Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953

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Given its title, historian David Monod’s book Settling Scores runs the unfortunate
danger of being confused with Settling the Score (Ned Rorem, 1988), or Settling the Score
(Kathryn Kalinak, 1992), or Settling New Scores (Felix Meyer, ed., 1998) and perhaps
also Settling the Score (Michael Oliver, ed., 1999). But Monod’s subtitle, “German Mu-
sic, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945–1953,” places it firmly in the company of
works like Michael Kater’s The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third
Reich (1997) and Pamela Potter’s Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from
the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler’s Reich (1998), or alongside recent work that
overlaps Monod’s, like Toby Thacker’s Music After Hitler, 1945–55 (2007), or my own

The nature of the book’s rich thesis is multifold: addressing the day-to-day reality
of military government’s staggering bureaucracy; the seriously confused procedures of
“denazification” and “reeducation”; the ineffectiveness of promoting American music; the
dangerous temptation of censorship in a post-dictatorship situation; the tension between
American and European values regarding culture versus entertainment; and much more.
Monod’s story adds to the politicized biographies of its prominent protagonists—in
particular well-known figures like Wilhelm Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Herbert von
Karajan, Carl Orff, Georg Solti, Paul Hindemith, Leonard Bernstein, Walter Gieseking,
Karl Böhm, and Winifred and Wieland Wagner—as well as lesser-known but equally
important players like John Bitter, Edward Kilenyi, Robert McClure, John Evarts, Hans
Rosbaud, Leo Borchard, Sergiu Celibidache, Harrison Kerr, Everett Helm, and Carlos
Moseley.

In writing on music politics during the postwar American occupation of West
Germany, the author operates convincingly from the premise that ours is a time of the
politicization of the arts (2), and explains that his “interests lie in exploring the debate
over what should have been done with Germany’s tainted generation of musicians and its
debased culture” (4). In turn, he asks his readers “to confront the question of the culpa-
bility of the artist” (4), and at the same time, to reexamine what the Americans actually
achieved in the first few years after World War II in cities under their control like Munich,

Monod gives somewhat scant treatment to the contemporary music culture that expe-
rienced such a remarkable rebirth in the years following the Zero Hour, and his insistence
on connecting the idea of “revolution” with reeducation leaves this reader only marginally
convinced. Several misspellings and minor mechanical errors should have been caught
during final proofreading, but overall the book is expertly designed and beautifully pro-
duced. Most significantly, the quality of this book’s scholarship is impeccable. Monod’s
research is based on myriad materials in ten German and six American archives, over a
dozen sets of additional private papers, eyewitness interviews, and the citation of nearly
two hundred published sources. Furthermore, despite the complexity of the topic and
the tangled web of tales the author is simultaneously trying to unravel and explain, this
insightful book is clearly organized and elegantly written. Monod’s engaging, authoritative
Settling Scores is poised to become required reading for all historians and musicologists
interested in cultural rebirth amidst the postwar ruins of occupied Germany.

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