

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 293

“Strength through Joy”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“On 5 September 1934/Twenty years after the outbreak of the World War/16 years after the beginning of Germany’s suffering/19 months after the beginning of Germany’s rebirth/Adolf Hitler again flew to Nuremberg to inspect his true followers.”

Prologue to *Triumph of the Will*.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 293. Strength Through Joy.

Helene Bertha Amalie Riefenstahl was born in Berlin on August 22, 1902. She was the first child of a man who owned an HV business. (I would say an HVAC business, but AC hadn’t become commonplace yet.) Unusually for the time, her father saw his daughter, known by the nickname Leni, as his successor in running the business and tried to groom her for that role. But young Leni had zero interest in heating or ventilation or running a business.

Leni was much more interested in art. As a child, she loved to paint pictures and write poetry. She was also athletic. She took to swimming and gymnastics, and her mother supported her in these interests, over the objections of her father. In her teen years, she combined her interests in art and athletics by studying ballet and dance.

By her early twenties, she had made a name for herself in interpretive dance and was performing on stages across Europe. Unfortunately, her dance career was cut short at the age of 22 when she suffered a knee injury. Leni was undergoing therapy for her knee injury when she became aware of the 1924 German silent film *Berg des Schicksals*, or *Mountain of Destiny*. It’s the story of a mountaineer killed while attempting a dangerous climb, and of his son, who subsequently vows to conquer the peak that claimed his father’s life.

Hiking, camping, mountain climbing: these activities are as German as lederhosen, and at the time mountain films were a distinctively German genre of film in the same way as, say, westerns were distinctively American. Filmed largely on location, with stunning visuals, highlighting the struggle of the individual against untamed nature, yeah, the two genres actually have quite a lot in common.

Anyway, here was another way young Leni Riefenstahl could combine her interests in art and athleticism. She arranged to meet Arnold Fanck, the director of *Mountain of Destiny*. He was sufficiently impressed with her talent, looks, dedication, and athleticism to cast her as the lead in his 1926 film, *The Holy Mountain*. This would be the first of five Fanck-directed films she would appear in over five years, with titles like *The White Ecstasy* and *Storm over Mont Blanc*.

Along the way, Leni studied the art and craft of filmmaking. She set out on her own and in 1932, released her own first film, *Das blaue Licht*, or *The Blue Light*, a supernatural story about a mystic woman who lives on a mountain that kills anyone else who tries to climb it. Leni directed the film, starred in it, and edited it. It was a success. *The New York Times* critic noted that “a summary of the story gives no adequate idea of the beauty of the action and the remarkable camera work...”

In that same year, 1932, along with millions of other Germans, Leni Riefenstahl attended a speech by Adolph Hitler during one of the four national political campaigns of that year. She later described a vision she had as she listened to Hitler’s voice, a vision of the Earth opening up before her to release a fountain of water that reached all the way to the sky.

As had been the case when she saw *Mountain of Destiny*, Leni decided she just had to meet this guy. A meeting was arranged, and it turned out that Adolf Hitler, who was something of a film buff himself, had seen *The Blue Light* and had been impressed by Leni’s work. The two of them got on like a house on fire.

The city of Nuremberg is the second-largest in Bavaria, after Munich. As you know, the National Socialist German Workers Party was born in Munich, and in 1923 the tiny movement held what it called a Party Congress there. In July 1926, after the Party became legal again, it held its second Party Congress in Nuremberg. The Third was held in August 1927, and the Fourth Party Congress in August of 1929.

The following year saw the Nazi Party win remarkable victories in state elections and in the 1930 federal election. We’ve already covered the history of 1930-33, so you know that the Party grew by leaps and bounds and contested five national elections and a number of crucial state elections over this period, which brought the Party agonizingly close to power but not quite, while also exhausting the Party’s energy and bank account. During these eventful years, there were no Party Congresses because the Party could not spare the resources to hold one.

But you also know that by mid-1933, Germany was a one-party state with the Nazis now firmly in control. In a mood to celebrate, Adolf Hitler decided to revive the tradition of Nuremberg Party Congresses by holding the Fifth Party Congress in that city, beginning August 30.

