

# From Propaganda to Protest: The Effect of Music in WWII Germany and France

Garret McNab, Emily Lu

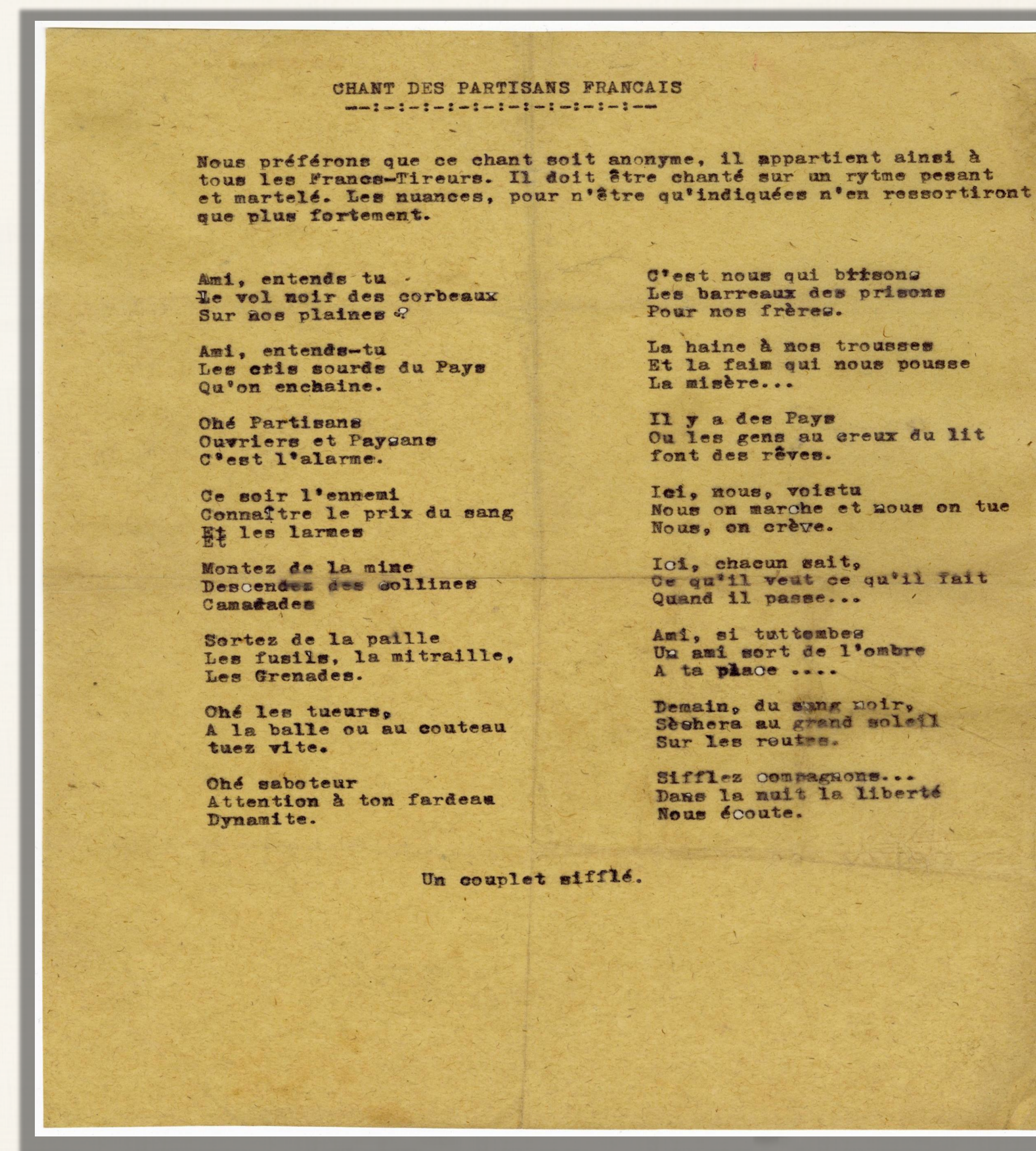
## Background

Music plays an important role in artistic expression and can typically be found outside of art as well. Whether in wartime, or in peace, nations use music primarily for the purpose of unification and morale. A key example of this phenomenon is France during World War II, in which the resistance movement in Paris would come together under song for rebellion against the German invasion. Music during war can be used to the opposite effect as well, suppressing resistance instead of encouraging it, such as seen in Goebbels' work with the Ministry of Propaganda under Nazi Germany.

Even in different situations, music's role would remain the same; as a national influence that drove citizen perspective, showing how music in the military and during wartime shaped both resistance and nationalistic movements. Taking this into account, this research aims to view the extent to which music was used for that purpose, and the implications music has on the broader sense of war itself.



Hitler, Goebbels, and other Nazi leaders at an SS concert, 1933. Image from Yad Vashem.



Lyrics to *Le Chant des Partisans*, written by Joseph Kessel. Image from *Ordre de la Libération*.

## Findings

In France, wartime music served as both a tool of resistance and collaboration. Songs like *Le Chant des Partisans* became anthems of defiance, uniting the French Resistance and strengthening morale against the German occupation (Raskin). Defectors from throughout Europe that inhabited Vichy France contributed to the cause (Tallandier), and many outside of France would aid the resistance through the Free French movement, involving radio stations manned overseas in Britain (Raskin). This effort demonstrates how music was used to unite those to a side during the war effectively.

In Nazi Germany, music played a significant role in propaganda efforts, reinforcing Nazi ideology and fostering a sense of unity and nationalism. The regime censored music that was deemed "degenerate," such as jazz and compositions by Jewish musicians, while promoting militaristic and patriotic songs that glorified the Third Reich (Pace). Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels understood the emotional power of music and integrated it into films, rallies, and radio broadcasts to manipulate public opinion and boost morale, especially as the war progressed (Currid). Through these efforts, music became a strategic tool in reinforcing Nazi control and mobilizing both soldiers and civilians toward the war effort.

## Methods

To examine war and military music in WWII France and its effects on Nazi Germany, a multi-disciplinary research approach was employed:

### Primary Source Analysis

- Examined military songs, war music, and wartime broadcasts from WWII-era revolutionary France.
- Analyzed and translated French lyrics, as well as distribution methods of music to differentiate definitions of "chanson guerre" and "chanson militaire."
- Reviewed contemporary papers, archived speeches, and records for official policies on music in Nazi Germany.

### Secondary Source Review

- Consulted historical analyses, musicology studies, and political science literature on wartime music in both France and Germany.
- Reviewed scholarly works on Nazi cultural policy, as well as revolutionary French thought and the use of music for ideological influence.
- Utilized published journals and books to further analyze the use of music as a motivator for the population.
- Examined literary review of Nazi musical thought concerning Jewish artists, and the way it shaped propagandization.

## Conclusion

Music's role in war extends beyond artistic expression. Rather, it becomes a force that unifies, influences, and even manipulates societies. In France, "chanson guerre" and "chanson militaire" gave citizens in support of a free France the opportunity to rebel and revolt in the form of musical expression, bringing likeminded individuals together to form powerful resistances.

Yet, in Germany, music was used to the opposite extent; by the government for repression and manipulation of the German populous. Censorship and idealization of a perfect German state led to the weaponization of music during wartime to sustain an ideological dominance.

This duality highlights how music, during wartime, becomes an active agent of culture which, regardless of purpose, drives people towards a common goal, affecting war by swaying or propagandizing a nation to drive its citizens towards a collective ideal.

### References:

