

The Economics and Aesthetics of the Early Twentieth-Century German Artist-Opera

By

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for my family

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Introduction

From at least the time of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* composers have been drawn to centering their most celebrated operas around the artist engaged in the creation of a masterwork and used these operas as thinly-veiled artistic manifestoes, communicating their views on the nature of art, the artist, and the place of both in contemporary society.¹

This self-conscious and aesthetically engaged form of opera, generally known as the *Künstleroper*, or artist-opera, became almost wholly a German phenomenon, with composers like Richard Strauss, Hans Pfitzner, Franz Schreker, Ernst Krenek, and Paul Hindemith making important contributions to the genre. Even more surprising, it nearly ceased to exist after the rise of the Third Reich in 1933. A particularly high concentration of such works seems to have flourished on the German stage during the first third of the twentieth-century amidst heightened economic, political, and even artistic turmoil. Examples of operas featuring artists in this period include Franz Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* (1912), *Das Spielwerk und die Prinzessin* (1909-1915), *Die Gezeichneten* (1918), *Der Schatzgräber* (1920), *Irrelohe* (1923), *Der singende Teufel* (1928), and *Christophorus* (1929); Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/1916) and *Intermezzo* (1924); Arnold Schoenberg's *Die glückliche Hand* (1913); Max von Schillings's *Mona Lisa* (1915); Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina* (1917); Ferruccio Busoni's

¹ Wagner's critical arch-enemy Eduard Hanslick noted the connection early on, writing, "Aside from the description of medieval national life, it is the conflict between free poetry, spontaneously inspired, and spiritless, pedantic versification which constitutes the intellectual and emotional core of the work. Walther represents the one, the guild of the Nuremberg masters the other. A poet of genius against a dozen pedantic masters who cannot understand him and yet dare to judge him. Do you get it?" Eduard Hanslick, "*Die Meistersinger* (1874)" in *Music Criticisms 1846-99*, ed. and trans. Henry Pleasants (Baltimore: Penguin, 1950), 117-118.

Arlecchino (1917); Ernst Krenek's *Orpheus und Eurydike* (1923), *Der Sprung über den Schatten* (1923), and *Jonny spielt auf* (1927); Kurt Weill's *Der Protagonist* (1925); Paul Hindemith's *Cardillac* (1926) and *Mathis der Maler* (1935), and Berg's *Lulu* (1935).

Musicologists (especially opera scholars) have made great advances in the rediscovery and revision of neglected and marginalized repertoires in the last thirty years, but the artist-opera has remained largely ignored as an object of study. Yet a thorough examination of these operas can reveal how concurrent economic and artistic upheavals affected German composers and prompted them to comment on their socio-economic condition on the opera stage during the first decades of the twentieth century. As the institutional structures of public music making in Germany passed from court to state or private hands, and as the demands of the public changed ever more rapidly during the early twentieth century, composers were forced to reevaluate their place in society and the relationship between the artist and his audience.

The quickly changing political and economic realities faced by these composers and others caused them to question previously assumed notions about the uses of art and the nature of composition in a modern and industrialized society. According to the Romantic ideals of the nineteenth-century, the composer needed to shun society and compose apart from the pressures of everyday life in order to remain faithful to his art, which, as Schopenhauer famously claimed, passed alongside the history of the world “guiltless and unstained by blood.”² During the twentieth-century, however, composers found this stance to be increasingly untenable, either as a matter of principle or as a matter of economic necessity. Rapidly developing technology and an explosion in

² “schuldlos und nicht blutbefleckt.” Quoted in Richard Taruskin, “Afterword: *Nicht Blutbefleckt?*” *Journal of Musicology* 26/2 (Spring, 2009): 277.

consumer culture forced composers to rethink the ways in which they engaged and interacted with audiences, critics, and publishers in order to remain relevant in an increasingly crowded marketplace. In addition to competing with the nascent recording, film, and radio industries, composers of art music also had to contend with various forms of dance and popular music for publishing and performance opportunities.

Through the medium of the artist-opera composers addressed a number of contemporary concerns on a wide range of issues, including technology, composer's rights, and musical style, issues that resonated far beyond the walls of the opera house. Above all, the artist-opera gave composers a forum in which they could express their frustrations concerning their constantly shifting role in society while simultaneously advocating for reforms—a fact not lost on critics and engaged audience members, as contemporary reviews attest. Lastly, the virtual disappearance of the genre coincided with the end of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of the Third Reich, but not necessarily because of any newly imposed political or aesthetic restrictions.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine, first, how this sea-change in both the aesthetics and economics of composition caused a groundswell of artist-opera production, nearly all of which were composed during the particularly unstable last years of the Wilhelmine Empire and the full duration of the Weimar Republic. Secondly, it will significantly broaden the scope of the genre and focus on previously ignored operas as well as composers in order to show how widespread and multi-faceted the genre was in terms of ideological scope and content. Lastly, the dissertation will consider possible reasons for the decline of the artist-opera after 1933, weighing how the initially promising changes in the organization and administration of German musical life brought

about by the Nazi government with the formation of the Reichsmusikkammer may have actually eased many of the social and economic anxieties that inspired the composition of artist-operas.

Before proceeding, it will be necessary to define the term “artist-opera” and explain how that term will be used within the context of this dissertation. Broadly speaking, any opera that prominently features an artist or the creation of an artwork in its plot is an “artist-opera.” A broad historical survey reveals that operas featuring composers, artists, or the creation of artworks as plot devices have existed since the beginning of opera itself. Orpheus’s musical performances were central to the plot of Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* (1607), and the personification of Music states in the prologue that what proceeds attests to the power of music to shape human events. Throughout opera history there have also been lesser-known works based on the lives of composers or that deal with the composition of opera within the frame of the drama.³ This general definition of artist-opera is not what the term *Künstleroper* has come to embody, however. A *Künstleroper* takes the life of the artist or the creation of an artwork and imbues it with ideological significance and a healthy dose of *Kultur*, thus marking it as a uniquely German product.⁴ Many German-speaking composers in the late nineteenth and

³ Operas about composers include: Flotow’s *Stradella* (1837) and *La jeunesse de Mozart* (1870) and Suppé’s *Franz Schubert* (1864) and *Joseph Haydn* (1887), and Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Mozart i Sal’ieri* (1898). Operas about opera composition include: Gassmann’s *L’Opera Seria* (1769), Mozart’s *Der Schauspieldirektor* (1786), Salieri’s *Prima la musica, poi le parole* (1786), Lortzing’s *Die Opernprobe* (1851) and Jánacek’s *Osud* (1910).

⁴ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 124. The idea of *Kultur* is notoriously difficult to quantify. In short, *Kultur* encompasses all of the virtues of the German people: honesty, fidelity, seriousness, etc., while prioritizing supposedly authentic and “non-political” traits like inwardness or the purely spiritual. *Kultur* is

early twentieth centuries used the conceit of the artist in the midst of creation as a platform from which to express their own ideas about the relationships of the artist, art, and the society around him. In this dissertation, the terms artist-opera and composer-opera are to be understood within this ideologically loaded context.

The specific word *Künstleroper* was not commonly used among German or English commentators to describe these operas until the mid-twentieth century; prior to that, the term comes up only sporadically. The earliest usage of the term that I found dates to the 1850s, when Peter Cornelius referred to Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* as a *Künstleroper* while reviewing a Weimar production of Wagner's *Lohengrin*.⁵ A 1903 article in *Der Kunstwart* discussing German performances of Berlioz operas again referred to *Benvenuto Cellini* as a *Künstleroper*; clearly the author had read Cornelius and borrowed freely from his writing.⁶ Although the word *Künstleroper* was not in common use among composers and critics, commentators recognized operas dealing with issues of art and the artist as a distinct subgenre of German opera. In his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918), Thomas Mann referred to Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina* and *Die Meistersinger* as *Künstlerdramen*, or artist-dramas. Hugo von Hofmannsthal also used that term to describe an idea for an opera Strauss had proposed that was supposed to be modeled on *Meistersinger*. Similar cognates like *Künstlertragödie* and even *Künstlerroman* (itself a distinct literary genre) were also used to describe Schreker's and

usually seen in opposition to *Zivilisation*, which is superficial, amoral, democratic, and usually embodied by Germany's historic enemy, the French.

⁵ Peter Cornelius, "Der Lohengrin in München," in *Peter Cornelius Literarische Werke Band III: Aufsätze über Musik und Kunst*, ed. Edgar Istel (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1904), 110.

⁶ Artur Smolian, "Hektor Berlioz und die deutsche Opernbühne," *Der Kunstwart* 17/5 (December, 1903): 336.

Krenek's work. While early twentieth century observers understood the *Künstleroper* to be explicitly engaged with contemporary aesthetic and economic debates raging in artistic circles, more recent scholarship viewed the genre as backward-looking and reactionary, disconnected from contemporary artistic life and projecting a fatalistic decadence and impulse toward self-psychologizing.⁷

According to the common usage arising in these more recent works, the immediate inspiration for nearly all twentieth-century artist-operas—and therefore for the operas under consideration in this dissertation—is Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* (1867). Many of the themes that dominate *Meistersinger*—tradition vs. innovation, the function of art in society, and the place of the creative artist in society—also figure prominently in the artist-operas of the twentieth century. In addition, the stylistic mixture of self-conscious musical historicism and contemporary musical language that pervades *Meistersinger* is prevalent in several twentieth-century works typically assigned to the category, including Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Schreker's *Der singende Teufel*,

⁷John Bokina, "Resignation, Retreat, and Impotence: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Modern German Artist-Opera," *Cultural Critique* 9 (Spring, 1988), 157-195; Lydia Goehr, "In the Shadow of the Canon," *The Musical Quarterly* 86/2 (Summer 2002), 307-328; Uwe Japp, *Das deutsche Künstlerdrama: Von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); Sebastian Stauss, *Zwischen Narzissmus und Selbsthass: das Bild des ästhetizistischen Künstlers im Theater der Jahrhundertwende und der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010); Claire Taylor-Jay, *The Artist Operas of Pfitzner, Krenek, and Hindemith: Politics and Ideology of the Artist* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Ulrich Weisstein, "Die letzte Häutung: Two German *Künstleropern* of the Twentieth Century, Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina* and Paul Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*" in *German Literature and Music: An Aesthetic Fusion, 1890-1989*, ed. Claus Reschke and Howard Pollack (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1992); and Peter V. Zima, *Der europäische Künstlerroman: von der romantischen Utopie zur postmodernen Parodie* (Tübingen: A. Franke, 2008).

Pfitzner's *Palestrina* and Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*. The artistic and ideological connections between *Meistersinger* and later artist-operas were made explicitly both by contemporary critics and the composers themselves. Reviews and correspondence surrounding the many artist-operas of the early twentieth century are full of references to Wagner's most accessible, but also most baldly ideological opera. Richard Strauss's correspondence with Hugo von Hoffmannsthal contains several instances in which *Meistersinger* is invoked in comparison to *Ariadne auf Naxos* and other proposed artist-operas. Franz Schreker's correspondence with Paul Bekker also reveals concerns about the similarities between Schreker's *Christophorus* and Pfitzner's *Palestrina*.

Previous Scholarship

The few works dealing with the *Künstleroper* privilege only a handful of representative works (*Meistersinger*, *Palestrina*, Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*, Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*)⁸ and focus on aesthetic or philosophical undercurrents in the operas, often overlooking their contemporary settings and the material challenges facing composers, and assuming instead that the composer is utilizing the opera to enact his own utopian visions based on his "stated aesthetic premises."⁹ These "stated aesthetic premises" are drawn either from the libretto of the opera itself, or, as is more often the case, other prose writings by the composer concerning the nature of art. This narrow interpretive frame—which excludes economic motivations for composing these works or the possibility that the composer's intentions are ironic—makes the genre seem small and homogenous.

⁸ German scholarship occasionally includes one or more Schreker operas, most often *Der ferne Klang*.

⁹ Taylor-Jay, 24.

Scholars also exhibit a certain ambivalence toward the autobiographical component of these operas: on the one hand they exclude from study any operas that are not directly autobiographical, as is the case with many of Schreker's artist-operas, which usually engage artistic questions on a more abstract level. On the other, they also leave out operas like Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* or *Intermezzo*, which are paradoxically viewed as being so autobiographical as to be banal and vulgar, leading John Bokina to write that these operas "purchased their success through a trivialization of the artist-opera."¹⁰

Because Strauss's artist-operas during this period were comedies with plots bordering on the banal in their use of every day settings, or *Alltäglichkeit* (especially in *Intermezzo*), Bokina goes on to state that Strauss never used his "artist-operas as a vehicle for posing the real and unique problems of art and the artist."¹¹

Furthermore, most studies have diverted our attention away from the material circumstances in which these operas were conceived by arguing that composers were more concerned with looking backward in time than in looking to the present or even the future. Scholars like Bokina and Claire Taylor-Jay, who authored the only book-length treatment of the subject in English, define the entire genre as containing a certain intellectual high-mindedness and nostalgic longing for the past, while fatalistically accepting that no such rapprochement with the past is possible, hence the repeated use of terms like "resignation," "retreat," "decadence," and "impotence," in analyses by these scholars and others.¹² Operas that display these features, like *Palestrina* and *Mathis der*

¹⁰ Bokina, 158.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² In 2001, an entire issue of *The Musical Quarterly* was devoted to Pfitzner's opera *Palestrina*, in which scholars like Leon Botstein, Karen Painter, and Christopher Morris discuss the opera in these terms. *The Musical Quarterly* 85/1 (Spring, 2001).

Maler, and operas that purport to lampoon the operatic “sympathy with death,” like *Jonny spielt auf*, are given pride of place in studies of the artist-opera. Furthering this interpretive strategy, Lydia Goehr stated in 2002 that *Künstleroperen* ought really to be called *Kanonoperen*, because they “assumed as their very topic the question of canonic heritage” while the composers of these operas “used the topic to affirm the status of their works and themselves as canonic.”¹³ Goehr argued that these works are obsessed with their own canonic status in the face of German economic and artistic decline, and that the “violent, silent, impotent, desperate, and melancholic gestures of their endings” show either anxiety or relief that the opera might be *the very last German work*.¹⁴ The italicized portion of the quotation resonates quite easily with the most famous of artist-operas, *Palestrina*, in which the title character is called upon by the shades of earlier masters to complete his Mass, thus becoming the “last stone on [God’s] beautiful chain.”¹⁵

Conceiving the *Künstleroper* in such a manner overlooks the mundane preoccupations so central to many works of the time and, in the process, excludes most of the works produced in this time period from consideration, including some of the most popular ones. For example, Strauss’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Intermezzo* expressed concerns about the nature of the music industry and the relationship between composer and audience, but did so with a good deal of humor and irony, two features not usually associated with the artist-opera. Because of this they are considered “trivial” by Bokina, and relegated to a list in an appendix by Taylor-Jay. However, most artist-operas from

¹³ Goehr, “In the Shadow of the Canon,” 321.

¹⁴ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ Quoted in Taylor-Jay, 55.

this period lack the monumentality of a *Palestrina* or *Mathis der Maler*, reflecting instead concerns about concrete economic and social difficulties faced by composers. In addition, most of these artist-operas also use tonality not as a signifier of the distant past (and thus ironically), as in *Palestrina* or *Mathis*, but as representative of modern society and current conditions, therefore running contrary to prevailing modernist narratives equating musical progress with the eradication of tonality.¹⁶ By examining these material circumstances, and by rejecting previously held assumptions about ideological content or musical style (especially the use of tonality as a measure of modernism or progressivism), I will show the *Künstleroper* to be the wide-ranging and complex phenomenon that it was. Production of artist-operas increased dramatically between 1912 and 1934 as it became clear that the artistic utopia so boldly prophesied by Wagner was a fiction, and a dangerous one at that. Substantial shifts in technology, aesthetics, and economics left composers anxious and uncertain about their social and economic standing, which was increasingly at odds with their exalted place in the German cultural imagination.

My study will also consider that the composers of *Künstleroper* were at least aware of, if not inspired by, the *Künstlerroman*, or “artist-novel,” popularized most famously by Thomas Mann. Many cornerstones of nineteenth-century German literature were *Künstlerromane*, including Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1795-1796) and E.T.A.

¹⁶ Bokina goes to nearly absurd lengths to posit that Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron* is the crowning achievement of the artist-opera, in large part because of its twelve-tone treatment of musical materials. A good deal of recent scholarship has rejected this model of canon formation outright. Frisch argues for “multiple modernisms” that account for factors other than tonality. Taruskin posits that Modernism has little to do with musical technique; rather, it is a mind-set or worldview. Walter Frisch, *German Modernism: Music and the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, vol. 4 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Hoffmann's *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr* (1821). In the twentieth century this tradition continued through novels like Mann's *Tonio Kröger* (1903), *Death in Venice* (1912), and *Doktor Faustus* (1947), as well as portions of *Buddenbrooks* (1901) and *The Magic Mountain* (1924). All of the composers under consideration certainly would have known the masterpieces of Goethe and Hoffmann and would even have had contact either with Mann personally or with his work.¹⁷

Mann often equated music with the effects of decay and decline in his novels: Hanno's frail nature and early death are associated with his love of Wagner in *Buddenbrooks*, while music casts an anesthetizing pallor over the sanatorium and Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*. Not only does Mann employ the themes of the artist and German music in his novels, but it is also telling that he refers directly to a *Künstleroper* in his most influential non-fiction venture. In his enormous 1918 essay, *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, Mann famously interpreted Pfitzner's *Palestrina* through the lens of modern German "non-political" conservatism, comparing the opera to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* in terms of its scope and ideological content.¹⁸ After Mann denounced the positions he took in *Reflections of a Non-Political Man* in 1923, he would later argue in *Doktor Faustus* that the Wagnerian impulse toward nationalist and heroic pretensions—those very same pretensions he praised in *Palestrina* as evidence of the

¹⁷ In addition, Strauss was a personal friend of Romain Rolland, and kept up a lively correspondence with him during the period that Rolland was writing his own sprawling *Künstlerroman*, *Jean-Christophe*, about a German composer who makes France his adoptive home.

¹⁸ Borrowing Mann's framework, Taylor-Jay reads *Jonny spielt auf* in terms of progressive Weimar-era politics, creating a kind of morally virtuous anti-*Palestrina*.

opera's high "ethical"¹⁹ value—induced a self-indulgence and lethargy that led to the horrors of the Third Reich.²⁰ Mann's positing of ethical and moral consequences for works like *Palestrina*, an opera that is often viewed as the most representative of all twentieth century artist-operas, has been largely the cause of the genre's poor reputation among scholars in no small part because of Pfitzner's arch-conservative personal politics, and has precluded any other avenues of inquiry into this fascinating and wide-ranging repertory.

Looking beyond the few canonic representatives of the genre privileged by scholars as well as by Thomas Mann, we find that an even larger number of artist-operas address a wide range of concerns about society and the profession of musical composition both directly and indirectly in ways that are in turn humorous and serious, earnest and ironic. Especially important to many composers of this era were issues of publishing and copyright protection. As Barbara Peterson and others have noted, Richard Strauss fought tirelessly for composer's rights, forming the Genossenschaft Deutscher Tonsetzer in 1903.²¹ Through this and other organizations Strauss sought to give composers a financial stake and more control in the performance and packaging of their compositions. He also fought for decades to extend the copyright beyond the original

¹⁹ Ibid., 310. "...Still one has perceived Pfitzner's work as 'hopelessly pessimistic,' and this is quite understandable and justified at a moment in which optimism has reached the revolutionary stage. *Palestrina* is really a great work that, although it stands higher ethically than artistically, completely lacks progressive optimism, political *virtue*, that is."

²⁰ Susan von Rohr Scaff, "*Doktor Faustus*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. Richie Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 176.

²¹ Barbara A. Petersen, "Richard Strauss as Composer's Advocate" in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 119.

thirty years provided in the 1870 German Gewerbeordnung.²² This was a concern that stayed with him throughout his professional life, and was one of the reasons that he agreed to become the president of the Reichsmusikkammer in November 1933 after the National Socialist government promised to extend copyright by signing on to the Berne Convention.²³

Even more burdensome for composers less financially secure than Strauss was the simple pressure to keep the opera genre alive in the face of shrinking subsidies to opera houses and diminishing box office revenues. In a world in which the market was flooded with new compositions, the need to have a “hit” and maintain one’s audience in the face of increasing musical complexity and audience alienation from artistic experiments was a chief concern for many composers of artist-operas. Schreker’s voluminous correspondence with his publisher Emil Hertzka at Universal Edition underscores this fact in grim detail. Faced with diminishing publishing revenues and declining status at the box office, Schreker looked continuously throughout the latter half of the twenties to find an opera topic that would be commercially successful.²⁴ John Lincoln Stewart posits that ahead of any artistic consideration, Krenek and his compatriots began writing operas as a means of gaining financial security and popularity.²⁵ Furthermore, composers increasingly turned to teaching professions and civil service positions to secure their livelihood during this period, most notably Schreker, who became the director of the

²² Michael Kennedy, *Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, 281.

²⁴ Christopher Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 198-202.

²⁵ John Lincoln Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 28.

Berlin Hochschule für Musik in 1920 and remained in that prestigious post until 1932. He wrestled with both the problem of maintaining his creative vitality despite bureaucratic demands on his time and the embarrassment caused by his students overtaking him in popularity and cultural influence. Schreker was so preoccupied with preserving certain notions of art in a changing aesthetic and economic climate that Wolfgang Molkow remarked: “For Franz Schreker the reflection and refraction of art in the artwork becomes the central problem,” causing him to conclude that “all of his operas are artist-operas.”²⁶ Yet, despite the centrality of the artist-opera to Schreker’s *oeuvre*, no real attempt has been made to understand these operas as anything but artifacts of musical decadence.²⁷

Members of the younger generation, including Ernst Krenek, were especially aware of the economic struggles that plagued composers during the Weimar period. Students often had to abandon their studies because of a lack of funding, and Krenek was able to attend the Hochschule only through the generosity of private benefactors. Additionally, Krenek quickly learned that a reputation as a rising star among atonal modernist composers did not translate into financial stability. Despite several high profile performances and glowing reviews of his early works, Krenek had to rely on stipends from philanthropists prior to the composition of his artist-opera *Jonny spielt auf* in 1927. For Krenek, the popular dance music played by the title character, a black American jazz musician, represented as much of a threat to high art and serious composition as it did an opportunity. The concerns and anxieties of these composers,

²⁶ Wolfgang Molkow, “Der Rolle der Kunst in den frühen Opern Franz Schrekers,” *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 44/5 (May, 1989): 219.

²⁷ This is all the more ironic when one considers how centrally Schreker figured in Nazi literature surrounding “Degenerate Music.”

both material and aesthetic, literally played out in front of theatergoers on stages all over Germany and Austria.

Methodology

In this study I have limited myself to examining what I am calling “composer-operas,” that is, operas that specifically feature composers, rather than painters or other artists, at the center of the drama. This distinction allows for the focus of my analysis to remain on the aesthetic, economic, and social pressures specific to composers and musicians in the Weimar period, which were often distinct from the issues facing other artists. I also concentrate my investigation on works that were composed during the tumultuous years of the Weimar Republic. I contend that these operas, while heavily informed by pre-Weimar models, concern themselves more explicitly with specific aesthetic and economic preoccupations. Interestingly, all of the composer-operas mentioned in this dissertation (with the exception of *Ariadne auf Naxos*) are set to librettos written by the composers themselves, a somewhat unusual feature that bolsters the notion of a heightened desire on the part of the composer to speak directly to the audience. Furthermore, all of the operas discussed in chapters three through five are essentially *Zeitopern*—operas set in the present day featuring all the material and technological trappings of modern life in some form or fashion—making their desire to communicate directly with their audiences all the more obvious. Unlike *Meistersinger*, *Ariadne*, or *Palestrina* these operas dispense with the need for historical distance as a device for contemporary critique. These operas show their composers exactly as they wished to be seen by their audience, without historical refraction.

The arguments advanced in this dissertation are supported by an extensive examination of relevant materials from (then) contemporary German periodical literature. I consulted the exhaustive *Bibliographie der deutschen Zeitschriftenliteratur* for the years 1917-1933, manually searching for articles by composer name and by keywords like *Komponist, Kunst, Künstler, Oper, Tonkünstler, Urheber*, and several others. In addition, I conducted archival research on the papers of Paul Bekker and Franz Schreker, held in the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library at Yale University; the archives of the Hochschule für Musik, held at the Archiv der Akademie der Künste in Berlin; and at the Zeitungsabteilung of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, where I examined unpublished and published materials unavailable in America. The Bekker holdings at Yale are extensive and include his correspondence with nearly every important cultural figure in Germany during the first third of the twentieth century. I was able especially to examine his fascinating correspondence with Leo Kestenberg, which continued throughout the Weimar Republic. Bekker's extensive correspondence with Georg Schünemann and a smaller number of letters exchanged with Franz Schreker also reside in this archive. Although the bulk of Schreker's papers are housed in European libraries, the Yale collection does include staging directions for his operas, hand-drawn scene sketches, a small amount of his prose writing, and facsimile scores of Schreker's operas, including the autograph of *Christophorus*, which was never published in full score. At the Archiv der Akademie der Künste I looked at the papers of Leo Kestenberg and Georg Schünemann. In addition to a lengthy correspondence between the two covering a variety of subjects germane to the daily operation of the Hochschule, both of these collections contain their correspondence with Franz Schreker, which was useful in determining how all three men managed the

administration of Germany's most important conservatory. Their personnel files also revealed the effects of the hyperinflation on salaries and wages in startling detail. This archival research provided me with a clearer picture of the economic, professional, and artistic challenges faced by these composers and how these challenges influenced their production of composer-operas during the Weimar era. I also relied heavily on reviews of the operas in this dissertation to demonstrate that critics and audiences recognized the ideological content of these operas and viewed them as a coherent genre. Much of the German language periodical and archival material drawn upon here has been largely absent from English language studies of the artist/composer opera.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One considers the operatic forerunners of the Weimar-era composer opera while also outlining the ideological content of contemporary artist-novels that provided the aesthetic underpinnings for Strauss's, Schreker's, and Krenek's later composer operas of the Weimar period. The chapter begins with an examination of *Die Meistersinger* and *Palestrina* as composer-operas, noting especially Thomas Mann's critical linkage of the two works in his 1917 *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*. I will then show how pre-Weimar operas by Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) and Schreker (*Der ferne Klang*) both reaffirm and challenge the model provided by *Meistersinger*, providing a platform for composers to address not only the aesthetic but also the material concerns they faced during the first third of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two provides the background for the economic and social challenges faced by German composers in the Weimar republic. Building on the work of Martin J.

Newhouse and Alan Steinweis, this chapter details the ambiguous professional status of German musicians during the period while accounting for the haphazard and mostly ineffective calls for reform. Using a variety of contemporary periodical literature, I show that the vast majority of composers and musicians in the Weimar era were extremely financially disadvantaged, challenging the notion that the period was an artistic “golden era.” In subsequent sections I attempt to decouple the linkage between “progressive” politics and “progressive” (in the sense of modernist) art, showing that many leaders who were otherwise politically democratic and progressive took a decidedly conservative view of artistic production and consumption. I also detail the unsuccessful fight on the part of Strauss and others to extend copyright from thirty to fifty years, as well as the sweeping attempts made by Leo Kestenberg at reforming both the public and private music education systems. In addition, I also briefly consider the ways in which the burgeoning field of music criticism posed a perceived hardship for composers who felt that influential critics (many of whom were not musically trained) exerted an outsized influence on the success or failure of their works.

Chapter Three examines influential artist-novels by Mann, Herman Hesse, and Franz Werfel that also participate in the same discursive debates about the nature of art and the artist, demonstrating that concerns for the economic and artistic future of music within Germany were widespread among artists and intellectuals of all types.

The following three chapters each concentrate on one composer and his signature artist-opera produced in the Weimar Republic. Chapter Four focuses on Richard Strauss’s *Intermezzo* of 1924. In the aftermath of the First World War Strauss experienced a series of personal setbacks: he lost much of his fortune in English banks,

his appointment as director of the Vienna State Opera was famously controversial and short lived, and audiences and critics saw him as increasingly out of touch after the failure of his ballet *Schlagobers*. This chapter argues that *Intermezzo*—a comedy that revolves around a domestic dispute caused by a case of mistaken identity—was Strauss’s attempt to portray himself as a normal, workaday craftsman in a musical idiom that was intentionally accessible and familiar to audiences increasingly enamored with film. Its overtly autobiographical libretto showed his desire to communicate directly with audiences but proved highly controversial with critics who felt that banal, everyday life had no place on the operatic stage, thus prefiguring, according to Bryan Gilliam, the *Zeitoper* craze that began in 1927. Not only does Strauss’s plot endeavor to define him as a bourgeois craftsman, but so also does a lengthy printed introduction to the opera written by the composer. This fascinating document lays out the specific musical problems that Strauss attempted to solve in *Intermezzo* and then illustrates how he overcame problems of text setting, orchestration, etc. It then moves into a technical discussion of how to conduct the opera, providing details that few audience members would have needed. Whether or not audience members understood the intricacies of Strauss’s arguments, however, they would have understood that *Intermezzo* was the work of a supremely gifted and dedicated craftsman who spent hours of toil in the perfection of his artwork, thus radically updating the romantic perception of the composer as an isolated genius alienated from society.

Chapter Five addresses Krenek’s landmark work *Jonny spielt auf* (1927), an opera often canonized as a shining example of Weimar progressivism and of Krenek’s own desire to abandon esoteric composition for a more popular and “democratic” approach.

Using Krenek's early career as background, I demonstrate that *Jonny* was composed out of a cynical desire on Krenek's part to have a financially rewarding "hit" rather than out of any real allegiance to jazz or popular music. Utilizing contemporary reviews of the highly successful opera, I show that the reception of *Jonny* was much more ambivalent than has been previously assumed, and illustrated a number of deeply held cultural and social concerns in German society. Much of the success of the opera owed to its groundbreaking visual presentation and did not necessarily indicate an endorsement of the lifestyle promoted by Jonny. Krenek's own writings from the period indicate that he intended *Jonny* not as a feel-good celebration of Golden Twenties progressivism or the "jazz age," but as an ironic warning for composers of his generation to reengage with their public, lest they be tempted by the dystopian future represented by Jonny. *Jonny spielt auf* uses a comic plot—the wanderings of a stolen violin combined with a modern love triangle—to explore the dichotomy between modern European art music (represented by Max, a composer) and nascent American popular music (represented by Jonny, an African-American fiddle player). Although many interpreters of the opera, including Taylor-Jay, believe Max to be the object of ridicule in the opera, Krenek himself insisted that the character of Max was not intended to be a ridiculous caricature of the modern "serious" music composer; rather, Krenek intended that audiences should take Max and his problems seriously. In this interpretation, *Jonny* functions not so much as a beacon of Weimar progressivism, but as a symbol of the deep moral and aesthetic cleavages in German society.

My sixth chapter focuses on Franz Schreker and his 1929 opera *Christophorus*. After the success of *Der ferne Klang* and *Die Gezeichneten* (1918) Schreker was the most

performed opera composer in Germany, his popularity overshadowed only by Richard Strauss. In addition to his reputation as a composer, Schreker also was the director of the Berlin Hochschule für Musik from 1920 to 1932, a position that placed him squarely at the center of German musical life. In that post he taught a number of important young composers, including Ernst Krenek, with whom he had a famously volatile relationship. Schreker's fortunes as a composer rapidly waned as he staged a series of failed operas during the 1920s and he found himself competing with his students (especially Krenek) for publication and performance opportunities. Exploring the disastrous premiere of *Der singende Teufel* (1928) reveals how far Schreker had fallen by the end of the decade and demonstrates the pressure he felt to produce a "hit" with *Christophorus*. His correspondence with Paul Bekker and Leo Kestenberg further reveals the professional and personal anxieties that Schreker composed into *Christophorus*, a work that he explicitly crafted as an answer to the *Zeitoper* craze touched off by Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*. *Christophorus* tells the story of a talented composition student named Anselm who defies his teacher's directives to write a string quartet, instead attempting to compose an opera. Murder and mayhem ensue, and Anselm finally comes to his senses and sets aside the opera for the string quartet. The opera specifically addresses the relationship between teachers and students, the threatening nature of critics (as embodied by the character of Starkmann), and the ambivalence of many German composers toward jazz, portrayed in *Christophorus* as the soundtrack of loose morals and opiate addiction.

In my conclusion, I consider the possible causes for the rapid demise of the genre after 1933. Building again on the work of Alan Steinweis, I assess the impact of the newly formed Reichsmusikkammer on the social and economic conditions of composers.

Many composers hailed the de-liberalization and centralized regulation of their profession, at least initially, that the formation of the Reichskulturkammer promised. The extension of copyright was granted under Nazi rule, as were a number of social safety nets for composers and other music professions. These considerations raise the distinct possibility that composers ceased to create artist-operas because, at least in part, the anxieties and uncertainties that motivated their composition were on the path toward resolution.

My dissertation not only reconstructs the history of the artist-opera in Germany, it illustrates the manifold aesthetic, social, and economic anxieties mediated through these operas. By prioritizing compositions that were previously misunderstood because they failed to fit into preconceived notions of modernism, my study contributes to the ongoing destabilization and reevaluation of the German musical canon, while demonstrating that these works, often overlooked because of their use of tonality, were far more representative of their age than prevailing historical narratives would have us believe. Drawing on a large number of primary sources that shed light on contemporary issues of publishing, performers' rights, journalism, and music criticism, this dissertation attempts to provide a deeper and more nuanced account of this idiosyncratic genre, arguing that the artist-opera is much more than a backward-looking and anachronistic phenomenon; rather, it enriches our understanding of this complex time in music history.

Chapter 1

The Background, Part One: Aesthetic, Operatic, and Literary Underpinnings of Weimar-Era Artist-Operas

In this chapter, I will contextualize the aesthetic origins of the Weimar era artist-opera, examining the ideological content of Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* (1867) and Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina* (1917), two operas that heavily influenced the composition and reception of Strauss's, Schreker's, and Krenek's artist-operas of the 1920s. I will also consider briefly Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/1916) and Franz Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* (1912), artist-operas that were written in the last years of the German Empire. Although these operas all participate in a similar cultural discourse and are just as ideologically freighted as the operas discussed in subsequent chapters, these earlier artist-operas tend to be more allegorical and less overtly autobiographical than those of the Weimar period, relying on historical distance and stylized settings to keep explicit connections between the characters in the plot and the composer at arm's length. In particular, *Meistersinger* and *Palestrina* use romanticized versions of seminal periods in (German) music history to make grandiose proclamations about the present and future of German music writ large.¹ The anxieties raised in *Meistersinger* and *Palestrina* about the direction of German music persisted through the Weimar Republic, resurfacing in various forms in the later operas of Strauss, Schreker, and Krenek.

¹ Despite the fact that the historical Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina was Italian, over the course of the nineteenth century his legacy was coopted by and reinterpreted by German critics and composers who placed him in the line of "German" masters. See James Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Although calls for reform in all aspects of German musical life were ubiquitous during the 1920s, very little progress was actually made in procuring the sweeping change desired by nearly all composers and performers. Some of the reasons for this failure, most notably the lack of a coordinated effort among the various music professions, will be discussed in the next chapter. One reason for this was the fundamentally held belief among many composers that art and modern politics were incompatible. To state it bluntly, composers wished to be supported like other artisans, but refused to sacrifice the cultural prestige of the free artist in the mold of Beethoven. Composers were not alone in this view; politicians, critics, and other intellectuals consistently espoused this elitist view, regardless of their populism in other regards. This tension between the intellectual elitism of many German composers and the inherent populism of a modern, democratic society runs like a red thread through all of the works examined throughout this dissertation. New technologies, like the gramophone and radio, also enter into this discourse, as do jazz and popular culture. The composers and writers discussed in this chapter exhibited a decided ambivalence, if not outright hostility, toward most new technology and popular idioms, believing them to be a debasement of the artistic experience and a signifier of the death of *Kultur*.

Die Meistersinger as Artist-Opera

The work that cast the longest shadow over the German artist-operas of the twentieth century is Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* of 1868. Wagner's opera, though ostensibly a light-hearted comedy about the German *Meistersinger* Hans Sachs and the Mastersinging guild of medieval Nuremberg, is in fact loaded with ideological significance. Through

the characters of Sachs, Walther, and Beckmesser, Wagner espoused his views on the nature of creativity and the ideal relationship of the artist to German society. In this section I will show the different ways in which Wagner represented the figure of the composer in *Meistersinger*, with an eye towards seeing how Wagner's ideals resonated with *Palestrina*, a work that, alongside *Meistersinger*, proved paradigmatic for artist-opera composers of the Weimar period.

Although *Meistersinger* is one of Wagner's most ideologically loaded operas, the composer originally conceived of the work as a light comedic counterpoint to *Tannhäuser* when he first began sketching a scenario for it in the 1840s.² But, as Bryan Magee has written, "what began as a skit became a massive hymn to the supreme position in social life of art, and above all of music."³ Lydia Goehr has also commented on *Die Meistersinger*'s referentiality: "...its appearance as a traditional grand, three-act comic opera proves deceptive. These stated motivations are revealed as concealing his genuine ones by the opera itself, because its libretto argues in favour of correct motivations for creativity and against its corruption by false ones. Genuine works of art result from correct motivation..."⁴

In *Meistersinger*, the ideological battle is between musical innovation and tradition. For Wagner, Sachs represented a time when music was a product of the *Volk*, from whence it received its authority and vitality. As the artistic leader of the

² Richard Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," in *The Artwork of the Future*, vol. 1 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, 1895), 329.

³ Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 365.

⁴ Lydia Goehr, "Die Meistersinger: Wagner's Exemplary Lesson," in *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 51.

Mastersinger's Guild of Nuremberg, he is set up as a foil to the other members of the guild, who have become so entrenched in their strict interpretation of the rules—the *tabulatur* that figures in the first act—that they have ceased to be creative. Indeed, it is exactly this turn from the *Volksgeist* into the abstracted obscurities of the *tabulatur* that has caused this artistic calcification. As Sachs exclaims near the beginning of the opera:

You'll admit I know the rules well;
 And to see that the guild preserves the rules
 I have busied myself this many a year.
 But once a year I should find it wise
 to test the rules themselves,
 to see whether in the dull course of habit
 their strength and life doesn't get lost:
 and whether you are still on the right track with nature
 will only be told you
 by someone who knows nothing of the Tabulature.⁵

Only by a reconnection with the *Volksgeist*, which Sachs himself will mediate through the character of Walther von Stoltzing, can the tradition reinvent itself and remain valid. Here again we can feel the nineteenth century creeping into the opera.

Lydia Goehr notes this tendency, writing,

First, a central part of the opera's subject matter is about the invention of a German and a Romantic tradition of art that uses a three-centuries old Lutheran tradition of mastersinging to serve as its authoritative past. The story is set in the sixteenth century; the argument belongs to the nineteenth. Secondly, the opera itself contributes to the actual invention of what Wagner claims is a newly emergent German tradition of art, by virtue of the relation in which the opera stands to a tradition of historical treatments of the mastersingers and so by association with Germany's actual Lutheran past.⁶

⁵ Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Dresden State Opera Choir and Orchestra, directed by Herbert von Karajan, Angel Records, 1971, libretto in liner notes, trans. Peter Branscombe, 20.

⁶ Lydia Goehr, "Die Meistersinger: Wagner's Exemplary Lesson," in *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 52.

The use of Hans Sachs, Stoltzing, and the guild as a thinly veiled metaphor for Wagner's own theories of art were readily apparent to Eduard Hanslick, one of the opera's first reviewers and one of Wagner's most outspoken critics:

Aside from the description of medieval national life, it is the conflict between free poetry, spontaneously inspired, and spiritless, pedantic versification which constitutes the intellectual and emotional core of the work. Walther represents the one, the guild of the Nuremberg masters the other. A poet of genius against a dozen pedantic masters who cannot understand him and yet dare to judge him. Do you get it?⁷

The character of Walther is a particularly interesting locus of identification for Wagner within the opera. Walther arrives on the scene, as it were, as an impoverished *Junker* who wishes to join the *bürgerlich* Mastersinger's Guild. In the process, he meets Eva, the daughter of the guild's chairman, Veit Pogner. Pogner has just agreed to marry Eva to the winner of a singing contest to take place the next day. Sachs insists that the proceedings take place in front of the *Volk* and that the winner be chosen by their acclamation,

If now you want to show the people
how highly you honour Art;
and if you leave the child to her own choice,
you don't want her to oppose the verdict:
so let the people be judges too;
they will assuredly agree with the child.⁸

Of course, this means that the self-taught Walther—he learned from the birds and from the *Minnesinger* Walther von der Vogelweide—will need to gain entrance to the guild through the singing of a trial song, in which he must follow the guild's rules concerning form, melody, and lyrical content. Predictably, Walther's song is a disaster from the

⁷ Eduard Hanslick, "Die Meistersinger (1874)," in *Music Criticisms 1846-99*, ed. and trans. Henry Pleasants (Baltimore: Penguin, 1950), 117-118.

⁸ Wagner, *Die Meistersinger*, libretto in liner notes, 20.

point of view of the *tabulatur*, with its daring leaps and visceral text-painting (along with the gross liberties taken with form), yet it intrigues Sachs, who defends Walther in front of the other Masters as they attempt to shout down his song:

Ha! What spirit!
 What glow of inspiration—
 You Masters, be quiet and listen!...
 His heart's in the right place:
 a true poet hero!
 If I, Hans Sachs, make verse and shoes
 he's a knight and a poet, too!⁹

For much of Wagner's career a good amount of criticism was leveled at him for "breaking all the rules" regarding form or harmonic relationships.¹⁰ He saw himself as the young Walther, inspired by Nature and a kinship with the *Volk*, yet misunderstood by his critics, here represented by the guild. Through Sachs's influence and instruction, Walther eventually crafts a song that both follows the rules and manages to be creative, thus winning him the acclaim heard in the final song of the opera.

Identifying Wagner in both Sachs and Walther makes the "explicit argument"¹¹ of the opera clear: music is in need of renewal, and the musician who will bring about this renewal must manage a synthesis of tradition with innovation. As Bryan Magee wryly put it, "no marks for guessing who."¹² Here Wagner is pointing to himself as just the person to renew music, indeed, to renew German music in the face of foreign threat. Recall Sachs's (and the peoples') sentiment from the end of the opera,

Even should the
 Holy Roman Empire dissolve in mist,
 For us there would yet remain

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰ Barry Millington, *Wagner* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1984), 245.

¹¹ Goehr, "Die Meistersinger," 48.

¹² Bryan Magee, *Aspects of Wagner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

Holy German Art!¹³

Immediately before these lines, Sachs conveys a more sinister warning, one that in the context of sixteenth-century Nuremberg might refer to the Thirty-Years War; during the Weimar era, audiences almost certainly would have understood these words in relation to Germany's humiliating defeat in the First World War.

Beware! Evil tricks threaten us:
 if the German people and kingdom should one day decay,
 under a false, foreign rule
 soon no prince will understand his people any more;
 and foreign mists with foreign vanities they will plant in our German land;
 what is German and true no one would know any more,
 if it did not live in the honour of the German masters.¹⁴

Within the context of the final act, in which Walther sings the song that Sachs helped him craft in order to win Eva, this sudden reference to foreign (*welscher*) rule intrudes into the festal atmosphere. This notion of *welscher* rule is particularly pointed, as this word was often used as a pejorative describing French people or culture.¹⁵ Only by honoring the “German masters” can *Kultur* be saved from the vicissitudes of French *Zivilisation*.

Wagner's conception of art and the artist's role in society as put forth in *Meistersinger* is based on the creation of an artistically informed community. Inspiration alone is not enough; a deep engagement with the community and (German) cultural tradition is necessary to create a true masterwork. The artist is a central component of Wagner's ideal society, simultaneously guarding and renewing tradition through a combination of inspiration and mastery of craft. Art loses its power when it is divorced

¹³ Wagner, *Die Meistersinger*, libretto in liner notes, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 39.

¹⁵ Millington, 245.

from society. In *Meistersinger*, the artist does not stand apart from society, but in the center of it.

Pfitzner, Palestrina, and Polemics

The argument laid out at the end of *Meistersinger* for the universality of German art and the superiority of its tradition resonated deeply for composers and authors in the twentieth century, perhaps none more so than Hans Pfitzner. With his 1917 opera *Palestrina*, Pfitzner provided a very different view of the composer: no longer an important member of the community, the composer is now an aloof genius who stands apart from society in order to maintain the integrity of inherited tradition. As Marc Weiner has written, for Pfitzner the artist is a “passive recipient, a vessel for the expression of art which pass[es] through the artist and exist[s] independent of the lives of men and of their political and social turmoil.”¹⁶ Pfitzner’s reinterpretation of the Wagnerian ideal in *Palestrina* proved both highly influential and controversial, spawning a series of widely read polemics between the composer and, at various times, Ferruccio Busoni, Paul Bekker, and Alban Berg. In 1918 Thomas Mann wrote about *Palestrina* approvingly in his sprawling defense of German conservatism, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (*Reflections of a Non-Political Man*), cementing the linkage between *Meistersinger* and *Palestrina* while simultaneously making *Palestrina* a cultural touchstone synonymous with artistic and political nationalism and conservatism.

Like *Meistersinger*, *Palestrina* is also an opera about an historic composer/musician engaged in the creation of a masterpiece. Like Wagner, it is clear

¹⁶ Marc A. Weiner, *Undertones of Insurrection: Music and Cultural Politics in the Modern German Narrative* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 162.

that Pfitzner personally identified with the main character, in this case the Counter-Reformation-era Italian composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina.¹⁷ Pfitzner found a kindred spirit in Palestrina, a papal composer who, according to the sources available to Pfitzner, was often treated indifferently in his own time.¹⁸ Until the composition of *Palestrina*, Pfitzner enjoyed only moderate fame in German art music, moving through a series of undistinguished teaching and conducting appointments until he was appointed to the head of the Strasbourg Conservatory in 1908.¹⁹ The security and prestige of his appointment in Strasbourg was fleeting; the Germans were forced to cede Alsace-Lorraine back to France after the First World War, and Pfitzner found himself without a job. During the Weimar period he bounced between teaching positions in Berlin and Munich, but a post that carried significant prestige eluded him. In Palestrina, Pfitzner saw a composer who (like himself) was an unrecognized genius toiling in obscurity for his art, eventually forging a masterpiece despite the turmoil surrounding him.²⁰ In Pfitzner's mind, both composers lived at a time of crisis, standing alone against the "degeneration of musical style" and the onset of decadence.²¹

Set in three acts to a libretto of Pfitzner's own writing, *Palestrina* takes place during the Council of Trent, at a time when the Church is considering the banishment of all polyphonic music from the Mass. The tension between new music and tradition is

¹⁷ Richard Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. by Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 594. Wagner occasionally referred to himself as "Hans Sachs" when corresponding with King Ludwig, who admired the composer a great deal.

¹⁸ John Williamson, *The Music of Hans Pfitzner* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 128.

¹⁹ Michael Kater, "Culture, Society, and Politics in the Cosmos of 'Hans Pfitzner the German'" in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 179.

²⁰ Williamson, 128-129.

²¹ Ibid.

apparent from the first scene, in which Silla, Palestrina's student, works at composing a song in a style very much unlike that of his teacher, remarking that he longs to leave the study of counterpoint behind and learn from Pietro Bardi, a member of the new "Florentine" school.²² Cardinal Borromeo, who has come to ask Palestrina to write a Mass that will prove the worthiness of polyphony for the Church, overhears Silla and confronts Palestrina about his student's non-traditional style, asking why he allows Silla to sing in such "sinful strains." Palestrina replies resignedly,

The art that masters through the ages
have built, through a mysterious alliance,
into an ever growing edifice,
to which they gave their trust, their lives,
to which I too have offered up my poor existence,
to him seems too well-worn, too-second hand,
he thinks it obsolete, believes it dead.²³

In what can only be a swipe at critics like Busoni, Pfitzner then has Palestrina continue,

But now a clique of amateurs in Florence
have taken antique, heathen writings
and worked out artificial theories
according to which music will be made.²⁴

Borromeo is astonished at Palestrina's lack of action, and demands that the composer reign in his student, but Palestrina says simply,

And Silla hurries eagerly toward them
and thinks and lives only in these new sounds.
Perhaps he's right. Who knows? Maybe the world
is set on pathways never yet imagined,
and what we thought was eternal
is bound to pass away.
One finds it hard to grasp—sad to believe.²⁵

²² Weiner, 164.

²³ Hans Pfitzner, *Palestrina – A Musical Legend in Three Acts*, Berlin Classics 0310 001 CD, libretto in liner notes, 38.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

The fatalism demonstrated by Palestrina toward Silla and the new style of composition emanating from Florence typified Pfitzner's attitude toward musical progress: stylistic evolution is inevitable, but not always desirable. Furthermore, the traditions of the past are worth defending regardless of current trends or fashions. Here Pfitzner is glossing his very public spat with fellow composer Ferruccio Busoni, whose *A New Aesthetic of Music* of 1907 caught Pfitzner's eye (and ire) when it was reprinted in 1916.²⁶ Busoni argued that the harmonic and formal language of Romanticism had run its course and was in need of renewal through the use of new materials, including quarter tones; although the inner emotional content of a piece of music remained constant over time, the means of conveyance must change with the times:

The spirit of an art-work, the measure of emotion, of humanity, that is in it these remain unchanged in value through changing years; the form which these three assumed, the manner of their expression, and the fire of the epoch which gave them birth, are transient and age rapidly.²⁷

Pfitzner fired back with his own polemic, *Futuristengefahr* (*Against the Dangerous Futurists*), scorning Busoni's desire for a change in musical materials, writing, "systems, rules, forms in music grow from music itself, just as with species of animals and plants in nature; some die out there, many survive. The rule against fifths has its own eternal correctness, as every real musician feels."²⁸ In Pfitzner's view, the expression of the universal in art will necessarily utilize techniques and form that also have their own "eternal correctness."

Busoni ran particularly afoul of Pfitzner when he called the timelessness of

²⁶ Weiner, 16.

²⁷ Ferruccio Busoni, *A New Esthetic of Music*, trans. Dr. Th. Baker (New York: G. Schirmer and Sons, 1911), 2.

²⁸ Quoted in Taylor-Jay, 50.

Beethoven and Bach into question later in his tract, writing, “Therefore, Bach and Beethoven are to be regarded as a *beginning*, and not as unsurpassable finalities.”²⁹

Pfizer’s retort to this statement gives an excellent overview of the aesthetic argument taken up in Palestrina:

Busoni hopes that the *future* will bring everything for Western music, and he thinks of the present and the past as a stuttering beginning, as the preparation. But what if it is different? If we find ourselves at a high point or even if the high point has already gone by? If our past century or our past century and a half makes up the golden age of Western music, the height, the real period of splendor that will never return and that is followed by a decline, a decadence similar to the period after the blossoming of Greek tragedy? My feeling tends much more toward this opinion. ... Should our present task not be, instead of ... wanting to destroy everything that has been accomplished for the sake of something new—should our present task not rather be to encourage a loving contemplation of what has been created and what is being created at present, and indeed, not just of what is floating on the surface? ... The preceding era asked of all new things: Is this comfortable and understandable for me? The present one asks: Will I not look foolishly behind the times?³⁰

Pfizer believed that the golden age of Western music was near its end and that any attempt to surpass the standard set by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms was pure decadence, and not worthy of the real composer. Instead, an attempt to preserve the “golden age” is made, even in the face of formal progress. This is not to say that Pfizer did not believe in progress, in a way. He realized that music would keep evolving, but he was skeptical that the result of further musical evolution would be an improvement: “Well, I do not want to put a spoke in the wheel of the ruling world spirit; let what must come, come. Whether what comes is beautiful is another question; and whether it will be more beautiful than what we already have is a crucial question for us.”³¹

In the opera, Palestrina views himself as the last in a long line of masters. The

²⁹ Busoni, 19.

³⁰ Quoted in Mann, 304.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

fact that musical innovation is shifting to Florence and the music of Monteverdi and the camerata is irrelevant; Palestrina is responsible for upholding the tradition passed down through the generations. Pfitzner saw himself in much the same way. At the end of the opera, having succeeded in his task, Palestrina prays,

Now fashion me, the final precious stone
on one of your unnumbered rings,
thou God! And I will be of good heart
and live in peace.³²

Reviewing *Palestrina* for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Eric Fließ noted that having reached the highest triumph with his Mass, “He remains alone. He lets it be sufficient to have completed it as a necessary element of world events.” After quoting the above passage, Fließ closed his remarks on the libretto by writing, “It is no coincidence that these concluding words full of holy, redeeming devotion to the will of the primal being were the first that Pfitzner put down on paper.”³³ For Pfitzner, the idea of the composer as an instrument, a passive vessel responsible to history itself was central to the portrait of the composer in *Palestrina*.

Shortly after his debate with Busoni over musical tradition and innovation, Pfitzner found himself in another polemic war, this time with Paul Bekker. As a friend and advisor to both Leo Kestenberg and Franz Schreker, he argued for the formation of an artistically minded community in which the audience, performer, and composer all play significant roles in the formation of musical meaning.³⁴ Pfitzner, on the other hand, saw the audience as passive recipients of the genius emanating from the stage. Bekker entered the polemic debate with an article entitled *Futuristengefahr?* (a play on the title

³²Pfitzner, *Palestrina*, libretto in liner notes, 104.

³³ Eric Fließ, “Palestrina,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 89 (1917): 206-207.

³⁴ Weiner, 51.

of Pfitzner's polemic), published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. In his article, Bekker defended Busoni's position of musical progress, writing that the "futurism" espoused by Busoni was not a danger facing art. The only danger in Bekker's mind was "...stagnation. In movement there can never be danger, because it releases powers that stagnation cripples and binds."³⁵

Never one to take criticism lying down, Pfitzner attacked Bekker over an interpretive framework the critic employed in his popular writings on the work of Beethoven and other symphonists. Bekker argued that all of Beethoven's works had their foundation in a poetic idea, and he sought to show how these works convey the poetic idea through the use of form and harmony.³⁶ In essence, Bekker attempted to grant the audience a certain amount of agency in their interpretation of Beethoven's work, and he believed that a Beethoven symphony should have the ability to build "communities of feeling."³⁷ This notion that was strongly opposed by Pfitzner, who believed that music—especially the music of Beethoven—could not be reduced to extra-musical analysis:

This kind of aesthetic must delight all musical quacks and dolts; they are protected by it, it justifies them. In order to satisfy followers of this aesthetic, one need not have the least musical talent. If nothing more depends on the music itself, but only on the "poetic idea," "the program," the power to "form communities," then it is easy to compose....Actually, there is no way of looking at art that is more false, more unmusical, and that removes one further from the work of art than the one developed in [Bekker's] book. He who does not comprehend that a Beethoven theme...is to be enjoyed *directly*, as a world all its own, indivisible, untranslatable, he now needs to dissect it, to describe, to interpret, to cut it up into pieces as a child tears apart a doll, a butterfly, he does not know what music is.³⁸

³⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁷ Bekker, *Neue Musik*, 37

³⁸ Quoted in Weiner, 54.

What may have at first seemed to be a rather esoteric debate about the finer points of musical analysis quickly erupted into a larger socio-political argument over the primacy of the individual versus the community in the creation of art. Bekker argued for an engagement between artist and community, an engagement that he believed was innately democratic. With statements like the one quoted above, it is clear that Pfitzner argued for an elitist view of artistic creation and consumption, one that is fundamentally undemocratic. For Pfitzner, artistic creation did not spring from continual engagement with the community, but from inspiration from the past. Again, the composer is not his own master; he is a passive recipient in the creative process, a belief made clear in *Palestrina*.

In Act I Scene V of *Palestrina*, the composer sits at his desk with his head buried in his arms. Cardinal Borromeo has commissioned him —ordered, really—to compose a Mass that will correct the obscurantism into which church music has fallen and thereby save music for the Western world. He cannot bring himself to compose, bereft as he is at the loss of his dear wife Lucrezia. He wonders aloud what meaning life even holds anymore, when he finds himself surrounded by the ghosts of musical masters from bygone eras. They inform him that he must write this Mass; it is inevitable: he has been chosen to become a Master himself, they proclaim:

We look upon you from afar
with gladness, as you grow in stature.
The chosen ones long for the one
who will complete their circle; you have been selected!³⁹

Palestrina protests, but to no avail; he says that he has nothing more to give, that he is part of an age that is coming to an end, he is weary unto death, and that there is nothing

³⁹ Pfitzner, *Palestrina*, libretto in liner notes, 49.

more to be wrung from him. Eventually Palestrina picks up his pen and begins to compose while in a dream-like state, carried along by angels as they sing “Gloria in excelsis Deo!” Palestrina writes the whole Mass this way, and then collapses into a deep sleep.

For Pfitzner, art and inspiration were products of genius that often flowed autonomously. There is no process in this construction, no communal participation: there is only the composer alone at his desk, composing because it is inevitable and he can do nothing else. Here Pfitzner separates his views on the nature of creativity not only from Bekker, but also from Wagner. Inspiration is important, but it is not enough by itself to create a masterwork in *Meistersinger*. Only through participation with tradition and the community combined with inspiration could Walther compose his master song and renew both the tradition and the community. In *Palestrina* there is no renewal of tradition, only an elitist defense of it.

Palestrina's centrality to the debate about art and the artist in contemporary society was cemented in 1918, when Thomas Mann, one of Germany's most famous authors and influential cultural critics, wrote an adoring essay about the opera in his *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*. Although Mann eventually came to embrace democracy and the Weimar Republic, he was a staunch defender of the monarchy and of German nationalism during the years of the First World War. Mann's temperament was fundamentally conservative, and *Reflections of a Non-Political Man* was Mann's sprawling, impassioned defense of German *Kultur* over French *Zivilisation*. Mann believed in the rightness of Germany's cause and also envisioned a Germany that was an intellectual community more than a political state. A basic tenet of Mann's (and

Pfitzner's) conservatism is that the intellectual or artistic life remains untouched by the stains of the real world, in keeping with the Schopenhauerian epigram at the top of the score of *Palestrina*: "Alongside world history there goes, guiltless and unstained by blood, the history of philosophy, science, and the arts." As such, the intellectual conservatism outlined by Mann was wholly incompatible with democracy and party politics as represented by France and America, which Mann believed were a debasement of the intellectual fidelity unique to German society.⁴⁰

Mann recognized this kind of intellectual conservatism in *Palestrina* and felt an innate kinship with the opera, remarking

I have heard Hans Pfitzner's musical legend, *Palestrina*, three times now, and remarkably easily and quickly I made this difficult and audacious production into my own, my intimate possession. This work, something ultimate, consciously ultimate, from the sphere of Schopenhauer and Wagner, of romanticism, with its characteristics reminiscent of Dürer and Faust, its metaphysical mood, its ethos of "cross, death, and grave," its mixture of music, pessimism, and humor—it is completely "to the point," to the point of this book, its appearance at this moment brought me the consolation and blessing of complete sympathy. It agrees with my innermost idea of humanity, it makes me positive, releases me from polemics...⁴¹

Mann was impressed with Pfitzner's musical setting, which he wrote was evocative of the "Middle Ages...the breath of the grave, crypt and skeleton," thus confirming for him the high ethical worth of the opera.⁴² Mann also understood that the work's value was more in its ideological character than in its merits as a composition: "*Palestrina* is really a great work that, although it stands higher ethically than artistically, completely lacks

⁴⁰ Williamson, 36.

⁴¹ Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: F. Ungar, 1983), 297.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 298.

progressive optimism, political *virtue*, that is. It is romanticism not only as an artistic confession, but also more deeply so, in its spiritual tendency, its intellectual mood...⁴³

In a conversation with Pfitzner, recorded in *Reflections*, Mann and the composer compared *Palestrina* to *Meistersinger*. Among the similarities: Palestrina and Sachs/Walther, the mass and the prize song, and the use of church music as a stylizing force.⁴⁴ The difference, according to Pfitzner, can be explained through an analysis of the final scenes:

At the end of the *Meistersinger* there is a stage full of light, rejoicing of the people, engagement, brilliance and glory; in my work there is, to be sure, Palestrina, who is also celebrated, but in the half-darkness of his room under the picture of the deceased one, dreaming at his organ. The *Meistersinger* is the apotheosis of the new, a praise of the future and of life; in *Palestrina*, everything tends toward the past, it is dominated by *sympathy with death*.⁴⁵

Pfitzner represented to Mann the ideal German artist: “national but nonpolitical... In his music he had been German as no other; his instinct, his basic desire to preserve, had stood deeply hostile to all artistic ‘democracy,’ to all European intellectualism.”⁴⁶

Despite the fact that Mann later came to regret the views he espoused in *Reflections* while Pfitzner became more entrenched in nationalist politics, the two men maintained a mutual respect for each other for the rest of their lives, even after Pfitzner played a key role in precipitating Mann’s exile from Germany in 1933. The debate over the nature of creativity and the role of the artist presented in *Palestrina* and argued in subsequent polemic works remained front and center throughout the years of the

⁴³ Ibid., 310. Italics in original.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 311.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Italics in original.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 312-313.

Republic, and, as shown in the previous chapter, occasionally interfered with attempts at reforming the material conditions of musicians and composers.

Ariadne auf Naxos

Palestrina was not the only artist-opera with an affinity for *Die Meistersinger* written during the last years of the Empire. Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/revised 1916) provided audiences with a very different conception of the composer and his role in society from that of Pfitzner. Although it was nowhere nearly as influential on the subsequent aesthetic debates undertaken by composers and writers in the 1920s, it stands as an example of a very different understanding of the Wagnerian inheritance, one that sought to highlight the notion of composer as craftsman. By examining the correspondence between Strauss and Hofmannsthal, we can gain a different viewpoint from that presented in *Palestrina* of a composer who performed the process of musical composition for his audiences both onstage and in his letters.

The initial idea for *Ariadne auf Naxos* originated with Hofmannsthal in 1911, shortly after his successful collaboration with Strauss on *Der Rosenkavalier*. Hofmannsthal's conception was novel: a dramatic performance of Molière's comic *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* would serve as a prologue to a short, stylized *opera seria* on the mythological subject of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus on the island of Naxos. In Molière's original, a music teacher, his student, and a dancing master are to provide the evening's entertainment for a nouveau-riche bourgeois gentleman named Jourdain. Jourdain—who despite his money is culturally illiterate—freely offers his unsolicited

opinions on the value of the art produced by those in his employ, which only serves to prove his ignorance further.

When Strauss received Hofmannsthal's adaption of the Molière in May of 1911, he immediately seized on the topical possibilities provided by the characters of the Composer and Dancing Master. He wrote, "I have read your *Gentilhomme*; Part I is delightful, especially the first scene for Composer and Dancing-master, which I dare say you will contrive to make still stronger—there is a fine opportunity here for a smack at the critics."⁴⁷ Strauss went on to remark that the second part, i.e., the opera seria, was thin dramatically and was in desperate need of a "point."⁴⁸ From the beginning, Strauss saw the *Ariadne* project as an opportunity to vent at critics and share his own views on art and society; indeed, when the entire work was revamped in 1916 he lobbied for an even more expansive role for the Composer.⁴⁹

Strauss and Hofmannsthal were at loggerheads throughout the composition of the work. Strauss thought that the center of the work was really the comedic Prologue, which he thought fertile ground for laughs at the expense of his critics (as embodied by the know-nothing Jourdain).⁵⁰ Hofmannsthal, on the other hand, was attracted to the symbolism of the Ariadne myth and was particularly taken with the antithesis between Ariadne and her comedic foil, Zerbinetta. Ever the practical musician, Strauss worried

⁴⁷ Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal, May 20, 1911, in Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 1907-1918*, trans. Paul England (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), 106.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal, April 6, 1916, in Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship: the Correspondence Between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, ed. and trans. Hanns Hammelmann and Ewald Osers (Vienna House, 1971), 241.

⁵⁰ Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, December 18, 1911. Ibid., 107.

that Hofmannsthal's symbolism would be lost on audiences, suggesting that the poet include his interpretation of the work in the program, lest the audience and critics misunderstand the work, writing, "If even I couldn't see it, just think of the audiences and—the critics. The way you describe it it's excellent. But the piece itself doesn't emerge quite so clearly and plainly."⁵¹

One of Strauss's chief concerns with the dramatic flow of the work was the transition from the Prologue into the opera seria. Hofmannsthal's solution proved brilliant, and very important for the future revision of the work. The transition would occur in a newly composed scene to take place right before the curtain raises on the opera, which was to be followed by a light-hearted comic piece performed by Zerbinetta and her troupe. Suddenly, Jourdain's footman announces to the Composer and the performers that, in the interest of time, both works are to be performed simultaneously. The Composer is furious, but Zerbinetta finds a way for her troupe to work themselves into the opera without causing undue distraction. This, according to Hofmannsthal, would motivate what comes after while allowing the space to plainly state "under cover of a joke" the antithesis between the characters of Ariadne and Zerbinetta.⁵²

Strauss approved of the idea enthusiastically, trying once more to goad Hofmannsthal into expanding the roles of the Composer and Dancing Master. He even suggested the idea of an affair between the Composer and Zerbinetta, provided the Composer did not resemble him (Strauss) too closely.⁵³ If handled properly, Strauss

⁵¹ Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal, July 19, 1911. *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁵² Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, July 23, 1911. *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵³ Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal, July 24, 1911. *Ibid.*, 101. Strauss was justifiably squeamish about being portrayed as having an affair onstage: the alleged (though false)

thought, these characters could get their jabs in at critics and others in the music industry while simultaneously disarming them with a certain amount of ironic self-deprecation.

He wrote to Hofmannsthal:

Give your sense of humor its head, drop in a few malicious remarks about the “composer”—that sort of thing always amuses the audience and every piece of self-persiflage takes the wind out of the critics’ sails. Molière’s piece is a little silly, but it can become a hit provided you develop the two parts of Composer and Dancing Master in such a way that everything is said that can be said today about the relationship of public, critics, and artist.⁵⁴

Despite Hofmannsthal’s objections, Strauss insisted that the center of the work be the scene preceding the opera seria and that they seize the opportunity to expound upon the modern relationship between artist, audience, and critic through the characters of the Composer and Zerbinetta. In short, Strauss conceived of *Ariadne* as an artist-opera, albeit an idiosyncratic one.

Strauss also invoked a direct comparison to *Meistersinger*, just as he did several years later in conceiving *Intermezzo*. It seems clear that Strauss’s own conception of the artist-opera was shaped in large part by his personal reception of *Meistersinger*. In writing about *Meistersinger* to Hofmannsthal, both in 1911 and 1927, Strauss places the center of meaning in Wagner’s opera at the intersection of biography and criticism of contemporary artistic life, viewed through the lens of light-hearted comedy. Though *Ariadne* had a very different dramatic surface than that of Wagner’s opera, Strauss believed the two works to be kindred spirits, performing similar functions half a century apart. Strauss even suggested to Hofmannsthal that *Ariadne* could become “a companion

infidelity between Strauss and a woman named Mieke Mücke that would eventually become the plot for *Intermezzo* was still a little too close for comfort.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 100.

piece to *Meistersinger*: fifty years after.”⁵⁵ While Hofmannsthal ignored Strauss’s remarks at the time, he would later frame his major revision of the Composer in terms of *Die Meistersinger*.⁵⁶

Although Hofmannsthal was not prepared to engage in the sort of topicality envisioned by Strauss, audiences and critics alike easily saw the figure of the Composer as a stand-in for Strauss. The title of a *New York Times* article previewing the opera on September 16, 1912 proclaimed, “Strauss Has a Role In His Opera—Character of Young Composer in ‘Ariadne auf Naxos’ Is Himself.”⁵⁷ The preview went on to state, “The young composer has a speaking role in Hofmannsthal’s comedy, and the opportunity is given to Strauss through his mouth to ventilate his views.”⁵⁸ This impression held through the October 25th Stuttgart premiere. In his review, the correspondent for the *Times* mentioned the biographical elements as portrayed by the Composer, drawing a parallel with Wagner:

Strauss has emulated the example set by Richard Wagner and has placed a thinly-veiled impersonation of himself among the characters of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. His counterfeit is a young composer who has a speaking role, and in a specially created scene expresses certain cynical views on present day music conditions. One of the typical sallies that the pseudo Strauss hurls at the pretensions of culture on the part of the modern rich is “They pay us well, and nowadays that’s more indispensable to our arts than anything else.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ In the correspondence surrounding the genesis of the 1912 Hofmannsthal never acknowledges Strauss’s request for the enlargement of the Composer’s role or the comparison to *Meistersinger*. Hofmannsthal did make the connection, however, in a letter to Strauss in June, 1913. Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, June 12, 1913. Ibid., 170.

⁵⁷ “Strauss Has a Role In His Opera—Character of Young Composer in ‘Ariadne Auf Naxos’ Is Himself,” *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1912.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “New Strauss Opera a Middling Success,” *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1912.

Writing in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Eisenmann made note not of the autobiographical elements of the plot but rather those elements in the score itself. In a mostly positive review, he remarked that the “youngest child of the Straussian muse” looked “totally like its Papa.”⁶⁰ He continued, “Everything is found therein: the illustrative art, the lush poetry, the refined fine orchestration, the sweeping pathos of Strauss as well as the tendency toward reminiscences of himself and other famous examples...”⁶¹ In the fuller context of these remarks, it is clear that Eisenmann is referring to musical reminiscences and quotations in the score that serve as a biography in music, with references from Strauss’s own earlier works and from his greatest theatrical influences, notably Mozart and Wagner. This focus on detail and the refinement of craft—embodied for Eisenmann in Strauss’s “refined fine orchestration” and his use of musical quotation—showcases Strauss’s professionalism. Music and orchestration with this level of precision is not created in a fit of inspiration in a lonely ivory tower; it is created through hard work and diligence in an office study. Critics such as Adorno routinely dismissed these displays of technical virtuosity in Strauss as evidence of his bourgeois temperament, but this is exactly the image of himself that Strauss sought to promote. An artist, yes, but also a professional who should be treated and protected by the law in the same manner as others of the professional class.

⁶⁰ “Dieses jüngste Kind der Strauß’schen Muse, wie schaut es aus? Antwort: ‘Ganz der Herr Papa’, wie es in der Operette heißt.” A. Eisenmann, “Ariadne auf Naxos,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 79/44 (October 31, 1912): 613. Eisenmann’s use of “Ganz der Herr Papa” is likely an allusion to the texted motive in Strauss’s *Symphonia Domestica* at rehearsal 18.

⁶¹ “Alles ist darin zu finden: die illustrative Kunst, die üppige Lyrik, die raffiniert feine Orchestrierung, das schwungvolle Pathos Straußens so gut wie die Neigung zu Reminiszenzen an sich selbst und an andere berühmte Vorbilder dieses Vielbewunderten und Vielgeschmähten.” Ibid.

Despite the excitement in the media, and even despite a few positive reviews like Eisenmann's, the Stuttgart premiere of *Ariadne* was viewed by most as a disappointment. Alfred Kerr was scathing in his review, describing the work as a "mixture of serious matter which is not serious with comic matter which is not comic."⁶² He went on to characterize Strauss's score as "whispering, rattling, skipping, whistling, cajoling, humming, shrieking, and wailing like—like something by a Mozart who has studied the warp and woof of *Meistersinger*."⁶³ The pejorative intent aside, Kerr's description is somewhat apt, not only of *Ariadne* but of much of Strauss's oeuvre. Mozart and Wagner were easily the two most important influences in Strauss's musical life (Strauss often compared his cosmopolitan style to Mozart), and part of the grand irony of *Ariadne* is the anachronistic mixture of those styles mediated through Strauss.

Additionally, the technical demands of the work proved difficult to accommodate: because the Molière was a play with incidental music, the work required a theatrical troupe alongside the opera company. Furthermore, Strauss and Hofmannsthal brought several singers and actors from Berlin, as well as the sets and costumes, which infuriated the Stuttgart actors and singers. Perhaps most importantly, the performance lasted far too long, in part because of the forty-five-minute intermission reception thrown by King Karl of Württemberg.⁶⁴ The evening was not a total loss, however, as Strauss was called out for at least a dozen curtain calls.⁶⁵ After the lukewarm critical reception in Stuttgart, *Ariadne* was performed over the course of the next few years in Munich, Berlin, and Vienna, but with only with marginal success. A frustrated Hofmannsthal confided in

⁶² Quoted in Tim Ashley, *Richard Strauss* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 104.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Strauss, *Recollections and Reflections*, 165.

⁶⁵ Eisenmann, 614.

Strauss's wife in early 1916 that he wished he had pulled the work after the Stuttgart premiere, only to bring it out "perhaps some years later, as something untarnished and fresh."⁶⁶

Despite the many setbacks the original *Ariadne* experienced, Hofmannsthal was unwilling to give up on the opera, working at revisions already in 1913, although it would take him until 1916 to bring Strauss back on board. Hofmannsthal wrote to Strauss on June 6, 1913 that it was no use "tinkering" with the original, merely "cutting this scene or that, or patching it up." He concluded that only a radical reimagining of the Prologue would do, one that placed the Composer squarely at the center of the drama.⁶⁷

Hofmannsthal described his new conception of the Composer as a figure who was "symbolically...half tragic, half comic," around whom the disparate worlds of Zerbinetta and Ariadne revolve.⁶⁸ Whereas in the 1912 version the Composer was an object of ridicule for both Jourdain and Zerbinetta,⁶⁹ in the revision, the Composer (and his enlightened views on art) would be transcendent, if only for a moment. This moment would culminate in a triumphant aria entitled, "Music is a Holy Art." Here Hofmannsthal—perhaps trying to pique Strauss's interest—drew a parallel to *Meistersinger*, stating that the Composer's aria would be a "kind of a little Prize Song," remarking parenthetically that "the whole *Ariadne* with the Prologue possesses a remote, purely conceptual affinity with *Meistersinger*."⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Letter from Strauss to Pauline Strauss, February 18, 1916, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 240.

⁶⁷ Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, June 6, 1913. *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Ashley, 120.

⁷⁰ Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, June 12, 1913, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 170.

Considering the Composer's aria within the context of Walther's Prize Song is an interesting exercise. To be sure, the two arias do possess only a remote, conceptual affinity, but their juxtaposition shows the intense irony of *Ariadne* and its modernist inversion of Wagnerian artistic triumphalism. Walther's aria is inspired by his deep and abiding love for Eva, mediated through the careful tutelage of Hans Sachs. His aria is idealistic and triumphant, marking a victory for artistic inspiration over the stultifying influences of pedantry and philistinism, a point further reinforced by Hans Sachs's subsequent lecture on holy German Art. At the conclusion of his aria, Walther is made a member of the Mastersinger's guild, and the town rejoices in the renewal of their artistic resources. Walther's aria is also a set-piece and is the long-expected culmination of the events in the third act. Conversely, the Composer's short aria, "Music is a holy art," is inspired not by love, but by a flirtatious conversation with Zerbinetta. In her aria, "A moment is nothing," she tells the Composer ("with extreme coquetry"), that, although she appears light-hearted and carefree, she really is lonely and in sympathy with the Composer.⁷¹ Transfixed by Zerbinetta, the Composer bursts forth in spontaneous song, and is distracted from the radical changes being made to his opera just long enough for all of the characters to take their places. In short, the Composer has been hustled. At the conclusion of his aria, nothing changes: despite his newly found confidence in the holiness and eternity of art, his masterpiece will still be bowdlerized against his will, causing him to despair almost immediately. While both the characters onstage and the audience in the seats wait patiently for Walther's Prize Song in *Meistersinger*, nobody on

⁷¹ Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Staatskapelle Dresden, directed by Giuseppe Sinopoli, Deutsche Grammophon, 2001, libretto in liner notes, trans. Peggy Cochrane, 59.

stage seems to have paid any attention to the Composer in *Ariadne*. The audience hears his peroration, but the Composer's gesture is rendered impotent and subsequently ironic when the final preparations are made for the new, improvised admixture of comedy and tragedy to continue unabated.

Despite Hofmannsthal's many changes to the Prologue, differences of opinion about the dramatic heart of the work surfaced quickly between composer and librettist. On April 6, 1916 Strauss wrote to Hofmannsthal suggesting further change to the part of the Composer. His first suggestion was to write the part for soprano, citing the lack of quality tenors available for the Vienna premiere of the revamped work.⁷² Although this was not the first time that a Strauss-Hofmannsthal collaboration featured a male character scored for soprano—the character of Octavian from *Der Rosenkavalier* comes immediately to mind—Hofmannsthal protested the idea vigorously, on the grounds that any attempt to “prettify” the Composer would result in a loss of spiritual depth critical to the correct understanding of the role. Despite Hofmannsthal's objections, Strauss refused to concede this point on purely practical grounds: good tenors were hard to find, and a leading baritone would not sing the role.

Yet Hofmannsthal was right: writing the Composer as a pants role does deflate the sense of “spirituality” and “greatness” around him, which was exactly what Strauss wished to do: what Hofmannsthal described as “opportunism in matters theatrical” was an attempt on the part of Strauss to avoid failing twice with the same work. As in the 1912 version, Strauss wished to downplay the idealism and high-mindedness of the work, seeking instead to bring forward the comic, cynical, and subversive elements of the story.

⁷² Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal, April 6, 1916, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 241.

Nowhere is this made clearer than in his second suggestion in the letter of April 6, 1916. Not only did Strauss wish for the Composer to be scored for soprano, he also wanted him to have the last word:

...perhaps you could write an additional pretty little solo scene for the Composer at the end (after *Ariadne!*): wistfully poetical—possibly by making him burst out in despair after *Ariadne*: ‘What have you done to my work’, and then the Major-domo could appear and pay the poor devil his salary, or the Count might appear and pay him some compliments, announce the acceptance of the opera by the Imperial Opera House in its present form (with the *Zerbinetta* scenes), or any other amusing idea that comes to mind—and then a wistfully-poetical final contemplation.⁷³

Strauss wanted to end on a comic, or at least ironic, note rather than with the tragedy of the *Ariadne* opera seria. Both of the scenarios envisioned by Strauss were (and still are) part and parcel of performing and composing for a living. In the first scenario, the Composer mourns the hackneyed butchering of his work at the command of Jourdain—until he gets paid, of course. Once paid, he forgets his woes and goes on his way. The second scenario, while a little more absurd, would certainly have spoken to Strauss’s ironic side: the haphazard monstrosity created for the evening’s entertainment was deemed by the critics worthy of performance at the Imperial Opera House. What is our young Composer to do? Refuse the invitation on principle (as Hofmannsthal undoubtedly would have done) and risk toiling in obscurity indefinitely, or accept the invitation to have his work heard by a large audience, even under less-than-perfect circumstances?

Strauss’s proposal to amend the ending was a bridge too far for Hofmannsthal; his caustic and somewhat hysterical reply accusing Strauss of destroying the “lofty atmosphere” of

⁷³ Ibid.

the work to make the part of the Composer “an inch longer” caused Strauss to back away from his suggestions.⁷⁴

Despite losing the battle over the Composer, Strauss did manage to get the last word in the opera, via Zerbinetta. As a compromise between the lofty ending desired by Hofmannsthal and the ironic one proposed by Strauss, Hofmannsthal proposed to have the “counter-voice” of Zerbinetta comment briefly on the closing scene. As Bacchus and Ariadne sail off together, she appears on the wing of the stage to sing, “when the new god approaches, we surrender without a word.”⁷⁵ In other words, when a new patron comes calling, composers quickly forget their scruples. The potent mixture of high style and irony had been achieved.

The premiere of the 1916 version took place at the Vienna Hofoper on October 4. Reviews were mixed, with Theodore Helm from the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* wondering whether *Ariadne* would be able to generate enough interest to fill the many seats of the Hofoper, despite the charms of the music and the excellent production.⁷⁶ Julius Korngold, in a long review for the *Neue Freie Presse*, had several good things to say about Strauss’s orchestration in what amounted to a rare positive review.⁷⁷ *Ariadne* still struggled to find an audience, and was received cautiously in Vienna. The new version was produced in November 1916 in Berlin and from there slowly began to

⁷⁴ Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, April 16, 1916, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 242.

⁷⁵ Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, libretto in liner notes, 92.

⁷⁶ Theodore Helm, “Die Neue ‘Ariadne’ in Wien,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 83 (November, 1916): 323.

⁷⁷ Julius Korngold, “Feuilleton,” *Neue Freie Presse*, October 5, 1916, 1-5.

replace the 1912 version in theaters across Germany.⁷⁸ Strauss and Hofmannsthal's ironic artist-opera gained true popularity only in the latter half of the twentieth century, and it is now considered among *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* as one of Strauss's greatest achievements.

Der ferne Klang

Perhaps no composer of the early twentieth century was as obsessed with portraying ideas about music and musical creation on stage as Franz Schreker. All of his operas feature artists, musicians, or the personification of music in some form or fashion. Kurt Westphal noted this tendency in a 1928 article celebrating the composer's fiftieth birthday. He wrote that for Schreker "sound as an originating phenomenon becomes his experience. He returns to it again and again in all of his works as the hub of dramatic action." Referencing instances of this tendency from Schreker's various operas, Westphal continued, "it sounds in the *Spielwerk* [Schreker's opera *Das Spielwerk und die Prinzessin*, 1908-1912] and from the column in *Memnon* [an unfinished opera by Schreker], it sounds from Elis's lute, it is the phantom after which Fritz chases. Music becomes the content of the music."⁷⁹ Ludwig Unterholzner expounded on this theme, noting that just as Wagner had overcome the "unreality of opera" by making music itself an integral part of the plot in *Meistersinger* (he refers specifically to Walther's Prize

⁷⁸ Michael Kennedy, *Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 193.

⁷⁹ "Klang als Urphänomen wird ihm zum Erlebnis. Als Angelpunkt des dramatischen Geschehens kehrt er in allen seinen Werken wieder. Er tönt in der 'Spielwerk' und in der Säule des 'Memnon', er klingt aus des Elis Laute, er ist das Phantom, dem Fritz nachjagt. Musik wird zum Inhalt der Musik." Kurt Westphal, "Franz Schreker. Zum seinen 50. Geburtstage am 28. März," *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (March 23, 1928): 305.

Song), so Schreker also overcame this same problem in opera by making music itself the focus of his operas. *Der ferne Klang* is exemplary in this manner, because the “distant sound” is the thing that motivates and creates all of the drama.⁸⁰

The 1912 premiere of *Der ferne Klang* was a great success and almost immediately placed Schreker at the center of operatic life in Germany and Austria. Schreker began teaching at the prestigious Vienna Academy of Fine Arts late in 1912 and was made professor of music theory and composition in early 1913 largely on the success of his first major opera. For many, the work signaled a new era in German opera, one free of the post-Wagnerian epigonism contained in the works of Siegfried Wagner, Engelbert Humperdinck, Erich Korngold, and others. The opera stayed consistently in the repertoire of theaters throughout Germany and Austria from the time of its premiere through the end of the 1920s, even as Schreker’s fame and importance as an opera composer dwindled over the course of the decade.

Of all of Schreker’s artist-operas, *Der ferne Klang* is the most dramatically conventional. The plot revolves around a young composer, Fritz, who is constantly in search of a “distant sound” that he believes will bring him fame and fortune. In Act I, he explains to his girlfriend Grete that he must leave her in order to find the sound, and will only return once he is successful. After he leaves, Grete is forced to flee home after her

⁸⁰ “Wo Wagner beispielsweise in den ‘Meistersingern’ in den Sängerswettstreiten, dem Ständchen und dem Preislied die Musik dem Stoff abgewinnt und damit der Irrealität eine Rechtfertigung wenigstens aus formbildenden Kräften schafft, da überwindet Schreker die Irrealität der Oper, indem er die Musik bereits der Handlung, nicht erst ihrem Aufbau einbezieht. Im ‘Fernen Klang’ ist dieser Typus bereits ganz klar ausgeprägt. In diesem ersten großen Werk ist der ‘Ferne Klang,’ der Fritz in die Welt hinaustreibt und damit als Ursache aller Konfliktstellungen erkannt wird, durchaus selbst als Komponente des Dramas, als ursächlich dramatischer Faktor zu werten.” Ludwig Unterholzner, “Franz Schreker als Opernkomponist,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (March 23, 1928): 306.

father promises her hand in marriage as payment for his gambling debts. Act II depicts a sumptuous bordello in Venice, where Grete (now Greta), is a sought after courtesan. Eventually Fritz, who is now a modestly successful composer but still in search of the sound, arrives and recognizes her. When he learns of her profession, he denounces her and leaves. Grete then abandons herself to the passions of her lifestyle in a wild dance. Act III takes place some years later, at the premiere of Fritz's opera. Grete, now a common streetwalker, is in attendance, and is overwhelmed by the music and faints. When she comes to, she sobs, recalling the woodland vision she had in Act I, the memory of which Fritz's music awoke in her. The final scene in the opera takes place in Fritz's study, where he is gazing out his window. As he watches the dawn, the distant sound begins to grow in intensity. He has heard about the woman who collapsed at his opera the night before and suspects that it was Grete. He has her brought to him, and the two are reconciled as the music representing the distant sound builds to a climax. Fritz realizes that the distant sound has been in Grete's love for him the whole time. At the peak of this climax, Fritz decides he will rewrite the last act of his opera, presumably to include the music of the distant sound. Alas, he would not get the chance, dying in Grete's arms. The curtain falls as Grete cries out.

Since the death of Wagner, opera composers struggled to reconcile the inheritance of his notions of Musikdrama and Gesamtkunstwerk, and *Der ferne Klang* represents Schreker's attempts to reconcile his own artistic inspirations with received tradition. Substituting fairy tale myths for the Nordic epics of Wagner, composers like Humperdinck and Siegfried Wagner sought to carve out a niche for themselves in German operatic life without challenging inherited tradition. Some composers, especially

Englebert Humperdinck, retreated to the cozy confines of the Märchenoper. These epigones of the Wagnerian style sought to, as Rudolf Louis wrote, “build a small hut in the shadow of the Wagnerian art work, a modest ‘happiness in the arbor,’ which shuns the peaks and, at the price of an absolute renunciation of aspirations of individual power and grandeur, affords the advantage of security.”⁸¹ Other composers, including Schreker, began looking to France and Italy for inspiration. As Christopher Hailey has noted, Schreker was attracted to the stylistic heterogeneity offered by this approach, steeped as he was in the multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan cultural experience of fin-de-siècle Vienna.⁸² Schreker was particularly taken with the possibilities offered by Italian verismo, which discarded mythical plots all together in favor of gritty and disturbing depictions of everyday life. A few years before the completion of *Der ferne Klang*, Paul Bekker (Germany’s preeminent music critic and an early champion of Schreker) called for more realistic plots and characters in his *Musikdrama der Gegenwart* of 1909, arguing:

Where can today’s music better find the abundance of characters, the subtly differentiated nuances of feeling, the fine analysis of moods it needs in order to unfold its best qualities than in the subject matter modern writers themselves have turned to as they searched for the appropriate vehicles for the themes that moved them?⁸³

Indeed, *Der ferne Klang* does contain many realistic or “naturalist” elements. Regarding the use of dialog in the libretto Ulrike Kienzle remarked that Grete’s first words—the words that open the opera—imply that the audience is walking into the middle of a

⁸¹ Quoted in Christopher Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934: A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36.

⁸² Christopher Hailey, “Franz Schreker and the Pluralities of Modernism,” *Tempo* 219 (January, 2002): 2.

⁸³ Quoted in Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934: A Cultural Biography*, 37.

conversation already in progress.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the language that Fritz and Grete use with each other is informal and conversational, eschewing the stylized prose of operatic convention.⁸⁵ The score of *Der ferne Klang* is also “naturalist” in the sense that Schreker goes out of his way to combine disparate musical styles, often at the same time, in order to create a more realistic soundscape. Act II takes place in a noisy bordello, and Schreker paints the picture by combining street music played by a Hungarian band with two women’s choruses, one of which sings a wordless melody while the other sings a popular love song.⁸⁶ Walter Frisch makes the connection between Schreker’s technique and the technique deployed by Puccini to depict a busy café during Act II of *La Bohème*, a paradigmatic realistic opera with which Schreker was undoubtedly acquainted.⁸⁷

Schreker would again use this technique of musical montage in Act II of *Christophorus*.

Der ferne Klang is also noteworthy because of its similarities in plot and motive with Romain Rolland’s epic artist’s novel, *Jean-Christophe*, written in a series of installments between 1904 and 1912, almost precisely the period of composition for *Der ferne Klang*. The eponymous protagonist of Rolland’s novel, a German composer of provincial birth, chases his muse continuously throughout his life, absorbing and being transformed by interactions with French and Italian culture. It is this synthesis of cultures and the rejection of narrow German parochialism that allows Jean-Christophe to succeed as a composer. Despite the many setbacks and hardships in Jean-Christophe’s artistic journey, he is sustained by an overarching love of life. This emphasis on the affirmation

⁸⁴ Ulrike Kienzle, *Das Trauma hinter dem Traum: Franz Schrekers Oper “Der Ferne Klang” und die Wiener Moderne* (Schliengen: Argus, 1998), 106.

⁸⁵ Frisch, 78.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

of life is not incidental; one of Rolland's primary criticisms of German artistic life was that it demanded withdrawal from the world rather than engagement with it. It is precisely Fritz's decision to withdraw from the real world of Grete's love in the pathological pursuit of artistic perfection (as well as the dramatic conventions of realistic opera) that causes his tragic demise.

At the heart of both *Jean-Christophe* and *Der ferne Klang* lies the same moral lesson: Art divorced from life is futile, and, in the case of Schreker's opera, dangerous. In this way *Der ferne Klang* participates in the same discourse about the role of the artist in society as *Meistersinger* and later taken up and reinterpreted in *Palestrina*. Though the musical and dramatic approaches are different, both Wagner's and Schreker's operas affirm the need for art to be grounded in some sense of community, implicitly—or explicitly in the case of *Meistersinger*—denouncing its separation or alienation from society. This is a theme to which Schreker returned several times over the course of his career, notably in the wildly successful *Die Gezeichneten* of 1918, the opera that cemented his status as one of the premiere German opera composers of the twentieth century, at least temporarily.

Conclusion

The operas examined in this chapter demonstrate that concerns about the artist—specifically the composer—and his role in German society were not unique to the Weimar Republic; rather, the artist-operas of the Weimar period exemplify an intensification of an already extant discourse. The global concerns about the current status and future of German art raised by Wagner in *Meistersinger* and reinterpreted by

Pfitzner in *Palestrina* influenced and informed the composition and reception of Strauss's, Schreker's, and Krenek's artist-operas of the 1920s, even as they became more explicitly topical and autobiographical.⁸⁸ *Ariadne auf Naxos* in particular previews the more cynical and direct approach favored by composers during the Republic; Strauss's Composer is neither a folk-hero nor an isolated and resigned genius, he is merely a young jobber attempting to reconcile the confusing and often irrational demands placed on him by his patron with his artistic integrity. Despite its stylized historical setting, *Ariadne* provided audiences with a more realistic vision of the realities of professional composition in the modern world. Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* presaged the contemporary and realistic setting preferred by composers in the 1920s while considering the source of artistic inspiration. In *Der ferne Klang* Schreker clearly communicated that the pursuit of the artistic muse without regard for relationships or society at large was harmful and ultimately futile. All of these operas and the questions and concerns they address continued to be pertinent in the 1920s, and in many cases intensified in the uncertain economic and cultural climate of the Weimar Republic.

⁸⁸ The influence of *Meistersinger* on these composers—both conscious and unconscious—is hard to overstate. Krenek relayed an anecdote in his autobiography in which Strauss thought that the main theme of one of Krenek's early compositions sounded like Beckmesser's serenade in Act II. Krenek remarked, "Strangely enough, he was right, but neither Schreker nor I had ever thought of it, though we all knew our *Meistersinger* by heart" ("Merkwürdigerweise hatte er recht, aber weder Schreker noch ich selbst, noch sonst jemand hatte jemals daran gedacht, obgleich wir alle unsere *Meistersinger* auswendig kannten.") Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit: Erinnerungen an die Moderne* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1998). 291.

Chapter 2

The Background, Part Two: The Economics of Composition In the Weimar Republic

The composer—as well as performing musicians—occupied an ambiguous place in German society during the Weimar Republic. Following in the footsteps of Bach, Beethoven and Wagner, the composer was—in the German cultural imagination—a demigod symbolic of the nation’s intellectual and artistic superiority as embodied in the notion of *Kultur*. This ideologically exalted status rarely translated into lived experience, however. In reality, composers and musicians in Germany had a very difficult time gaining financial security through the production of their art, a fact that caused a great deal of consternation and calls for reform both from the artists themselves and the press. In this chapter, I detail the economic and social hardships faced by composers during the Weimar Republic and address some of the major attempts to improve the material conditions of composers by reforming copyright, education, and music criticism, areas that would take center stage in the artist-operas during the period. Furthermore, I will place the debates on the status of the artist in society within the context of a larger trend toward professionalization taking place in nearly all walks of German society, a movement sought to smooth out the disruptive and unpredictable effects of the liberal marketplace through government accreditation and regulation of most professional occupations. As we shall see, attempts at reform and professionalization during the Weimar period were fragmentary only partially successful.

Although composers, musicians, and other artists all sought to improve their material situations through professionalization during the years of the Republic, they rarely took coordinated action, with economic, ideological, and partisan divides undermining attempts at wide-ranging reform. The divergent social classes of the wide range of music professions created competing, and occasionally diametrically opposed, interests.¹ Composers, interested in protecting their individual intellectual property through stronger copyright legislation, were often at odds with orchestral musicians and ensemble directors, for whom stronger copyright legislation meant higher fees and fewer performances. Heavily influenced by the Romantic ideal of the artist as individual genius, composer and musicians struggled to suppress their individualism for the sake of achieving collective goals, and many looked down on the entire democratic political process. Though it is sometimes difficult to wrap one's head around the diffuse nature of the attempted musical reforms during the period, it is precisely this diversity of interests and opinions that characterizes what Eric D. Weitz calls the particularly "vital and intense" engagement with culture during the Weimar Republic.²

Music as a Profession

Underlying the many problems and economic insecurities facing musicians and composers (and indeed all artists) during the Weimar period was the issue of professional classification. As first outlined in the 1870 *Gewerbeordnung* or Industrial Code, artists

¹ Alan Steinweis, *Art Ideology, & Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 9.

² Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 250.

could be classified as *Arbeiter* (workers), *Angestellte* (salaried-employees), *Beamte* (civil servants), or as members of the *freie Berufe*, or “free professions,” depending on employment status.³ Regardless of classification, the vast majority of musicians in the Republic could not support themselves solely through music, and often sought other forms of income.⁴ Members of state-run orchestras and opera houses, conductors, and teachers at state sponsored schools were the exception; they were provided with generous salary and benefits and a higher degree of job security, thus forming an enviable minority.⁵

Composers, performers in private ensembles, and private music teachers were considered members of the *freie Berufe*. As such, composers and independent musicians were free from government regulation, in keeping with the Romantic view of the artist living outside the everyday political process. This artistic freedom came at a high price, however: although they were free to create without the threat of political manipulation, these musicians lacked any official standing in the state.⁶ Because these “free” artists were unregulated, they were ineligible for government protections, including unemployment and health insurance.⁷

In order to gain a more secure footing, musicians began unionizing in the early years of the Wilhelmine Empire, with the most influential union being the Allgemeiner deutscher Musikverein (ADMV). Unfortunately, however, even after the ADMV worked for decades to improve the material lives of musicians by lobbying to change the

³ Steinweis, 8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Martin J. Newhouse, “Artists, Artisans, or Workers: Orchestral Musicians in the German Empire,” Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1979), xvi.

⁷ Ibid.

language of the Industrial Code, the writers of the 1919 Weimar constitution simply took the language verbatim from the 1870 code, thus reinforcing the inferior status of German artists in the societal hierarchy.⁸ Trade unions like the ADMV and the Genossenschaft deutscher Tonsetzer (GDT)—formed in 1893 to protect composers’ rights and reform existing copyright laws—sought to reposition musical professions in the legal sense. This meant showing that artistic production was, indeed, able to be regulated, and that mastery of craft and dedication to the discipline were more important than individual inspiration. As historian Konrad Jarausch demonstrated, the goal of professionalization in all occupations was to “provide economic rewards and higher social prestige based on ‘competence, professional ethics, and the special importance of [its] work for society and common weal.’”⁹ Professionalization was also a means of limiting competition in overcrowded fields through the enactment of rigorous testing for credentials and through the enforcement of quotas. Perhaps most importantly, musicians hoped that becoming a legally recognized profession would lead to less reliance on the patronage of an increasingly fickle and impoverished public. The state would play a central role with regulations to prioritize competency over individual effort and by becoming a major patron of the arts by subsidizing officially recognized organizations.¹⁰ The public, it was hoped, would choose to support only those artists with professional credentials, which

⁸ Ibid., 406. The ADMV and other musicians unions were not officially recognized bargaining units in the way that industrial trade unions were, and their resolutions lacked any binding authority.

⁹ Konrad Jarausch, “The German Professions in History and Theory” in *German Professions, 1800-1950*, ed. Geoffrey Cocks and Konrad Jarausch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13. Jarausch also writes that the centrality of the State in German professional development is a “truism.”

would in turn encourage aspiring musicians to seek credentials through official channels.¹¹

Although the impulse towards professionalization began long before the declaration of the Republic, the “unprecedented opportunities”¹² created by the revolution and the abject poverty of musicians as a result of the war and subsequent inflation placed new urgency on the calls for reform. As the incoming government, led by a coalition of Social Democrats, German Democrats, and Catholic Centrists, expanded protections for a number of professions, music interest groups like the ADMV and GDT hoped that the new administration would take legislative steps to address problems of high unemployment and non-regulation. That hope, however, soon turned to frustration in the years following the war, as calls for reform went largely unheeded by those in government, regardless of political affiliation. The cognitive dissonance created by the disparity between the ideal image of the musician and the actual experience of musicians in German society became a pervasive theme in newspapers and journals of the period.

Post-war Crisis, Inflation, and Calls for Reform

In economic terms, the end of the First World War was devastating for artists of all political persuasions, for a number of reasons. As Alan Steinweis notes, the end of the monarchy, the difficult—and often bloody—transition to the new government, and the

¹¹ “Man hofft, daß das Publikum diesen staatlich diplomierten Lehrer ein größeres Vertrauen entgegenbringen wird, daß die angehenden Musiklehrer selbst das Privilegium des Diploms immer mehr entstreben werden...” Leo Leichtentritt, “Die Neuordnung des Privaten-musikunterrichts in Preussen,” *Anbruch* (1926): 31.

¹² Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 6.

crippling effects of inflation all resulted in diminished opportunities for artists.¹³ State sponsored orchestras and opera houses were either eliminated or saw their budgets slashed dramatically, which exacerbated the already chronic problem of underemployment or even unemployment among instrumentalists and vocalists. Reduced budgets for performing ensembles meant that new works went unpublished or unperformed, and the base of middle-class patronage for arts was almost completely wiped out. The new coalition government, led by Social Democrats, faced grave problems from its inception. The Republic, born “almost by accident, and covered with apologies,”¹⁴ to borrow Peter Gay’s phrase, struggled to maintain legitimacy against attacks by hard line Communists on the Left, and militant nationalists on the Right. Additionally, the two million war dead and 4.2 million wounded placed enormous strains on the coffers of the new Republic, both in terms of needed social services and lost economic productivity.¹⁵ Perhaps most damaging of all were the terms of reparations set forth in the Treaty of Versailles, which placed a drag on the economy that led to massive currency inflation, wiping out the life’s savings of millions of Germans.

Writing only one month after the armistice that ended the First World War, music critic Paul Bekker painted a bleak picture of both the present and the immediate future for German artists. He advised that one should listen quietly to all of the “right and good” suggestions put forth concerning the future of German art, but then ask two simple questions: “How shall it be implemented?” and “Where will the money come from?”¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ Gay, 11.

¹⁵ Weitz, 83.

¹⁶ “Wie denken Sie sich die Durchführung? Woher soll das Geld kommen?” Paul Bekker, “Die Künste geht nach Brot,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, December 13, 1918.

He then posed the rhetorical question: “Do we not need to restrict our public expenditures to the utmost for the foreseeable future?”¹⁷ The new Republic was only a month old at the time of Bekker’s writing, and it was still ruled essentially by martial law. Machine gun fire was commonly heard in Berlin as political opponents fought in the streets. In an attempt to consolidate power, Social Democrats made an uneasy alliance with leaders of the German military, most of whom despised Social Democrats and viewed them as traitors.¹⁸ Soldiers, both the wounded and the physically able, were still returning from the front and required physical and psychological care. This placed an enormous strain on essential social services, already worn thin by the dire need for heat, shelter, and food. Bekker argued that even a less catastrophic end to the war—one that did not have to account for reparations imposed by the winners—would have had dire economic consequences for the nation.¹⁹

Is it not self-evident, that if compromises must be made, that we have to think about the regulation of invalid and survivors’ care, as well as the payment of the existing debt we have and remunerations yet to be imposed—all in a period of deep economic decline and monstrous growth in operating costs—is it not a self-evident and almost moral imperative that we must first and foremost think about limitations on expenditures for artistic purposes?”²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid. “Werden wir nicht jetzt auf...unabsehbar Zeit hin unsre öffentlichen Ausgaben aufs äußerste einschränken müssen?”

¹⁸ Weitz, 28. The army agreed to recognize the legitimacy of the Social Democrat led government and provided soldiers to suppress the radical Left. In exchange, the Social Democrats promised not to denigrate the integrity of the officers nor question their authority over the military.

¹⁹ Bekker, “Die Kunst geht nach Brot.” The Treaty of Versailles was not signed until June 28, 1919.

²⁰ “Und ist es nicht selbstverständlich, daß, wenn Abstriche gemacht werden, wenn wir an die Regelung der Invaliden und Hinterbliebenen-Fürsorge, an die Bezahlung unserer bisherigen Schulden und der uns noch aufzuerlegenden Entschädigungen denken müssen—und dies aller in einer Zeit heftigen wirtschaftlichen Niederganges und ungeheuerlich anwachsender Betriebskosten—ist es nicht eine selbstverständliche, beinahe sittliche Forderung, daß wir da zu allererst an die Einschränkung der Ausgaben für Künstlerische Zwecke denken müssen?” Ibid.

The logic of his position, he concluded, was “inescapable.”²¹

The situation went from bad to worse. The hyperinflation, the likes of which the developed world had not seen before and has not seen since, eventually necessitated massive budget cuts for arts spending, such that even the relatively safe state-employed musicians were not spared. Over the course of the war, the German government accumulated a massive amount of debt, much of which was owed to German citizens through the issuance of bonds. Additionally, the Treaty of Versailles stated that Germany was totally responsible for the outbreak of the First World War, and as such, owed the victors (France, Great Britain, and the United States) billions of dollars in reparations. The treaty also imposed draconian trade restrictions on Germany, which made it impossible for the economy to grow quickly enough to make the payments. Many Germans viewed the treaty as illegitimate and overly punitive, regarded the Social Democrats who signed it as traitors to the nation, and actively undermined attempts to comply with its terms.²²

Despite these initial difficulties, before the disaster of hyperinflation the German economy rebounded very quickly in 1919 and 1920, ironically because of inflation. Rising prices for goods meant an upswing in manufacturing, which in turn kept unemployment low. German goods were relatively cheap abroad, stimulating foreign investment that allowed the constant demands for wage increases by trade unions and workers' councils to be paid with an inflated currency.²³ All of this progress was stopped in its tracks, however, when the Allies delivered the total bill for reparations, amounting

²¹ “...deren Logik man sich nicht entziehen kann.” Ibid.

²² Weitz, 131-132.

²³ Ibid., 132.

to 132 billion goldmarks—a staggering sum. The government was placed in an impossible position: on the one hand, there simply were not enough gold reserves to make the payments; on the other, citizens refused tax increases for the payment of reparations they viewed as morally illegitimate. The government was forced to try and raise the money by borrowing on foreign currency markets, but found no takers for their bonds.

Over the course of 1922 the German government claimed the inability to pay and worked to revise the payment of reparations downward; the French accused the Germans of dealing in bad faith and militarily occupied the Ruhr valley (Germany's largest manufacturing region), taking its payment in coal, timber, and other raw materials. The occupation of the Ruhr led to violent conflicts between the French army and German citizens, and solidified anti-French sentiments throughout the Republic. The factory workers in the region resisted by going on a government-supported strike—they simply refused to work.²⁴ This policy of passive resistance was disastrous from an inflationary standpoint. With the manufacturing sector effectively shut down, the government faced a huge monetary shortfall. At the same time, the government was making massive unemployment and welfare payments to the striking workers, while also making loans to manufacturers to keep them afloat during the strikes. Nobody in government saw a need to restrain the supply of money, and the printing presses ran twenty-four hours a day, causing the hyperinflation to spiral out of control.

²⁴ Gay, 154.

By December 1923, the exchange rate between the dollar and the mark stood at 4.2 trillion to one.²⁵ The currency lost value by the hour; workers were sometimes paid two or three times per day and immediately converted their wages into material goods. Germany paid off its internal debts to bond holders in worthless paper marks, effectively bankrupting its own citizenry. Only a drastic and painful currency reform in 1924 brought an end to the madness.

Contemporary observers were quick to link the inflation to the decline of German musical life. One author reasoned that the main reason for the decline of musical performances and opportunities was that the inflation caused the “blatant impoverishment of the intellectual middle class.” Continuing, he wrote:

The intellectual middle class, on whom the well-being of musical and cultural life is primarily dependent, was well off until the year 1919/1920, due to its ownership of financial institutions and bank deposits, mortgages, mortgage bonds, municipal and government bonds and other securities. But since the state took the view during and after inflation that ‘paper marks equal Goldmarks,’ the German people and, above all the intellectual middle class...had its wealth expropriated and was thus betrayed in a sense.²⁶

The segment of the population, the “intellectual middle class” that supported much of Germany’s public musical life, lent the government over 100 billion goldmarks in the form of bonds. By the end of the inflation, those bonds were worthless, and the

²⁵ Frederick Taylor, *The Downfall of Money: Germany’s Hyperinflation and the Destruction of the Middle Class* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 370.

²⁶ “...so ist die Hauptursache des ständigen Rückganges des Konzertlebens in der noch krasserem Verarmung des geistigen Mittelstandes zu suchen. Der geistige Mittelstand, von dem das Wohlergehen der Musik- und Kulturpflege hauptsächlich abhängt, war bis zu Jahre 1919/20 noch begütert, und zwar auf Grund seines Besitzes an Sparkassen und Bankguthaben, Hypotheken, Pfandbriefen, Kommunal- und Staatsanleihen und anderen Wertpapieren. Da aber der Staat während und nach der Inflation den Standpunkt vertrat: ‘Papiermark gleich Goldmark’, wurde das deutsche Volk und vor allen Dingen der geistige Mittelstand...enteignet und dadurch gewissermaßen betrogen.” “Die Not der Musikwelt,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (1926): 102.

collective spending power of the nation was effectively zero.²⁷ The author asked how a musician, whether a composer or a performer, could “make any money when money is not available?”²⁸ Even international artists found it difficult to perform in Germany. Concerts were often cancelled at the last minute due to “sudden illness,” but the real reason for cancellation was that hardly any tickets were sold. Music education also suffered, according to the writer, as teachers struggled to find enough students capable of paying for lessons. Music-related industries suffered, too: piano factories and instrument makers had little demand for their products, while publishers and music store owners watched sheet music gather dust on the shelves.

In the Viennese journal *Anbruch*, prominent musicologist Alfred Einstein relayed a similar assessment. Writing during the height of the inflation, he commented that as he put pen to paper, the value of 1 trillion paper marks was equivalent to one Goldmark. “One can imagine what the cost of a...chamber concert is under these circumstances, much less an orchestral or choral concert.”²⁹ He continued that it was almost impossible to hold concerts, because the audience could not afford to attend. The middle class, so integral to public musical life in Germany, had been priced out of every concert hall and opera house, and now was forced to “sit at home and brood about the procurement of the next day’s necessities.”³⁰ Composers were especially hard hit by this turn of events. Einstein estimated that there were only five to seven composers in Germany able to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Aber wie soll er zu Geld kommen, wenn Geld nicht vorhanden ist?” Ibid.

²⁹ “...man kann sich ungefähr vorstellen, was unter solchen Umständen die Veranstaltung eines...Kammerabends, gar eines Orchester- oder-Chorkonzertes kostet.” Alfred Einstein, “Die Not der deutschen Musiker und deutscher Musiker,” *Anbruch* (January, 1924): 24.

³⁰ “...sie sitzen zu Hause und brüten über die Beschaffung des Notwendigsten für den kommenden Tag.” Ibid., 24-25.

support themselves through composition, and all of them had been famous before the war. The rest were forced to take day jobs, most of which ground the creativity out of them. Einstein declared, “Today I know creative musicians of high rank who, crushed in a mind-numbing occupation, mostly in the banking industry, have not written a note for years and years.”³¹ And why should these put-upon composers even bother composing music, he asked. No opera stage would produce it, no conductor would program it, no singer would sing it, and no publisher would print it, because the “profit” would not be enough to cover the cost of the staff paper and ink.³²

Einstein was also pessimistic about the futures of the students in German conservatories. Very simply, there were too many of them, a condition that Einstein blamed on “unhealthy developments in music education before the war.”³³ As a musicologist himself, he was especially sympathetic toward the struggles facing young researchers: they had little money for books and supplies, much less the ability to travel in order to promote their research and to acquire resources from abroad.³⁴ He noted that their dissertations were no longer being printed, and that their books would not be published, as there was little readership for the advanced topics they undertook. Even

³¹ “Heute kenne ich schaffende Musiker hohen Ranges, die, zermalmt in einem geisttötenden Beruf, meist im Bankgewerbe, seit Jahr und Tag keine Note mehr geschrieben haben.” Ibid., 26.

³² Ibid., 25.

³³ “Dennoch ist die Zahl der Studierenden noch immer viel zu groß: eine Nachwirkung der ungesunden Entwicklung des musikalischen Erziehungswesens vor dem Kriege.” Ibid., 25.

³⁴ Ibid., 26.

going into music criticism was a difficult road, as the numbers of German newspapers (and therefore job opportunities) diminished weekly.³⁵

The situation among Germany's composers and musicians was, indeed, dire in the first years after the First World War, and many of the hardships described above remained to some extent throughout the duration of Republic. That there were major problems with the material conditions of Germany's artists was a nearly universally recognized truth, yet the causes of and the proposed solutions to these problems varied greatly. In the next sections, I will show the fractured nature of the debate surrounding these issues before focusing specifically on copyright reform and education reform, two areas that garnered the most attention during the period.

Defining the Problem

Despite the fact that artists comprised a small portion of the population in terms of hard numbers (one to two percent), the material problems facing artists during the Republic received a good deal of attention in the press. The fact that thousands of artists lived in indigent conditions was not just a social problem for Germans, but also a major embarrassment for the land of Goethe, Beethoven, and *Kultur*. Dozens of articles describing the *Notlage* (plight) or *Krisis* (crisis) of German artists appeared in newspapers and other publications over the course of the Republic, even during years of relative stability. One of the immediately apparent features of this literature is the lack of agreement on what the most pressing problems were; additionally, the solutions proposed

³⁵ The number of newspapers in Germany sharply rebounded once the economy stabilized in 1924-1925.

varied almost as much as the authors, which only served to highlight the fragmentation inherent in German musical life.

Generally speaking, writers fell into one of two camps: those who believed the problems facing composers were largely the result of economic disadvantage (and therefore solvable through the right combination of regulation and social programs), and those who believed that the problems facing German music and musicians went far beyond unemployment figures or access to social safety nets. For the latter, German artists were not embroiled in an economic crisis, but a moral crisis that could only be solved by a rejection of politics *per se* and by a recommitment to the ethical standards of German *Kultur*. Writing from the economic perspective, some in the first camp felt that little could be done to improve the conditions of musicians without first improving the general economy. In an article entitled, “The Economic Position of our Artists,” Hans Liege attributed the lowered social and cultural status of musicians solely to the current economic pressures.³⁶ An organization known as the “National Association for Rebuilding the German Economy” concurred that:

First, we must be clear that the entire field of music with all of its sublevels (performing musicians, composers, concert societies, music teachers and educational institutions, opera theaters, instrument manufacturers, music publishers and distributors, etc.) indeed represents only a small branch of the economy as a whole...[therefore] the musical and cultural life of a State can only flourish on the basis of orderly economic conditions.”³⁷

³⁶ Hans Liege, “Die wirtschaftliche Lage unsrer Künstler,” *Kölnische Zeitung* (9 May, 1925).

³⁷ “Zunächst müssen wir uns darüber klar sein, daß das gesamte Musikgebiet mit allen Unterstufen (konzertierende Künstler, Tonsetzer, konzertgebende Vereine, Musiklehrer und Unterrichtsanstalten, Operntheater, Instrumentenfabriken, Musikalienverleger und Händler usw.) ja nur einen kleinen Zweig der Gesamtwirtschaft darstellt...Musik- und damit Kulturpflege eines Staates kann nur gedeihen auf dem Boden völlig geordneter wirtschaftlicher Verhältnisse.” “Die Not der Musikwelt,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (1926): 101.