Now, I've been calling these little get-togethers "Party Congresses," because that's a fair English translation of what the Nazis called them, but in the Anglophone world they are usually referred to as the "Nuremberg Rallies." The term "party congress" evokes a large group of people seated in a meeting hall, debating controversial questions of policy and ideology, but the Nazi Party had no need of such debates when it had an infallible leader. Party Congresses were more about affirming that Hitler was right about everything and the Party rank and file demonstrating that they backed him to the hilt. Thus, these little get-togethers in Nuremberg were more about propaganda and putting on a good show than they were about Party governance, so calling them "rallies" is fair. Their main features were speeches, large outdoor gatherings, stormtrooper parades, and fireworks and other spectacles, and Adolf Hitler was always the star of every show.

And as we've seen before, the Nazis were quick to take advantage of the propaganda possibilities of the new medium of motion pictures. The 1927 rally was filmed and those films made into a 17-minute silent documentary called *Eine Symphonie des Kampfwillens*, or *A Symphony of the Fighting Will*. That's Nazis for you.

The 1929 rally was bigger and more lavish and led to the production of a bigger and more lavish silent film, this one 90 minutes long, though bearing the admittedly dull title *The Nuremberg Congress of the NSDAP*.

In planning the 1933 rally, Joseph Goebbels hit upon the idea of inviting Leni Riefenstahl to make the documentary film of that year's event. This idea did not go over well in the Party propaganda division. The Party had its own film office with its own on-staff film crew, who were not at all pleased to learn they were to be sidelined during the Party's victory rally, replaced by a woman, barely 30 years old, and not even a Party member. But Hitler and Goebbels wanted Riefenstahl, so that was that.

It was an inspired choice. Riefenstahl hired a talented crew and shot film throughout the rally, the theme of which was "victory," in the sense of the Party's political victory in taking over the German government. Afterward, Riefenstahl holed up to edit the film. The end result was something unusual, a documentary film like none that had been seen before. There was no narration; the only spoken words in the film were excerpts from speeches by Party leaders. These she intercut with scenes of marches, assemblies, demonstrations, and cheering crowds. The result was a film a little more than an hour long, titled *The Victory of Faith*. Because faith in the Party and in its Leader led to victory, get it?

The film had its rough spots, but overall Hitler and Goebbels were quite pleased with it. At the conclusion of its premiere in Berlin on December 1, 1933, the audience reportedly stood and sang "Das Horst-Wessel-Lied." Over the next six months, the film was shown all across

Germany; an estimated 20 million people saw it. Then Hitler ordered it withdrawn from circulation and every copy destroyed.

You see, there was just one teensy little problem with the film: Ernst Röhm, who featured prominently, had been declared the greatest traitor in history and executed in the Night of the Long Knives, episode 285. He was now an unperson and therefore *The Victory of Faith* had to become an unfilm. For decades afterward, *The Victory of Faith* was thought to be a lost work, but eventually a surviving copy did turn up, in the archives of the German Democratic Republic.

Be that as it may, the fact was that *The Victory of Faith* had been a valuable propaganda asset until suddenly it wasn't. The logical solution was to hire Leni Riefenstahl to film a new documentary at the 1934 Nuremberg Rally, the theme of which was "Unity and Strength." She did, and this film would be called *Triumph of the Will*. Hitler came up with the title himself.

Now that the Nazis understood how valuable a Leni Riefenstahl film could be, they spared no expense in the production of this new one. Riefenstahl was given a budget of RM 300,000 and a staff of 170. A camera was mounted on a mast to give overhead shots, while another camera ran on tracks around the podium so Hitler could be filmed from diverse angles. Trenches were dug to permit camera angles looking up at Hitler and other speakers.

The highlight of the rally was a mass nighttime assembly of thousands. The 29-year-old architect Albert Speer, who was already becoming one of Hitler's favorites, arranged 152 searchlights around the assembly, pointed at the sky, which created the appearance of so many luminous pillars in some gigantic temple. They called it the Cathedral of Light, and it was breathtaking.

Riefenstahl shot 130,000 meters of film, representing about sixty hours of material. She labored for months to assemble this into a finished film with a 114-minute runtime.

Triumph of the Will was released in March 1935. No one was about to make the mistake they had made last time. This film would have only three stars: Adolf Hitler, Adolf Hitler, and Adolf Hitler. It opens with an on-screen prologue, which I read to you at the top of the episode. This is the only commentary in the film. The rest, as with the earlier film, is presented without narration.

