

Rethinking Popular Music Production in Austria and Germany from 1930 to 1950 – Structures, Styles, and Stagings

20–22 March 2025

Anton Bruckner Private University Linz, Austria

Call for Papers

During the first half of the 20th century, the mass production of popular music took off in the German-speaking world. Music publishing houses were founded and expanded, the recording industry boomed, as did musical film. Certain tools of these production processes have been handed down to us as extensive collections of sheet music, promoting both theater and film songs as well as Schlager editions, arrangements etc. Academic research has hardly begun to engage with these testaments of popular music as sold between 1900 and 1950. Recent studies have indicated ways in which the era might be investigated more source-based, thus questioning certain patterns of argumentation on how to engage with popular music of the Third Reich and other fascist periods. The conference wants to follow up on said studies – with the aim of rethinking common narratives by relying on a large body of sources.

It intends to examine artistic agency in the production of popular music during the Nazi regime and Austrofascism of the 1930s and 40s, including the years before 1933 and up to 1950, so that both fractures and continuities can become visible. The focus is on all actors involved in the production process, i.e. not only on composers and lyricists, but also arrangers, performers, publishers, etc. We are interested in the aesthetic, communicative and economic strategies of published and printed music, for example in how performers were integrated into the productive process; how specific (audience) groups were targeted; which musical styles were chosen, how cultural, social and political tropes were positioned, and how cultural figurations and racial, gender and other stereotypes were established and promoted. Intermedial networking and cross-promotion between film, theater and record production also play an important role.

Furthermore, we are interested in how the restrictions of cultural policy, racist persecution, and stylistic-aesthetic control strategies affected the music production, and what artistic leeway, if any, remained. We also would like to encourage a comparative look at the trends in popular music and musical theatre/film abroad, employing the theoretical approaches of 'cosmopolitan musicology' and 'cultural mobility'.

The conference will be structured along three overarching aspects, focusing on the styles, structures and staging in popular music production.

Possible topics for a paper could be:

Styles:

- Negotiations of stylistic, political or social issues within the framework of popular music production
- Strategies of music/record/film publishing industries to cope with occupation or restrictions in cultural policy
- the involvement of specific singers, musicians or producers with the music industry during the NS-regime/Austrofascism

Structures:

- Distribution and circulation of popular music
- Media and infrastructures of popular music production
- Communication and networks between different agents of and media in the popular music industry
- Exchange and dialogue between the different occupied regions in the area of popular music production between 1930 and 1950
- International exchange between the rest of Europe, North and South America, and other parts of the world with the German/Austrian popular music/musical theatre industry
- Previously unknown collections or archives and their work as agents during the period from the 1930s to the 1950s

Staging:

- Configurations of gender, race and/or disability in musical theatre, film, sheet music or other media
- Creations and negotiations of star personas

This conference is part of the research project "PopPrints. The Production of Popular Music in Austria and Germany, 1930-1950", jointly conducted by the University of Greifswald, the University of Salzburg and the Anton Bruckner Private University Linz (<https://popprints.eu/>).

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A keynote will be delivered by American musicologist and historian Pamela M. Potter, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

The conference will take place on 20–22 March 2025 at the Anton Bruckner Private University in Linz, Austria; the conference language is English. Personal attendance is required. Conference papers must be previously unpublished and in an advanced state, as it is our aim to include a selected number of expanded papers in a subsequent handbook publication.

Please submit an abstract in English of no more than 350 words by 30th September 2024 to Lukas Mantovan via lukas.mantovan@bruckneruni.at. Please include your full name and contact details, affiliation, preliminary paper title, and keywords in a separate document in order to facilitate a blind peer review process. Participants will be notified of the acceptance of their proposal, which will be chosen by a committee made up of members and consultants of the PopPrints-Team, by 15 October 2024 at the latest.

We look forward to receiving your submissions. If you do have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the organizing team:

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