The writer then asked how, with an inflated currency and a bankrupt middle class, a musician could make money when there was no money to be made.³⁸ Government intervention on any large scale would not produce positive results unless the country experienced a general economic recovery.

Offering one of the most bizarre analyses of the hardships facing musicians, Gerhard Wehle testified that the real problem was the fact that musicians were too poor to buy their own tickets to concerts, which meant they were unable to keep abreast of the latest trends. His solution was the creation of a program that provided concert tickets and other means for musicians to experience new music.³⁹ His proposal was so unworkable (and his assessment of the issue so off the mark) that the editors of the journal where he published his remarks provided the following disclaimer: “We provide room for the following remarks without assuming that all suggestions are feasible. The main thing is to lay out the complaints of our musicians about the impossibility of further training, which needs to be corrected, so that finally remedial action is taken.”⁴⁰ This editorial remark underscored the frustrations of many in the musical community; with all of the issues facing German musicians (whatever they might be), the time for action (in whatever form it might take) was now. Unfortunately, these calls for action would, in most cases, never be acted upon.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Gerhard F. Wehle, “Hilfe für den deutschen Musikerstand” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (December 23, 1927): 1323.

⁴⁰ “Wir gewähren den nachstehenden Ausführungen Raum, ohne alle Vorschläge für ausführbar zu halten. Die Hauptsache ist, daß die nur zu berechtigten Klagen unserer Musiker über die Unmöglichkeit ihrer Weiterbildung zur Diskussionen gestellt werden, damit endlich Abhilfe geschaffen wird.” Ibid.

Representing the other camp, one music educator writing in the *Kölnische Zeitung* declared the musical emergency so profound that concern should “burn in the souls” of anyone who loved the German *Völk*.⁴¹ His crisis was not material, however. Urging his readers to set aside the economic problems faced by musicians, he wrote that the true emergency could be solved only by a recommitment to teaching the classics in school and in the home. In his opinion, the present generation suffered not from a lack of funds, but from a lack of Goethe and Schubert.⁴² In some instances, such cries for ethical renewal turned bellicose. Writing in the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*, Georg Göhler argued that conditions would not improve without a “moral renewal of the [German] soul.”⁴³ Art had gone the way of politics, Göhler declared, stating that, “working with slogans, ‘isms, [demo]cracies,’ and similar phrases, one defends more or less financial special interests and directs his attention and energies away from the heart of the matter.”⁴⁴ Göhler believed that the plight of German music would only get worse over the next few years, as a direct result of the Treaty of Versailles: “Everything that is done to eliminate the plight of artists and other intellectual workers is just a drop on a hot stone...as long as the

⁴¹ “Und doch gibt es eine musikalische Not unsrer Zeit, die jedem, der sein Volk lieb hat, in die Seele brennen sollte.” F. Nöser, “Die musikalische Not unsrer Zeit” *Kölnische Zeitung* (May 13, 1922).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Ohne eine sittliche Erneuerung des ganzen Volkes, ohne eine grundsätzliche Richtungsänderung der Lebensanschauung ist der Musik mit noch so vielen Millionen Unterstützung nicht geholfen.” Georg Göhler, “Die Notlage der deutschen Musik,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (February 8, 1921): 487.

⁴⁴ “Man streitet sich um Richtungen, man arbeitet mit Schlagworten, mit ‘ismen,’ ‘kratien,’ und ähnlichen Phrasen, man verfißt mehr oder minder finanzielle Sonderinteressen und richtet seine Blicke und Kräfte nicht auf den Kern der Sache.” Ibid., 488.

Treaty of Versailles stands.”⁴⁵ Indeed, a Germany that could not force the revision of Versailles was not capable of a moral renewal. In a line that could have been written by Thomas Mann in *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, Göhler proclaimed, “Art certainly has nothing to do with politics,” though he acknowledged that the two were inextricably linked at present, a decided negative for German art.⁴⁶ Göhler certainly was not alone in the view that art was incompatible with economic and political concerns, nor in his opinion that the Versailles Treaty was supremely problematic—remember that Paul Bekker also feared the effects reparations might have on German cultural life in the first days and months after the war. The difference, however, is that Bekker saw the treaty as an economic drag, whereas Göhler clearly viewed the treaty as a moral affront, a drag on the collective spirit of the nation. It is important to note that arguments like Göhler’s remained popular throughout the Republic, and many artists, critics, and politicians—even reform minded ones—were uncomfortable with with the relationship between art and economics even as they debated over how to improve material conditions for artists.

Copyright reform: 30 oder 50?

In early 1918 Richard Strauss completed his Op. 66, a song cycle entitled *Die Händler und die Kunst*, later given another name by which it is more commonly known: *Krämerspiegel*. The creation of the song cycle was the result of a contract dispute between Strauss and his publishers Bote and Bock: In return for publishing his *Symphonia Domestica* they required that he next compose a song cycle, from which they

⁴⁵ “Alles, was getan wird, um die wirtschaftliche Notlage der Künstler und aller geistigen Arbeiter zu beseitigen, ist nur ein Tropfen auf einen heißen Stein...solange der Friedensvertrag von Versailles besteht.” Ibid.

⁴⁶ “Kunst hat mit Politik gewiß nichts zu tun...” Ibid.

hoped to profit handsomely.⁴⁷ Strauss refused to provide them with the cycle and composed no songs between 1906 and 1918. When he decided to begin composing songs again for his new publisher Fürstner, he found he still had to honor his obligation to Bote and Bock and composed for them the *Krämerspiegel*. Strauss took the opportunity to compose a song cycle whose texts were a vicious, direct assault on the predatory practices of publishers, calling out several by name. Furthermore, they require both a virtuoso pianist and vocalist to perform, which along with the obscure text made the cycle practically unusable for Bote and Bock, which was just as Strauss intended. He fulfilled his obligation, and the publisher was unable to profit off of his creation.⁴⁸

One way that Strauss hoped to end the predatory practices of publishing companies was through the extension of copyright protection for composers from thirty to fifty years, a cause close to Strauss's heart (and wallet) for most of his professional career. Calls for copyright reform for German composers began long before the Weimar period; Richard Strauss and a small group of like-minded composers and other professionals were lobbying the Reichstag for an extension of copyright and of royalty collection already in 1898, which led to the founding of the Genossenschaft deutscher Tonsetzer in 1903.⁴⁹ Although the GDT was somewhat successful in its attempts to

⁴⁷ Barbara Petersen, "Richard Strauss as Composer's Advocate," in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 120.

⁴⁸ The texts range from mildly satirical ("Einst kam der Bock als Bote zum Rosenkavalier an's Haus, Er klopft mit seiner Pfote, Den Eingang wehrt ein Rosenstrauß. Der Strauss sticht seine Dornen schnell dem Botenbock durch's dicke Fell. O Bock, zieh mit gesenktem Sterz hinterwärts, hinterwärts!") to the semi-vulgar. In the penultimate song, Strauss decrees that he has a last word for publishers that destroy the "hero's" art: they can kiss his ass ("Der lässt ein Wort erklingen wie Götz von Berlichingen").

⁴⁹ Hans-Christophe Mauruschat, "Part One: The Appreciation of Music," *GEMA News* 160 (December, 1999): 69.

ensure regular royalty collection, it was unable to procure an extension of copyright during the Wilhelmine Reich. The movement regained momentum during the Republic, as the GDT hoped that the new democratically elected government would be more sympathetic to their aims. Despite the best efforts of Strauss and the GDT, however, copyright would not be extended until after 1933.

The copyright protections provided to Germany's composers during the Weimar period lagged far behind those of almost every other European nation. As codified in the 1870 German constitution, copyright protections for musical compositions lasted for only thirty years after the death of the composer. Furthermore, this protection applied only to the publication of the music; the right of performance was essentially public domain in all but a few limited circumstances.⁵⁰ In order to exercise any kind of control over the performance of a work once published, the composer needed to expressly state that all performance rights were reserved at the time of publication. In practice, however, only a few of the most in-demand composers actually enforced their right, because orchestras and opera houses, when faced with the choice of paying a royalty for the performance of a new composition or playing an older one for free, almost always chose the latter.⁵¹ By contrast, France had provided for a copyright extending fifty years after the death of the composer already in 1850.⁵² Performance royalties were also rigidly enforced, and the French set up performing rights societies at this time to uphold copyright protections and ensure timely royalty collection. In Italy, the copyright was forty years, and in Spain,

⁵⁰ Mauruschat, "Part Three: The Appreciation of Music," *GEMA News* 162 (December, 2000): 85.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Mauruschat, "Part One: The Appreciation of Music," 69.

eighty.⁵³ In addition to these national protections, all of these nations and more subscribed to the Berne Convention, which regulated copyright among participating countries. Germany was not a participating country and did not recognize international copyright protections within its borders.

One of the largest difficulties in gaining passage of the copyright extension was the internecine struggle between composers and performing ensembles, the latter of which allied their interests with the publishers. Performing ensembles complained that they could not afford to perform new works if they had to pay the composer a performance royalty, and even without a performance royalty, works under copyright cost more to procure than those in the public domain. The publishers themselves wanted the length of copyright protection kept short so that they could continue to print and sell copies of works they owned without paying the composer. The stage was set for this battle in 1898, when Hans Sommer, an early champion of copyright reform and the man who introduced Strauss to the cause, proposed for discussion a set of reforms beneficial for composers at the June 27 general meeting of the ADMV.⁵⁴ He hoped to construct a proposal with the backing of the ADMV that could then be presented to the Reichstag, which was set to debate reforms to the 1870 law. When Sommer and his contingent arrived at the meeting, however, they found that the head of the Verein deutschen Musikalienhändler (German Society of Music Publishers) had already convinced the board of the ADMV to back a proposal that favored publishers. The ADMV membership was made up of a variety of music professions, and the composers represented only a

⁵³ Wenzel Goldbaum, "Dreißig oder Fünfzig?" *Berliner Tageblatt*, September 1, 1926.

⁵⁴ Mauruschat, "Part One: The Appreciation of Music," 71.

small minority. To make matters worse, they could not even manage to vote unanimously amongst themselves.⁵⁵

When Sommer and Strauss's proposals eventually came up for debate in the Reichstag, they were received with a good deal of hostility. One member of the Reichstag in particular, Eugen Richter, proved an especially passionate opponent of reform, writing, "...if it becomes generally stipulated that special authorization must be obtained from a composer to perform any of his works on the program in the smallest of places, or in any public house or club where an entrance fee or other similar charge is levied, how is it going to be possible to put all this into practice?"⁵⁶ He charged that any implementation of sweeping reforms would lead to a huge upswing in administrative costs, as was the case in France. He concluded, "No, Gentlemen, these suggestions are not being made by practical men. Usually the saying is: they are good men, but bad musicians. Let us say here: they are good musicians, but unpractical men."⁵⁷

While the Reichstag passed some of Sommer's and Strauss's reforms, the main proposals to extend copyright from thirty to fifty years and establish a government agency responsible for royalty tracking were voted down. Strauss was furious at the outcome and summed up the political motivations for opposing the composer's reforms in a letter to his parents: "Richter's standpoint was as follows: he was speaking out against 250 composers in order to gain the votes of 200,000 publicans and choral society members. It's simply all politics!"⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*

What was true at the turn of the century remained so in the Weimar era, and as the material existence of the composer eroded as a result of economic instability, composers' demands for increased protections intensified, as did assertions by publishers that no more protections were necessary, and that the extension of the copyright would bring about nothing less than the destruction of German culture itself.⁵⁹ Unlike composers, who despite the leadership of Strauss and the GDT lacked a unified political voice, the publishers were a powerful lobby and exerted influence over politicians. In a 1921 article describing the allies in the fight over copyright reform, Hans Schoenfeld listed the ministries of the interior and justice among the supporters of the publishers' position.⁶⁰ The unwillingness on the part of composers and publishers to compromise kept meaningful reform from becoming reality. Schoenfeld advocated that the state needed to support its "worthy and needy artists" on the question of copyright reform, but the members of the Reichstag took the view that they could not set in motion their "law machine" for the desires of a few thousand creative artists. Rather, lamented Schoenfeld, the state turned both its ears and money to completely different "nuisances," i.e. social welfare reform for groups with larger and more cohesive lobbies.⁶¹ A lack of legislative reform did not, however, keep the debate out of the press.

⁵⁹ Goldbaum, "Dreißig oder Fünfzig?"

⁶⁰ "Die Pflicht des Reiches zur Unterstützung würdiger und bedürftiger Künstler besteht nach wie vor." Hans Schoenfeld, "Urheber und Reichshilfe," *Tägliche Rundschau*, December 23, 1921.

⁶¹ "Das Reich mag nicht und kann nicht seine Gesetzesmaschine in Bewegung setzen für nur wenige Tausende von schaffenden Geistern; es muß für ganz andere Quälgeister Ohr und Beutel hergeben." Ibid.

Describing the situation of modern composers, Fritz Müller-Rehrmann lamented that in Germany, no other profession, save authors, work “so cheaply and hopelessly.”⁶² Forced to take day jobs to supply their daily bread, many aspiring composers had all of their creative energy sapped in the pursuit of a secure existence. Denying that any but the most popular composers made money from their performances, he stated that publishers took nearly all of the money made from a performance of a new work in order to recoup the outlay for mounting the work. When one tried to make this case before the public, Müller-Rehrmann complained, the majority did not have much sympathy, viewing the artwork as a kind of common good, as the property of the nation itself. This attitude, wrote Müller-Rehrmann, that an artist should surrender his best work and receive nothing in return, was a “peculiar and naïve” one, to say the least.⁶³ According to Müller-Rehrmann, the public did not appreciate the amount of time and effort necessary to create large artworks, believing that symphonies and operas could be written in one’s spare time or on weekends.⁶⁴ The solution for these problems lay not only in the adoption of the fifty-year copyright, but also in convincing the public that composition was a profession in its own right.

The idea that the artwork was a kind of public commodity was one that the publishers used very effectively in attempts to thwart reform. They argued that the German *Volk* had a right to procure musical compositions as easily and cheaply as possible. An extended copyright, reasoned the publishers, would restrict access to

⁶² “Es gibt in Deutschland keinen Berufsstand, der im Durchschnitt so billig, so hoffnungslos arbeiten muß wie der Schriftsteller und der Komponist.” Fritz Müller-Rehrmann, “50 Jahre Autorenschutz,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (April 22, 1927): 445.

⁶³ “Ein recht eigentümlicher, naiver Standpunkt, vom Künstler zu erwarten...” Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. He cites here the example of Bruckner, noting that however much one tells the “Philistines” how he suffered under the stress of his dual obligations, the notion persists.

masterworks of German culture, thus damaging the spiritual health of the nation. A Leipzig book publisher named Kirnstein went so far as to say “the people need to be protected against the unauthorized claims of the creative artist.”⁶⁵ H.M. Elster wrote in the *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung* that when forced to choose between the position of the publishers and the position of the composers, one must choose based on “national need and not according to the interests of one party or another or for a compromise from both parties.”⁶⁶ Of course, for Elster, “national need” dictated that the copyright remain at thirty years: “The National necessities demand, owing to the experience of the last century, owing to the cultural state of the present, and owing to the demands for cultural development for the future...the retention of the thirty year protection period.”⁶⁷

While composers were expected to give up the rights to their intellectual property for the good of the people, nobody suggested that publishers do the same by selling their music for no more than the cost of production. Richard Strauss noted this irony in early 1927, writing that publishers made most of their money on royalty-free reprints of older

⁶⁵ “Die Vorkämpfer der 30jährigen Schutzfrist, geführt von dem Leipziger Buchverleger Dr. Kirnstein, rufen die Oeffentlichkeit auf, um ‘das Volk vor den unberechtigten Ansprüchen der schaffenden Künstler zu schützen.’” Richard Strauss, “Zur Frage der Schutzfrist,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (1927): 77-78.

⁶⁶ “Hier ist so recht einmal die Notwendigkeit entstanden, wo man allein nach den nationalen Notwendigkeiten entscheiden muß und nicht nach den Interessen der einen oder anderen Partei...!” H.M. Elster, “Dreißig oder Fünfzig,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung* (9 October, 1926).

⁶⁷ “Die nationalen Notwendigkeiten verlangen aber auf Grund der Erfahrung der letzten hundert Jahre, auf Grund des kulturellen Zustandes der Gegenwart und auf Grund der kulturellen Entwicklungsforderungen für die Zukunft, für die jetzt lebende und bestimmende Generation, als die Dreißig bis Siebzigjährigen, die Beantwortung zu tragen hat, die Beibehaltung der dreißigjährigen Schutzfrist.” Ibid.

works.⁶⁸ Strauss vehemently denied the claims of the publishers that strong copyright protection was tantamount to a robbery of the *Volk*:

German composers must emphatically reject being placed in opposition to the German people, the educationally starved layers of the working class. The creative artists feel more connected with their people than those capitalist entrepreneurs, who run their businesses through exploitation of foreign artistic creations and achieve profits that are denied to German authors, with few exceptions.⁶⁹

Strauss was pointing to the fact that German publishing companies often printed the works of foreign composers without paying royalties; because Germany was not a participant in the Berne Conventions, their publishers were not required to pay royalties on compositions not currently under protection in Germany, regardless of whether they were copyrighted elsewhere. Strauss then moved to dispel the myth that most composers in Germany were wealthy:

The German public has to know that among the 1000-2000 German composers very few—scarcely a single one if one takes serious music into consideration—are able to earn a livelihood from the income generated by their creative work, while hundreds of publishers, including their numerous staff, through the exploitation of these artistic creations, are able to have a secure existence.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Strauss, “Zur Frage der Schutzfrist,” 77.

⁶⁹ “Die deutschen Komponisten müssen es aber auf das Entschiedenste ablehnen in einen Gegensatz zum deutschen Volk, zu den bildungshungrigen Schichten der werkstätige Stände gebracht zu werden. Die schaffenden Künstler fühlen sich mit ihrem Volke mehr verbunden, als jene kapitalistischen Unternehmer, die die Verwertung fremden künstlerischen Schaffens geschäftsmäßig betreiben und dabei Gewinne erzielen, die den deutschen Autoren, von wenigen Ausnahmen abgesehen, versagt sind.” Ibid., 77-78.

⁷⁰ “Die deutsche Öffentlichkeit muß wissen, daß unter den 1000-2000 deutschen Komponisten nur ganz wenige, wenn man allein die ernste Musik in Betracht zieht, kaum ein einziger, von den Erträgen der schöpferischen Arbeit den Lebensunterhalt bestreiten können, während Hunderte von Verlegern, einschließlich ihres zahlreichen Personals, durch die Verwertung des künstlerischen Schaffens ein gesichertes Dasein führen.” Ibid., 78.

Even Strauss—who was easily the wealthiest and most popular German composer of the twentieth century—was forced during the Weimar Republic to rely on conducting positions to augment his income.

Contrary to the claims of the publishers, wrote Strauss, the composers had never placed an undue burden on the *Volk*, nor would they in the future. In fact, in an ideal world, composers “would love to waive any remuneration for their artistic creation and, if the state could provide the possibility of a reasonable economic existence in some other way, would be happy to dedicate all of their work without compensation to the cultural community.”⁷¹ Of course, Strauss was quick to admit, this sort of utopian ideal was impossible, which meant that the artist must, “like any other member of society, demand economic compensation for his work.”⁷² The only difference between the composer and another “worker or craftsman” (note the carefully chosen wording), is the fact that a normal worker receives payment in immediate and direct proportion to the work completed. For the composer, however, “it takes significant time, often after the death of the creator, before his labor in his works is well known, before it is sought after and brings in a significant economic return.”⁷³ Ongoing royalty payments—specifically in

⁷¹ “Sie würden gern auf jedes materielle Entgelt für ihr künstlerisches Schaffen verzichten, wenn ihnen der Staat auf andere Weise die Möglichkeit angemessener wirtschaftlicher Existenz bieten könnte und wären glücklich, ihre ganze Arbeit entschädigungslos der Kulturgemeinschaft widmen zu können.” Ibid.

⁷² “Weil dieses Ideal nicht verwirklicht werden kann, ist der Künstler darauf angewiesen, wie jeder andere Volksgenosse, für seine Arbeit wirtschaftliches Entgelt zu fordern.” Ibid.

⁷³ “Nur ist die Lage des schöpferischen Künstlers unendlich schwieriger als die eines Arbeiters oder eines Handwerkers. Bei diesen setzt sich die geleistete Arbeit sofort in klingende Münze um, beim schaffenden Künstler aber, zumal beim Komponisten, dauert es geraume Zeit, oft genug bis nach dem Tode des Schöpfers, bevor seine Arbeit in ihrem Werte erkannt, bevor sein Werk begehrt wird und einen nennenswerten wirtschaftlichen Ertrag einbringt.” Ibid.

the form of a fifty-year copyright—at least guaranteed that the family of the composer could be paid back for the struggles and toil experienced by the composer during his lifetime.

Germany was not the only country in which copyright debates took place. As described earlier, most European countries had a variety of copyright laws on the books, most of which were stricter than Germany's. The only countries listed in Goldbaum's article with copyrights less than thirty years were Haiti and Liberia, non-European countries in the developing world.⁷⁴ In an effort to promote cooperation among nations and standardize best practices, countries from around the world came together to hold an international conference on copyright, held in May of 1927 in Rome.⁷⁵ Although organizers placed many different issues on the table, the centerpiece of the conference was a vote for an internationally uniform copyright protection of fifty years.⁷⁶ Officials from the German government attended, as did representatives of the various composers and publishers interest groups. Mussolini made the opening remarks and declared that while manual labor was important, intellectual work was more important and deserved commensurate protection.⁷⁷ These remarks were received enthusiastically, as was an announcement by the American delegation that the United States would henceforth join the Berne Convention, prompting an ovation that lasted several minutes.⁷⁸ The conference also considered whether or not to provide copyright protection to performing musicians. The advent of recording and film made questions like these, unthinkable a

⁷⁴ Goldbaum, "Dreißig oder Fünfzig."

⁷⁵ Hugo Rasch, "Erster Urheberrechtskongreß in Rom," *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (May 10, 1927): 619.

⁷⁶ Goldbaum, "Dreißig oder Fünfzig?"

⁷⁷ Rasch, "Erster Urheberrechts Kongreß in Rom," 619.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

mere decade earlier, extremely important. Was a soloist who recorded a group of arias or concertos entitled to copyright protections? The Reich Ministry of Justice convened a committee to study this and other questions ahead of the copyright conference. German lawyers were fairly unanimous in their opinion that performers should be granted copyright insofar as the performance itself constitutes a unique creative act.⁷⁹ Delegates to the congress disagreed, however, and on the first motion of the conference voted unanimously to exclude performers from copyright protections.⁸⁰

The second day of the conference was full of action, resembling the famous tumult of “the second act of Pfitzner’s *Palestrina*,” according to Rasch, reporting for the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*.⁸¹ The various interest groups argued passionately back and forth, with the GDT arguing for the extension of the copyright and managing to pass a resolution for both “tactical and practical reasons” that separated the copyright for music from the copyright for words.⁸² Those opposed to the copyright extension cited the *Volk*’s wellbeing and used the controversial example of Wagner’s *Parsifal* to illustrate why an extension was not necessary. Before his death, Wagner had requested that *Parsifal* be performed exclusively at Bayreuth. Hoping to honor his wishes, Cosima and others lobbied the Reichstag unsuccessfully to grant an exception for the opera, which became public domain in 1913 and was subsequently performed the world over. Zahn-Speyer stated that in the years since *Parsifal* became public domain more Germans had

⁷⁹ Rudolf Zahn-Speyer, “Aesthetisches Grundlagen eines Urheberrechtes,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (March 4, 1927): 207.

⁸⁰ Rasch, “Erster Urheberrechtkongreß in Rom,” 619.

⁸¹ “An Pfitzners zweite Palestrinaakt erinnerte die Stimmung dieses zweiten Tages...” *Ibid.*, 619.

⁸² *Ibid.*

access to performances of this masterwork, and Cosima Wagner seemed no worse off financially for it.⁸³

In the end, however, all participants agreed in their commitment to “Protect the Author.”⁸⁴ But despite the positive feelings the conference inspired for those in favor of an extended copyright in Germany, the government took no subsequent action. In fact, Speyer went out of his way to note that those in attendance from Germany felt slighted and unsupported in their efforts by the German embassy in Italy, which invited them over neither for breakfast, lunch, nor a snack.⁸⁵ The resolutions of the international conference were non-binding, and so while many pious words were said about protecting the author’s rights, no legislative action would come of it. The extension of the copyright from thirty to fifty years would have to wait until December 1934, when Richard Strauss, now head of the Reichsmusikkammer, finally won the support of Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels for the extension, a move that prompted many composers to be favorably disposed toward the new government of the Third Reich.⁸⁶

Music Education Reform

While meaningful copyright reform faced stiff opposition from many in the government, one area of reform that received a good amount of government support, especially among the majority Social Democrats, was education reform.⁸⁷ During the Weimar period reforms in the education system were undertaken in all disciplines, but the reforms to the

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Schutz dem Urheber!” Ibid., 620. The phrase is spaced apart from the surrounding paragraphs and centered in the column.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Steinweis, 51.

⁸⁷ Leo Kestenberg, “Music und Staat,” *Der Auftakt* XII (1928): 227.

music education system in particular received special attention.⁸⁸ Thanks to the efforts of Leo Kestenberg—the music advisor to the Prussian ministry of Education and the Arts and also a concert pianist and committed socialist—the new government looked to bring all facets of German musical education under its control, from state schools to private instruction, and to shape the curriculum in such a way as to create an artistically literate society committed to Social Democratic values. Regulation of music education went hand in hand with broad trends toward professionalization during the period, with reformers seeking to implement standardized tests in order to control the quantity and quality of professional musicians and teachers in the Republic. Some of the reforms undertaken by Kestenberg were controversial, especially reforms to the private music education system, which enjoyed a large amount of freedom under the Weimar constitution. Ironically, many of the Social Democrat’s arguments for the regulation and state control of music education would later be made by the National Socialist government, who completed the *Gleichschaltung*, or coordination, of the music education system by centralizing state control through the implementation and administration of nationalized competency exams.

One of the biggest obstacles Kestenberg faced in implementing his agenda was the reality of partisan democratic politics that informed and influenced nearly all of his decisions, especially the appointment of personnel to positions in Germany’s most famous cultural institutions. Above all else, Kestenberg wished to place a candidate who shared his political and aesthetic ideals at the head of the Berlin State Opera and the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. One of Kestenberg’s closest allies in the reform movement

⁸⁸ Ibid.

was Paul Bekker, Germany's most influential music critic, who would go on to have a distinguished career as an opera director. Kestenberg first attempted to place Bekker at the head of the newly reformed State Opera, despite the fact that Bekker had no experience in the theater or in arts administration. This lack of experience would have made his confirmation difficult to begin with, but Bekker's highly public polemic with Hans Pfitzner effectively killed his appointment before it got off the ground. Instead, newly formed Worker's and Soldier's councils voted Max von Schillings to be the next leader of the Opera.⁸⁹ Previously the long time director of the Stuttgart Opera, von Schillings harbored aesthetic and political positions that ran counter to those advocated by Kestenberg. Knowing that Schillings would hinder his aspirations for the newly reformed Opera, Kestenberg hoped to avoid his appointment to the position by pushing him to consider (unsuccessfully) the directorship of the Hochschule.⁹⁰ Apparently, Bekker believed himself to have the position at the opera in hand despite his highly divisive confrontation with Pfitzner and his inexperience; he was greatly disappointed by Schillings' appointment, expressing his frustration to Schreker:

The staff has finally decided on Schillings—you see, that's how people are. If they had appointed one for whom I would have to say: now, that's really a real man—all right, I would have been quite in agreement. But Schillings, this slick man of the ancien régime in every respect, dependent, without solid, independent views, asserting himself only by his adroitness and bearing—this bothers me in a *substantive* way.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Dietmar Schenk, *Die Hochschule für Musik zu Berlin: Preußens Konservatorium zwischen romantischem Klassizismus und Neuer Musik, 1860-1932/33* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004), 79.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹¹ “Das Personal aber hat sich schließlich doch für Schillings entschieden sehen Sie, so sind die Menschen. Wenn da einer hingekommen wäre, bei dem ich mir hätte sagen können: nun, das ist doch wirklich ein ganzer Kerl—schön, ich wäre ganz einverstanden gewesen. Aber Schillings, dieser aalglatte Mann des ancien régime in jeder Beziehung, unselbstständig, ohne festes, eigenes Wollen, nur durch seine Gewandtheit und Manieren

The appointment of the aesthetically conservative Schillings against Kestenberg's wishes (by a Socialist Worker's Council no less) illustrates the multiplicity of opinion about the direction of German cultural life even among those of otherwise sympathetic political views. Despite all of Kestenberg's influence as the newly appointed music advisor to the Prussian ministry of Education and the Arts and Bekker's influence in the press, Kestenberg did not have *carte blanche* to make high profile appointments; rather, he often found himself compromising and picking his battles in order to ensure that key facets of his agenda could be achieved. One such example of political compromise involved Kestenberg's decision to appoint Busoni as the leader of the prestigious composition master class at the Akademie der Künste. Kestenberg believed that Busoni would bring fresh ideas to the position, but he faced stiff resistance from others in the Ministry because of Busoni's controversial *Entwürfe einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (*Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*), a writing that touched off the same fierce polemic with Pfitzner that also involved Bekker, who intervened on Busoni's behalf. In order to ensure Busoni's appointment, Kestenberg also had to offer a masterclass in composition in the Akademie der Künste to Pfitzner, a man who embodied the very aesthetic attitude that Kestenberg sought to reform.⁹² Undeterred by his failure to install Bekker as the next director of the State Opera, Kestenberg turned his sights to the Hochschule as the locus for reform. Kestenberg initially hoped that Paul Bekker would take the directorship, but

sich behauptend—das verdrießt mich in *sachlicher* Beziehung.” Letter from Bekker to Schreker, June 29, 1919, in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Christopher Hailey (Rimbaud, 1994), 106. Emphasis in the original.

⁹² Michael Kater, *Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 145. Fortunately for Kestenberg, Pfitzner rarely did any actual teaching in his position, treating the appointment as an “absentee professorship” according to Kater.

after the earlier flap with the Ministry over his appointment to the State Opera, Bekker had serious reservations about joining the Hochschule.⁹³ Shortly after Bekker declined the position Kestenberg settled on Schreker, a decision that proved non-ideal in the promotion of his reform-minded agenda.⁹⁴

Despite Kestenberg's inability to appoint Bekker to a high profile position in a state-run institution, Bekker still proved influential in the reform movement, writing widely read articles and essays on the subject and advising leaders like Schreker behind the scenes. In his 1918 article, "Die Kunst geht nach Brot", Bekker argued for a complete reorganization of German musical life. Bekker strongly believed that music had an important role to play in the construction of a democratic society and in the betterment of the people generally. The key for Bekker was to reform musical culture in such a way as to make music worthy of public funding. In the new Democratic Socialist republic, the State would take the place of the middle class as the primary patrons of the arts. The time of the amateurs—the members of the middle class who made the patronage of the arts their hobby—was over.⁹⁵ "The Social Republic must have as its aim...the highest possible enhancement and strengthening of artistic and intellectual

⁹³ Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 129, fn. 1. In late January 1920 Bekker wrote to Hanna vom Rath that the Hochschule had made overtures, though there were still serious difficulties to work through. Although Berlin attracted Bekker as a city, it is clear that he did not think the position was a good fit for him; additionally, the salary was not very attractive. He preferred, he wrote to vom Rath, simply to "drop the whole business." Writing to Schreker (who had not yet been offered the position) at the end of February, Bekker informed the composer that nothing was going to come of the "Berlin Project," a situation with which Bekker was perfectly agreeable.

⁹⁴ Schenk, 80.

⁹⁵ Bekker, "Die Kunst geht nach Brot."

life.”⁹⁶ The achievement of this goal, he continued, would necessitate “the corresponding economic obligations” (read: taxes), but a thriving artistic life and a thriving economy go hand in hand. Bekker finished by proclaiming, “The state of social rights requires the state of social arts.”⁹⁷ In the new Republic, founded on Socialist ideals, art music would not be the domain of a few wealthy citizens, but the property of all citizens.

Kestenberg seconded this notion of the State bearing primary responsibility for the support of the arts in a short essay entitled “Musik und Staat,” writing, “With the political revolution, with the consequences of war, and the post-war period, the State's responsibility in the field of education is growing quite substantially.”⁹⁸ No longer was the State's role in education simply to create good citizens, soldiers, and officials. Now, the State was interested in forming the person from the ground up, creating a “harmonious personality” that was community-minded.⁹⁹ Contrary to the goal of music education before the war, which Kestenberg maintained consisted of nothing more than the revitalization of folk music and patriotic songs, the present goal was to teach music in a holistic manner, as useful for all facets of life.¹⁰⁰ In keeping with the goal of

⁹⁶ “Die soziale Republik muß hoher zu ihrer eigenen Daseinsbejahung die höchstmögliche Steigerung und Kräftigung des Kunst- und Geisteslebens zum Ziel haben.” Ibid.

⁹⁷ “entsprechenden wirtschaftliche Verpflichtungen...” “der ‘Staat des sozialen Rechts’ bedingt den Staat der sozialen Kunst.” Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Mit der Staatsumwälzung, mit dem Folgen des Krieges und der Nachkriegszeit wächst die Verantwortung des Staates auf dem Gebiet der Erziehung ganz wesentlich.” Kestenberg, “Musik und Staat,” 228.

⁹⁹ “*harmonische Persönlichkeit*” Italics in the original. Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

professionalizing the discipline, Kestenberg also emphasized that aesthetics and theory were never allowed to overtake “fundamentals and craftsmanship.”¹⁰¹

The largest roadblock facing Kestenberg, Bekker, and their fellow travelers in enacting a centralized state takeover of music education was the expansive system of private music education in Germany, which encompassed everything from private voice and piano lessons to privately owned conservatories. Private music instruction and the competition it created for state certified teachers and schools had been problematic, as Newhouse has shown, at least since the 1870s. Private music teachers, many of whom taught as a sideline, took students away from professional musicians who relied on teaching as an important supplement to their income. Furthermore, the private music education system flooded the marketplace with amateur musicians who took jobs from professionals because they were willing to perform for little or no pay. Having an entire class of part-time musicians who viewed music as an avocation competing in the job market with full-time professionals undermined the legitimacy of music as a profession and helped to further the employment crisis among German musicians.¹⁰² Aware of this reality, Kestenberg warned that if the State was going to play an increasingly large role in music education, it could not be “indifferent” to private music education.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “Schnell haben die Schlagworte: ‘Weckung der schöpferische Kräfte’, ‘Fähigkeit des Musikerlebens’ Geltung gewonnen, und heute stehen wir schon wieder vor die Gefahr, daß zugunsten dieser ethische-aesthetische Kräfte die realen Grundlagen, die bei aller gesunden Musikpflege entscheidende Bedeutung haben, übersehen werden, daß *das handwerkliche Können* vernachlässigt wird.” Ibid., 428. Italics in the original.

¹⁰² It is hard to overestimate the amount of competition among music teachers. Music-related trade magazines contained several pages of classified ads in each issue advertising for private instruction for every voice and instrument type.

¹⁰³ “Der Staat, der in der Schule zu anderen Auffassungen, anderen Wertmaßstäben kommt, kann sich nicht gleichgültig gegenüber dem Privatunterricht verhalten.” Kestenberg, “Musik und Staat,” 228.

What was perhaps most problematic for those who sought reform was the fact that private music instruction was completely unregulated by the government. There were no standards proving competency to teach privately; in theory, anyone could hang out a shingle and call himself a music teacher. Private music instruction was one of the *freie Berufe*, discussed above. As such, it was explicitly exempted from regulation in the constitution, as opposed to State-run schools and institutions, over which there was a considerable amount of control.¹⁰⁴ Over the course of the 1920s the quality of private instruction became a real concern, with unqualified “teachers” attracting unsuspecting students and turning out an inferior product in an effort to make easy money. Bernhard Paumgartner described the situation in the March 1920 issue of *Anbruch*:

To be sure, in no area of private instruction do deception, charlatanry, and lack of knowledge clothed in grandiloquent phrases take as much space as they do in music, nowhere is more severe indecency carried on with Holy Art, nowhere are stupid, unsuspecting students exploited more rapaciously than here.¹⁰⁵

Paumgartner wrote that the problem was particularly acute among voice teachers, who, strangely enough, were at no time ever required to prove that they could sing.¹⁰⁶ The incompetent teachers who took advantage of students lowered the reputation of the entire

¹⁰⁴ Wolfgang Heine, “Der ungesetzliche Unterrichtserlaß,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (February 18, 1927): 147-149.

¹⁰⁵ “Gewiß macht sich auf keinem Gebiete des Unterrichtswesens im Privatunterrichte soviel Schwindel, Charlanterie, und Unkenntnis im Gewande hochtönender Phrasen breit wie gerade in der Musik, nirgends wird mit der heiligen Kunst schwerere Unzucht getrieben, nirgends dumme, ahnungslose Schüler raubgieriger ausgebeutet als hier.” Bernhard Paumgartner, “Reform des Musikunterrichtes,” *Anbruch* 2/5 (March, 1920): 179.