The film opens with shots of clouds seen from above, as Hitler's plane approaches Nuremberg. Beneath the clouds, we see the skyline of beautiful medieval buildings, decorated with tall swastika banners. Through the streets march thousands of stormtroopers, appearing like ants from our vantage point. As the plane descends, the stormtroopers become easier to see, though we also see the shadow of Hitler's airplane passing over them.

The divine symbolism continues as Hitler's plane lands and he is greeted by cheering crowds of handsome young stormtroopers and lovely young German women, who also line the streets as Hitler rides through the city, standing in an open car: the German savior's triumphant entry.

Triumph of the Will was the number one motion picture in Germany in 1935. The critics raved. Goebbels called it “mind-shattering” and a “masterpiece.” Riefenstahl won many awards for the film, both in Germany and in other countries.

Triumph of the Will did much both to burnish Hitler’s image and firmly establish the Hitler cult. Here is Adolf Hitler, as he wanted to be seen in his own time and as he wished to be remembered by history.

The film itself would certainly be remembered. *Triumph of the Will* is hailed as the greatest propaganda film ever made. Riefenstahl’s techniques and style have influenced countless other films, documentaries, and even TV commercials for the past ninety years. You can put it in the same category as *Birth of a Nation*, a spectacularly successful and innovative film created in the service of one of the most detestable ideologies ever conceived by the human mind.

[music: Wagner, “Entry of the Gods into Valhalla” from *Das Rheingold*]

The Nazi Party had worked for years to build up Hitler as a larger-than-life, mythic figure. *Triumph of the Will* was just one piece of that larger effort to construct a cult of personality around the *Führer*. This was made easier by the German people, who embraced that effort enthusiastically.

They didn’t have public opinion polling back then, and those who were unhappy with the new government were not free to express their views, so there is no hard data on how many Germans supported Hitler versus the number who opposed him, but what information we can glean suggests that Hitler was quite popular. April 20, 1933 was Hitler’s 44th birthday. He had at that point been chancellor less than three months, and yet the Chancellery in Berlin was inundated with birthday presents. Hitler got so much fan mail that a staff of four had to be assigned to deal with it. One family in Mannheim sent Hitler a picture of their ten-month old daughter giving a Nazi salute. They claimed she would do it whenever they showed her a photograph of her “Uncle Adolf.”

Cities and towns across Germany renamed streets and public squares after Hitler. You could buy busts of Hitler, and his face adorned beer steins, ashtrays, fountain pens and playing cards. So much Hitler kitsch was put on the market that the government had to begin regulating the use of Hitler’s image on merchandise. Similarly, Hitler received so many requests from parents asking him to be the godfather of their newborn child that his office had to set a limit: Hitler would only consent to become godfather of a ninth child or a seventh son. One zealous Party member in Düsseldorf wanted to name his newborn daughter “Hitlerine.” Local authorities gently suggested that perhaps “Adolfine” would be more appropriate.

Foreigners marveled at how quickly the German public embraced the Nazi salute and “Heil Hitler!” as an everyday greeting. In the cinemas, the audience would applaud whenever Hitler

appeared in a newsreel. Autographed pictures were in high demand, and wherever Hitler went, he drew a crowd.

The Nazis took a particular interest in reaching out to the working class. This was not just a large demographic, it had also been the base of the now outlawed Socialist and Communist Parties. The official Party line was that the Party represented all Germans, not merely a faction of them.

May Day has been a festival day in Europe since Roman times. Traditionally, it was celebrated as the beginning of summer. In 1889, the Second International designated the first of May as International Workers' Day, or Labor Day; the date was chosen to commemorate a strike held in Chicago in 1886 that led to the Haymarket bombing, but that's another story. In Germany, the traditional May Day was always celebrated, but in 1933 the Nazis declared May Day a state holiday as the "Day of National Work." Hitler curried favor with the working class by speaking often about the honor and dignity of labor and condemning those who looked down on workers. "[W]e will root out the conceit that causes some individuals to look down on their comrades who 'only' work with a lathe, a machine, or a plow." Hitler professed to be a simple person himself. In a speech to factory workers in 1936, Hitler boasted that he did not own stocks. He did not earn dividends. In fact, he said, "I am probably the only statesman in the world who does not have a bank account."

