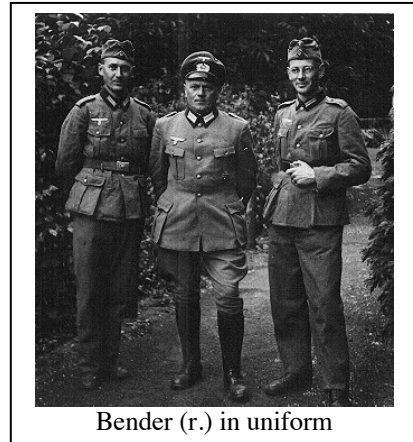


## Jan Bender – War Years and Career in Germany

Jan Bender began his military service with three months of training in the spring of 1939. He was married on June 21, and then in August, he was called to active duty, serving first in France (near Aachen), then Denmark, and finally in Russia. In August 1941, he was wounded at Luga, near Leningrad. Shrapnel from a Russian hand-grenade severed his left optic nerve. After recuperation, he was sent home to Aurich and, though still in the Reserves, was able to resume his duties at Lambertikirche and as *Kirchenmusikdirektor* for Ostfriesland. This last post required him to supervise all the parishes in his district, visiting each one every year, advising the church musicians on their work, recommending additional study in some cases, organizing workshops, etc. He was responsible for this to the Superintendent of the *Landeskirche von Hannover*, who was none other than the renowned Christhard Mahrenholz mentioned above, editor of *Musik und Kirche*.



Bender (r.) in uniform

After his return to Aurich, Bender wrote in his *Tagebuch* on Oct. 31, 1941:

Der Krieg... der entsetzliche Krieg.. ist für mich zu Ende. Gott hat ein Einsehen gehabt. Am 17. August, in der ersten Morgenstunde riss mir vor Luga ein russischer Handgranatsplitter das linke Auge fort. Jetzt bin ich "daheim." ... Mittagsruhe im ganzen Hause.

(The war... the ghastly war.. is over for me. God has shown consideration. On August 17, at Luga, in the first hour of the morning, a Russian hand-grenade splinter ripped my left eye out. Now I am "at home." ... Midday rest throughout the house.)

Kameran. 31. 10. 41.  
Der Krieg... der entsetzliche Krieg... ist für mich zu Ende.  
Gott hat ein Einsehen gehabt. Am 17. August, in der  
ersten Morgenstunde riss mir vor Luga ein russischer  
Handgranatensplitter das linke Auge fort. Jetzt bin ich  
"daheim"... Mittagsruhe im ganzen Hause.

234.

--excerpt from Bender's *Tagebuch 1927 bis 1957*

But the war was not over for him after all. He was called back to active duty again in September 1944, and sent back to Aachen, where he was captured by the Allies on Oct. 20. He spent the rest of the war in a Prisoner-of-War camp, first at Compiègne, then nearby at Attichy in France. He was finally released in early September 1945, to return to his home in Aurich. He was truly delighted upon his return to discover that his wife and three sons were safe and well, and his house, especially all his scores, papers, and books were just as he had left them a year earlier! In his *Tagebuch 1927-1957*, he wrote an entry on the top of page 271, dated 2. September 1944, in which he comments on his imminent remobilization, ending with:

Es ist nicht ganz einfach, von den lieben Herzen zu scheiden. Aber Gott ist mit dabei. Er kommt mit und bleibt hier und bindet uns zusammen. Ihm sei Lob und Dank für diese 3 Jahre in der Heimat. Ihm sei Preis und Ehre auch in der finsternen Zukunft.

(It is not easy to leave [my] loved ones. But God is with them. He comes with [me] and remains here and binds us together. To Him be praise and thanksgiving for these three years at home. To him be praise and glory also in the dark [or obscure] future.)

2. September 1944.

Einen Nachmittag und einen Sonntag nach Gerhard Meyers  
Geburtstag mit Händchen, Hauptgottesdienst und Abendmahls-  
feier am nachmittag; dann geht es zum zweiten Mal hinaus  
zum Festungs-Pionierbataillon nach Lamberg-Kentorf.  
Es ist nicht ganz einfach, von den lieben Menschen zu scheiden.  
Aber Gott ist mit dabei. Er kommt mit und bleibt hier  
und bindet uns zusammen.  
Ihm sei Lob und Dank für diese 3 Jahre in der Heimat.  
Ihm sei Preis und Ehre auch in der finsternen Zukunft.  
16. 9. 45

Endlich wagt das Herz den ersten Jubelschrei: Wieder daheim!  
Und alles wie ehedem! Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib, - nichts  
haben sie genommen. Da, wo ich abschloss, darf ich neu  
beginnen. Wie wenigen Menschen ist das zuteil geworden.  
So wie diese Landschaft der obigen gleicht, so selbstver-  
ständlich darf ich nach Jahresfrist, als ob nichts gesche-  
hen sei, im alten Stile weiterleben, beschenkt mit unzäh-  
ligen Erfahrungen dieses Lebens und der Macht, des  
Lohnes, der Erbarmung und der Liebe Gottes.

--excerpt from Bender's Tagebuch 1927 bis 1957

On the very next line of the same page of his journal he writes a year later, on September 16, 1945:

Endlich wagt das Herz den ersten Jubelschrei. Wieder daheim! Und alles wie ehedem! Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib, - nichts haben sie genommen. Da, wo ich abschloss, darf ich neu beginnen. Wie wenigen Menschen ist das zuteil geworden.

(At last the heart ventures its first cry of joy. Home again! And all as it was before! Possessions, honor, children and wife, - they have taken nothing. [Obviously a paraphrase from Luther's chorale *A Mighty Fortress*]. There, where I ended, may I begin anew. How few people have this chance.)

During those months in the POW camp, he worked as an assistant to the American Lutheran Chaplain, Pastor Carl Albert Zimmerman. He played for services in the various sections of the camp, cleaned and swept out the Chaplain's office, participated in Bible study, studied music theory(!), and continued his composing. According to his journal, it seems that he also had some access to a Pleyel piano! While there, he expanded his *Auricher Singbüchlein* (opus 1), which consists of 122 chorale settings for SA or SAB voices, written for his children's choir in Aurich. This collection is very reminiscent in style and content to Distler's *Der Jahrkreis* (opus 5). After the war, they were published by Bärenreiter and, along with his *90 Kleine Choralvorspiele*, (opus 2) launched his publishing career. (Actually, his *Eine vergnügte Klaviermusik* (opus 3 no. 1), piano pieces from 1936-37, appeared in print first.) It is interesting to read an entry from his untitled *Tagebuch*, written during his confinement at Compiègne and Attichy, dated August 31, 1945:

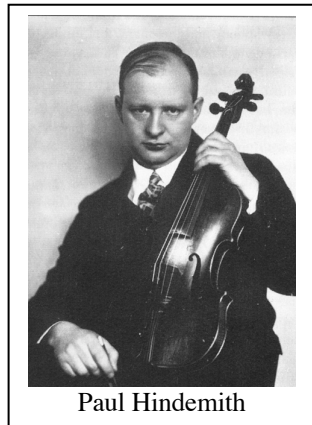
Ich möchte möglichst schnell heim, das Auricher Singbüchlein abschreiben in Druck geben, ein berühmter Mann werden und gar eine Sing- und Konzertreise durch die Vereinigten Staaten machen. Aber in diesem elenden Lager muss ich wohl noch lernen, dasz Gott seinen Kindern oft ganz andere Wege führt, wie sie zu gehen beabsichtigen.

(I desire the possibility to be home quickly, to have my Auricher Singbüchlein copied in print, to become a famous person and perhaps to make a singing and concert tour through the United States. But in this wretched camp I still must learn well, that God often leads his children on quite a different path than they intended to go.)

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--excerpt from Bender's *Tagebuch Dec. 1944-Sept. 1945*

It is noteworthy that all of his desires were met, probably even in part surpassed!



Paul Hindemith

In addition to Hugo Distler, a second important influence on Bender as a composer is the work of Paul Hindemith. While he never had the chance to study personally with Hindemith, he thoroughly studied the music and treatises by Hindemith, even calling him "Saint Paul" out of affection and respect. From Hindemith came some of Bender's ideas regarding harmony (especially quartal harmonies), use of non-harmonic tones, and analysis. This influence is especially evident in his textbook on organ improvisation (opus 59) and in his *Experimentum organo* (opus 55). Bender also required his composition students to study and use Hindemith's *Craft of Musical Composition*.

Bender remained in Aurich until 1952. Then, for a year, he went to Jacobikirche in Langen, near Frankfurt am Main, but moved on in 1953 to Michaeliskirche in Lüneburg. This is the church where Johann Sebastian Bach had studied as a teenager. Bender established good collegial relationships with the musicians at the other two main churches in Lüneburg, sponsoring joint concerts and cooperating for major festivals. According to reviews of the time, this was a welcome change from the previous prevalent competition. During these years (1953-60), in addition to his responsibilities for oversight of all church music activities and facilities in the region (he was



The young Bender family

named Kirchenmusikdirektor for the Diocese of Lüneburg in 1955), Bender's work began to be known in America. A few of his motets were enclosed in an issue of *Musik und Kirche* and thereby came to the attention of some Lutheran church musicians in the United States. On March 2, 1954, he received a commission from Pastor Fred Otto of Fremont, Nebraska (later the founder of Chantry Music Press) to write a *St. Mark Passion* (opus 11 no. 1). That same day he received in the mail an invitation from Ed Klammer, music editor at Concordia Publishing House, to become a "house composer." Two of his chorale preludes had already been included in the *Parish Organist*, edited by his classmate from Leipzig days, Heinrich Fleischer, who was then at Valparaiso University. His next publications with Concordia were several *Gospel Motets* (Opus 12). As a result of this

## Jan Bender – War Years and Career in Germany

exposure, and contacts made during the Bachfest in Lüneburg in 1956, Bender was invited as a visiting professor, first to Valparaiso in the late spring of 1956 to replace Heinrich Fleischer for a couple of months, and then by Daniel Moe to teach a summer session at the University of Denver in 1959.

Upon his return to Lüneburg, he discovered that his substitute had not adequately discharged the duties at the organ during Bender's absence, and the new Pastor declared that Bender would not be allowed to leave for such an extended period again. In his Christmas letter to Prof. Hoelty-Nickel at Valparaiso, Bender asked him to look for possible positions in America.



Bender (accompanying) with Daniel Moe (conducting)  
Denver, 1959

*(Narrative continued in section “Career in America, Retirement, and Legacy”)*