¹⁰⁶ “Anderseits ist der Musikunterrichts Gewerbe wie jedes andere, ein freies und künstlerisches allerdings; es bleibt aber, das es sich hier wie bei jedem Lehrberufe nicht bloß um leblose Sachen, sondern um Menschen und Bürger handelt, deren brauchbare sachliche Ausbildung, gleichgültig, ob sie Tischler, Doktoren, oder Musiker werden, im höchsten Interesse der allgemeinen Wohlfahrt und Kulturhöhe, der erhöhten Beaufsichtigung des Staates bedürftig.” *Ibid.*

discipline. Paumgartner argued that, although “free and artistic,” “the teaching of music is a profession like any other,” and that the “useful and factual education” of students, regardless of whether they were “carpenters, doctors, or musicians,” was in the highest interest of both the general welfare and cultural literacy of the nation. To exercise the “mildly outdated, liberal tendency of ‘laissez passer’” was, for Paumgartner, “more misguided and dangerous than the rigid compulsory guilds of old. After all, they at least brought forth qualified and able workers.”¹⁰⁷ Because the stakes were so high, Paumgartner concluded, the increased supervision of the State was necessary.¹⁰⁸

Reforming private music instruction and bringing it under State control was not only about demanding baseline competence, it also contained an aesthetic component at a time when tastes were changing rapidly and popular music encroached upon the turf of art music in Germany for the first time. Leo Leichtentritt complained about a shortage of teachers dedicated to maintaining traditional standards, writing, “the shifting of the audience over the fateful last decade has threatened to worsen the position of these skilled and efficient teachers.”¹⁰⁹ The “older clientele, the well situated and cultivated middle class” was so impoverished that they could not afford instruction anymore, causing the “good teachers” to lose their livelihoods.¹¹⁰ As a result of the inflation and other

¹⁰⁷ “Das sanft veraltete Prinzip, ‘laissez passer’ liberaler Tendenz hier walten zu lassen, halte ich für verfehlter und gefährlicher, als den starren Zunftzwang der Vorzeit, der immerhin qualifizierte und standesbewußte Arbeiter hervorbrachte.” Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Doch zeit der Umschichtung des Publikums in dem verhängnisvollen letzten Jahrzehnt hat sich die Lage dieser vertrauenswürdigen und tüchtigen Lehrerschaft bedrohlich verschlechtert.” Leo Leichtentritt, “Die Neuordnung des Privaten Musik-Unterrichts in Preussen,” *Anbruch* 8/1 (January, 1926): 31.

¹¹⁰ “Ihr alter Kundenkreis, der wohl-situierte und gebildete Mittelstand, ist so verarmt, daß er zu mehr als drei Viertel aus seiner früheren für die öffentliche und privat Musikpflege

economic chaos, “the wealth has been transferred to circles that, for the most part, don’t have the hereditary, long-maintained sense of the quality of art that the German middle class had, which accounted for the prosperity of musical art.”¹¹¹ The preference of the “new, reasonably affluent” layer of German society was, in Leichtentritt’s opinion, bad music, taught by “unscrupulous, incompetent, ignorant so-called teachers” out to flatter the tastes of their patrons.¹¹² Properly regulated, however, private music instruction was very important to the development of what Paul Bekker called the “musically disposed society.”¹¹³ Leichtentritt believed “it is the beautiful and important task of private music instruction, to foster the growth of a receptive audience that loves and understands art and to provide for the artistic dilettantes or amateurs.”¹¹⁴

As presently constructed Kestenber, Leichtentritt, and others concluded that private music instruction was a liability to both the economic and aesthetic health of German musical life. Through regulation and a redefinition of its purpose, however, private instruction could be turned into a useful tool for the State. Ideally, private

so bedeutungsvollen Stellung ausscheidet. Die guten Musikleher verlieren zum großen Teil ihr Brot.” Ibid., 31.

¹¹¹ “Der Wohlstand ist auf andere Kreise übergegangen, die zur Zeit wenigstens noch nicht das angestammte, langgepflegte Gefühl für Qualität der Kunst besitzen, das den gebildeten deutschen Mittelstand den gebildeten deutschen Mittelstand so schätzbar machte für das Gedeihen der musikalischen Kunst.” Ibid.

¹¹² “Die Freude dieser neuen, einigermaßen zahlungskräftigen Schichten des Publikums beschränkt sich auf den aufdringlichen, musikalischen Schund. Dem rohen Geschmack dieser an Zahl weitaus überwiegenden sogenannten ‘Liebhaber’ der Musik schmeichelt, nach dem Gesetz von Nachfrage und Angebot, eine bedrohlich angewachsene Zahl gewissenloser, unfähiger unwissender sogenannter ‘Lehrer’ und Konservatorien, deren Wirken schließlich zu einer die Kundigen erschreckenden Gefahr für die Kultur geworden ist.” Ibid., 31-32.

¹¹³ “...in jener musikalsich gestimmten ‘Gesellschaft’, für die Paul Bekker in seinem Buch ‘Das deutsche Musikleben’ mit so guter Begründung eintritt.” Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁴ “...so hat der privat Musikunterricht die schöne und wichtige Aufgabe, für das Aufwachsen eines kunstliebenden und verständnisvollen, aufnahmefähigen Publikums, für die Dilettanten oder Amateure der Kunst zu sorgen.” Ibid., 31.

instructors would cease to compete with professional musicians. Instead, the State would control the supply of musicians, and private instruction would serve to create an audience that appreciated the efforts of the professional class. In the social society, it was the responsibility of music colleges and conservatories, and not private instructors, to train professional musicians, researchers, and other “clever artisans of the musical art.”¹¹⁵

The primary way the State hoped to enforce standards in the private education sphere was through the introduction of a national standardized test, with passage being required for state licensure. Kestenberg and others in the Ministry of Art, Science, and Education supported the idea of state licensure, similar to that required of carpenters or other tradesmen, as did a plurality of professional musicians. The musical press was also largely in favor of creating a national examination, with the editors of the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* calling for this and other reforms explicitly, though they presented all views in their publication.

Sensing that popular opinion was on his side, Kestenberg and the Ministry of Art, Science, and Education took executive action in May 1925, declaring that all music educators needed to comply with a newly created state examination system. While this bold action, taken without the consent of the Reichstag, was applauded in musical circles, it caused consternation among many in the government, including within Kestenberg’s own Social Democrat party. With the creation of a mandatory exam for music educators, Kestenberg and the Ministry abridged the constitutional freedoms guaranteed to artists in the Weimar constitution, and did so outside of the democratic process.

¹¹⁵ “...die nützlichen und unentbehrlichen tüchtigen Handwerker der musikalischen Kunst fachgemäß auszubilden...” Ibid.

Wolfgang Heine, a former leader of the Social Democrats and member of the Reichstag with over thirty years of experience within the Ministry of Justice, disagreed vehemently with Kestenberg's action. Writing in the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*, he argued:

Art cannot be detached from the whole of spiritual life. Therefore, [the Ministry] should not claim a protective measure that shakes the foundation on which the spiritual health and the power of the entire society and state organization are based. This includes in the first place freedom in the intellectual sphere and legal assurance against arbitrariness.¹¹⁶

Heine believed that Kestenberg's decree violated all of the principles mentioned above. He reasoned that the very existence of a standardized exam violated the intellectual freedom of music educators, because a small number of bureaucrats would be imposing their priorities on the rest of the profession. Furthermore, he declared, the decree was not just a bad idea, but illegal: “[The decree] violates the principles of the rule of law and the rule of the people...[it] places art under the control of the authorities, who based on experience have a stronger feeling for their official authority than respect and understanding of the artistic personality.”¹¹⁷ In an attempt to stop the economic opportunism and incompetence of a few bad apples, Kestenberg and the Ministry trampled on one of the foundations of a democratic society, the rule of law.

¹¹⁶ “Die Kunst kann nicht aus der Gesamtheit des geistigen Lebens herausgelöst werden. Deshalb, dürfte sie keine Schutzmaßregel beanspruchen, die das Fundament erschüttert, auf dem die geistige Gesundheit und Kraft der gesamten Gesellschaft und ihrer Organisationsform des Staates überhaupt beruhen. Dazu gehört in erster Reihe die Freiheit auf geistigem Gebiete und die Rechtssicherheit gegen Willkür.” Wolfgang Heine, “Der Ungesetzliche Unterrichtserlaß,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (February 18, 1927): 147.

¹¹⁷ “Sie verstößt gegen die Grundgedanken des Rechtsstaates und Volksstaates. ...Die Verordnung unterstellt die Kunst einer Kontrolle durch Behörden, die allen Erfahrungen nach mehr starkes Gefühl für ihre Amtsautorität als Achtung und Verständnis für die künstlerische Persönlichkeit besitzen.” *Ibid.*, 147.

Heine was also deeply concerned about the level of arbitrariness in the decree. Leaving aside the actual content of the exam, which Heine left for experts to debate, the licenses, once given, could be rescinded at any time, without cause or explanation. There was no appeals process for a failed exam, and no orderly process for submission to an independent judge for a ruling. Heine noted that there was no security granted against abuses in the licensing law to suppress a politically, religiously, artistically, or otherwise unpopular personality or viewpoint. In short, Kestenberg's decree enabled the Ministry to act autocratically, without recourse to the legislature, with only a "flick of the wrist."¹¹⁸ Noting that under this new decree those harassed by regulators would have no redress through the usual governmental channels, Heine concluded with a warning: "This is a step backward representing the worst practices of the pre-March police state, and is unworthy of today's Prussian republic."¹¹⁹

Predictably, the private music educators themselves also opposed the testing and licensing proposals, and actually banded together to unify their opposition, holding conferences that sought to create alternatives to a standardized test while attempting to shed a more positive light on the state of their discipline.¹²⁰ Writing on behalf of the *Deutscher musikpädagogischer Verband*, Hans Schaub was incensed that music teachers were not allowed to police themselves and that they were not consulted in the creation of

¹¹⁸ "Dies alles macht das preußische Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Kunst, und Unterricht aus dem Handgelenk durch selbtherrliche Verfügung ohne Anrufung des Gesetzgebers." Ibid., 148.

¹¹⁹ "Rechtsmittel gibt es nicht, außer der Beschwerde im Dienstaufsichtwege, d.h. an das Ministerium, von dem diese Drangsalierungen ausgehen. Dies bedeutet einen Rückschritt in die ärgsten Gepflogenheiten des vormärzlichen Polizeistaat und ist der heutigen preußischen Republik durchaus unwürdig." Ibid., 149.

¹²⁰ Martin Friedland, "Die Dortmunder Tagung für Privatmusikunterricht" *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (May 6, 1927): 491-492.

the test. Responding to Kestenberg's assertion that only State control could eliminate the prevalence of musical "bunglers," Schaub asserted, "...the regulation of the musical education system was already just around the corner, and would have taken place without the upheaval and without Prof. Kestenberg. And the regulation would have been, as expected, better, and more correct... than the present measure..."¹²¹ Instead of incorporating the ideas and priorities of those in the *Verband*, Kestenberg went his own way, and, as a result, was opposed unanimously by the *Verband*.¹²²

Leo Leichtentritt, himself an exam administrator, thought this kind of thinking to be no more than sour grapes and believed the exams to be a net positive:

I can confirm that these tests are quite wholesome and promise an entirely salutary result with consistent implementation. The attacks made against the Ministry are not directed against the plan of state supervision, which is generally perceived as useful and timely, but against the way of implementation, and against individual provisions.¹²³

Leichtentritt agreed that it would be useful to listen to groups like the *Verband* and to incorporate their ideas, in order that there might be unified acceptance of the examination, which would grant more legitimacy to the process.

Despite the misgivings of Heine and those in the *Verband*, it is clear that, for most in the musical community, the end justified the means. In an article describing the

¹²¹ "musikalischen Puschertums" "...Eine Regelung des musikalischen Unterrichtswesens stand also vor der Tür und wäre gekommen auch ohne die Umwälzung und ohne Prof. Kestenberg. Und diese Regelung wäre, so wie zu erwarten war, besser, richtiger...als die jetzige..." Hans Schaub, "Wie das Musikprüfungswesen segensreich gestaltet werden könnte," *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (1927): 609.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "...kann ich bestätigen, daß diese Prüfungen durchaus vollwertig sind und bei konsequenter Durchführung ein durchaus ersprießliches Ergebnis verheißen. Die gegen das Ministerium erhobenen Angriffe richten sich nicht gegen den Plan der staatlichen Aufsicht, der allgemein als nützlich und zeitgemäß empfunden wird, sondern gegen die Art und Weise der Durchführung, gegen einzelne Bestimmungen." Leichtentritt, "Die Neuordnung des Privaten Musik-Unterrichts in Preussen," 33.

proceedings of the Dortmund Private Music Education Day, the author complained about Kestenberg's decree and offered several of his own flowery but vague suggestions for improving the system, triggering the following editorial note:

Words, nothing but words, cheap as blackberries and standing in complete contrast to the prior deeds of Kestenberg. The German music world, however, does not require additional pretty sounding speeches, but wants to see positive evidence.¹²⁴

Despite all of this debate, however, the decree ultimately lacked the force of law and relied on voluntary compliance. Leo Leichtentritt noted this circumstance, writing,

For the time being it is a matter of a transitional state, because it is impossible for practical, legal, and social reasons to carry out the new rules with unrelenting severity. One cannot reach quite all the bunglers (*Pfuscher*), as they can be difficult to find in their lairs, nor does one know them all.¹²⁵

Because of the opposition of Reichstag members like Heine, who saw an inherent danger in regulating artistic speech, Kestenberg and his supporters were not able to implement comprehensive testing during the Republic. Such testing would only be implemented by the Reichsmusikkammer in 1934.¹²⁶

Music Criticism

The field of music criticism exploded in the first few decades of the twentieth century and also serves to illustrate the fractured and deeply partisan nature of Weimar artistic

¹²⁴ "Worte, nichts wie Worte, billig wie Brombeeren und völlig im Gegensatz stehend zu den bisherigen Taten Kestenbergs. Die deutsche Musikwelt aber verlangt nicht noch weitere schönfärberische Reden, sondern sie will positive Beweise sehen." Friedland, "Die Dortmunder Tagung für Privatmusikunterricht," 492.

¹²⁵ "Vorläufig handelt es sich um einem Übergangszustand, da es aus praktischen, rechtlichen, und sozialen Gründen unmöglich ist, die neuen Bestimmungen mit unnachsichtlicher Strenge durchzuführen. Man kommt nicht an alle Pfuscher heran, weil man sie in ihren Schlupfwinkeln schwer aufstöbern kann, sie auch gar nicht alle kennt." Leichtentritt, "Die Neuordnung des Privaten Musik-Unterrichts in Preussen," 32.

¹²⁶ Steinweis, 85-86.

life. What was once the provenance of a few specialized journals like the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* or the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* now became common reportage in the hundreds of newspapers of the Weimar republic, with an opera premiere often generating dozens of reviews written for papers all over the country. Additionally, new journals sprang up, often with aesthetically partisan motivations in mind. *Melos*, founded in 1919 by conductor Hermann Scherchen, was explicitly dedicated to the promotion of new music. Scherchen embraced composers like Schoenberg, Krenek, and Hindemith and used an early issue to come to the defense of Ferruccio Busoni in his polemic against Hans Pfitzner.¹²⁷ Publishing companies began creating their own journals to promote their own artists. Founded in late 1919, the *Musikblätter des Anbruch*, one of the most influential new music journals of the period, was the official literary organ of Universal Edition and was tireless in its promotion of Franz Schreker in its early years.¹²⁸

The explosion in music criticism was a potential boon to musicologists, many of whom were unemployed after the First World War with few prospects within the academy. As we have already seen, Alfred Einstein believed that newspaper criticism was a viable career path for young musicologists, though even this option was greatly diminished during the hyperinflation. The academic credentials of musicologists often proved to be more of a hindrance than anything in entering the field of criticism,

¹²⁷ Fabian Lovisa, *Musikkritik im Nationalsozialismus: Die Rolle deutschsprachiger Musikzeitschriften, 1920-1945* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1993), 43. Lovisa couches his study of music journals in political terms: *Melos* and *Anbruch* are “Vorkämpfer der Moderne” while the *Zeitschrift für Musik* and *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* are classified as “Traditionsorgane.”

¹²⁸ This promotion did not last as the decade went on, at least not to a level acceptable to Schreker. Already a letter dated February 25, 1926, the composer complained to Paul Bekker that, despite the continued success of his earlier operas in theaters all over Germany, Paul Stefan (the editor of *Anbruch*) considered his career finished. Letter from Schreker to Bekker, in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 206.

however. As was the case with private music education, there were no standards determining whether or not someone was qualified to be a critic, and many trained musicologists working as critics felt threatened by untrained competitors.¹²⁹

Musicologists like Leo Leichtentritt, already a proponent of state licensure exams for music teachers, also believed that a doctorate in musicology should be the minimum requirement necessary to practice public music criticism.¹³⁰

Whether critics held degrees or not mattered little to composers. Although the open advocacy for certain composers in music journals and newspapers certainly helped advance the careers of composers like Schreker, Krenek, and Hindemith, more often than not composers believed that the explosion in criticism did their careers more harm than good. Critics were often hyperbolic in their condemnation of works they did not like; examples litter the following pages of this dissertation. Lesser known critics often followed the lead of more established ones, creating an echo chamber of praise or disapproval for a work. Composers often had powerful enemies in the press who rarely missed an opportunity to harangue a new work. The phenomenon of composers versus critics in itself was not new to the Weimar era—Carl Maria von Weber routinely roasted Beethoven in the press, as did Eduard Hanslick with Wagner—but the proliferation of media outlets in the 1920s served to intensify this sort of antagonism to a level that had the potential to exact lasting economic consequences on composers.¹³¹ Composers like

¹²⁹ Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 126-127.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹³¹ Richard Strauss was often at war with Julius Korngold, father of composer Erich Korngold, who used his powerful position at the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse* to harass Strauss whenever possible. Adolf Weissmann, one of Berlin's most important critics,

Strauss, Schreker, and Krenek thought it unfair that critics unqualified to analyze their music held such outsized power in influencing its reception. Schreker in particular was often bitter in this regard, especially as his fortunes waned.

One of the most iconic moments in twentieth-century music history, the founding of Arnold Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performances, usually privileged as emblematic of the self-conscious split between modernist composers and their audiences, was also an attempt to circumnavigate negative criticism of new works in the press that set audiences against compositions before they could have a fair hearing. The third founding principle of the Society was that "performances must be removed from the corrupting influence of publicity...and must be unaccompanied by applause, or demonstrations of disapproval."¹³² To achieve this aim, performances were to be "in all respects private"; members were expressly forbidden from engaging in public criticism: "...members shall be obligated to abstain from giving any public report of the performances and other activities of the Society, and especially not to write or inspire any criticisms, notices, or discussions of them in periodicals."¹³³ Schoenberg did not wish to dispense with the audience, which he felt could be educated through repeated listenings under the correct circumstances. More than anything, he and his colleagues wished to eliminate the scourge of criticism from their midst. A young Ernst Krenek sought (and eventually gained) an invitation to the Society, enamored not only of the exclusivity but also of the opportunity to hear new music without critical influence.

was unremitting in his negative criticism of Schreker's operas, and Schreker often complained about critics in his letters.

¹³² Alban Berg, "The Retreat to the Ivory Tower," in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Belmont, CA: Schirmer, 2008), 367.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

The threat of negative criticism so affected composers that they called for an end to opinion-based criticism all together. Although nothing was accomplished to this end during the Republic, Joseph Goebbels eventually made a decree banning any sort of arts criticism, leaving room only for straight reportage of events. The *Kritikverbot* of 1936 was enacted as a sop to artists and was framed as a protection for the dignity of German artists against rapacious newspaper critics. Goebbels's rationale for curbing criticism was designed to appeal to composers and other creative artists, arguing that only those who were themselves creative were in a position to criticize others.¹³⁴ As a result, many artists were initially enthusiastic about the ban, despite (like many Nazi cultural policies) the impossibility of its total implementation.¹³⁵

Conclusion

The years of the Weimar Republic were difficult years for composers and musicians in Germany. Tight budgets, both in the government and in private homes, meant that performance opportunities diminished greatly. Furthermore, a lack of professional regulation allowed amateurs to compete with professional musicians for jobs and students. While the terrible material conditions of composers and musicians was generally acknowledged, very little concrete action was taken to alleviate those conditions, in part because all artists in Germany only represented one to two percent of the population, and in part because internecine divisions kept the various artistic interest

¹³⁴ John London, "Introduction," in *Theatre Under the Nazis*, ed. John London (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 21.

¹³⁵ Lovisa, 206-207. Goebbels's decree went largely unenforced as critics found creative ways to circumvent it. Self-censorship on the part of regime-friendly publications was the main driver of compliance.

groups from presenting a unified voice and message to the public and elected officials.

Although many hoped the new, democratic government would be quick to address inequities in copyright, the music education system, and the field of music criticism, this was not the case. The anxieties felt by composers such as Strauss, Krenek, and Schreker concerning these issues were made manifest in their composer-operas of the Weimar period.

Chapter 3:

The Weimar-Era *Künstlerroman*: A Parallel Discourse

Concern for the status of the artist—specifically the composer—in German society during the 1920s was not limited to a small number of opera composers fretting over their personal fortunes; novelists of the era like Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, and Herman Hesse also problematized the relationship of the composer and music to society in their widely-read novels. As Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter have written, music (and therefore the figure of the composer) became central to the formation and understanding of German national identity over the course of the nineteenth century, with the connection between musical talent and national distinction growing more explicit in the early twentieth century.¹ Therefore, the economic and aesthetic struggles of composers during the Weimar Republic symbolized the struggles of the nation itself in the years after the First World War. Writers turned to the *Künstlerroman*, or artist-novel, simultaneously confronting many of the same issues addressed in the artist-operas of the period.

Just as the artist-opera of the 1920s was the continuation and intensification of an established genre, so to were the works of Mann, Werfel, and Hesse. The artist-novel has its roots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century works of Goethe (*Torquato Tasso*, *Wilhelm Meister*), E.T.A. Hoffmann (the *Kreisleriana*, a series of stories about a musician named Kreisler culminating in *Kater Murr* in 1820-21), Wilhelm Heinrich

¹ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, “Germans as the ‘People of Music’: Genealogy of an Identity,” in *Music and German National Identity*, edited by Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 22.

Wackenroder (*Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*) and Ludwig Tieck (*Musikalische Leiden und Freuden*). In these works the artist is treated as an outsider imbued with a special calling. Sabrina Hausdörfer cites a decline in court patronage and advances in industrialization as reasons for the explosion in artist-novels in the early nineteenth century, which in many ways mirrors the upswing of the artist-novel and the artist-opera after the First World War, as court patronage under the Kaiser disappeared only to be replaced by an uncertain and very provisional federalism that varied widely from location to location.²

In this chapter I will examine three works from the parallel genre of the artist-novel—Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924), Werfel’s *Verdi* (1924), and Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* (1927). Composed during the years of the Republic, these novels illustrate the pervasive influence of both Wagner’s and especially Pfitzner’s work during the 1920s. All of the works discussed in this chapter were extremely popular and widely consumed in their own time, contributing in their own ways to the complex and often frustratingly porous aesthetic zeitgeist of the period. Additionally, I will demonstrate how the Weimar-era artist novels of Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, and Herman Hesse engaged in the same debates about the role of the artist in society as the artist-operas of the period, helping to shape and complicate an already complex sociopolitical discourse.

The Magic Mountain

² Sabrina Hausdörfer, *Rebellion im Kunstschein: Die Funktion des fiktiven Künstlers in Roman und Kunsttheorie der deutschen Romantik* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 62.

The influence of *Palestrina* on Mann's thinking did not end with *Reflections of a Non-Political Man* (1918). The notion of German music as being "in sympathy with death" and the composer as a resigned facilitator of that aesthetic formed a central theme in Mann's first major novel of the 1920s, *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*).

Although Mann's massive novel was not completed and published until 1924, he had already begun sketching ideas for the book by the time of the publication of *Reflections* and made the thematic connection between *Palestrina* and *The Magic Mountain* explicit in his essay on the opera. When Pfitzner noted that *Palestrina* was "in sympathy with death," Mann wrote that he was shocked, because that very phrase was used by Mann to describe the tone of the then-unpublished *Magic Mountain*.³ Mann wrote,

Before the war I had begun to write a little novel, a type of pedagogical story, in which a young person, landed in a morally hazardous resort, found himself between two equally quaint educators, between an Italian literary man, humanist, rhetorician and man of progress, and a somewhat disreputable mystic, reactionary, and advocate of antireason—he had the choice, the good youngster, between the powers of virtue and of seduction, between duty and service to life and the fascination of decay, for which he was not unreceptive; and the turn of the phrase, "sympathy with death," was a thematic constituent of the composition.⁴

The "little novel" described by Mann became, by the time of its publication, a sprawling tome that examined by way of allegory the aesthetic position taken by *Palestrina*, problematizing it and ultimately rejecting the "sympathy with death" so consistent with Pfitzner's and Mann's war-time conservatism in favor of "life"; that is, an engagement with society as exemplified by modern democracy.

As Pfitzner entrenched himself more and more deeply over the course of the 1920s as the representative of a musical and political conservatism antithetical to

³ Mann *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, 311.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 311-312. Translation modified.

democracy, Mann underwent a significant change of heart. In the time between the publications of *Reflections* and *The Magic Mountain*, Mann evolved from a critic of democracy into a *Vernunftrepublikaner*, or, rational republican.⁵ Rational republicans had no special love for democracy and did not necessarily believe in its future; rather, they viewed it as an historical inevitability that, at present, was better than any alternatives. In an aesthetic parallel, Mann still felt an affinity for Pfitzner and the aesthetic territory staked out in *Palestrina*; however, on an intellectual level he had come to believe that the fetishization of genius and the artist present in Pfitzner's work was both morally and politically dangerous and needed to be overcome through engagement with society.

The evolution of Mann's position and his rejection of Pfitzner's aesthetic in *The Magic Mountain* was made explicit in a strained, though strangely touching, exchange on the occasion of Mann's fiftieth birthday in 1925. Pfitzner wrote,

We have not seen each other for a long time. This could be due to what one calls chance; for neither of us has expressed the wish that we should avoid one another. But it weighs on me, and I consider it my duty to tell you, that, for my part, the impossibility of my seeing you was forced by a confrontation between us... Thus, I would like to tell you what you have apparently felt for a long time: that your recently published 'political' (to use this not quite suitable word) views have painfully alienated me from you... Perhaps it would have been better to tell you this in person. But ... to meet you without bringing up something of all that has been mentioned, would have scarcely been possible for me, and, moreover, I would not have wished it. On the other hand, to allow your day of honor to pass without letting you hear something from me was inconsistent with my relation to you, and so, I must in this manner follow suit, however unusual this birthday greeting may seem to you.⁶

The political views mentioned by Pfitzner in his letter were, at least in part, those espoused in *The Magic Mountain*, as Mann's reply makes clear:

⁵ Gay, 24.

⁶ Quoted in Jon Newsom, "Hans Pfitzner, Thomas Mann, and 'The Magic Mountain,'" *Music and Letters* 55/2 (April, 1974): 141-142.

Naturally, it was clear to me that my new intellectual resolutions must be offensive to you. At least believe that they originate from a sincere heart—and from a sense of vindication that may be stronger than that which a musician is obliged to feel... The character designated the hero of my latest novel is occasionally called ‘life’s delicate child’. All of us artists are delicate children of life, but children of life nonetheless, and—this now pertains to the musician with his romantic license as well as to the literary artist—whoever, at a moment such as this in Europe, does not take sides with the party of life and the future against fascination with death, would truly be an idle boy.⁷

Mann continued in his letter, writing that despite their disagreements, the two men would always be linked by virtue of Mann’s essay on *Palestrina*, which he viewed as “the only such essay that is nearly worthy of its subject.”⁸ The two men would be free to make enemies with one another, wrote Mann, but such a decisive break would not keep history from “speaking our names in one breath.”⁹ Therefore, he concluded, despite all of the differences between them, they ought to recognize the peculiar kinship they shared.

Although none of the main characters in *The Magic Mountain* are musicians, the relationship between Hans Castorp and the music he hears during his seven-year stay in a Swiss sanatorium plays a central thematic role in the novel. The first description of Hans Castorp’s character in the novel highlights his ordinary, rather ambitionless personality and his casual love of music:

But otherwise he was a regular, healthy lad, a passable tennis-player and oarsman, although on summer evenings instead of manning an oar, he preferred sitting on the terrace of the Uhlenhorst Boathouse, a refreshing drink in hand, listening to music and watching the boats as they drifted among the swans, their lights reflected in the bright smooth water.¹⁰

⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 142.

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage International, 1996), 29.

Castorp is a dull, unreflective person, and his love of music is also one that he never questions or stops to consider. As the novel progresses, Castorp's receptivity (and susceptibility) to music returns over and over again, creating a kind of leitmotif within the story.¹¹

During the first part of his stay at the sanatorium, Castorp is befriended and mentored by Herr Settembrini, an Italian humanist and man of letters who challenges many of Castorp's assumptions about art, specifically music. Settembrini is highly critical of the German relationship to music and believes music to have a dangerous narcotic effect. In an important chapter entitled "Politically Suspect," Settembrini lays out his position on music at a Sunday afternoon band concert held at the sanatorium. When Castorp asks Settembrini whether he enjoys listening to music, Settembrini replies that he does not enjoy listening when he is forced to (the Sunday concerts are part of the treatment program), and that he tries to maintain at least the illusion of freedom from the regimented schedule of the sanatorium. He continues by noting his general distrust of music, stating, "Music...there is something only semi-articulate about it, something dubious, irresponsible, indifferent."¹² Even if music is formally clear, it is "not true clarity, but a dreamy empty clarity that demands nothing of us, a clarity without consequences, and therefore dangerous, because it seduces us to take our ease beside it."¹³ Music is dangerous because it inflames the emotions, unlike the written word, which should inflame the intellect. "Music," Settembrini maintains, "...is movement for its own sake—although I suspect it of quietism. Let me overstate my case: my distaste

¹¹ Newsom, 145.

¹² Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, 111.

¹³ Ibid.

for music is political.”¹⁴ In keeping with his unreflecting personality, Castorp finds Settembrini’s assessment to be ludicrous and tells him so, which causes Settembrini to issue a warning: “By itself, music is dangerous. And for you in particular, my good engineer, it is absolutely dangerous.”¹⁵

Settembrini’s (and Mann’s) distrust of music stems from its ability to “numb us, put us to sleep, counteract all activity and progress...”¹⁶ The narcotic effect thus produced is the “Devil’s tool,” creating “dullness, rigidity, stagnation, slavish inertia.” With these words, Mann is implicitly critiquing the musical aesthetic of Pfitzner as evidenced in *Palestrina* and his subsequent polemics. For Pfitzner, the composer was a master, and the superiority of his work demanded passive and devoted reception from the audience.¹⁷ It is precisely this sort of passive engagement with music that Settembrini notes in Castorp, thus making him susceptible to the dangerous manipulations of music.

Ultimately, it is Hans Castorp’s rejection of a passive, uncritical relationship with music that precipitates his choice to leave the sanatorium, rather than stay and face certain death, both physically and spiritually. In the chapter “Fullness of Harmony,” the sanatorium acquires a gramophone and a collection of records: mainly operas, symphonies, and art songs. Castorp is entranced by the new technology, advertised as “the German soul, up to date.”¹⁸ The gramophone quickly becomes an obsession for Castorp, and he places himself in charge of it and the library. Each night, Castorp plays carefully selected records for the patients, often continuing to play his favorites long after

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷ Weiner, 54.

¹⁸ Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, 628.

everyone else goes to bed. The song that resonates most deeply with him is Schubert's *Der Lindenbaum*. Mann describes Castorp's experience of the song in minute detail, asserting through the narrator that he had "penetrated deeply enough into the life of the intellect" to understand the song and his love for it.¹⁹ His time at the sanatorium had challenged Castorp to become a more reflective critic of the world around him, causing him to realize that his love for the song was rooted in a love for death itself, and that love for death lurked behind his love of Schubert's song. In *Der Lindenbaum*'s original form, "there may have been no sympathy with death, only something full of life and folk culture. But to feel spiritual and intellectual sympathy with it was to feel sympathy with death."²⁰ At this moment, Castorp remembers Settembrini's admonition to avoid "intellectual backsliding," that is, to avoid succumbing to the dangers of music. Mann as narrator interjects to explain how one can avoid such backsliding:

Hans Castorp's sweet, lovely, fair song of nostalgia, the emotional world to which it belonged, his love for that world—they were supposed to be 'sick'? Not at all. There was nothing more healthy, more genial on earth. Except that this was a fruit—a fresh, plump, healthy fruit, that was liable, extraordinarily liable, to begin to rot and decay at that very moment, or perhaps the next; and although it was the purest regalement of the spirit when enjoyed at the right moment, only a moment later and it could spread rot and decay among those who partook of it...It was a miracle, perhaps, in the eyes of unscrupulous beauty, who gave it her blessing; yet it was regarded with mistrust, and for valid reasons, by the responsible eye of someone 'playing king,' who affirmed life and loved its organic wholeness. Both a miracle, and in response to the final compelling voice of conscience, the means by which he triumphed over himself.²¹

Through an active engagement with music, Castorp comes to realize and ultimately reject the "sympathy with death" that lay behind not just *Der Lindenbaum*, but the whole of German art music. This epiphany is a turning point for Castorp, who eventually decides

¹⁹ Ibid., 641

²⁰ Ibid., 642.

²¹ Ibid., 643.

to leave the decadent safety of the sanatorium in order to experience the uncertainties of life as a soldier in the First World War. Despite the fact that Castorp will probably not emerge from the war unscathed (this matter is left open at the end of the novel), he has chosen “life,” that is, to engage with society, just as Mann exhorted Pfitzner to do in 1925, to no avail. Mann praised the “sympathy with death” found in *Palestrina* in 1917; by 1924 he believed that only a renunciation of this aesthetic could provide a way forward for German art and culture, explicitly arguing his position in *The Magic Mountain*.

Verdi

Thomas Mann was not the only author to engage the problematic nature between artist and society in the twenties. In 1924, the same year as *The Magic Mountain*, Austrian Franz Werfel published his best known novel, *Verdi: A Novel of the Opera*, a work of historical fiction that challenged Pfitzner’s conception of the composer as aloof genius, subject only to the rarefied influence of *Einfall*. In *Verdi*, Werfel proposes a vision of the composer as a craftsman who shares a sense of community and purpose with his audience.²² As Marc Weiner has shown, the text of *Verdi* maintains a significant dialogue with *Palestrina* through a web of overt and covert references.²³ Werfel was undoubtedly familiar with *Palestrina* and knew Pfitzner personally through Alma Mahler, who was married to Werfel by the time he was writing *Verdi*. The two men disliked each other’s

²² George C. Schoolfield, *The Figure of The Musician in German Literature* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 168.

²³ Weiner, 152-153.

personalities and politics intensely.²⁴ Werfel, a socialist who thought of himself as a “class-conscious worker of the mind and heart,” despised the German nationalism and aesthetic elitism of Pfitzner, writing in 1917 that the work of German authors would be insignificant if they continued to embrace abstraction and intellectualism while remaining at a remove from society.²⁵ In the novel, Verdi the composer engages with and ultimately outlasts—literally—both the self-aggrandizing romanticism of Wagner and the severely ascetic detachment of the fictional composer Mathias Fischböck, culminating in the composition of *Otello*.

Verdi takes place in a period of the composer’s life about which little is known, the winter of 1882-83. Verdi has not been able to complete a work for the stage in a decade, during which time Wagner supplanted him as the leading European opera composer. In the novel, Verdi secretly travels to Venice in hopes of finishing *King Lear*, an opera that has occupied him for years. He has a chance encounter with Wagner, which incites in Verdi a sense of rivalry that runs throughout the book. Verdi spends much of the novel attempting to compose an opera named *King Lear*, a project that he never finishes. He eventually burns the sketches because he fears that Wagner, specifically the harmony of *Tristan und Isolde*, has influenced them. In the end he determines to meet with Wagner face to face, only to find out the latter recently died. An epilogue depicts Verdi and his librettist Boito and publisher Ricordi at Verdi’s farm a few years later after the success of *Otello*. Although the novel is ostensibly set in 1882, the questions of art and the artist being debated in the 1920s lie close beneath the surface. In particular, Werfel uses the character of Wagner to represent the aesthetic worldview proclaimed by

²⁴ Ibid., 171-172.

²⁵ Ibid., 172.

Pfitzner and *Palestrina*, which stands in opposition to the worldview of Verdi. Acting as the narrator, Werfel writes,

It is true that Wagner's work is a thousand-branched epitome of poetry, music, and philosophy. But between these domains their creator acknowledge no frontiers; he expressed his genius as if from a point alike beyond them all. In an ether, devoid of any conditioning or hampering element, free from all practical necessity, and obeying only the laws of his own being, he accomplished his incommensurable work.²⁶

Werfel's assessment of Wagner's creative process is remarkably similar to Pfitzner's: recall that in *Palestrina*, the composer creates his mass all at once, composing in a daze as he receives direct, unmediated inspiration from past musical masters and angelic choirs.

