

VIEWS & REVIEWS

On Account Of the Schingderassa

FREDERIC V. GRUNFELD

BAD REICHENHALL, BAVARIA
COLUMNS of Bundeswehr infantry tramping down country roads are a common sight hereabouts, and the chances are that if you see them marching you will also hear them singing their own particular brand of choral music—those four-square, optimistic songs known as *Marschlieder* or *Soldatenlieder*. The marching song was once an indispensable feature of the military life in Germany, and since the founding of the Bundeswehr in 1954, musical observers have been watching with interest to see how a “citizens’ army” would handle its choral traditions.

As a musical genre the *marschlied* never had much in common with those raggedly improvised antiphons—“Jody rolled the bones when you left; you’re right”—which are the only marching songs American infantrymen ever heard of. A proper *marschlied* has a beginning, middle and end; it can be counted out by the numbers, is stoutly resistant to syncopation, and depends on choral unanimity for its best effects. Over the years the German infantry has cultivated its marching songs with the same assiduity which other armies devote to rifle practice and the polishing of belt buckles. Generations of *marschlieder* have also exerted more than a casual influence on German concert music; they can be found in Beethoven’s symphonies, Brahms’ choral works and Wagner’s operas; Mahler’s symphonies and Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck* are unthinkable without them.

Today’s marching repertoire has been brought into line with the times, but it is still a mainstay of the military curriculum. After several weeks of intensive listening and observation throughout West Germany, I am in a position to state my considered opinion (as a military-

music critic) that when the Bundeswehr was established, NATO acquired its best brass players and most song-conscious footsoldiery. To maintain these standards, every recruit who enters the German army is carefully taught the art of singing while marching with a full field pack.

MANY DRAFTEES already know how to sing from school and such, and these provide the musical backbone of the ensemble, but even those who are shy and try to hum



along with a closed mouth (*bouche fermée* is the musicological term for this) are encouraged by their corporal to “Sing out!” which they then usually do.

Marschlieder training takes place both in classrooms and outdoors in actual practice, when the men march down back roads to the tune of something like:

*Regiment sein Strassen zieht, auch
mein Bursch in Reig und Glied,
juchhei!*

(The regiment marches by in style.
There’s my boy in rank and file,
juchhei! etc.)

The official *Liederbuch der Bundeswehr*—in handy pocket size, bound in water-repellent plastic for bivouac

exigencies—prescribes a standard repertoire of some 150 of these songs. After a few weeks of concerted singing, the average platoon manages to achieve performances of considerable vocal finesse and rhythmic rapport. Indeed the stentorian sound of the Bundeswehr on the move must be heard to be appreciated. A percussive four-four beat of slogging feet provides an *ostinato* bass while stalwart voices with strong chest tones roar out the vocal line above it. The current preference is for singing in unison, though rudimentary two-part harmony is sometimes added. Occasionally they also use rounds (in the musical rather than ordnance sense, I mean).

Although American-style helmets and accoutrements often lend a Yankee air to the Bundeswehr when seen from a distance, the illusion is shattered as soon as one of their marching columns comes within earshot. This is an unmistakably central European sound, descended from the old Männerchor, Meistersinger and Liederkranz tradition:

*Wenn die Soldaten
durch die Stadt marschieren
öffnen die Mädchen
Fenster und die Türen.
Ei, warum? Ei, darum!
Ei, bloss weg’n dem
Schingderassa, Bumderassa
Schingdera.*

(When the soldiers march through town, the girls open doors and pull the windows down. Oh but why? Why, oh why? All on account of the Schingderassa, Bumderassa, Schingdera.)

I HAVE NOTICED that mountain troops in the Bavarian alps sing far more *con brio* than the lowland infantry, and the motorized units have a definite tendency toward *tempo rubato* (*schleppend*, as Mahler would say). I attribute this to the circumstance that mountain troops are used to moving their legs “*Im gleichen Schritt und Tritt*” (In the same step and tread) as one of their songs has it, while motorized troops have outgrown the habit of using their legs eurhythmically except for short, informal strolls to the mess-hall, etc. Armored units, which do the least walking of all, have a

branch song that manages to mechanize the "marching" lied:

*Mit donnerndem Motor,
so schnell wie der Blitz,
dem Feinde entgegen,
im Panzer geschützt. . . .*

(With thundering motor, as swift as lightning, against the enemy, protected by our armor. . . .)