Hitler was in fact living a very comfortable life by this time, but still, this kind of talk was well received by working people. Working people liked even better the economic recovery Germany was enjoying under Nazi rule. The German economy was beginning to pick up even before Hitler became chancellor, but under his leadership, the recovery accelerated. It was driven by the government's rearmament program, public spending that put people to work and put money in their pockets. It was, in short, good old Keynesian economic policy, just like what the Roosevelt Administration was doing in the United States, except that, instead of building bridges and dams, German workers were building machine guns and artillery pieces. Hitler's government was financing the military buildup with some creative accounting that obscured the fact that they were running up huge new debts to finance it, but that didn't matter to the workers who had jobs.

The leadership of the Social Democratic Party, the SPD, in exile, collected information on what was going on inside Germany, especially among the working class. What they found was Hitler was very popular, as much for his strong foreign policy as for the strong economy. He was seen as a strong leader who took no guff and never gave up pushing for what he believed was right. As for the economy, one former SPD member told them, "You people always made socialist speeches, but the Nazis have given us jobs...I don't care whether I make grenades or build the autobahn. I just want to work. Why did you not take job creation seriously?"

Also in 1933, in its early days and despite this outreach to the working class, Hitler's government banned socialist and communist political parties and independent labor unions. But to replace these, it created the German Labor Front, a government organization that was supposed to

represent German workers and act as an honest mediator between workers and the businesses they worked for. In truth, the German Labor Front favored employers over workers, giving the former free rein in making company decisions and usually siding with them in wage disputes. On the other hand, the government took measures to improve working conditions, such as establishing workplace lunchrooms and exercise facilities and setting standards for lighting and cleanliness and air quality, to create a sense that the government was looking after the welfare of workers, even if their relationship to their employer had not fundamentally changed.

In November 1933, the German Labor Front created a state leisure-time organization, modeled on the Italian Fascists' *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*. The German version was named *Kraft durch Freude*, Strength through Joy, of KdF for short. It grew rapidly into a program with thousands of employees that created after-work recreation programs and vacation holidays that ranged from weekend retreats to ocean cruises aboard KdF's own purpose-built fleet of cruise ships. These ships were famous for their unique distinction of offering just one type of accommodation. None of this first class, second class, third class stuff in the new Germany!

But you still had to have enough money for a ticket, which meant that most of those who enjoyed these cruises were middle class and up, although some employers offered KdF cruises as bonuses or gave away tickets by lottery, so a few working-class people were able to take advantage of the program.

Two of KdF's most ambitious programs never got to fruition, because of the war. One was the Volkswagen program, the People's Car that would sell for a mere RM 1000. I already told you about that project in episode 285. But perhaps the most ambitious project was a massive sea resort on the island of Rügen, in the Baltic Sea. This resort, called Prora, was meant to make seaside vacations available to the ordinary German. A set of eight buildings designed by Albert Speer would accommodate 20,000 vacationers in 10,000 rooms, every one of which offered a view of the sea. There were plans for a concert hall, a theatre, a cinema, and two swimming pools. Had it been completed, it would have been the largest holiday resort in the world, but it never was.

Even so, a million Germans went on KdF vacation excursions every year, and millions more took advantage of the weekend getaways. If those were too pricey, there were simpler after-work programs that involved exercise and dance classes, hiking, sports, and trips to the theatre or the movies. It was a wildly popular and successful program, and the Nazis took advantage of it to instruct participants in National Socialist doctrine. Similarly, although the Volkswagen never became a reality, the *Volksempfänger* did. That was the People's Radio Receiver, offered in 1933 for the low, low price of RM 76. In 1939, an even cheaper radio was introduced, which cost just RM 35. Because of this, the size of the German radio audience increased from four million to eleven million over that period of time, and everyone who listened to the radio heard what the government wanted them to hear.

[music: Wagner, "Entry of the Gods into Valhalla" from *Das Rheingold*]

All this egalitarianism, these programs to enrich the lives of ordinary people, this sense of brotherhood has within it something worthy of admiration, but never forget that it came with a catch.

The catch is what the Nazis called *Volksgemeinschaft*. This is a complicated word to translate. It's usually rendered into English as the "people's community" or the "national community," but I think perhaps the "national fellowship" captures the idea a little better. The Nazis did not coin this word or invent the concept, but it was central to Nazi ideology. The *Volksgemeinschaft* is the national family. It is all Germans, whether they live in Germany or not.