This notion of direct inspiration void of any cultural or other mediating factors stands in complete opposition to Verdi, whom Werfel depicts as a craftsman who creates out of material, rather than aesthetic, obligation:

For young Verdi, a composer of operas, obliged to write with an eye upon opera seasons and opera singers the word Art (how he hated the cant which this word gave rise to!) had no romantic suggestion of a mission of garret ideals, of supermanhood.²⁷

Verdi did not exist outside of society; he was an integral part of it "because he worked for it, very much as the painters...did not paint because they had some theory of light or form to express, but because the pious demanded pictures...Verdi wrote for the public, for the people who thronged the theaters of Italy."²⁸

Werfel constructs his workmanlike vision of Verdi by depicting the composer directly engaged in the creative act throughout the novel, mostly in futile attempts to

²⁶ Franz Werfel, *Verdi: A Novel of the Opera*, trans. Helen Jessimann (New York: Allen, Towne, and Heath, 1947), 87.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 87-88.

finish *King Lear*. In describing Verdi's writing process, Werfel relates the vision of a composer who writes out of duty and fidelity to craft rather than inspiration:

The metronome was by no means a necessity for him. He was able to take any time-measure he desired unaided. But what wine, cognac, black coffee or forbidden drugs might be to another artist, this stimulating instrument was to him. Pulsing its presto through the night, it lent him wings and mastery...His experience was that the sound of its bating enabled him to work steadily through a piece without interrupting himself and to maintain a uniform rate of progress.²⁹

Even as inspiration abandons him in the composition of *King Lear*, Verdi continues to work:

No verse would fall at his feet today and spur him to work again. Only reason, knowledge, and practical work were left to him now...the Maestro smoothed out the open pages of the *Lear* music. Even this was only a duty task, for it was one of his deepest convictions that no man had the right to live idle and produce nothing.³⁰

In contrast, Wagner is never described in the act of composition in *Verdi*. He is nearly always holding court among a group of young, sycophantic followers, engaging in a one-way discourse with himself. Early in the novel, when Verdi sees Wagner in the street, he is surrounded by a crowd, speaking "loudly, emphasizing the breadth of his expansive German vowels, expounding, explaining, bantering, and he was the first to greet his own wit with sympathetic laughter."³¹ As for the young men following Wagner, they were "...beside themselves. With the wild eyes of fanaticism, the relaxed lips of intoxication, the hissing breath of ecstasy, they drank in his words without understanding

²⁹ Ibid., 90.

³⁰ Ibid., 259-260.

³¹ Ibid., 11.

them. No, it was not the words they drank, but the mere sound of his voice.”³² Although Wagner is surrounded by crowds, he is not connected to them, nor does he care to be.

For Werfel, the music of Wagner (and Pfitzner, by implication) is destructive because it is unmoored from the community; it debases itself and its listeners through intellectual abstraction. In order for music to be a positive force, it must be—like the music of Verdi—rooted in community and free from overanalysis. Werfel makes this clear in a scene in which an illiterate and disabled boy named Mario improvises for Verdi. Verdi is moved by the beauty and perfection of Mario’s song and marvels at its power, despite Mario’s lack of formal musical knowledge. Soon he begins to compare the perfection of Mario’s song with German music, fuming to himself, “And the Germans? Have they truly created anything new? Were their classics not after all slaves of the Italian form...What can they do, then, these Germans? Only destroy!”³³ Verdi concluded that the German spirit was a “...disintegrating, analytic spirit, striving against nature, evil, up in arms even against the eternal verities of Music.”³⁴

Although Wagner’s music and aesthetics weigh heavily on Verdi throughout the novel, the two composers never meet in person. Instead, Verdi (under the alias of Carrara) befriends Mathias Fischböck, a sickly and struggling German composer living in Venice. Fischböck represents the Pfitznerian aesthetic of preservation and detachment in the extreme. He describes himself as a “Conservative,” whose goal is to “free art from its modern formlessness, its psychic, subjective irresponsibility.”³⁵ For Fischböck, the

³² Ibid. Werfel’s description of Wagner’s followers bears an uncanny resemblance to the words of Settembrini.

³³ Werfel, 132.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 221.

salvation of music lay in the rediscovery of the polyphony of Palestrina, Buxtehude, and Bach. He despises opera and lays the blame for the undoing of music at the feet of Monteverdi and the introduction of monody. Fischböck is so committed to his idealization of counterpoint that he abhors even the work of Beethoven and Wagner, describing the latter and his compositions as "...nothing but a filthy, diabolical striving after effectiveness....He is the destroyer of music! All his methods are unclean. He is the arch idol of the most abject self-seekers."³⁶ Fischböck will not write for voices, corrupted as they are by the opera, and he cannot stand the sentimentality of the orchestra, leaving him only the string quartet and keyboard instruments as vehicles for his compositions. His manuscripts are not given names, only labeled by form: Toccata, Chacone, or Passacaglia; some are just called "piece" and given a number.³⁷ Verdi begs Fischböck to play one of his compositions; Werfel describes the experience thusly:

At the second bar Verdi set the young man down as a lunatic, at the tenth, as a humbug; by the thirtieth he was convinced that this atrocious creation must be the result of the mysterious malady which had undermined the young man's powers...Each part seemed to go its own way, as if unrelated to the others, till at intervals all were drawn together with a strongly marked accent into a sort of harsh chord that clanged in the ears. The rhythm stumbled on like the never halting trampling of exhausted feet. Soon the key was lost again, dominant and tonic notes seemed to be banished from the composition as if by order of the police...³⁸

Readers of the 1920s would have recognized Werfel's description of Fischböck's music as a critique of the atonal and so-called neo-classical works of contemporary modernist composers. Though the musical texture of atonal modernism was vastly different from Pfitzner's romanticism, both styles were driven by the same aesthetic elitism that

³⁶ Ibid., 219.

³⁷ Ibid., 239.

³⁸ Ibid., 240.

championed the composer as an isolated genius who creates apart from, and often in spite of, the society that surrounds him. Indeed, the words of Fischböck to Verdi upon the completion of his performance could have easily come from the mouth of Schoenberg: “Herr Carrara, it is not to be expected that you should be able, at the first onset, to master my music. To begin with, you must rid your mind of all your preconceptions about tune.”³⁹

Fischböck is terminally committed to his rigid, self-imposed elitism, harming both his personal health and the material well-being of his wife and child. Verdi, portrayed in the novel as a craftsman and family man above all, finds Fischböck’s unwillingness to provide for his family even more vexing than his alien harmonies. Shortly after meeting Fischböck and his family it becomes clear to Verdi that they have no steady stream of income. Verdi tells him that there would surely be opportunities for publication and performance for a composer of his talent, if only he would put aside his “critical theories.”⁴⁰ If no opportunities were found in Germany, certainly Fischböck could secure performances in Italy, provided he composed the “right sort of music,” by which Verdi meant music designed, like his own, for mass consumption.⁴¹ Fischböck rejects the notion, uttering the patently modernist sentiment, “I do not write for the world of today.” He continues, his retort redolent of Palestrina’s fatalist remarks to Borromeo, “In my compositions I simply fulfill the law of music as a tree fulfills the law of nature. What the world will do with it or refuse to do with it, is of no consequence to me.”⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 241.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 237.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 238.

Verdi's response to Fischböck summarizes Werfel's populist aesthetic, advocating for the communal aspects of music making in language similar to that used by Paul Bekker in his polemics against Pfitzner:

You Germans take a lofty attitude towards consequences. But I cannot conceive of a musician who does not produce music. Music is not a philosophy or a dogma of absolute truth, otherwise that which is produced would not become obsolete so soon. More than any other art it expresses the reaction of humanity to a given period. ...[T]he applause which music evokes is not indecent, as the moderns declare, but an essential part of the music itself. It has to be reckoned with from the first draft of the score. It is as impossible to conceive music without the public as politics without the masses.⁴³

Despite Verdi's attempts to influence Fischböck's intransigent aesthetic purity out of pity for the composer's wife and child, he remained committed to his ideals, eventually succumbing to the fever and ill health that mysteriously plagued him, described by Fischböck as "the spirit of evil...which always tries to hinder him who seeks the truth."⁴⁴ Recounting Verdi's final farewell to Fischböck's family, Werfel once more juxtaposed the healthy craftsman against the sick aesthete, describing the sadness in Verdi's face, "the face of a wise old workman."⁴⁵ In a way Fischböck's death lifts an emotional and intellectual load off of Verdi, who departs from "...the smell of carbolic and the atmosphere of the sick wards, [filling] his lungs with pure air."⁴⁶ With the death of both Wagner and Fischböck, Verdi is finally free from the sick ward of German aestheticism and is finally able to breathe the clean air of Italian creativity, rooted in a deep sense of community and artistic tradition.

⁴³ Ibid. Wagner forbid applause after the first act of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth, and the bylaws of Schoenberg's Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen expressly banned applause at the conclusion of a work.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 214.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 407.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 410.

In describing Verdi as a craftsman who is inspired and renewed by his audience, Werfel cast a very different vision of the ideal composer than that proposed by Pfitzner or even Mann. In Werfel's telling, the only way forward for German art was through a rejection of both the romantic mysticism of Wagner and the intellectual purity of Fischböck, both of which resulted from a Pfitznerian separation of the artist and his audience. The portrait of Verdi presented in the novel reflected the socialist and populist politics of its author and resonated with the Social Democratic policies and reforms attempted by men like Paul Bekker and Leo Kestenberg during the Weimar years.

Steppenwolf

Perhaps no literary work of the Weimar period describes the inner turmoil and moral confusion of German artists and intellectuals as effectively as Herman Hesse's 1927 novel *Steppenwolf*, published in the middle of the so-called "golden years" of the republic. Like Mann, Hesse often explored the relationship between the composer/musician and society in his writing, with composers playing prominent roles in works like *Gertrude* (1910) and *Demian* (1919). Unlike the works of Mann and Werfel described above, *Steppenwolf* engages directly with contemporary popular culture in Germany, betraying a deep ambivalence toward jazz culture and advances in technology, specifically the invention of the phonograph. Hesse's novel, like Mann's and Werfel's, points to a need for reform in German cultural life; however, by the end of the book it remains unclear at best whether popular culture and jazz could stimulate meaningful reform. By the late 1920s the emergence of jazz and the phonograph challenged the almost unquestioned hegemony of the German art music tradition and provoked a large

amount of intellectual discourse in all areas of literature and music. As I will show in a later chapter, the ambivalence displayed in *Steppenwolf* toward popular culture and music is also present in Ernst Krenek's artist-opera *Jonny spielt auf*, which premiered in late 1927 and was the most performed opera in German-speaking opera houses for the next year. Throughout the novel, the protagonist Harry Haller receives visions of the "immortals" that shape his cultural sensibilities, much in the way that Palestrina was surrounded in Pfitzner's opera by visions of past musical masters as he toiled on the Pope Marcellus Mass. Unlike in Pfitzner's opera, however, Haller's visions of Goethe and Mozart do not exist merely to reinscribe the genius of the "immortals" while granting him a place among their ranks; rather, in Haller's visions Goethe and Mozart openly mock him and his rigid ideals, challenging him to embrace laughter and life.

Steppenwolf tells the story of Harry Haller, who struggles to overcome the repression of his upbringing and the alienation brought about by modern existence. His sense of remove from society is made evident in Hesse's description of his lifestyle: Haller is financially secure, living alone in an apartment while reading extensively and writing in his journal. He is also a published author, writing polemics of a socialist and pacifist nature on occasion for a local paper.⁴⁷ Haller's crisis of the spirit results from the disparity between his conservative cultural tastes and his liberal, populist political views.⁴⁸ Haller's relationship with music is central to his intellectual journey: throughout the novel, different types of music are used as signifiers of different cultural levels navigated by the protagonist; as Marc Weiner has written, Haller's "...battle of the psyche and the rigid stratification of his society is undertaken through a reevaluation of

⁴⁷ Weiner, 106.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

cultural works,” especially the works of Goethe, Mozart, and the jazz music of the period as mediated through the character of Pablo, a saxophone player.⁴⁹ At the beginning of the novel, Haller associates a high social position with the classical music of Mozart and the writing Goethe, both of which are opposed to the moral degeneracy and disenfranchisement of jazz.⁵⁰ Haller hates himself for his elitist tastes and wishes to release himself from the repressive social order that influenced his upbringing, attempting to free himself from his self-imposed alienation through a journey into the seedy underbelly of Weimar nightlife, where he is guided by the prostitute Hermine and the sexually and racially ambiguous jazz musician Pablo.

Haller’s ambivalence toward jazz is made apparent early in the novel, when he hears it emanating from a dance hall as he walks by: “I passed by the strains of lively jazz music, hot and raw as the steam of raw flesh. . . . This kind of music, as much as I detested it, had always had a secret charm for me. It was repugnant to me, and yet ten times preferable to all the academic music of the day.”⁵¹ For Haller, jazz was half “sugar and sentimentality,” the other half was “savage” and “temperamental,” representing the music of decline.⁵² When compared with the “real” music of Bach and Mozart, jazz was a “miserable affair,” but, according to Haller, so was all German music and art of the present.⁵³ If Haller hated jazz, it was no more than the works of all contemporary composers.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, trans. Joseph Mileck and Horst Frenz (New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1963), 37.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 37-38.

Despite his reservations, Haller was drawn to jazz music, eventually even learning how to dance the fox trot and other jazz dances. And yet, despite his desire to engage with popular culture, which he believes may be a corrective for his cultural alienation, Haller displays an involuntary elitism towards jazz music and the musicians who play it. Upon meeting Pablo for the first time, Haller remarks that he did not believe that the “charming jazz caballero” did not appear to think much of anything aside from playing saxophone and womanizing.⁵⁴ Haller’s first instinct is to intellectualize the music played by Pablo and his band, and he attempts to engage Pablo and Hermine in a dissertation about tone color in jazz music, embarking on a “manly justification” of jazz music.⁵⁵ Although Pablo’s “large, vacant eyes” smiled politely he did not join the conversation, leading Haller to conclude that the two men “came from contrasted races and spoke languages in which no two words were akin.”⁵⁶ Haller describes Pablo in racist terms typical of his class: Pablo is an instinctive, emotional, child-like creature, countered by Haller’s elite intellectualism and privilege. Though Pablo eventually becomes Haller’s “best friend in earthly affairs”⁵⁷ the social and intellectual division between the two remains on some level, despite Haller’s best efforts at dissolving his bourgeois personality through jazz and dance.

The climax of the novel takes place after a night of jazz-induced revelry. Invited to a masquerade ball, Haller finally leaves behind his intellectual hang-ups and gives himself over fully to the intoxication of the music and dance:

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Schoolfield, 157.

I myself breathed the sweet intoxication of a common dream and of music and rhythm and wine and women—I, who had in other days so often listened with amusement, or dismal superiority, to its panegyric in the ballroom chatter of some student. I was myself no longer. My personality was dissolved in the intoxication of the festivity like salt in water.⁵⁸

In that moment of communal revelry Haller abandoned the perch of his intellectual superiority and became one with Pablo and the dancers, if only temporarily: “let come to me what may, for once at least, I, too, have been happy, radiant, released from myself, a brother of Pablo’s, a child.” Once the dancing breaks up, Pablo invites Haller and Hermine upstairs to experience his “Magic Theater,” for which the price of admission is nothing more or less than the entrant’s mind. Here Pablo gives his guests some hallucinogenic drugs in order to prepare them for the experience. The goal of the dance and the drugs is, according to Pablo, to allow Haller to leave his personality behind.⁵⁹ Pablo surmises that Haller’s wish to escape time and reality is simply a desire to be relieved of his personality, which the musician refers to the “prison” in which Haller languishes.⁶⁰ Having abandoned himself, Haller steps through a door and is immediately transported into an anarchic, chaotic scene: “a world of noise and excitement.”⁶¹ Weiner writes that noise is the acoustical equivalent of jazz in *Steppenwolf* and marks the equivalence of jazz with political anarchy in the novel.⁶² Haller describes the scene:

Cars, some of them armored, were run through the streets chasing the pedestrians. They ran them down and either left them mangled on the ground or crushed them to death against the walls of the houses. I saw at once that it was the long-prepared, long-awaited and long-feared war between men and machines, now at last broken out. ... There was a war on, a violent, genuine and highly sympathetic war where there was no concern for Kaiser or republic, for frontiers, flags or

⁵⁸ Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶² Weiner, 142.

colors...but a war in which everyone who lacked air to breathe and no longer found life exactly pleasing gave emphatic expression to his displeasure and strove to prepare the way for a general destruction of this iron-cast civilization of ours.⁶³

Haller quickly joins in the fray, picking up a gun and shooting everyone in his path without regard to sides or allegiances. It is wanton destruction for its own sake, without logic or remorse. In this scene, Hesse gives vent to the fears of many about the industrialization of society and the rapid advance of technology while simultaneously revealing these fears to be absurd by the patent unreality of the situation; Haller's compatriot Gustav shouts, "Of course, what we are doing isn't rational. It's childishness..."⁶⁴

Rather than providing him with enlightenment and release, the Magic Theater turns out to be a nightmare for Haller. Confronted in a different room by the image of a man ripping a live rabbit apart while under the control of a wolf, Haller declared, "The Magic Theater was clearly no paradise. All hell lay beneath its charming surface."⁶⁵ The image of the man subordinated by the wolf is a parable for Haller's abandonment of bourgeois rectitude in favor of his base instincts, represented by jazz and the popular culture to which he had given himself over. Significantly, in that moment of horror and realization, the words of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony ring in his ears, "O Friend, not these tones,"⁶⁶ as if the composer himself was warning Haller against the danger of his path.

⁶³ Hesse, 180-181.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Soon after this traumatic event Haller comes face to face with Mozart, who enters the scene to the music that signals the arrival of the stone guest in *Don Giovanni*.⁶⁷ Haller conjures up the most exalted picture of the composer that he could muster. Mozart's first words are not pompous, but self-deprecating, "it goes alright without the saxophone—though to be sure, I shouldn't wish to tread on the toes of that famous instrument."⁶⁸ When Haller attempts to give an academic justification for the greatness of Mozart's music, the composer laughs at Haller in "frightful mockery," exclaiming, "Don't overstrain yourself... You're a musician yourself, I perceive. Well I have given up the trade and retired to take my ease. It is only for amusement that I look on at the business now and then."⁶⁹ Mozart then flippantly passes judgment on the music of Brahms and Wagner, to Haller's astonishment. He suddenly disappears into the "rarefied and glacial atmosphere" of the immortals, but returns shortly, in modern dress, to address Haller's hatred of the gramophone.

Haller's hatred of the gramophone is established early in the novel, when he is required to buy one in order to take dance lessons from Hermine. Haller "could not picture the detested instrument" in his study, and offered it to Hermine as an honorarium at the end of their lessons.⁷⁰ The gramophone was a violation of Haller's personal space, an invasion of American music into the "sanctum" where he took refuge with Novalis and Jean Paul.⁷¹ Haller's hatred of mechanical musical reproduction had not waned by the end of the novel, when he encounters Mozart intently tuning a radio, listening to a

⁶⁷ Ibid., 204.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 205.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Munich broadcast of Handel's *Concerto Grosso in F Major*.⁷² Haller described the sound of the "devilish tin trumpet" as a "mixture of bronchial slime and chewed rubber; that noise that owners of gramophones and radios have agreed to call music."⁷³ Haller pleads with Mozart to turn it off, shouting, "Do you really mean to inflict this mess on me and yourself, this triumph of our day, the last victorious weapon in the war of extermination against art? Must this be, Mozart?"⁷⁴ Mozart exhorts Haller to "pay attention and...learn something".⁷⁵

Observe how this crazy funnel apparently does the most stupid, the most useless and the most damnable thing in the world. It takes hold of some music played where you please, without distinction, stupid and coarse, lamentably distorted, to boot, and chucks it into space to land where it has no business to be; and yet after all this it cannot destroy the original spirit of the music... When you listen to radio you are a witness of the everlasting war between idea and appearance, between time and eternity... Everywhere it obtrudes its mechanism, its activity, its drear exigencies and vanity between the ideal and the real, between the orchestra and the ear. All life is so, my child, and we must let it be so; and; if we are not asses, laugh at it. ... Learn what is to be taken seriously and laugh at the rest.⁷⁶

Mozart casts the distortion between live musical performance and mechanical reproduction as a metaphor for modern human existence. The radio is non-ideal and offers only a grotesque caricature of the original, but then again, most of existence is non-ideal. By clinging to his idealism, Mozart continued, Haller has "made a frightful history of disease out of your life, and misfortune of your gifts."⁷⁷ The only way forward for Haller, according to Mozart, was to "come to [his] senses." As a kind of punishment for creating such a disease out of his life, Mozart sentences him to life: "You are to live and

⁷² Ibid., 211.

⁷³ Ibid., 212.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 213.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

to learn to laugh. You are to learn to listen to the cursed radio music of life and to reverence the spirit behind it and to laugh at its distortions. So there you are. More will not be asked of you.”⁷⁸

In *Steppenwolf*, Hesse explored the deep psychological discomfort among many intellectuals regarding jazz and popular culture. For Hesse, making peace with new technology and music might be necessary to survive in the modern world, but the process was not without pain and ambivalence. Like Mann, with whom he was a close friend, Hesse understood and embraced notions of political democracy as allegorized in jazz and the gramophone intellectually, but found it difficult to cast off the aesthetic elitism with which he was raised.

Conclusion

The Weimar era was a period of intellectual and aesthetic crisis for composers and artists. Political changes brought about by the introduction of democracy challenged the Romantic notion of the composer as a detached elite and provoked passionate debates concerning the autonomy of art and its responsibility to society. Itself influenced by Wagner’s *Meistersinger*, Pfitzner’s *Palestrina* proved to be a cultural touchstone in this debate, with overt and covert references to the opera made in the Weimar period artist novels of Mann, Werfel, and Hesse. Although the works of these writers embraced a more socially grounded and populist vision of the composer over against the entrenched elitism of Pfitzner, they remained ambivalent about the impact of new technologies like the gramophone and radio on modern society. In particular, *Steppenwolf* illustrates the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 216.

struggle of the German intellectual class in accepting popular culture and its musical byword, jazz. Many who embraced democracy and political populism like Mann and Hesse struggled to reconcile their political beliefs with their aesthetic elitism. Over the course of the next three chapters I will demonstrate how the aesthetic and economic debates presented here and in the previous chapter influenced the composition of the 1920s artist-operas of Strauss, Schreker, and Krenek.

Chapter 4

“There are no opera heroes, but real men:” Richard Strauss’s *Intermezzo*

Upon hearing Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* for the first time in several years, Strauss wrote to Hugo von Hofmannsthal in June 1927 declaring that he would like to write an opera that was “good theatre and at the same time a genuine document of German civilization.”¹ The best way to achieve that aim, Strauss felt, would be to write an opera that revolved around the “age-old conflict between Romance art and German art.” To that end, the opera would revolve around three character types, “the Italianized German bohemian” (Franz Schreker), “the artist who draws on both nationalities, the supreme representative of which is Mozart and the last modest one my humble self,” and the “so-called Boche type” (Hans Pfitzner).² Strauss went on to suggest several scenarios for his idea, suggesting either the era of the Minnesingers or the court of Mannheim circa 1780 as the setting, enthusiastically ending his proposal by writing, “No reason why it shouldn’t be a long five-hour opera with choruses and ballet! I have now time and leisure and feel there is still just about enough strength in me for a major opus such as this!”³ Hofmannsthal’s response, however, proved less than enthusiastic. He rejected Strauss’s proposal, and accused the composer of completely misunderstanding the dramatic underpinning of Wagner’s opera. Strauss, not wanting to let the idea die, replied that it was Hofmannsthal who misunderstood; what Strauss really wished to do was to put

¹ Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal June 16, 1927, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 429.

² *Ibid.*, 430

³ *Ibid.*, 431. Strauss had resigned as director of the Vienna Opera a little over a year earlier, and the relief from the constant stress renewed his vigor.

himself into the opera, writing that it was “the autobiographical element” that attracted him in the first place.⁴ Hofmannsthal shot back with typical acerbity, “I did not, as you assume, ‘fail to understand’...I merely felt it more polite not to say that the fortuitous circumstances of an artist’s life and a juxtaposition with his contemporaries offers me nothing to stimulate my imagination or appeal to me as a ‘subject.’”⁵ Hofmannsthal went on to write that the only way an artist’s biography could be remotely fruitful in a dramatic sense is if the events of his life were truly exceptional, citing Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso* and Pfitzner’s *Palestrina*.⁶ Indeed, according to Hofmannsthal, Strauss’s idea was the antithesis of good drama, and would drag the poet into the “odious field of the artists’ drama (*Künstlerdrama*)”; Hofmannsthal could think of a no less appealing subject.⁷ With that outburst, Strauss quickly and quietly changed the subject.

This exchange between Strauss and Hofmannsthal is interesting for a number of reasons, not least of which is the curious fact that, despite his apparent hatred of the genre, Hofmannsthal had already collaborated with Strauss on at least one “artist’s drama”: *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/rev. 1916). Most importantly, this exchange between poet and composer lays out clearly how Strauss conceived of the artist-opera in the twentieth century: he viewed it more or less as autobiography, as a way of “putting [himself] into music.”⁸ This penchant for musical autobiography is consistent throughout Strauss’s *oeuvre*; Strauss “put himself” into several of his tone poems (*Don Juan*, *Ein Heldenleben* and *Symphonia Domestica*) and operas (*Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Die Frau ohne*

⁴ Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal, July 12, 1927 in *ibid.*, 436.

⁵ Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, July 16, 1927 in *ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 437. Hofmannsthal expressed reservations even about these.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 436.

Schatten, Intermezzo, and Capriccio) consistently over the course of his career, often in ways that were readily apparent to audiences and critics alike. When Strauss confronted the issue of the artist in modern society, most notably in his 1924 opera *Intermezzo*, he did so by putting facets of his own everyday life on display without any sort of poetic or aesthetic distance. As I will show over the course of this chapter, *Intermezzo* placed Strauss directly at the center of the economic and aesthetic debates discussed in earlier chapters, specifically the genius/craftsman discussion that influenced directly—as Strauss knew all too well—the material conditions of composers and musicians in Germany. In *Intermezzo*, Strauss portrayed himself as a supremely gifted, yet remarkably normal craftsman and working professional. This portrayal served two separate, but related purposes. As we saw in the first chapter, Strauss was a strong advocate for copyright reform and other measures of professionalization among composers, and repositioning the composer as a craftsman rather than an isolated genius was central to the achievement of his aims in that arena. Additionally, Strauss looked to rehabilitate his career and personal image with *Intermezzo*. In the years following the First World War many critics viewed Strauss as increasingly out of touch, concerned only with his own personal welfare and unable to compose music that resonated with modern audiences. *Intermezzo* was designed to provide Strauss with a much needed “hit” that would reassert his status as Germany’s top opera composer, thus proving to his critics that he was a thoroughly modern and relevant composer.

Strauss and the Economics of Composition

The issue of Strauss and money has historically been, and continues to be, one of the most controversial pieces of his biography. As Scott Warfield recently remarked, the image of Richard Strauss as a “money grubber” is one that has commonly been held over the last century, having only recently begun to fade.⁹ One of the most important creators of that image, Theodore Adorno, famously quipped in his 1964 essay on the composer that, “Strauss was the first composer to adopt the gesture of the idealized big industrialist.”¹⁰ In an earlier essay Adorno charged that “philosophy, as well as religion...is for sale in Strauss’s music...Everything becomes a cultural good to be looked at, to be bought, to be enjoyed as a stimulus for the nerves of the big but tired business man.”¹¹ Though Adorno’s criticisms have proved influential to modern day interpreters of Strauss, he was by no means the first to insinuate a negative relationship between Strauss, his music, and the matter of money. A journalist for the *New York Sun* opined regarding *Salome* in 1907,

Doubtless Mr. Strauss saturates himself in the spirit of Bach and Beethoven and bows before the statue of Wagner when he sits down to compose. But his contracts are models of financial skill. A master technician of orchestral combinations, he knows how to orchestrate a bank account. Creator of carnal visions in three-four time, he is also a dreamer of dollars, florins, reichsmarks, francs. Everywhere he sees them, everywhere he gets them.¹²

⁹ Scott Warfield, “Strauss and the Business of Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, ed. Charles Youmans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 242.

¹⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹¹ Theodore Adorno, “National Socialism and the Arts,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 379.

¹² Nicolas Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective: Critical Assaults on Composers Since Beethoven* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1953), 191.

The author of the *Sun* article went on to write that Strauss “may have heard a high and holy call to study the conscience of Salome...Perhaps Art sat upon her chaste throne and beckoned him to do this but there was money in it...”¹³ A little closer to home, the prominent Viennese critic Karl Kraus declared in 1924 (the year of *Intermezzo*) that Strauss was “more of a stock company than a genius.”¹⁴ Even Paul Bekker contextualized Strauss’s success as symptomatic of what he perceived to be the crass commercialism of the Weimar period: “He is a great Industrialist, a Music Baron in the American sense—we must be content to accept him as he is.”¹⁵

These examples of critical disapproval of Strauss’s relationship with money are by no means isolated; the notion of Strauss as a great talent tainted by greed was (and in some cases continues to be) a common trope in discourse surrounding the composer.¹⁶ The reasons for this nearly universal invective are manifold. In the first place, Strauss was a shrewd negotiator when it came to his works and his skills as a conductor; he knew what they were worth and was not afraid to ask for high fees, often getting them. This occasionally rankled publishers and performing venues; as we shall see, public knowledge of his contract with the Vienna State Opera caused a good deal of critical and public outrage. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Strauss was one of the first

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Karl Kraus, “Cultural Bankruptcy,” in *Richard Strauss and His World*, ed. Bryan Gilliam and trans. Susan Gillespie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 360.

¹⁵ “Er ist der Großindustrielle, der Musikkönig im amerikanische Sinne—wir müssen uns begnügen, ihn so zu nehmen, wie er ist.” Perhaps needless to say, Bekker did not view Strauss’s artistic contributions during the Weimar Republic favorably. Paul Bekker, “Richard Strauss” *Anbruch* 6/6 (June-July 1924): 220.

¹⁶ For example, the chapter dealing with Strauss’s efforts at copyright reform in Matthew Boyden’s rather cynical and negative 1999 biography of the composer is called “Protecting the Merchandise.” Matthew Boyden, *Richard Strauss* (Lebanon, N.H.: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 136.

composers to advocate for the rights of the composer against publishers and performing venues. In this manner he took the rather modern view (certainly ahead of his time) that in many ways art is a commodity; it does have a value in the marketplace, and the creator of that work should feel no compunction about being remunerated fairly for its use. Indeed, the published criticism of Strauss and his music contained nothing construing the composer as greedy until he joined the nascent fight for composers' rights in the late 1890s.¹⁷ By asserting the economic value of his compositions and by positioning them in such a way as to maximize their earning potential, Strauss offended the sensibilities of many who held to the Romantic ideal of art music as somehow separate from everyday concerns like money. Strauss spent much of his career defending, as Matthew Boyden trenchantly observed, an "entirely reasonable aversion to poverty"¹⁸ for the simple reason that he was actually successful in securing his own interests.

The publishing system Strauss encountered when he began publishing in the 1880s offered very little to composers in terms of long-range income from their compositions. Strauss's first compositions were sold to his publishers in exchange for a one-time fee, with no expectation of future royalties and no control over future use.¹⁹ Strauss had no say in the release of arrangements of a piece or new editions, and had little recourse regarding the performance of his own works. As Strauss became more successful, he began to demand the retention of some of these rights: in 1898 Strauss wished to grant his publisher only print rights, and insisted on a twenty-five percent royalty on all early works up to his first opera *Guntram*. In addition, Strauss retained all

¹⁷ Warfield, 243.

¹⁸ Matthew Boyden, *Richard Strauss* (Lebanon, N.H.: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 138.

¹⁹ Petersen, "Strauss as Composers' Advocate," 117.

performing rights and rights to arrangements of his music.²⁰ This was an important victory: it not only guaranteed that Strauss would continue to be compensated for his musical compositions long after their publication, it also allowed him to control the places and circumstances under which his compositions would be heard. All of this was on top of the increasingly large fees he was receiving up front for the rights to publish his material, fees that quickly outpaced his earnings as a young conductor. As Barbara Petersen notes, Strauss sold his tone poem *Ein Heldenleben* for approximately five times the amount of his yearly salary as a conductor.²¹ From there, the fees for his major works skyrocketed: Strauss's *Alpensinfonie* earned five times as much again as *Ein Heldenleben* in 1915.²²

By the time of Strauss's entrance into the composers' rights struggle in 1898 (detailed in Chapter Two) he was already a leading light in German musical life and was no stranger to criticism or controversy. Angered by the critical and popular failure of his first opera *Guntram* in his hometown of Munich, Strauss's second opera, *Feuersnot*, was an extended critique and rebuke of the philistine attitudes of Munich. As he worked to arrange for the 1901 premiere in Dresden, the composer was engaged in a contract dispute with both the director of the Dresden Opera, Ernst von Schuh, and his publisher, Adolf Fürstner:

So 1500 marks is still too much! O this theatre! To hell with all opera composing! ... Perhaps I should send you something more for nothing? ...I find 1500 marks really not too much. Let Fürstner do as he likes, anyway. If it doesn't come off, then I can traipse off to Vienna, where Mahler will do anything if only I will give him the première. I shall change my name to Riccardo

²⁰ Ibid., 116.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 117.

Straussino and have my works published by Sonzogno, then you'd agree to everything.²³

Strauss negotiated hard with his publishers over royalties and performance fees and soon found himself embroiled in a long-term feud with another publisher, Hugo Bock. Bock himself was intimately familiar in the composers' rights movement: as the head of the Association of German Music Dealers in 1898 he attempted to lobby for copyright reform that was favorable to music publishers, placing himself directly at odds with the aims of Strauss's GDT.²⁴ Bock's firm had already published a set of Strauss's orchestral songs in 1897 and agreed in 1903 to publish Strauss's *Symphonia Domestica*. The composer was paid a handsome fee for the score; in return for this large sum, Strauss was required to allow Bote & Bock to publish his next set of lieder, which the publishers felt would be very profitable for them.²⁵ Strauss, perhaps chafing at the idea of being compelled to write in a particular genre, simply stopped writing lieder. Indeed, as Petersen reports, he wrote no new songs between 1906 and 1918, a silence of over a dozen years.²⁶ Predictably, this angered Bote & Bock, who hoped to recoup the enormous expense of *Symphonia Domestica* through the sale of a new batch of Strauss lieder. They threatened to sue the composer over breach of contract, so the composer responded in 1918 with the witheringly satirical *Krämerspiegel*, the details of which are related in chapter two.

²³ Quoted in Kennedy, 134.

²⁴ Hans-Christophe Mauruschat, "The Appreciation of Music," *GEMA News* 162 (December, 2000): 89. The two opposing camps did eventually reach an agreement that was mutually beneficial.

²⁵ Petersen, 120.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 121.

The very public spat between Strauss and his publishers over his lieder production corresponded roughly with the composition, performance, and subsequent revision of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/1916), and Strauss used every opportunity afforded him in the libretto to satirize the relationship between composers and their patrons (or publishers). The ironic and cynical tone taken by Strauss when recounting the artistic compromises made by the young Composer in order to get his work heard in the opera certainly would have resonated with audiences as an extension of Strauss's own struggles with his publishers during this period.

Throughout his career, though especially during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Strauss was acutely aware of the complicated relationship between art and commerce. In particular, when it came to his operatic productions, Strauss was invested in producing works that maintained their artistic integrity while remaining commercially viable. This impulse to simultaneously edify and entertain while working out a specific musical problem onstage was abundantly evident in the creation of *Intermezzo*, an opera conceived and created in part against the backdrop of Strauss's continuing struggles for composers' rights during the Weimar period and the ensuing critical backlash that increasingly portrayed Strauss as nothing more than an opportunist who placed money above all other motivations.

Dislocation and Change

The end of the First World War in 1918 was a shattering, disorienting experience for many Germans, and Strauss was no exception. Due to his fervent championing of copyright reform and the massive success of his pre-war operas, Strauss accumulated a

great deal of wealth, much of which was deposited in British banks. At the beginning of the First World War those assets were frozen and were never returned to Strauss after the war. Previously the wealthiest living composer in Europe, Strauss was forced with the daunting task of rebuilding his finances at an age when most would be preparing for retirement. Though his compositions still brought in a good deal of money, it was nonetheless absolutely necessary for Strauss to conduct in order to meet his financial obligations. In a letter written to his wife Pauline shortly after the end of the war, the family finances are clearly on Strauss's mind:

We are going to need all our nerve now to steer our little ship safely on its way. We will think over everything calmly, although I wouldn't know what else to do, even now, other than carry on as usual for as long as possible, according to plan, for as long as theatres and concerts keep going and pay fees. If you love me, then there isn't much the world can do to harm us.²⁷

As Michael Kennedy points out, we see the true Strauss represented in this letter, the archetypical bourgeois whose life centered on his family and work.²⁸ Indeed, Strauss saw very little dissonance between his art and the cultivation of bourgeois values. As Bryan Gilliam observed, this was one way in which Strauss set himself apart from his contemporaries, who increasingly saw art as irreconcilably at odds with bourgeois culture.²⁹ This is also the side of himself that Strauss shared with audiences in *Intermezzo*, the harried conductor whose travels are undertaken not for leisure, but out of financial obligation. Strauss shared this side of himself intentionally: in the years after the war, he was seen as increasingly irrelevant and out of touch. As I will discuss below,

²⁷ Quoted in Kennedy, 205.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bryan Gilliam, *The Life of Richard Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2-3.

after the failure of the ballet *Schlagobers*, Strauss needed to reconnect with his audience and confront the social and economic changes swirling around him.

At the end of the war Strauss truly was a harried conductor. His nearly thirty-five year association with the Berlin Court (now State) Opera came to an acrimonious end, and in 1919 the composer became the director of the newly reorganized Vienna State Opera at the age of fifty-five.³⁰ Strauss's appointment was intensely controversial, and his stormy tenure reinforced the notion among many critics that he both was out of touch with economic reality and beyond his creative prime. Even Hofmannsthal was originally against the idea of Strauss's appointment, stating that he thought Strauss would place his personal interests in matters of repertoire and personnel before the general interest of the State Opera. In a letter dated August 1, 1918, Hofmannsthal argued at length:

I believe that about fifteen years ago you would have been the ideal person to bring about the urgently needed renaissance of the Vienna Opera, but I cannot think that you still are today...I believe...that today you would put your own personal convenience, and above all the egoism of the creative musician, before the uphill struggle for the ultimate higher welfare of that institution...I believe, when it came to engaging artists, making enemies, friends, etc., etc., in short in handling the whole policy of the theatre, the advantage to your own works would be uppermost in your mind and not the advantage to the institution. All in all I feel that your appointment would add outward luster to the Opera by giving it an important and famous conductor, but it would not offer it any true, decisive, intrinsic benefit and must therefore, in the last resort, on careful and conscientious consideration be *rejected*, for the sake of the institution itself.³¹

Hofmannsthal believed that Strauss lacked the physical energy to reform the Opera as a man quickly approaching the age of sixty. Instead, Hofmannsthal thought that Strauss would use the prestigious post as a way to boost his own career at the expense of the institution's welfare at a time when the Opera needed a dedicated, tireless servant to

³⁰ Kennedy, 211.