For more formal occasions, instrumental music is provided by brass marching bands that glitter in the sun and follow musical precedents established by the flute-playing King Frederick the Great during the Seven Years' War. Every division has its own band led by a captain or major. In marching formation, the bandmaster struts ahead, wielding a heavy baton of the kind that killed Lully; two steps behind him comes the Schellenbaum or "bell tree," consisting of a long silver pole trimmed with a small banner, a silver crescent fringed with tiny bells, and two long horse tails.

Originally a near-Eastern symbol of authority, this curious instrument was taken over from Turkish troops in the eighteenth-century Balkan campaigns led by the famous field marshal Prince Eugene, who is the hero of a popular military ballad still sung by the Bundeswehr, "Prince Eugene the Noble Knight." The text of this song has him saying, in part: "Men load your guns and make them play so these heathen Turks will run away." It was not on the program, I noticed, when the Bundeswehr recently entertained General Tural, the head of the Turkish general staff.

THE German parade march once known as the "goose step" is no longer in use here and has been replaced by the same kind of quickstep as the British and Americans use—about a hundred and ten steps per minute by my watch. For that matter, the entire marching inventory of the German army has been overhauled, and many stock items of former times are now missing from the catalogue. The prevailing tendencies of most lieder is to praise the joys of the outdoor life and hunting in green forests, plus flowers blue and your little eyes so true. If "the spirit and posture of the troops

are mirrored in their songs," as Franz Joseph Strauss contends in his preface to the first Bundeswehr *Liederbuch*, then these are very happy troops indeed because they sing so many happy songs, such as "Let's Go the Cheerful Hunting," "Musketees Are Jovial Brothers," "Our Hearts Dance and Sing," etc.

In deference to new foreign alignments, the songbook also contains non-German songs for assorted occasions, such as "*O Susanna! O weine nicht um mich! Denn ich komm von Alabama, bring meine Banjo nur für Dich.*" There are only a few irreddentist lieder in the *Liederbuch* on the order of "*Silesia my Heimatland, we'll meet again on the Oder strand,*" which refers to a piece of territory now in Poland. Altogether these texts contain little to rouse the fears of nervous neighbors; record industry statistics show that German military band LP's are now among

the perennial best-sellers not only in Germany and Austria but also in France, Belgium, and Holland.

Of wars more recent than 1918 I could find no mention in the official handbook. But a platoon of grenadiers I heard training near Würzburg were practicing their marching to a song that goes:

*Narvik, Rotterdam, Korinth
und das heisse Kreta sind
Stätten unserer Siege.*

(Narvik, Rotterdam, Corinth and the hot isle of Crete are the sites of our victories.)

Although they sang loudly and on pitch, I doubt whether many of these recruits could have explained what it was that had taken place at Narvik, Rotterdam, Corinth. They probably think of these places as waystations in the campaigns against the Turk.



New Haven Bound

GERALD WEALES

ROBERT LOWELL'S *Prometheus Bound*, which had its premiere at the Yale School of Drama on May 9, presumably had its beginnings in a suggestion by Peter Brook that the poet do an adaptation of the Aeschylus play for the Royal Shakespeare Company. If so, Brook is a literary matchmaker with an eye out for the easy and hopefully productive union, because Lowell and *Prometheus Bound* were obviously made for each other. Whatever Aeschylus did in his trilogy (and, I suppose, being Aeschylus, he reconciled Zeus to man, and damped down the Promethean fire), the surviving play is concerned with Zeus as tyrant, the heavenly

rebel who, with a successful revolution on his hands, had to take on "the responsibilities of power," to use a phrase from the Lowell version, and found that that meant acting with harshness.

In *The Old Glory*, Lowell's remarkable dramatic trilogy, of which only two plays were performed in New York and only one, *Benito Cereno*, with much success, the playwright borrowed stories from Hawthorne and Melville and transformed them into fables about the necessary misuse of power. In *The Old Glory*, the fact of power demands action, the act has consequences and the result is inevitably violent. Given