Perhaps I should say "ethnic fellowship" or "ethnic community," because only ethnic Germans need apply. There were also those who lived in Germany, even some who were born in Germany, who were not part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. When you think about Nazi ideology, the first excluded group you are likely to think of is Jewish Germans, and they certainly were not regarded as part of the fellowship. Neither were the Roma. Beyond that, there were those who were ethnic German by ancestry, but nevertheless did not conform to Nazi ideals for one reason or another: the physically or mentally disabled, LGBT people, and the vague catch-all category, "antisocials."

I spoke about some of this two weeks ago, and described the Nuremberg Laws, which were called that because they were enacted at a special session of the Reichstag held in Nuremberg during the Party's 1935 Nuremberg Rally. By this time, autumn of 1935, Hitler and his government were losing some of their support. The German economic miracle had been the cornerstone of the Nazi government's support and popularity, but now Germany was approaching full employment, and beginning to feel some of the economic effects of an overheated economy, including inflation and shortages, which led to grumbling.

It was partly in response to this, a desire to restore the government's popularity, or at least to change the subject, that Hitler made the decision to move the German Army into the Rhineland in spring of 1936. But even after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, Hitler was still reluctant to unleash the Nazi rage against Jewish Germans. The international situation was delicate after the militarization of the Rhineland, and 1936 would bring a major international event that would focus attention on Germany, and Hitler wanted the world to see Germany in the best possible light. The event I'm referring to is the 1936 Olympics.

You may recall all the way back in episode 67, when I talked about the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, I mentioned that Berlin had also been in the running. When Stockholm was chosen, Berlin was promised the 1916 Olympics instead. Needless to say, the World War forced the cancellation of that Olympics, the first and so far only time a modern Olympics was cancelled. Tradition has it that the ancient Greeks observed truces to allow the games to proceed even in wartime, but the twentieth century world does not follow that custom.

Germany was not invited to the 1920 or 1924 Olympics, but did participate in the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam, one sign of how Germany had been more or less readmitted to the community of nations by the late 1920s. In 1931, the International Olympic Committee, or IOC, awarded the 1936 Summer Games to Berlin. At last, albeit twenty years late, Berlin would have its chance to host the Games.

But then in 1933, Adolf Hitler became chancellor and turned Germany into a one-party fascist state. The IOC was made uneasy over this development and officials met with Hitler and his government to discuss how the Nazis intended to conduct the Games. The answers they got satisfied them, and the IOC went on to award the 1936 Winter Games to the German alpine resort town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

Not everyone was satisfied though, especially in the United States, where there was talk of boycotting the Olympics. The controversy grew after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, but the head of the American Olympic Committee, Avery Brundage, was a staunch proponent of the US team attending both Games. The Amateur Athletic Union agreed, after advocates of a boycott narrowly lost a key vote in December 1935.

In Germany, Hitler and the Nazis made whatever promises they were asked to make, as they were desperate to host a successful Olympics as well as use the event for propaganda purposes, an opportunity to display the virtues of the new Germany to the world.

In February 1936, the Winter Games were held and went off without a hitch. Norwegian figure skater Sonja Henie won her third straight gold medal in women's figure skating, and the British ice hockey team won gold after scoring a last-minute goal against Canada, the favored team. Ouch. That must have hurt. The top medal-winning nations were Norway, Germany, and Sweden, in that order. Behind the scenes, the German hosts gave visiting foreigners the red carpet treatment. American journalist William Shirer wrote, "They've greatly impressed most of the visiting foreigners with the lavish but smooth way in which they've run the games and with their kind manners..."

The following month, Hitler ordered the German Army into the Rhineland. Not only did this act not provoke a military response, it didn't even renew calls to boycott the Summer Games, not even in France, the country most directly threatened by the move. Forty-nine nations were represented at the 1936 Summer Olympics, the largest number ever.

The German government built an arena that seated 100,000 for the Games, along with a sporting complex that became the largest in the world. Berlin was polished and spit-shined for the occasion. Nazi banners were hung everywhere, and businesses asked to remove those signs that announced Jewish customers were not welcome, for the duration of the Games. The Nazi newspaper *Der Angriff* advised Berliners to be "more charming than the Parisians, easier-going than the Viennese, livelier than the Romans, more cosmopolitan than Londoners, and more practical than New Yorkers."