³¹ Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, September 1, 1918, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 308. Italics in original.

advocate for its interests in a period of financial austerity.³² Hofmannsthal was not the only insider who had concerns about Strauss's appointment. Rumors that Strauss had negotiated an astronomical salary of 80,000 kronen per year (plus bonuses of 1,200 kronen per performance) rubbed many of the singers and staff at the Opera the wrong way, leading them to lodge a formal protest before Strauss even arrived.³³ Hans Gregor, the outgoing director of the Vienna Opera, wrote a scathing article in the *Neue Wiener Journal*, voicing many of the same concerns raised by Hofmannsthal, asking, "But what, may I ask, does the name of the composer Richard Strauss have to do with the director's post of the former Court Opera? Does it need a composer or a director?"³⁴ Fearing that Strauss would prioritize his own operas over the works of others, Gregor later asked, "Will you change the House on Kärtnering into 'Richard Strauss Theater?'"³⁵

Unrelenting in his attack on Strauss, Gregor accused the composer of looking out only for his own interests, and of analyzing every situation by asking only, "what's in it for me?"³⁶ Knowing that the structure of the Opera would need to be overhauled in the

³² Hofmannsthal's attempts to dissuade Strauss may also have had something to do with their complex personal relationship. While Hofmannsthal regarded Strauss very highly as an artist, he found the composer's personality and personal habits to be rather odious. Strauss hoped that a move to Vienna would allow the two men to meet in person more often, but Hofmannsthal sincerely believed that closer personal interaction would ruin their working relationship.

³³ Gilliam, 111.

³⁴ "Was aber, so frage ich, hat der Komponistename von Richard Strauss mit dem Direktionsposten der ehemaligen Hofoper zu schaffen? Braucht diese einen Komponisten oder einen Direktor?" The article, which appeared in the *Neue Wiener Journal* on May 1, 1919 is reprinted in Franz Grasberger, *Richard Strauss und die Wiener Oper* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1969), 52-53.

³⁵ "Will man das Haus am Kärtnering zum 'Richard-Strauss-Theater' wandeln?" Ibid., 52.

³⁶ "Strauss hat für keinen Menschen ein Herz als nur für sich selbst, er ist Ich-Mensch in reinsten Kultur, betrachtet jedes Ding, jede Sache, jedes Angelegenheit nur unter dem Gesichtswinkel: Frommt sie dir?" Ibid., 53.

coming days in order to protect the majority of its many employees and ensure the continued existence of the institution, Gregor asked critically, “Is Strauss the organizer? We know in this matter nothing about him, except that he is an excellent businessman: Is that enough? Do we want a businessman?”³⁷

Despite the opposition, Strauss also had supporters at the Opera and took up his post in October 1919. Perhaps stirred by Gregor’s criticism, Strauss took the opportunity to address the material needs of his new charges in his first official meeting with the company, pledging to leverage all of his influence in order to safeguard the social status of the company and to “bring about the fulfillment of your demands, especially the claims of those who now have to contend with hardship: orchestra, chorus, ballet, and stage staff.”³⁸ Outside of the immediate needs of the Opera, the artists’ rights movement generally was still very much on Strauss’s mind: in a March 1919 letter to Pauline the composer wrote,

I wonder if I am really so very necessary as Rösch [Strauss’s associate in the GDT] thinks I am for the organization he is setting up so energetically to unite the associations of independent artists and the various musicians’ bodies... With these matters to think about, which are very important for the future of the arts, it is best to forget the whole idiotic revolution and enjoy the inner satisfaction of working selflessly for a good cause.³⁹

Strauss hoped that the gains made by the GDT during the prewar era would be continued and furthered under the new governments in Germany and Austria. Strauss may not have

³⁷ “Ist Strauss der Organisator? Wir wissen in diesem Belang nichts von ihm, als daß er ein hervorragender Kaufmann ist: Genügt das? Sucht man einen Kaufmann?” Ibid.

³⁸ Quoted in Kennedy, 211.

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 207.

been the “philanthropist” that Hans Gregor wished him to be,⁴⁰ but the composer was genuinely concerned with the financial position of other artists, especially during the immediate postwar years, which were rife with inflation, financial instability, and material privations.

And yet, despite his concerns for the material well being of his opera company, Strauss remained a controversial figure in Viennese cultural life. His lavish salary remained a sticking point, as did his schedule: Strauss was only obligated to work five months out of the year, with the remaining seven months free for composition and freelance conducting. This arrangement left it to Strauss’s co-director Franz Schalk to oversee the day-to-day operations of the company because of Strauss’s rather light schedule. Strauss’s opponents argued that the terms of the composer’s engagement had been negotiated by the now defunct monarchy, and that the fledgling Republic simply could not afford such extravagances. In addition, Strauss was given an incredibly expensive plot of land in the center of Vienna essentially for free (he donated the autograph of *Der Rosenkavalier* to the State Library) for a period of sixty years.⁴¹

Accusations that the State Opera could not afford Strauss’s salary and working conditions were not unfounded: the financial state of the Opera was so bad when Strauss took over that he had to tour South America with the Vienna Philharmonic shortly after his first season as director in 1920 in order to raise dollars to supplement the operating

⁴⁰ Gregor contended that anyone who led a large group of people, whether in art or industry, needed to be first and foremost a “philanthropist,” considering the greater good first. Strauss would do just the opposite, he thought. Grasberger, 53.

⁴¹ Richard Strauss and Romain Rolland, *Richard Strauss and Romain Rolland: Correspondence*, ed. Rollo Meyers (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968), 164.

costs of the Opera.⁴² The Austrian currency was badly destabilized after the war (and about to freefall into hyperinflation); lining the State Opera's coffers with stronger foreign currency was the only way to ensure its financial viability moving forward. Shortly after the South American tour with the Philharmonic, Strauss made a conducting tour of America in 1921 (this time without the orchestra), a move that angered the Viennese press and struck Schalk as selfish. When Schalk criticized Strauss's decision to tour America despite the uncertainties faced by the Opera at home, the composer replied that he toured not because he wanted to, but because he needed to in order to provide for the welfare of his family, writing in a letter to Schalk,

After England confiscated the chief part of my capital, having no pension to look forward to from any quarter, I have only the royalties from my works to fall back on if anything happened to me that stopped me going on conducting. Even operatic successes are unreliable—if the royalties fail, which I hope will not happen for a while yet, I shall be a beggar and shall leave my family in 'poverty and shame.'⁴³

To be fair, Strauss's notion of "poverty and shame" was nowhere near the everyday lived experience of the average Viennese citizen—the composer and his family were never in danger of hitting the breadlines—but Strauss's concerns for the welfare of his family were legitimate and sincerely held nonetheless. As he neared his sixtieth birthday, Strauss wished to save enough money to retire (preferably to Italy, though it never came to pass) and concentrate fully on composing.

When Strauss undertook his American tour, the prospect of receiving payment in dollars (one dollar was worth about 180 marks) was indeed tantalizing enough to convince the composer to leave the comforts of his home for nearly three months. The

⁴² Kennedy, 215.

⁴³ Quoted in Boyden, 253.

soprano Elisabeth Schumann, who accompanied Strauss on the trip, reminded him of just this fact when the composer complained about the rigors of the tour. On November 10, 1921 Schumann wrote in her diary:

9 o'clock in the morning, arrival in Baltimore. Strauss in a bad mood, venting all his feelings on Franz—scolding about everything...I said to him that I couldn't understand how he could think of the tour as a sacrifice and reminded him how many marks we got to the dollar. 'Yes, yes,' he said, 'I'm only doing it so that I can one day afford to live in Italy again.'⁴⁴

The American tour was a great success for the composer—Strauss was enthusiastically received wherever he went. Even though Strauss was in the main concerned with rebuilding his personal finances through the tour, he also staged benefit concerts for the Opera, in the end netting \$13,000 for the struggling institution. Nevertheless, when he returned home in the early days of 1922, the Viennese were outraged and accused Strauss of vulgarizing the European artistic tradition by touring America for money, underscoring the uneasy relationship between art, economic realities, and politics as outlined in the first two chapters. Franz Schalk's criticism, though first leveled before the tour, typified the response. He simply could not understand why Strauss would trade the rarefied air of Vienna for the cultural backwaters of America, writing,

If you are not here doing your appointed cultural work of a higher order, I can only think it is because you do not wish for your composing to be disturbed; but to show the Americans how music is made—don't take it wrong—I don't understand it, and don't be angry if I give my incomprehension such a candid

⁴⁴ "9 Uhr morgens Ankunft Baltimore. Strauß schlecht gelaunt, läßt alles an Franz aus—schimpft über alles. Ich fahre mit ihm zum Hotel—Franz und Taylor im 2. Auto. Sage ihm, daß ich nicht begreife, daß er mit dieser Reise solche Opfer bringt und bringe in Erinnerung wie der Dollar zum Mark steht. 'Ja, ja,' sagt er 'ich tu's ja auch nur, um mal wieder in Italien leben zu können.'" "In Amerika mit Richard Strauss: Elisabeth Schumanns Tagebuch, 14 Oktober bis 31 Dezember, 1921," <http://www.elisabethschumann.org/1921diary/diary21d.htm>. Franz Strauss was the composer's son.

expression. –I had always thought that your mission, whether in the creative or performing arts, lay at the highest level, in the best possible milieu.”⁴⁵

Schalk certainly was not alone in voicing his displeasure: critics like Julius Korngold, writing in the Vienna *Neue Freie Presse*, routinely criticized Strauss’s management of the Opera.⁴⁶ Although Viennese cultural insiders knew that Korngold’s negative critiques were largely motivated by personal animus toward Strauss due to a feud between the composer and Korngold’s son Erich Wolfgang (who was also a successful composer), the barbs shot by the elder Korngold still managed to undermine Strauss’s agenda. Paul Bechert, the Vienna correspondent for the British *Musical Times*, agreed with the substance of Korngold’s criticism, while simultaneously admonishing him for only raising his voice after Strauss crossed the younger Korngold. Bechert’s article, written by a Viennese insider reporting to the English-speaking world, encompassed the many reasons for growing public hostility toward Strauss.

After nearly three years on the job, wrote Bechert, Strauss had done nothing to usher in the “golden age” that his supporters promised; rather, Strauss’s tenure thus far was an exercise in “severe disappointment and disillusionment.”⁴⁷ Sounding much like Hofmannsthal, Bechert continued, explaining that the Opera needed a leader of “profound theatrical experience,” “infinite enthusiasm,” and “iron energy,” but that those

⁴⁵ “Wenn Sie schon hier nicht constitutive Kulturarbeit höherer Ordnung leisten wollen, so könnte ich mir wol denken, dass Sie durch Komponieren sich davon abhalten liessen; aber blos um den Amerikanern Musik vorzumachen—nehmen Sie mir’s nicht übel—ich verstehe das nicht—und seien Sie auch nicht böse wenn ich meinem Unverständnis so freimütigen Ausdruck gebe. –Ich habe mir immer vorgestellt, dass Ihre Mission im Productiven wie im Reproduktiven ganz hoch oben liegt, in der denkbar besten Atmosphäre.” Richard Strauss and Franz Schalk, *Richard Strauss-Franz Schalk: Ein Briefwechsel*, ed. Günter Brosche (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1983), 199-200.

⁴⁶ Paul Bechert, “Korngold, Strauss, and Others: ‘Subjective’ Criticism,” *The Musical Times* 63/934 (August 1, 1922): 547-549.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 548.

attributes could not be expected of Strauss, a “composer whose chief interests must needs favour his own creations.”⁴⁸ Under Strauss’s leadership, the “once perfect ensemble of the State Opera has undergone a deplorable process of disintegration”; furthermore, his predilection for using guest singers both demoralized the regular performers and put an unnecessary financial strain on the already struggling Opera.⁴⁹ Finally, Bechert criticized Strauss’s absenteeism, taking him to task for abandoning his post in Vienna “for the benefit of his extensive and lucrative foreign tours,” surfacing only long enough to premiere an overly-lavish production of his own *Josephslegende*, which Bechert felt was “of doubtful value” at best.⁵⁰

Bechert’s wide-ranging critique followed along the same lines of criticism that Gregor and Hofmannsthal leveled against Strauss; namely, that he would prove incapable of placing the aims of the Opera above his personal agenda. In a sense, these fears were borne out during Strauss’s tenure in Vienna: out of the 216 opera and ballet performances conducted by Strauss, 88 were of his own work.⁵¹ Generally speaking, Strauss limited himself to conducting only his favorite composers during this time: Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, and (of course) himself.⁵² It should be noted, however, that the vast majority of productions at the Opera, including premieres of new works by more contemporary artists, were conducted not by Strauss, but by Schalk and others. While Bechert and others may have had a point when it came to Strauss’s repertoire selection, one wonders how he could possibly have thought that Strauss did not possess the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Raymond Holden, *Richard Strauss: A Musical Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 97.

⁵² Ibid., 206-210.

“profound theatrical experience” necessary to run the Vienna Opera, given his twenty years in a leadership position at the Berlin Opera.

Bechert was more to the point when he criticized Strauss’s lavish productions and extensive use of guest artists at the expense of local musicians. Strauss was in the habit of importing his favorite singers to perform in his operatic productions, and was often criticized for it. When he engaged Maria Jeritza to sing in the Berlin premiere of *Intermezzo*, the *Vossische Zeitung* exclaimed that the 12,000 marks she was asking was ludicrous, given that in Vienna she could barely demand “ein Butterbrot,” a sandwich, for her services.⁵³ The Viennese, many of whom were near starvation, could not conscience the extravagant spending of the Opera under Strauss, which operated at huge deficits every year. In turn, the shortfalls were made up for by increased taxation (both directly and through increased ticket prices) of a populace that could barely afford bread, much less a ticket to the opera. Strauss’s seeming lack of respect for the public weal combined with the long periods of absence from his post in order to earn more money—when the composer already appeared to be unfathomably wealthy to most Austrians—promoted the image that Strauss was completely out of touch and increasingly irrelevant.

Strauss’s next major composition, the ballet *Schlagobers*, would only serve to reinforce the impressions of his detached decadence that surrounded the composer in Vienna. Originally conceived by Strauss as a tribute to the city (specifically its deep love affair with pastry and desserts), *Schlagobers*, which premiered in Vienna on 9 May 1924, was almost universally scorned by critics. The title itself (usually translated “Whipped Cream” in English) refers to a uniquely Viennese dessert. The plot, to the extent there is

⁵³ “Richard Strauss und die Gagenkonvention,” *Vossische Zeitung*, April 18, 1925.

one, revolves around the gastrointestinally-induced visions of a boy who indulges too freely in a variety of sweet treats, which then prance across the stage, with some plotting “revolution” only to be tamped down in the end. The music is tonally stable, light and airy, and features waltzes and ländlers designed to please the public. Modernist critics like Paul Bechert considered the light style and trivial subject matter beneath a composer of Strauss’s stature and took the score as further evidence of Strauss’s decline after *Elektra*. Bechert considered *Schlagobers* to be the first work to show “the real Strauss as he is today manifested openly and frankly.”⁵⁴ The real Strauss, according to Bechert, finally lifted the mask, eschewing the Wagnerian ethical imperative and showing himself to be nothing more than a “playful, un-literary, un-intellectual *Musikant!*”⁵⁵ Although Bechert certainly meant to insult Strauss with his use of the term *Musikant*, Strauss was, in fact, attempting to portray himself in a less rarified and more relatable light through works like *Schlagobers* and *Intermezzo*, trying to engage and entertain audiences rather than preach to them.

Bechert’s criticism was mild compared to the review written by Karl Kraus in *Die Fackel*. Kraus wrote, “...there has not been a nastier desolation of the spirit even of the ballet or a more thoroughgoing degradation of theater to the level of a preschool than this *Schlagobers*...”⁵⁶ Kraus was particularly offended by a scene in which the “proletariat” cookies, cakes, and pretzels are stirred toward revolution by (presumably) Jewish matzo balls (onstage, the matzos were played instead by five Magi), only to have the revolution

⁵⁴ Bechert, Paul, “The New Richard Strauss Ballet,” *Musical Times* 65/976 (June 1, 1924): 547-548

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 548. Interestingly, once Bechert began reviewing the music itself, he was very complimentary and wrote a number of positive things about the structure, melodies, and harmonies employed by Strauss.

⁵⁶ Kraus, “Cultural Bankruptcy,” 360.

stalled by the calming influence of Munich beer. Kraus wrote that he experienced a feeling similar to the boy whose nausea motivated the entire scene.⁵⁷ Perhaps Kraus's greatest objection to *Schlagobers* was the startling visual of decadent pastries dancing on stage in a bankrupt country, composed by a man who was paid richly for only a few months work:

As for the theatrical production of an idea that the patisserie gets into a fist fight with the cake from the suburbs...and indeed, there does exist a theatrical world that is willing to devote itself to playing alcoholic drinks and baked goods—a beggar state spends billions, while the city gives the master a piece of property on which to construct a castle in Vienna's most elegant park. All this and a week-long celebration of enthusiasm in the ideal expectation that the creator of a musical world that has the Will to Tourism written all over its face should remain with us for a few months of the year in full nonconnection to the institute with which he has been entrusted.⁵⁸

The constant criticism weighed heavily on Strauss, as Romain Rolland, the composer's long time friend, noted in his diaries from the period. Rolland visited Strauss three days after the premiere of *Schlagobers* and described him thusly: "Strauss, serious, heavy, affectionate. Very preoccupied by nationalist follies, by our threatened European civilization...He never has a smile on his face. No sudden bursts of gaiety, of fire, of unconscious 'ragamuffinry' as there used to be in the past."⁵⁹ Rolland often commented on the youthful vigor in Strauss's appearance over the course of their friendship, so seeing Strauss in this state must have come as a bit of a shock. Furthermore, Rolland continued, Strauss was completely preoccupied by the problem of money, noting, "In

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 361.

⁵⁹ Strauss and Rolland, *Correspondence*, 164.

Vienna he is reproached for, and people speak ungraciously of, the place this preoccupation now occupies in his life...”⁶⁰

Rolland stayed for the evening performance of *Schlagobers* and determined (like Bekker) that the music was “highly agreeable” and the production “remarkable”.⁶¹ Despite this, he wrote, the audience would not applaud, having been given their marching orders from the press that, according to Rolland, was seeking revenge on Strauss over previous disagreements.⁶² Strauss, wrote Rolland, wished simply to write what he pleased and to “create joy” with his compositions. This desire to communicate directly with the audience in a joyful manner void of philosophical preoccupations would be realized in *Intermezzo*.

The Beginnings of *Intermezzo*

Although Strauss would not finish composing *Intermezzo* until the end of 1923 and the opera would not receive its premiere until the end of 1924, Strauss first envisioned the project almost immediately after completing the 1916 version of *Ariadne*. Already by the end of the *Ariadne* project Strauss declared to Hofmannsthal that he thought himself “the only composer nowadays with some real humor and a sense of fun and a marked gift of parody.”⁶³ Wishing to continue in the vein of lighter comic opera of the kind pioneered by *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Ariadne*, Strauss implored Hofmannsthal to begin a new libretto in that style, admonishing, “Why shouldn’t you be able to write that? Altogether

⁶⁰ Ibid., 164-165.

⁶¹ Ibid., 165.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Letter from Strauss to Hofmannsthal, June 5, 1916, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 250.

you write far too little: put your Pegasus in tight harness for once. You'll see how the beast can run."⁶⁴ Specifically, Strauss wanted to compose "realistic comedy with really interesting people," a goal shared at least in the abstract by Hofmannsthal.⁶⁵ Ultimately, however, Hofmannsthal was unwilling to move ahead with a new collaboration, stating that he would not start a new Strauss collaboration until one of his own comedies was produced on stage.⁶⁶ Instead, Hofmannsthal recommended Hermann Bahr, a multi-talented writer and critic who had success in 1910 with a play called *Das Konzert*, the plot of which revolved around the marital problems of a musician, which, as we shall see, is almost exactly the impetus for the plot of *Intermezzo*.⁶⁷ Strauss gave Bahr a rather detailed summary of the plot he envisioned, and although Bahr eventually presented Strauss with a draft, the writer encouraged Strauss to undertake the libretto himself, as the composer later remembered, "[Bahr] eventually declared, 'There's only one person who can handle this story, and that's you.'"⁶⁸ Strauss heeded Bahr's advice and produced the libretto during a week's retreat in a sanatorium.⁶⁹

Intermezzo is innovative on a number of levels, each of which speaks to Strauss's desire to be perceived by audiences as a master craftsman still capable of reflecting current trends in his work. The text of the opera, the only libretto written by Strauss himself after *Guntram*, helps to accomplish this goal in two ways. The very topic of the libretto was innovative for its frank treatment of the daily struggles within a middle-class

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Letter from Strauss and Hofmannsthal, July 28, 1916, in Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *A Working Friendship*, 258.

⁶⁶ Letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss, September 16, 1916, in *ibid.*, 263.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, 196.

⁶⁸ Willi Schuh, ed., *Richard Strauss: Recollections and Reflections* (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1949), 167.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

marriage, and Strauss used a vocabulary and pace that mirrored everyday speech in a way that shocked audiences and critics, presaging the *Zeitoper* of the late 1920s.

Additionally, his use of conversational language created a specifically musical problem for Strauss concerning text setting, a problem that he established for the audience through a published foreword to the opera and then proceeded to show his mastery of it through the performance of the opera itself. In other words, with *Intermezzo* Strauss showed himself to be simultaneously an everyday, working musician and an exceptionally gifted master of musical craft.

With *Intermezzo*, Strauss granted audiences a very personal glimpse into his home life and often-combative relationship with his wife, Pauline. *Intermezzo* was not the first time that Strauss chose to dramatize his married life for audiences; his tone poem *Symphonia Domestica* (1903) explored similar themes of marital strife and reconciliation, garnering Strauss a good deal of criticism for his supposedly tawdry instrumental depictions. In fact, the thematic similarities between *Symphonia Domestica* and *Intermezzo* were so apparent to critics that one opened a review of *Intermezzo* by stating, “With this opera Strauss’s *Symphonia Domestica* has come to theaters.”⁷⁰ Strauss made no real effort to conceal that he was writing about his own life: the main character in *Intermezzo* is Robert Storch, a world famous composer and conductor, married to Christine with one son (Strauss had one son in real life). The source of dramatic conflict in *Intermezzo* was drawn directly from Strauss’s life, a case of mistaken identity that led to accusations of infidelity by Pauline that nearly ended the couple’s marriage in 1905. Furthermore, a model of Strauss’s famous Garmisch home was constructed onstage for

⁷⁰ “Mit diese Oper ist Strauß’ ‘Sinfonia domestica’ zum Theater gegangen.” Ludwig Karpath, “Intermezzo,” *Neue Freie Presse*, January 16, 1927.

the Dresden premiere.⁷¹ Writing in *Anbruch*, Paul Stefan noted, “I must assume as common knowledge that here a comedy of errors from the life of the composer himself will be displayed. Richard Strauss is seen in the theater.”⁷²

The plot of *Intermezzo* is fairly simple and can be summarized quickly. Robert is leaving on a conducting tour, which causes an argument between him and Christine. After Robert leaves, Christine goes tobogganing and meets a young con man named Baron Lummer. The two become fast friends and go dancing together. Posing as a poor student, Lummer attempts to get Christine to loan him a large sum of money without Robert’s knowledge. Christine refuses, stating that Robert would gladly help him once he returns. In the midst of this conversation Christine opens a letter addressed to Robert from a young woman named Mieke Maier asking casually for two tickets to the opera for the next night, after which she proposes that they meet up in the bar “as usual.”⁷³ This letter causes Christine to assume infidelity on Robert’s part, and she determines to divorce him immediately. The first act ends with her crying in her son’s room bemoaning her fate.

The second act begins with Storch playing a game of skat with friends, completely unaware of the events that have transpired at home.⁷⁴ During the game he

⁷¹ Laurenz Lütteken, “Leben und Kunst: Das *Intermezzo* von Richard Strauss,” in *Richard Strauss: Intermezzo*, CPO 777 901-2. Essay in liner notes, 7. The construction of the Garmsich villa was done against Strauss’s wishes, apparently. The opera is not set in Garmisch, but rather outside Vienna.

⁷² “Ich darf als Gemeingut voraussetzen, daß hier eine regelrechte Verwechslungskomödie aus dem Leben des Komponisten selbst abgespielt wird. Richard Strauß ist auf dem Theater zu sehen.” Paul Stefan, “Intermezzo und Demission,” *Anbruch* 6/10 (November-December 1924): 412.

⁷³ Richard Strauss, *Intermezzo*, CPO 777 901-2, 2011, libretto in liner notes, 65.

⁷⁴ Strauss was famous for his love of skat, a card game similar to sheephead. He played the game obsessively; his love for the game was often commented on in the press.

receives a telegram from Christine telling of the letter and her plans to divorce him, which leaves him dumbfounded, because he has no idea who Mieke Maier is. He desperately attempts to clarify the situation with Christine, who does not return his letters or calls. Eventually, one of Robert's friends named Stroh admits that the letter was meant for him, but that when Ms. Maier attempted to find his address in the phone book she found Storch instead. Storch rushes to tell Christine the truth in person, while Stroh sends a telegram explaining the situation. When Robert returns, thinking the incident is over, Christine refuses to believe him and reconcile until Lummer (who she has tasked with investigating the situation) provides his report. Lummer leaves hastily, and Robert reveals that he knew more of Lummer than Christine let on, which also hastened his return. The two both realize their petty jealousy and reconcile, ending the opera.

The very first scene of the opera is perhaps the most personal, and Strauss uses it to portray himself not as a genius, but as a working musician experiencing the ups and downs of married life. *Intermezzo* begins in the Storch's bedroom, with Christine helping Robert to pack for an upcoming tour. The two quickly begin arguing, with Christine insulting her husband's family, intelligence, and profession within the first few minutes of the opera while checking mundane items off the packing list, asking Anna, the housemaid, whether she had packed, among other things, his "shoehorn, gloves, and travelling hat" as well as food for his journey.⁷⁵ Between packing, Christine cuts at her husband in ways that would have been familiar to anyone remotely close to the couple, using language that was exceedingly direct for the opera stage. For example, when Christine complains that it is such a burden to run the house and keep an eye on the help

⁷⁵ Strauss, *Intermezzo*, libretto in liner notes, 37.

when Robert is gone, he reminds her that thousands of families live more simply and perhaps even more happily than they, to which Christine sneers, “Naturally, the way you were raised, you didn’t know any better!” When Robert retorts that she acts as though she were a queen raised in a castle, Christine tells him angrily that he dare not compare his family to her distinguished relation. When Robert tells Christine that true distinction comes from within, she responds, “Finish your packing, you plebeian!”⁷⁶

With this hostile interchange (one of several in the first scene), Strauss reminds audiences that he was not born into wealth, and that he earned his success through his own hard work and talent. His father was a working musician, a court horn player who, despite his virtuosity, was by no means rich. Pauline, on the other hand, was the daughter of a distinguished general and part of a family made wealthy through brewing. A little earlier in the scene, Strauss (as Storch) used Christine’s complaint about the amount of intellectual work and thinking she needed to do while he was gone to illustrate his passion for his craft: “It’s only that productive thinking by the artist, the scholar, by an inventor is intellectual work: and it should be a pleasure; for me it truly is.”⁷⁷

After their quarrel about family status, Christine belittles Robert’s profession, yelling “contemptuously,” “Du...du...du bist ein Musikant!” One can almost hear her thinking aloud, attempting to come up with the most spiteful insult she could muster, to which Robert replies, “God knows, so in your eyes I’m some kind of inferior person!” Christine backs down a little, saying that she did not mean it quite that badly, rather it was the lifestyle of the working musician she could not stand, with its “shameless librettists” placing their adventures on the stage for the whole world to see. This sort of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 35.

pandering she found “disgusting.”⁷⁸ Robert then reminds her that she should have thought about these things earlier, and that he could no longer “resaddle” or change professions because he never learned anything else.⁷⁹

Although Christine comes off rather badly in this argument, Strauss uses it to portray composers like himself not as transcendent beings, but as henpecked husbands with marital difficulties like everyone else. No matter what the outside world thought of him, at home and in the eyes of his wife Storch/Strauss was simply a “Musikant,” a title that, as illustrated earlier by Paul Bekker, held no particular prestige. Furthermore, Christine’s discomfort with the artistic process of laying bare one’s inner life before an audience speaks to the discomfort of many in Weimar society with the equation of art with everyday matters like money or politics. Strauss also shows in this interchange that he does not take himself too seriously; after all, as the librettist he was the one who chose to let his wife disparage his profession. Furthermore, this argument simply floats off into another disagreement about something else; it is not a jumping off point for a defense of the artistic life nor does it re-emerge as a plot point *per se*, it is simply left to stand as a realistic interchange between husband and wife, one in which neither party emerges unscathed.

Strauss’s use of unvarnished, and sometimes violent language to describe a marital spat that the audience knew stemmed from real life was a controversial move, as was Strauss’s decision to place himself so obviously at the center of the drama. The *Zeitschrift für Musik* thought that *Intermezzo* would find more commercial success than its predecessors (*Josephslegende* and *Schlagobers*) because of its less demanding plot

⁷⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

and musical style. The author thought the plot a little thin, but quite amusing all the same.⁸⁰ Paul Stefan thought that Strauss displayed “a true sense of humor, that is never just a joke” with the libretto.⁸¹ Reporting on the Dresden premiere, the *Vossische Zeitung* was also generally positive about *Intermezzo*’s libretto. The author stated that *Intermezzo* belonged to a small subset of modern operas known as “Conversation Operas,” and that, while Strauss may not have been the first to write in this style, *Intermezzo* was unique inasmuch as Strauss displayed absolutely no misgivings about portraying the life of his family onstage without any distance or filter.⁸²

Indeed, it was precisely this lack of filter that caused consternation among some of Strauss’s critics. Ludwig Karpath, who otherwise had a good deal of praise for *Intermezzo* in the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse*, noted that while Mahler, Goethe, Wagner, and others routinely put themselves into their work, they did so with a certain amount of poetic remove, keeping the most intimate parts of their lives from stage. For Karpath, this linkage between Storch and Strauss was a little too close for comfort.⁸³ Indeed, Karpath was close enough to Strauss to name the real life people behind the characters in the famous skat scene that opens the second act.

While Karpath’s objections were relatively minor given the rather lavish praise he heaped on the rest of the opera, Karl Kraus—another leading critic in Vienna—was downright hostile in his review of *Intermezzo*. He placed Strauss’s latest work directly in

⁸⁰ “Intermezzo,” *Zeitschrift für Musik* (November, 1924): 714.

⁸¹ “...einen wahren Humor, der nie bloß Witz ist...” Stefan, *Intermezzo und Demission*, 413.

⁸² “Konversations-Oper—Richard Strauß’ *Intermezzo*,” *Vossische Zeitung*, November 5, 1924.

⁸³ Karpath, “Intermezzo.” It should be noted that Karpath and Strauss were friends and that the composer dedicated *Schlagobers* to him.

line with the decadent failure of *Schlagobers*, which he thought to be a work of supremely juvenile intentions. Concerning the libretto generally, Kraus remarked sarcastically “in the realm of genius it is evidently not important what is set to music.”⁸⁴ The fact that one could even set “complete with skat game” the marital life of Strauss to music proved for Kraus to be the “autocracy of swindle.” To say that he found the subject matter banal would be an understatement: “But when the hippopotamus master at Schoenbrunn calls ‘come here Fritzl,’ and a salmon-colored gorge opens to receive a breadcrumb, that is an act of intellectual heroism compared to everything we experienced in the vicinity of Herr und Frau Storch.”⁸⁵ Going even further, Kraus concluded, “A more trivial but at the same time shameless dreariness has probably seldom entered into the realm of artistic creation.”⁸⁶

Paul Zschorlich was embarrassed by the way Strauss depicted his wife, and declared that one could never envision masters like Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, or Bruckner putting their private lives before the public.⁸⁷ For Zschorlich, the greatness of Strauss the artist rubbed uncomfortably against the tawdry *sturm und drang* of his home life. Strauss may have been the first composer to set his deepest personal life to music, but for Zschorlich that hardly represented progress.⁸⁸ Zschorlich concluded that Strauss had built in the hearts of many a monument with his many excellent earlier

⁸⁴ Karl Kraus, “Seeigleise,” trans. Susan Gillespie, in *Richard Strauss and His World*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 364.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Paul Zschorlich, “Strauss und Frau: Epilog zur *Intermezzo*,” *Deutsche Zeitung*, April 8, 1925.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

works, but that the tabloid drama of *Intermezzo* has caused that monument to stand crooked.⁸⁹

Strauss's controversial decision to use everyday speech in *Intermezzo*, though condemned by some as tawdry and beneath the dignity of a man like Strauss, was ahead of its time and reflected the emerging trend of *neue Sachlichkeit*, which, according to Gustav Hartlaub, "...expresses itself in the enthusiasm for the immediate reality as a result of the desire to take things entirely objectively on a material basis without immediately investing them with ideal implications."⁹⁰ One critic even declared *Intermezzo* an "overture to a new era of German opera."⁹¹ Indeed, much of the fast-paced conversation and foregrounding of modern experiences in the plot (Christine talks on the phone and has a frank conversation with a divorce attorney, among other things) were also central elements in the *Zeitoper*n of the late 1920s, including Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage* and Krenek's wildly popular *Jonny spielt auf*, both of which (like *Intermezzo*) used the everyday experiences of modern life as a way to entertain audiences of all kinds and were composed unapologetically with commercial success in mind.

The everyday speech and banal scenarios employed in *Intermezzo* were not the only ways in which Strauss attempted to convey aspects of his professional and personal life through the opera. Strauss also included a lengthy written preface to the score, in which he discussed the realistic setting of operatic text and the difficulties encountered by conductors and singers in the faithful reproduction of musical speech on the stage. Just as the plot of *Intermezzo* provided audiences with a glimpse into Strauss's personal and

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Gilliam, *The Life of Richard Strauss*, 119.

⁹¹ Quoted in Bryan Gilliam, "Strauss's *Intermezzo*: Innovation and Tradition," in Gilliam, *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, 279.

family life, the preface provided readers with a glimpse behind the scenes of Strauss's life as a conductor and composer. At a time when Strauss was criticized both in Vienna and internationally over the size of his salary and the relative ease of his conducting schedule, Strauss's preface to *Intermezzo* explained in detail the importance of good conducting and conscientious composition methods for the success of a work, implicitly making the case for the professional worth of himself and others. Underlying Strauss's preface is the notion that excellent compositions and performances are not the result of momentary inspiration or even transcendent genius, but rather hard work, dedication to craft, and attention to detail in all areas.

One might have expected Strauss to use his preface as a direct answer to critics, or at least provide a compelling rationale for his unorthodox choice of subject. But, as Bryan Gilliam has observed, the preface is "less a manifesto... than a short treatise offering practical advice to the conductor and singer..."⁹² Indeed, rather than provide a rationale for using his own life as fodder for an opera or explicitly argue for a new era in opera composition, Strauss used his preface to provide readers with an academic lesson on text setting and conducting dynamics. Using historical examples from Mozart, Wagner, and himself, Strauss explained how difficult it was for conductors to bring the orchestra and singers into balance, using *Salome* and *Elektra* as examples of operas in which the dialogue is drowned out by the orchestra unless the conductor follows Strauss's dynamic markings perfectly: "But it [dialogue] is unfortunately still very much handicapped by instrumental polyphony unless extremely careful observation of my dynamic markings gives the orchestra that pellucidity which I took for granted when

⁹² Bryan Gilliam, *Rounding Wagner's Mountain: Richard Strauss and the Modern German Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 176.

composing the operas...”⁹³ Strauss went on to observe that, although he paid more attention to dialogue in operas like *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*, he still was not completely successful in achieving his aims in making the dialogue “absolutely clear.”⁹⁴ In this matter Strauss was not above self-criticism, writing that his inability to set the text in these operas as clearly as he would have liked may be the result of “a lack of talent on my part, as a result of which even this tenuous and diaphanous orchestra appears still too polyphonic, and the scoring so erratic as to impede the spoken word on the stage...”⁹⁵ The simplified musical style of *Intermezzo*, marked by a prominent use of *secco* recitative that only blooms into melodic singing at dramatic high points, was not only the result of the “peculiar subject matter” of the text, but was also the culmination of a years long attempt by Strauss to render operatic dialogue naturally.⁹⁶

By providing readers with a capsule history of text setting within his own operas—complete with self-criticism—Strauss demonstrated his dedication to the process of musical composition, while also showing himself to be aware of his own shortcomings as a composer. The breakthroughs that Strauss experienced in setting dialogue in *Intermezzo* were the result of years of hard work and partial successes, and required an intense amount of compositional discipline to realize. In particular, Strauss was concerned in disciplining his habit of writing too much orchestral counterpoint underneath the voices, which “no matter how subdued its tones or how softly it is played, spells death to the spoken word on the stage.”⁹⁷ As a composer working in the tradition of

⁹³ “Preface to *Intermezzo*” in Strauss, *Recollection and Reflections*, 96.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner, the writing of counterpoint was the natural state of affairs for Strauss, who quipped, "...the devil himself is to blame that we Germans imbibe counterpoint with our mothers' milk, to keep us from being too successful on the operatic stage."⁹⁸ Strauss intentionally composed the score in a way that would make it difficult for careless performers to sabotage the diction: "The symphonic element has been so carefully and repeatedly revised and polished that...even when dynamic markings are carelessly observed...[it cannot] prevent the natural conversational tone...from being not only heard but also clearly understood..."⁹⁹ For Strauss, discernment and discipline—traits more often associated with accountants than with artists—were key factors in crafting operas like *Intermezzo* that were both artistically and commercially successful.

