

***Victory through Harmony: The BBC and Popular Music in World War II.*** By Christina Baade. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. vii + 275pp. \$45.00 cloth.

It is well known that the British Broadcasting Corporation was at the front lines of the battle for British hearts and minds during the Second World War. In *Victory through Harmony*, Christina Baade tilts the ear of wartime radio studies away from the spoken word and toward the vast and neglected soundscape of popular music broadcasting in Britain. The broad reach and appeal of music broadcasting amply warrants this shift in attention: when war broke out, the BBC was the most pervasive mass medium in the nation, reaching 70-80% of the British population. It was also, as Baade notes, the largest employer of musicians in the nation (3). While a successful radio play might hope to attract 15-20% of the national listening audience, Gracie Fields's 1939 Christmas broadcast drew in 67.6% of domestic listeners (47). Such an audience was exceptional, to be sure, but it points to the breadth of popular affective engagement with broadcast music during the Second World War. By combining extensive archival research with a deft synthesis of existing cultural histories of the period, Baade expertly parses the currents of cultural influence and exchange that shaped this engagement. The result is a compelling and detailed account of the wartime musical soundscape.

*Victory through Harmony* traces a roughly chronological arc from the interwar period to the restructuring of the BBC immediately post-war, each chapter dealing with a particular musical genre or program in its social and historical context. (Most chapters also feature links to a companion website where readers can hear snippets of the music in question, a resource that greatly enhances the reading experience.) Baade begins her study with the rise of dance music and the proliferation of dance halls in the 1920s as sites of mass leisure and musical engagement, developments which the BBC initially ignored. Baade then moves through the BBC's faltering first attempts to embrace popular genres in the late 1930s and during the Phoney War before her argument (like the BBC itself) blossoms to encompass programs featuring swing, "hot" jazz, dance instruction, sentimental crooning, and light orchestral music. Baade's main contention is that this shift to accommodate changing popular tastes during the war years marks the BBC as an index of larger developments and tensions in British society, in particular debates about what constitutes mainstream British culture. While new musical programs could serve to unite the nation in an imagined community of listeners, they also revealed underlying divisions of gender, race, class, nationality, and taste.

Among the many compelling elements of Baade's argument is her willingness to contend with complex patterns of action and reaction between the BBC and its listeners. At one level, the BBC's mobilization of various

popular forms of music worked to define both form and audience in relation to each other, conditioning listeners' embodied relationship to the music while simultaneously giving shape to audiences variously defined as male or female, young or old, soldiers or civilians, factory workers or homemakers. Listeners were not simply passive vessels; they corresponded with the BBC via letters, participated in Listener Research surveys, and interacted physically with the music itself. In her chapter on *Music While You Work*, a program designed to be played in factories in order to boost employee morale and productivity, Baade acknowledges the bodily discipline broadcasting enacted, but insists that such a reading is incomplete; not only did workers experience a sense of agency and satisfaction in participating in a national industrial effort against fascism, but the introduction of music into the workplace "referenced flexible modes of listening and the bodily mechanics of leisure for factory workers" (62). *Music While You Work* foregrounded rhythmical and non-vocal music that enabled both productivity and bodily engagement via humming, whistling, and toe-tapping, hallmarks of the kind of inattentive listening that was formerly anathema to the high-minded Corporation. Such changes indicate that as the nation relied increasingly on the support of its citizens, the needs of the listening subject at both work and play became more central to programming decisions and composition. Baade argues that even the success of such wartime hits as "We'll Meet Again" and "We're Gonna Hang out the Washing on the Siegfried Line" spurred listener engagement, as the first-person plural of the titles encouraged audience identification with the songs' performers and narrators (44-45).

While the BBC's use of popular music could shape cultural attitudes and behaviour, the Corporation's music policies were themselves the product of complex social and political determinants. Drawing on internal BBC correspondence and debates in listener periodicals, Baade shows that as U.S. troops began arriving *en masse* in advance of D-Day, the BBC felt pressured to resist the creeping threat of musical "Americanization." Consequently, the Corporation reduced the broadcasting hours of the "pseudo-American" (though thoroughly Cockney) bandleader Geraldo in favour of the more "authentically British," less swing-inflected songs of Jack Payne and his band (184-85). In a similar attempt to police the airwaves, the BBC launched a crackdown on male "crooners" in 1942, arguing that their "anaemic or debilitated" performances were not in the national interest; as Baade argues, such vocal styles "were antithetical to wartime hegemonic masculinity, which celebrated physical toughness, bravery, and the task of protecting women and the nation" (138). At times, however, the BBC provided an outlet for relatively progressive ideas about music. *Radio Rhythm Club*, a swing- and jazz-focused series on the Forces Programme, served as a forum for the serious discussion of black cultural production

at a time when such opportunities were rare. With each program to which she turns her attention, Baade adds a thread to her finely woven exploration of the role popular music played in wartime discourses of national and cultural identity.

In its interdisciplinary approach, *Victory through Harmony* offers insights for scholars interested in radio studies, Second World War social history, and popular music and culture more generally. Readers unfamiliar with musical terminology will find the work approachable; if anything, Baade underplays the formal analysis of her musical subject in favour of socio-historical contextualization. But this is a minor complaint. Though no recital can be definitive, Baade's work registers the kind of careful and methodical performance to which much future scholarship will have to refer. Baade diligently integrates canonical works such as Asa Briggs's five-volume history of the BBC and Angus Calder's *The People's War* together with more recent social histories including Sonia Rose's *Which People's War?* and Sian Nicholas's *The Echo of War*. Above all, however, *Victory Through Harmony* is a meticulous excavation and analysis of archival sources relating to popular music during the Second World War. In her assessment of the relationships between popular music, musicians, listeners, and the British Broadcasting Corporation, Baade moves effortlessly between hundreds of intertextual and paratextual documents including scores, scripts, concert and record reviews, fan mail, and Listener Research reports. Her reading of wartime cultural ecology connects internal BBC correspondence with the shifting tastes of dance music aficionados; the acoustics of accent and delivery with anxieties about national identity and sexuality; and questions of tempo and syncopation to larger concerns about ethnicity, decorum, and national autonomy. Baade's compelling evocation of the networks of wartime popular music broadcasting ensures that the same cultural prejudices that sought to marginalize swing, dance music, jazz, and crooning do not succeed at muting their voice in wartime cultural history.

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