The Games began on August 1, with opening ceremonies designed around the biggest VIP in the VIP box, Adolf Hitler. The teams of the forty-nine nations paraded into the stadium. The French Olympic team gave the Olympic salute as they passed Hitler, causing the crowd to cheer, as they misunderstood the Olympic salute as the very similar Nazi salute. The Olympics would drop that salute after the war. The British team pointedly refused to salute, which drew the crowd's ire.

The Olympic flag was raised, thousands of doves were released, and cannons fired a twenty-one gun salute. A hymn specially composed for the occasion by Richard Strauss was performed. (Fun fact: Garmisch-Partenkirchen is Richard Strauss' home town.) Then a runner entered the stadium and lit the Olympic Flame with a torch bearing fire that had been carried by relay all the way from Olympia in Greece. This was the very first instance of the now-customary Olympic torch relay.

The most famous athlete at the 1936 Summer Olympics was American track and field star Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals at the Games. Now this moment, the triumph of an African-American athlete in a competition hosted by history's most famous racist has become the stuff of legend. Like most legends, there is truth and there is myth, so let's take a moment to try and separate them out.

It is often said that Owens' victories were an embarrassment to Hitler and the Nazis, a powerful real-world demonstration of the falsity of Nazi racial theories. This is certainly true, but there are versions of the story that attempt to make this embarrassment personal, by depicting Hitler as refusing to shake Owens' hand, or storming out of the stadium. The truth is more complicated.

Adolf Hitler was not what you would call a gracious sports fan. (No surprise there.) When a German won an event, he cheered with enthusiasm; when the German lost, he sulked. On the first day of the Olympics, he shook hands with the winners he approved of, who were all either German or Finnish. Afterward, the chair of the IOC told Hitler that was inconsistent with the principles of the Olympics, and he should either congratulate every winner or none of them. Hitler chose the latter, and on the second day, when Jesse Owens won his first gold medal, Hitler did not shake his hand, but neither did he shake the hand of any other winner.

This is not to say that Owens' victory did not produce any sense of embarrassment. Joseph Goebbels' diary entry for August 4, the day Jesse Owens won two gold medals, reads, "We Germans won one gold medal, and the Americans three, two of them by a Negro. That's a scandal. White people should be ashamed. But what does that matter, over there in that country without culture?"

After Owens won his four gold medals, the head of the Hitler Youth, Baldur von Schirach, suggested to Hitler that it would be good publicity to receive Owens in the Reichs Chancellery. Hitler became angry and shouted at Schirach: "Do you truly believe that I will allow myself to be photographed shaking hands with a Negro?" So the story is true to that extent.

But you should also keep in mind that, whatever the Nazis' racial doctrines, the African-American members of the US Olympic team traveled with their white teammates and stayed in the same accommodations as their white teammates, which would have been illegal in many states in the US. When Owens returned to his home country and attended a reception held in his honor at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City, the hotel made him ride the freight elevator to get to his own event.

Jesse Owens himself denied at the time that Hitler had done anything to snub him; to the contrary, Owens insisted that Hitler had waved at him following one of his gold medal victories. A lifelong Republican, Owens would campaign for Republican Presidential candidate Alf Landon in the 1936 election that fall and tell African-American audiences that it was not Adolf Hitler who snubbed him, but Franklin Roosevelt, who did not invite Owens to the White House, nor so much as send him a congratulatory telegram.

Despite Jesse Owens' contribution, Germany beat the United States in the medal count that year. The two countries came in first and second, with Hungary in third place.

Still, Jesse Owens' four Olympic gold medals must have been a welcome bit of good news for African-American sports fans back home just a few weeks after Max Schmeling's surprise win over heavyweight boxer Joe Louis, which I told you about two weeks ago.

Also present at the 1936 Summer Games was Leni Riefenstahl, who had been commissioned to film a documentary of the games, which became *Olympia*, a two-part film that runs nearly four hours. Riefenstahl again brought to her work innovative techniques that many filmmakers after her would adopt, including slow motion and tracking shots, where a camera moved on tracks alongside the runners, following them as they ran. She put cameras in pits to film the athletes from below, and she made Adolf Hitler the star of the show.

So overall, the 1936 Olympics have to be regarded as a propaganda victory for Hitler and the Nazis, despite the embarrassment of Jesse Owens and his accomplishments. More than that, Hitler and the Nazis demonstrated to future hosts of the Olympic Games how useful they can be to the host country, as a tool of publicity and propaganda.

