

"Music Education in the Capital of the French Resistance:
The Conservatoire de Lyon (1940–1944)"
12:30 p.m., deLaski 3001

Abstract

The Armistice of 22 June 1940 achieved the cessation of hostilities between German and French forces, but divided France into occupied and unoccupied zones and inaugurated four years of control by the German Occupation and the newly formed Vichy Regime. These forces swiftly reshaped the state's many musical institutions. At the Conservatoire National de Paris, German Occupiers confiscated instruments, Vichy's anti-Semitic laws removed Jewish professors and students, and attempted to appropriate students to work in German factories through the Service Obligatoire du Travail.

These demands extended beyond Paris to unsettle the system of conservatoires nationaux and écoles de musique across France, where they were met with varying degrees of cooperation or hostility. Overseen for decades by the Ministre des Beaux-Arts, these institutions created fraught intersections between state and local politics. Under Vichy and the Occupation, geographical distance, constraints on travel and communication, local political leanings, and distress over the future generated new conflicts.

Building geographically outward from existing scholarship, archival research illuminates the significant differences in the wartime history of the conservatoire national in the highly contested city Lyon. A radically Republican city prior to the war, the socio-political environment Lyon cultivated a loyalty that took precedence over the edicts of Vichy or Berlin, growing to a center for resistance activities. Archival documents from the conservatoire and municipal government reveal multiple instances of discontent and outright deception on the part of individuals within the Conservatoire in the face of harsh regulations that add new dimension to Vichy-era institutional studies.

Jessica Grimmer is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan. Her dissertation, "Cultural Battlefields: Music Conservatoires of the French Provinces under the Nazi Occupation and Vichy Regime," explores the relationship between twentieth-century music and politics through the lens of the French Resistance, a subject that remains under-explored particularly by musicologists.