader questions of civil rights. The lesson of this wretched, shameful episode is, of course, that threats to basic freedoms so often come in the guise of attacks on individuals or works that many don’t think worth defending. But in what has come to be known as the ‘New Protest’ or ‘DIY Culture’, which is all too often short-sightedly dismissed as ‘non-political’, music is inextricably bound up with some of the most important political/ideological issues of our time - witness the Dongas, Reclaim the Streets, and Exodus, who feature on our CD. Strongly reminiscent of Crass, Exodus’ commitment to music, and especially to free parties, is part of a much wider commitment to radical political change, and they have been treated accordingly: to sustained harassment by

Luton police and council, mass arrests, evictions, and violent raids by riot squads.  
They, and people like them, need and deserve our support just as strongly as every  
other victim of censorship and persecution chronicled in this survey.

Julian Petley