The 1932 Winter and Summer games were both held in the United States; in 1936 they were both held in Germany. These will be the only two occasions when both sets of games would be held in the same country. The IOC awarded both of the 1940 games to Japan—Winter Games in Sapporo, Summer Games in Tokyo, but, yeah, that's not going to happen.

It's about time for me to wrap up today's episode, but before I go, I have one more story I'm itching to tell, about the German composer Carl Orff, born in Munich in 1895 to a Catholic family. His father was an Army officer. Carl himself studied music and served in the Great War on the Western Front and was seriously injured.

Afterward, Carl Orff taught music and did some composing. In 1934, he came across *Carmina Burana*, which is a manuscript discovered in a Benedictine monastery in Bavaria in 1803 and first published in 1847. *Carmina Burana* is a collection of poetry from the 11th through 13th centuries, mostly in Latin but including some medieval German and French, apparently written by monks and students and including some surprisingly irreverent material you wouldn't expect to find in a monastery, including poetry about the indifference of fate, the pleasures of going to a tavern and getting drunk, and how sweet it would be to make out with the Queen of England.

Orff was inspired to compose a cantata using texts from *Carmina Burana*. It took him two years to compose, and it debuted in Frankfurt in 1937. Orff arranged the poems in a quasi-medieval way, with the text sung in a style reminiscent of medieval and Renaissance liturgical music, with a relatively simple accompaniment, lacking complex harmonies or polyphony, although it comes with rhythmic complexities that resemble the works of Igor Stravinsky. If *Rite of Spring* was supposed to be the music of ancient Russia, this would stand in for the music of medieval Germany.

Carmina Burana was a huge success. It was much more accessible to the ordinary listener than the harmonies of Stravinsky, or whatever it was Arnold Schoenberg was creating. For his part, Orff told his publisher he might as well destroy all of his previous compositions.

The Nazis weren't sure what to make of *Carmina Burana* at first. The poetry's erotic and antiauthoritarian elements made them uneasy, but when it became clear the piece was popular, they embraced it. It was said that Hitler himself enjoyed it. Orff was perhaps not as ardently anti-Nazi as he later claimed to be, but he was never a Party member or conspicuously pro-Nazi either.

After the end of the Second World War and of Nazi rule, *Carmina Burana* only grew in popularity. It has become one of the most frequently performed classical works in concert. In 1978, American choreographer Loyce Houlton created dances to be performed with the music, and *Carmina Burana* is also often performed by dance companies, and the music has been used in literally hundreds of films, television shows, and commercials over the past half century.

Nazi Germany persecuted and drove off most of its great artists, and generally speaking, the Nazi period is not an era of great art, but *Carmina Burana*, along with *Triumph of the Will*, represent perhaps the two greatest artistic accomplishments of Germany in the Nazi era. Unlike the work of Leni Riefenstahl, though, *Carmina Burana* can be enjoyed without discomfort, as there is no discernible Nazi message in it.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Gabriel for his kind donation, and thank you to Bill for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Gabriel and Bill help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone. They also keep Mrs. History of the Twentieth Century happy, and when she's happy, I'm happy, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have

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If I sound like Sylvester the Cat in today's podcast is the sound of air passing through the space where I used to have an eyetooth, but it had to go. A partial is on order, but you can expect me to sound like this for at least one more episode.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we take a look over at Britain, and observe the passing of King George V and the drama concerning his succession. The Year of the Three Kings, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Leni Riefenstahl never joined the Nazi Party, but she continued to support Hitler and the Nazis until 1944. She seems to have soured on them that year, perhaps because that was the year her younger brother was conscripted and sent to the Eastern Front, where he died.

After the war, she would be investigated multiple times for her involvement with the Nazis, and although she was deemed a sympathizer, she was judged no worse than that. She continued to work as a filmmaker and photographer, always insisting that in the 1930s she had been apolitical and perhaps naïve about the Nazis, but no more than that. She always denied that her Nazi-era films were propaganda, insisting they were merely documentaries; that she had done no more than film real-life events that had been organized and staged by others. In 1993, she was the subject of a documentary in which she appeared, titled *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*.

Leni Riefenstahl died in 2003, at the age of 101.

[music: Closing Theme]