Strauss's preface voiced not only compositional concerns, but also concerns related to conducting the opera properly. Despite a composer's best intentions, careless conducting could easily spoil a work like *Intermezzo*. He was particularly concerned with the correct execution of dynamics, going much further than assigning a dynamic level for the entire orchestra, instead providing separate dynamics for different groups and individual instruments.¹⁰⁰ The accurate observation of these dynamics was of the utmost importance in achieving an excellent performance. Failure on the part of the conductor or orchestra would be disastrous for *Intermezzo*. With a story that contains as little action as *Intermezzo*, all of the interest is in the dialogue. If the dialogue cannot be understood, the performance "will have the effect of intolerable tedium since the listener,

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 97.

inadequately understanding the text, will not be able to comprehend the plot in all its details, nor will the musically trained ear find sufficient compensation in symphonic orgies.”¹⁰¹ Although Strauss orchestrated the opera so as to make the dialogue clear “no matter how heartless the officiating conductor may be,” he still conveyed in his preface to *Intermezzo* the importance of a good conductor and thoroughly rehearsed musicians for the success of his opera.¹⁰² The achievement of these goals required time, effort, and dedication on the part of the performers; Strauss suggested that the actors should master the purely musical parts of their roles during piano rehearsals, so that by the time of stage and orchestral rehearsals they would be “completely independent of the conductor’s baton,” and would be able to “devote all their energy to the natural presentation of this modern conversation piece.”¹⁰³

Critics were quick to latch onto Strauss’s preface in their reviews, comparing their experiences in the opera house with Strauss’s claims about dialogue, instrumentation, and the rest. Paul Stefan, in a wide-ranging review for *Anbruch* that situated the opera within the context of Strauss’s resignation from the Vienna State Opera, was quick to notice Strauss’s craftsmanship, writing that throughout the nearly three hour opera, Strauss displayed “unfailing technique,” and a “sovereign grace,” pouring a “cornucopia of melody” over the audience.¹⁰⁴ While Stefan encouraged Strauss’s fans to draw a distinction between Strauss the artist and Strauss the man—again because of what he considered to be an embarrassing contradiction between the transcendence of Strauss’s

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰⁴ “...nie versagenden Technik, einer souveränen Grazie...ergießt Strauss...ein Füllhorn von Melodie...über den Zuhörer...” Stefan, “Richard Strauss und Demission,” 412.

skill and the vulgarity of his private life as displayed in the libretto, Stefan still believed that with *Intermezzo* Strauss proved he was still capable of advancing his legacy at age 60.¹⁰⁵

The reviewer for the *Vossische Zeitung* was also very keen on acknowledging the high level of craft in *Intermezzo* and touched on several points acknowledged in Strauss's preface. Strauss's imagination, wit, and humor were all on display, he wrote, as well as his "never failing technical capacity." The reviewer was especially impressed by the economy of means used by Strauss in the orchestral score, specifically noting that Strauss renounced the urge to flaunt his polyphonic writing style, which in turn allowed for a number of innovative transitions from the spoken to the sung and back again.¹⁰⁶ The end of the review reinforced the notion of Strauss as the consummate craftsman, exclaiming, "What a worker is Strauss!" before extolling his "immense will to discipline his art."¹⁰⁷ The author also admired Strauss's intense self-criticism, noting that he recomposed parts of the opera four times in order to achieve the effect that he wanted.¹⁰⁸ He concluded that even the "youngest and most daring *Sturm und Drang*-ers" could (and should) learn something from Strauss. Presumably, that "something" that the younger generation could learn from Strauss was discipline, work ethic, and humility. Perhaps guided by Strauss's preface, the *Vossische Zeitung*'s review foregrounds the intense mental labor undergone by Strauss in the creation of what seems on the surface to be a rather frivolous work.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 214.

¹⁰⁶ "...sein nie versagendes technisches Vermögen..." "Intermezzo," *Vossische Zeitung*, November 5, 1924.

¹⁰⁷ "Welch ein Arbeiter ist Strauß! Erkennen wir nicht schon in jedem Takt den ungeheuren Willen zur Disziplinierung seiner Kunst?" Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ "...und die Jüngsten und Wagemutigsten unter den jungen Stürmern und Drängern können noch alle von ihm lernen." Ibid.

By providing critics and interested audience members with such a detailed preface discussing both the difficulties encountered in the composition of *Intermezzo* and his musical solutions, Strauss also opened himself up to a certain amount of criticism by leading listeners to potential trouble spots. Writing in the *Neue Freie Presse* three years after the premiere in 1927, Ludwig Karpath was particularly interested in Strauss's claim that he had overcome his impulse to orchestral counterpoint in *Intermezzo*. Noting Strauss's well-known statement that it was the devil's fault that Germans began learning counterpoint in the cradle, Karpath wrote that while it was a witty thing for Strauss to say, it did not change the fact that Strauss was, in fact, one of those self-same Germans for whom counterpoint was an almost unconscious habit.¹⁰⁹ Karpath observed that Strauss omitted none of the complex contrapuntal structures for which he was famous during the orchestral interludes, concluding that the music of *Intermezzo*, despite Strauss's claims to the contrary, had much more in common with *Meistersinger* than *Falstaff*.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, he wrote, parts of the score contained just as much pathos and sentimentality as any other Strauss opera, regardless of Strauss's insistence that the music of *Intermezzo* was designed to avoid these characteristics.¹¹¹

Despite the fact that Strauss's preface opened him up to criticism because of the specificity of his claims about *Intermezzo*, it communicated to audiences and critics alike the intellectual and technical rigor necessary to produce a modern opera—even an opera with relatively modest aims like *Intermezzo*. By providing a capsule history both in operatic text setting and conducting, Strauss demonstrated that conducting involved much

¹⁰⁹ Karpath, "*Intermezzo*."

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

more than gesticulating wildly on a podium. Likewise, the process of musical composition necessitated specific technical knowledge gained only through years of trial and error, through continuous revision and self-criticism. In Strauss's preface, conductors and composers are professional craftsmen in the modern sense, a notion that is borne out by the all-too-realistic feeling of the opera itself. In this way, Strauss used *Intermezzo* as an extension of the ideals he had championed from the founding of the GDT. The libretto and preface to *Intermezzo* demonstrate Strauss's deep engagement with current musical and economic debates and his desire to communicate his views to the public by putting himself onstage in a remarkably direct manner.

Additionally, the structure of *Intermezzo*—with its fast-paced, dialogue-laden scenes and lengthy orchestral interludes—reveals Strauss's engagement with the developing technology of film. At a time when opera houses were rapidly losing ground to movie theaters, *Intermezzo* incorporated many techniques common in film, highlighting the fact that Strauss intended *Intermezzo* to appeal to the widest possible audience, both for artistic and financial reasons. Strauss's pragmatic motives for including filmic elements in *Intermezzo* are made readily apparent when one considers that Strauss personally loathed the cinema and avoided attending at all costs.¹¹² Strauss's professional interest in film technique was almost certainly financial, with opera houses competing with (and losing to) movie theaters in a battle for the very finite entertainment dollars of an economically depressed audience. The notion that *Intermezzo* was, at least in part, a response to the popularity of film is borne out by the collaboration of Strauss

¹¹² Kennedy, 341.

and Hofmannsthal on a silent film adaptation of *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1925, less than a year after the premiere of *Intermezzo*.

One of the most innovative aspects of *Intermezzo*, not remarked upon in the preface, is the use of orchestral interludes to connect the scenes. Indeed, the orchestral interludes are as integral to the action as the dialogue, a fact that is reflected in *Intermezzo*'s subtitle, "A Bourgeois Comedy with Symphonic Interludes." These interludes serve as a kind of glue that holds the often short, vignette type scenes together. Strauss envisioned this kind of setting already when he was working with Hermann Bahr on the libretto. Strauss's chief complaint was that Bahr's scenes were too overly dramatic and self-contained.¹¹³ Strauss envisioned fluid, quickly changing scenes that left more dramatic space for the orchestral interludes. In a sketch of settings that Strauss subsequently sent to Bahr, he told the playwright that he wanted the scenes to be almost cinematic in nature, with the music itself moving the drama forward.¹¹⁴ As a result, many of the scenes in *Intermezzo* are very short, dissolving into an orchestral interlude that allows the composer to shift through time and space rapidly. Indeed, there are a dizzying thirteen scene changes within the two acts of *Intermezzo*. One example of this effect occurs in the first act between scenes six and seven. Near the end of Act I, scene XI, Baron Lummer sits at his desk to write Christine a letter asking for a thousand marks, something he spent all of scene five hinting at without summoning the courage to ask in person. He begins to write, narrating the words out loud, "Dear madam, so kind and gracious were you today, that I could not tell you with my lips everything that my heart

¹¹³ Gilliam, *Rounding Wagner's Mountain*, 177.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

yearned to tell you...Forgive me, then, if I try to put into writing...”¹¹⁵ At this point Lummer trails off and the letter is completed and “sent” to Christine via the orchestra.¹¹⁶ Scene VII opens with Christine in the middle of reading the letter, exclaiming, “A thousand marks he wants! He must be crazy!”¹¹⁷ Strauss uses the compact, rapidly changing scenes to create an effect akin to cinematic montage, using the intervening orchestral interludes to stitch them together. This effect was not lost on critics, one of whom described the opera as a “cinematic play with connective tone painting.”¹¹⁸

Strauss’s extensive use of orchestral interludes also provided him with an opportunity to compose the kind of ultra descriptive instrumental music for which he had been famous since the beginning of his career. For many, these descriptive interludes—particularly the interlude that accompanied Christine and the Baron’s meeting while tobogganing and the opening interlude of Act II, in which Strauss vividly depicts a game of skat played among friends—were the best part of the opera. Although the opera itself provided little opportunity for show stopping arias or catchy tunes, the interludes proved to be a marketable commodity. The enduring popularity of the orchestral interludes from *Intermezzo* allowed Strauss to arrange the best of them and publish them as a stand-alone concert work in 1929.

Although modern critics rarely mention *Intermezzo* in the same breath as Strauss’s most “important” operas, it is, in its way, every bit as innovative as *Salome* or *Der Rosenkavalier*. Strauss’s libretto, though often mocked by critics, proved influential for the composers of *Zeitoper*n and even inspired Schoenberg to write his own “marriage

¹¹⁵ Strauss, *Intermezzo*, libretto in liner notes, 63.

¹¹⁶ Gilliam, *Rounding Wagner’s Mountain*, 178.

¹¹⁷ Strauss, *Intermezzo*, libretto in liner notes, 63.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Gilliam, *Rounding Wagner’s Mountain*, 179.

opera,” *Vom Heute auf Morgen*. Perhaps surprisingly (Schoenberg was not a fan of Strauss generally), *Intermezzo* was one of Schoenberg’s favorite Strauss compositions.¹¹⁹ In addition to the libretto, Strauss’s manipulation of time and space through the use of the symphonic interludes borrowed from emerging techniques in film. Finally, Strauss’s published preface to *Intermezzo* allowed readers a behind-the-scenes look into the daily professional lives of composers and conductors, a move that, when taken in conjunction with the content of the libretto, allowed Strauss to take the composer out of the ivory tower and place him in a middle-class living room, thus redefining the relationship of the composer to society.

Conclusion

Throughout his long and varied career, Strauss actively subverted the notion of the composer as isolated genius, arguing instead for a conception of the composer as a professional craftsman responding to the needs and desires of his audience. Through his close association with the GDT, Strauss sought to improve the material conditions of composers by lobbying for changes in copyright law, underscoring his deeply held convictions about the economic worth of artistic production. Strauss’s idiosyncratic composer-opera *Intermezzo*, composed at a time of particularly intense professional and economic difficulties for its composer, reinforces Strauss’s thoroughly modern conception of both the opera and the relationship between artist and audience. His use of everyday prose and a true-to-life comic scenario portrayed him as a bourgeois husband and father, while his detailed preface provided critics a glimpse into the professional

¹¹⁹ Kennedy, 233.

difficulties of opera composition and performance. Strauss's multi-leveled engagement with contemporary debates surrounding music and economics, as well as with his audience, provided a sharp contrast to the detached fatalism of Pfitzner. With *Intermezzo*, Strauss articulated a new, modern vision of the composer: they are not "operatic heroes," but rather, "genuine human beings."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Strauss, "Preface to *Intermezzo*," 101.

Chapter 5:

“This Work is Untimely”: Schreker’s Weimar-Era Composer Operas

Perhaps more than any other early twentieth-century opera composer, Franz Schreker used his works to explore questions of art and the artist in modern society. Every one of his operas features musicians, composers, or visual artists, though their importance to the opera itself varies. This predilection on Schreker’s part (the composer wrote all of his own librettos) has led one modern commentator to declare that “For Schreker the reflection and refraction of Art in the Artwork is a central problem; all of his operas are artist-operas...”¹ Indeed, Schreker was in a unique position to engage in debates about art and the artist in a modern society: he served as director of the prestigious Berlin Hochschule für Musik from 1921 until late 1932. As the leader of one of Germany’s greatest cultural institutions, he struggled to reconcile the workaday life of a bureaucrat with the Romantic ideal of the isolated composer. He was not alone in engaging this issue: many composers at this time, including Strauss (himself a prestigious conductor) and Pfitzner (a composition teacher and head of the Strassburg Conservatory from 1909-1917), were concerned with this same question. In addition to his duties as the director of the Hochschule, Schreker was also a highly respected composition teacher; many of his

¹ “Bei Franz Schreker wird die Spiegelung und Brechung von Kunst im Kunstwerk zum zentralen Problem; alle seine Opern sind Künstleroperen...” Wolfgang Molkow, “Die Rolle der Kunst in den frühen Opern Franz Schrekers,” *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 44/5 (May, 1989): 219.

students, most notably Ernst Krenek, were part of the next generation of composers that helped to turn the critical tide against Schreker.²

As with Strauss, navigating the rapidly evolving worlds of technology and musical commerce was an increasingly consuming problem for Schreker. As his commercial viability dwindled over the course of the 1920s, Schreker's relationship with his publisher Universal Edition (a firm largely built on the successes of Schreker's early operas) became markedly strained, and it is clear that the pressure to provide a "hit" influenced the composition of both *Der singende Teufel* and *Christophorus*. Indeed, these late composer-operas reveal Schreker attempting to work through all of the concerns listed above: the dissonance between the ideal composer and the reality of being a composer in the twentieth century, and the twin pressures of competing with his own students in the marketplace while remaining commercially successful.

In this chapter I will briefly review the composer's activities and operas prior to 1920 before examining two of Schreker's later operas, one of which was performed during the composer's lifetime, *Der singende Teufel* (1928), and one that was not, *Christophorus*, composed between 1925 and 1929 but not performed until 1978. I will contextualize these works within their cultural milieu and will demonstrate how Schreker attempted to communicate his professional struggles with his audiences through these operas, showing the composer to be increasingly engaged with the specific aesthetic and social problems of his era.

² Besides Krenek, Schreker also taught Max Brand, Berthold Goldschmidt, Wilhelm Grosz, Alois Hába, Felix Petryek, Karol Rathaus, and Ignace Strassegger.

Vienna and Early Operas

Schreker shot to fame nearly overnight with the success of his 1912 opera, *Der ferne Klang*, discussed in chapter one. But even before the success of his first opera, Schreker had been building a reputation as an excellent teacher. In the years between his graduation from the Vienna Academy and the premiere of *Der ferne Klang* the young composer supported himself mainly by teaching private students. He also had aspirations to be a conductor, and in February of 1907 was appointed assistant chorus master of the Vienna Volksoper, a position that led to his appointment as conductor and musical director of the newly formed Philharmonic Chorus at the end of that year.³ Because of the success of the Philharmonic Chorus and his growing reputation as a rigorous, innovative, and modern teacher, he was appointed to a professorship in composition at his alma mater in June 1912, just a few months before the premiere of *Der ferne Klang*.⁴ Teaching was not merely something Schreker did to pay the bills as he waited for financial success as a composer; rather, it was a core part of his artistic makeup. Christopher Hailey goes so far as to say that, during the first quarter of the twentieth century, the impact of Schreker's teaching had far more impact on Viennese musical life than his music.⁵

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 disrupted much of the momentum Schreker had gained with the success of *Der ferne Klang*. Several planned productions of the opera were cancelled, as were Schreker's plans to travel to France and America.⁶ Many of his students were drafted, though Schreker himself was deemed unfit for

³ Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934: A Cultural Biography*, 19-23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

military service.⁷ Unlike his contemporaries Strauss and Pfitzner, Schreker was no fan of the war, in part because of the damaging effects it had on his career, and in part because the composer viewed war as the antithesis of art. In September 1914 Schreker wrote to the president of the Vienna Academy saying, “This is a time against Art and all creative things. But the world won’t go under and the Beautiful will survive the Horrible. For my part I cannot cut off all ties that which moved me earlier and passively follow the events that flow over us so *incomprehensibly*.”⁸

Schreker refused to let the war keep him from new projects, and in some ways the travel restrictions it placed on him may have been beneficial, as the war years proved to be the most productive of his career.⁹ Between 1914 and 1918 Schreker wrote the librettos for and composed two of his most successful operas, *Die Gezeichneten* (premiered 1918) and *Der Schatzgräber* (premiered 1920), though owing to shortages of material and electricity neither work was premiered until after the war.¹⁰ When *Die Gezeichneten* finally received its premiere in Frankfurt on April 25, 1918, audiences and critics alike were nearly unanimous in their praise, declaring that Schreker was the true heir to Wagner’s legacy and the savior of German opera. The lush, fantastic world dreamed up by Schreker resonated deeply with audiences that were exhausted by war and looking for an escape. In an article written for *The Musical Courier* and reprinted by *Anbruch* in a collection of positive reviews, Cesar Saerchinger wrote:

In the last year of the war, in the midst of that terrible spring offensive which threw Germany into the abyss, Schreker’s great new work, *Die Gezeichneten*, was

⁷ Ibid., 79. Schreker’s daughter listed the cause as varicose veins.

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 80-81. Italics in the original.

⁹ Ibid., 81.

¹⁰ Ibid. *Die Gezeichneten* was initially slated for a 1916 Munich premiere, which was eventually cancelled after several postponements.

produced. The way in which the people received it seemed to say that here, at last, was what they had been groping for. Such a success, in the case of a serious work, is almost a miracle. People from everywhere travelled to Frankfort to hear the opera, where it was produced a number of times throughout the summer. Munich followed last spring, in the midst of the revolution, and from there the work began a triumphal progress through Germany such as has not been the lot of an opera in a generation.¹¹

With the success of *Die Gezeichneten*, many critics and artistic observers named Schreker as the face of the new artistic generation. Saerschinger proclaimed in another article that Schreker was the “Messiah of German Opera.”¹² He continued by writing that the war had produced “a grand mental and moral housecleaning in Germany,” which allowed for a new generation, “stifled through years of ruthless strife,” to come to the fore in philosophy and in politics.¹³ Saerchinger then stated emphatically, “That generation is Schreker’s. Not Strauss or even Wagner are its musical progenitors, but Mahler and the sons of the sunny South.”¹⁴

Saerchinger was certainly not the first to make such grand claims about Schreker; in proclaiming the primacy of Schreker’s art he was mirroring the claims made by Paul Bekker at the end of 1918. In a pamphlet on the composer, Bekker stated that the most important artistic question of the time was whether a talent on the level of Wagner would reappear. He went on, “...the question has now been answered: Franz Schreker is such a talent; the first since Wagner who is by Nature related to him, the same phenomenon,

¹¹ Cesar Saerchinger, “The Latest Schreker Opera,” *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 2/1-2 (January, 1920): 68-69. *Anbruch* routinely collected positive reviews both domestic and international for works published by Universal and always reprinted them in their original languages, hence the appearance of an English language article in a German language publication.

¹² Cesar Saerchinger, “The Messiah of German Opera,” *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 2/1-2 (January, 1920): 68.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

only in a completely different incarnation.”¹⁵ Bekker became Schreker’s most important critical champion and eventually paved the way for the composer’s move to Berlin.

Although less overt than some of Schreker’s other operas, *Die Gezeichneten* is an artist-opera nonetheless and provided the dramatic template that Schreker would follow until *Christophorus*. It tells the story of a young crippled, hunchbacked nobleman named Alviano, who has created the island paradise of Elysium as an aesthetic sublimation of the sensual life that his physical appearance denied him in reality. He wishes to present the island to the city of Genoa as a gift and in the process falls in love with the mayor’s daughter Carlotta, who is a painter. Though the two of them profess their love for one another, Carlotta is eventually seduced by a rogue named Tamare, who rapes her on Alviano’s island, thus in one stroke defiling both of his loves. Carlotta rejects Alviano for her rapist Tamare as she lies dying, and the opera ends with Alviano stumbling away through the crowd.

Despite the medieval setting and the at times overpowering sensuality of the score, *Die Gezeichneten* is not escapist art; rather, through his opera Schreker demonstrated a deep engagement with some of the fundamental concerns and anxieties about modern art and society. We see in the character of Carlotta and the ways in which she interacts with Alviano and Tamare the distinctive stamp of Otto Weininger, the Viennese author whose influential 1903 writing *Sex and Character* described women as nothing more than the sum of their sexual drives while bemoaning an increased “femininity” in modern males. By the end of the First World War the question of

¹⁵ “...diese Frage ist jetzt beantwortet: Franz Schreker ist ein solche Begabung, die erste seit Wagner, die ihm der Art nach verwandt ist, das gleiche Phänomen, nur in ganz anderer Verkörperung.” Paul Bekker, “Die Persönlichkeit,” *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 2/1-2 (January, 1920): 3.

“masculine” artistic potency in the German operatic world was a pressing one largely because of the epigonism and aesthetic decadence that followed after Wagner, with critics wondering who would breathe new life into the genre. The physically deformed and impotent Alviano with his island paradise of Elysium represented the new, decadent, and “feminized” nature of modern art. Schreker’s true achievement, according to Joachim Beck, was combining the themes of feminine decadence represented by Carlotta (and Alviano) with what he termed an “artist-tragedy.”

but the poet-composer has coupled this theme in “Die Gezeichneten” with an artist-tragedy in the context of a sexually charged Renaissance setting, coupled with the tragedy of the fools in Apollo, who gives beauty to the world, but who himself remains excluded.¹⁶

As an artist-opera, *Die Gezeichneten* operates on a more abstract plane than *Der ferne Klang*. While Carlotta is the conventional artist in the opera (she especially likes to paint Expressionist renderings of hands), her art is not at the center of the opera. Alviano is the “artist” here, whose artwork is the island paradise that he wishes to share with the people of Genoa. As with *Der ferne Klang*, one of the central themes explored by Schreker is the danger of art divorced from society. Alviano is an outsider and pursues the creation of Elysium as Fritz pursuing the distant sound; that is, without regard for the consequences of his actions. Their commitment to the world of the purely aesthetic and alienation from society proves destructive not only to themselves, but to those around them.

¹⁶ “...aber der Dichterkomponist hat dieses sein Thema in den ‘Gezeichneten’ verklammert mit einer Künstlertragödie, die in Rahmen eines brünstig heißen Renaissancestoffes steht, verklammert mit der Tragödie des Narren in Apoll, der der Welt die Schönheit schenkt, selbst aber ein Ausgeschlossener bleibt.” Joachim Beck, “Die Gezeichneten,” *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 2/1-2 (January, 1920): 12.

The success of Schreker's first two operas (and the even larger success of his third opera, *Der Schatzgräber*, in 1920) combined with continuous critical championing by Bekker and others placed the composer firmly on top of the world of German opera at the beginning of the interwar period. His operas were performed more often than those of any other composer, including Richard Strauss.¹⁷ As the symbol of a new generation of German composers, one whose art was decidedly cosmopolitan in its influences, Schreker was an attractive figure for those wishing to reshape German cultural institutions to conform to the democratic ideals of the nascent Weimar Republic. In 1920 Schreker made the most important move in his professional career, leaving his position at the Vienna Academy to become the director of the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. Although the position was a prestigious one that placed Schreker squarely in the center of German cultural life, his decision to come to Berlin proved in some ways disastrous for his career as a composer, and Schreker would later translate many of the professional frustrations and anxieties of this era into *Christophorus*.

Schreker and the Hochschule

The choice of the new director of the Hochschule was a highly political one, and was motivated by the desire for sweeping reform in music education on the part of members of the newly ascendant Social Democrat government. In the new Republic, party politics and ideological identification factored into most facets of public life, including musical life. Tamara Levitz described the cultural landscape thusly:

¹⁷ Hailey, "Franz Schreker and the Pluralities of Modernism," *Tempo* 219 (January, 2002): 3.

Ideologically opposed cultural groups could not peacefully coexist: despite the will of individual artists, every facet of musical life in Berlin became politicized. Composers, performers, critics, writers, and artists of all kinds defined themselves or were defined by the opposition as representatives of the right- or left-wing camp. Unwilling or unable to avoid questions of Germany's moral, ethical, and political future, artists engaged in ideological, philosophical, and political battles which rocked the very foundations of German society.¹⁸

The cultural affairs of Berlin were of a different piece than in other parts of the country. In the area of music especially, Berlin lacked the long-standing, somewhat autonomous institutions found in places like Dresden, Munich, or Frankfurt. As a consequence, notes Christopher Hailey, Berlin's major cultural institutions were "largely creations of the state and served its interest."¹⁹ In turn, the Hochschule itself was something of a political battleground, and every new appointment or curriculum decision carried with it political significance. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Schreker's appointment was the end result of a difficult political process, and he was not the first choice for the job. Indeed, the process that led to Schreker's appointment exemplifies just how large a role politics played in the reorganization of German cultural life in the capital city.

Schreker had tired of Vienna after the war and was planning a move to Germany, regardless of his employment prospects. He was offered the directorship of the State Theater at Karlsruhe but eventually declined the position, citing professional and cultural reasons. He wrote to Bekker that the "forced cooperation" with the General Music Director and "the *incomparable desolation* of the city of Karlsruhe" deterred him greatly.²⁰ At this point in his career Schreker could choose to be picky: his stock as a

¹⁸ Tamara Levitz, *Teaching New Classicality: Ferruccio Busoni's Master Class in Composition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 56.

¹⁹ Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934: A Cultural Biography*, 117.

²⁰ "...eines aufgezwungenen Zusammenarbeiten mit Hr. Cortolezis und die *beispiellose Öde* der Stadt Karlsruhe haben mich stark abgeschreckt." Letter from Schreker to Bekker

cultural commodity was rising, and salary was not a large concern for him. In providing his rationale to Bekker for declining the job he continued, “Away from here [Karlsruhe]— even without a position. My publisher says I do not need any more [positions]. I am now looking for an apartment—in Germany—somewhere.”²¹

Schreker’s choosiness paid off, as he was soon made a much better offer to become the director of the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. Schreker’s initial assessment of the appointment reveals that he was seemingly unaware of the grand sweep of Kestenberg’s proposed reforms and the intensely political nature of his new job. Kestenberg wished to put one of his people in the position, someone who would be a public mouthpiece for his agenda while working tirelessly behind the scenes. Schreker was not an ideal candidate from this perspective. He had his own ideas for reforming the Hochschule, but they were of a more general nature and not tied to specific public policy initiatives. Furthermore, Schreker was determined that his new position would not interfere with his ability to compose and perform his works. In fact, he seemed most concerned about making sure that release time for composition was established in his contract. On March 25, 1920, the composer wrote excitedly to Bekker about the conditions of his appointment: “Guarantee for free creation—holidays—3 months—an administrative director at my side and so forth. I may come immediately.”²² While Schreker also looked forward to working with Kestenberg and Schünemann, he

February 4, 1920, Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 126. Emphasis in original. The General Music Director of the Karlsruhe Opera was a Herr Cortolezis who served from from 1913-1924.

²¹ “Trotzdem fort von hier. –auch ohne Stellung. Mein Verleger behauptet, ich brauche keine mehr, nun gut. Ich suche jetzt eine Wohnung—in Deutschland—irgendwo.” Ibid.

²² “Gewähr für freies Schaffen—Urlaub—3 Monate—ein administrativer Direktor mir zur Seite u.s.f. ich möge sofort kommen.” Letter from Schreker to Bekker March 25, 1920, in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 131.

mistakenly believed that the two men were there to help the composer implement his agenda, rather than the other way around. He wrote to Bekker,

And it makes me happy—even if difficulties and hostilities may still come. The whole [situation] is very favorable, I can do many good things; I have the famous Kestenberg on my side in the Ministry and Dr. Schünemann as managing director. In Vienna there is great consternation—now [they] want to give me everything and much more than I ever could expect—but I am going to Berlin and will give it a try...²³

Despite the fact that Schreker was a less than ideal choice to lead the Hochschule, Bekker and Kestenberg believed they could mold him into an effective advocate for their causes, at least initially.

Although he was not involved with the Hochschule in an official capacity, Bekker played an important role in the reorganization of the institution, as his correspondence with Schreker and Kestenberg during the early 1920s readily attests. Bekker maintained a vast network of contacts in all walks of German cultural life and was a valuable resource in identifying and vetting potential faculty. His public row with Pfitzner made Bekker well aware of the vicissitudes of German cultural politics, and he took it upon himself to school Schreker in the cultural politics of Berlin, which were quite a bit different from those in Vienna. Bekker's congratulatory letter contained a good deal of advice for Schreker, advising the composer to keep Schünemann and Kestenberg very close while avoiding "falling into false and totally inappropriate friendships with

²³ "Und es freut mich—mögen noch Schwierigkeiten und Anfeindungen kommen. Das Ganze ist sehr günstig, ich kann mancherlei Gutes leisten; habe den famosen Kestenberg zur Seite im Ministerium und Dr. Schünemann als geschäftsführenden Direktor. In Wien große Bestürzung—nun will man mir alles geben und mehr als ich je erwarten durfte—doch ich gehe nach Berlin und will es versuchen..." Ibid., 131-132.

others.”²⁴ Bekker counseled that keeping the appropriate friends would guarantee Schreker’s success, putting people on his side with insider knowledge and insight.²⁵ Bekker also admonished Schreker to steer clear of replying to unfavorable criticism in the press, writing that he alone would defend the composer against his detractors: in his new position Schreker needed to remain “completely objective” while relying on Kestenberg and Schünemann to support him internally with their power and influence.²⁶ By keeping Schreker close, Bekker hoped to influence his decision making.

At the time of Schreker’s appointment the quality of the education at the Hochschule was compromised both from without and within: it was greatly harmed by the economic crisis of the immediate postwar period, and much of the faculty was old and hostile to new ideas. Shortly after Schreker’s appointment, Kestenberg wrote to Schünemann asking for his assessment of German opera, concert, and school life in light of the economic crisis.²⁷ Schünemann responded gravely that the economic crisis threatened German musical culture “at the root: at the musical education of our students.”²⁸ Not only was there not enough funding for programs, but many of the students took jobs playing in movie theaters and salons all night, causing them to come to class tired, overworked and in no condition to learn at a high level. Furthermore, their experiences playing in bars and theaters made them difficult to instruct, because many of

²⁴ “...falls Sie sich jetzt nicht in falsche und durchaus unangebrachte Freundschaftleien mit anderen einlassen...” Letter from Bekker to Schreker, April 4, 1920, in *ibid.*, 134.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ “...*Sie* müssen ganz objektiv bleiben.” Letter from Bekker to Schreker, mid-November, 1920, in *ibid.*, 145-146. Italics in the original.

²⁷ Kestenberg to Schünemann, June 23, 1920. Georg Schünemann Papers, Archive of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²⁸ “Die wirtschaftlichen Not der deutschen Kunst bedroht unsere musikalische Kultur an der Wurzel: bei der musikalischen Erziehung der Studierenden.” *Ibid.*

the students felt that they knew all they needed to in order to be professional musicians.²⁹

This trend among students especially worried Schünemann, and he feared that the Hochschule would not be able to supply an adequate number of qualified players for Germany's orchestras and opera houses.³⁰

Even if the material concerns for students were improved, the instruction they received in class was not sufficient to prepare them for careers as professional musicians. Prior to the 1920s the Hochschule, founded in 1869 by Joseph Joachim, was a generally conservative institution, reflecting the stable nature of the Prussian state. Professors were often slow to change and in many cases openly mocked modern music and methods. In no place was this more evident than in the composition department, where some of the faculty saw *Tristan und Isolde* as a bridge too far. In the fall of 1920 Schreker arranged an informal gathering of the composition students in order to hear their works and get to know them. What he heard shocked and appalled him. Writing to Bekker on November 10th of that year, Schreker referred to his colleagues as an “incompetent rabble” (unfähige Gesindel) against whom he was taking up the fight. He continued,

What passes for Composition instruction—and *how* (!!!) defies description. Herr Koch, Friedr. E. presents me with works by the students that are to be played. One *would not think it possible!* If only they were—let's say—dryly correct—outdated but at least *decent*, well-written! None of that. Among my allegations: how can you explain such an excess of the grossest errors—50 on every page—it serves as proof of “Modernity”! The students no longer forbid themselves to use parallel fifths and the like—it is enough to make you climb the walls! Helpless old men!³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Was hier in Composition unerrichtet und *wie* (!!!) das spottet jeder Beschreibung. Herr Koch, Friedr. E. überreicht mir Werke von Schülern die aufgeführt werden sollen. Das sollte man *nicht für möglich halten!* Wenn das noch—sagen wir—trocken korrekt—veraltet aber wenigstens *anständig*, gut im Satz wäre! Nichts von alledem. Auf meinen Vorhalt: Wie denn ein derartiges Maß gröbster Kunstfehler—50 auf jeder Seite, zu

As a composition professor Schreker (like his friend Arnold Schoenberg) believed in providing his students with a thorough theoretical grounding in traditional form, harmony, and counterpoint. Only after mastering the fundamental building blocks of musical composition could a student find his own, unique compositional voice. In order to help jumpstart his overhaul of the composition program, Schreker asked some of his most talented students from Vienna, including Ernst Krenek and Alois Hába, to join him in Berlin. The discrepancy between the current Hochschule students and those who followed Schreker from Vienna was immediately noticeable, as Georg Schünemann detailed in the 1928 Schreker issue of *Anbruch*, stating that there were almost no compositional problems that students like Krenek and Hába could not solve. Schreker's Viennese gambit worked: soon everyone wanted to be a part of Schreker's class.³²

Although Schreker advocated for each student to find his own artistic voice, his focus on developing strong fundamentals as part of the craft of composition reflected Kestenberg's commitment to music education reform centered on standards geared toward the professionalization of the discipline. In Kestenberg's (and Schreker's) view, music education needed to be centralized in institutions like the Hochschule, while the influence of unregulated private teachers (detailed in chapter two), needed to be diminished. Near the end of his first year at the helm of the Hochschule, Schreker published an article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* that summed up his philosophy not only on music education, but also on what it meant to be a professional music teacher, writing

erklären sei—mußte die “Moderne” herhalten! Die Schüler ließen sich Quinten und dergl. nicht mehr verbieten—es ist zum die Wände hinaufklettern. Ratlose Greise!!” Letter from Schreker to Bekker, November 10, 1920, in Schreker to Bekker, *Briefwechsel*, 142-143. Parenthetical exclamations in the original.

³² Ibid.

that the teacher must subordinate his own desires for the good of the students. He believed that students needed understanding coupled with discipline and freedom. Above all, he saw himself and his colleagues as “givers”(Gebenden) of artistic education, leading students to appreciate the past while reaching for the future.³³ While at the Hochschule, Schreker was committed to exposing his students to new compositional trends, but never at the expense of proper technique. Like the acquisition of a new language, learning to compose took time and effort, and patience above all.³⁴ Schreker’s methods gained him the unfailing loyalty of a great number of his students, many of whom went on to influential positions throughout the German-speaking world as teachers, composers, and conductors. One need only look at the many lengthy and heartfelt positive reminiscences published by his former students in the 1928 edition of *Anbruch* in honor of the composer’s fiftieth birthday to gain a sense of the commitment Schreker made to his students, especially in his first years at the Hochschule.³⁵

Despite the good work Schreker was able to do on behalf of his composition students, he soon found out that the demands of his position were much more than he bargained for; furthermore, he had much less autonomy in decision-making than Bekker had implicitly promised in their early correspondence. Once he accepted the position of director, Schreker immediately sought to recruit faculty for key positions. Schreker made these personnel decisions based on the skill and artistry of the candidates, without regard for political affiliation. He failed to realize, however, that all regular Hochschule positions were classified as civil service, and therefore applicants were subject to political

³³ Franz Schreker, “Musikhochschule,” *Anbruch* 2/14 (September, 1920): 490-493.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 491.

³⁵ *Anbruch* 9/1 (January 1928).

approval. This caused quite a bit of consternation for Kestenberg, because it seems that Schreker promised positions to people who, for various reasons, could not get past the vetting process. This forced Kestenberg to perform unwanted damage control, rescinding offers Schreker made to candidates.³⁶ Schreker thus found his autonomy undermined by Kestenberg almost immediately after he assumed his post. In a letter to Schreker explaining the political nature of appointments, even for piano teachers, Kestenberg pleaded, “For all new combinations [of personnel] I ask you sincerely to take the somewhat changed political situation into consideration.”³⁷ One of Schreker’s attempted hires, a Frau Isori, proved particularly problematic for Kestenberg because she was a foreigner. Kestenberg begged Schreker not to insist, for the moment at least, on her appointment, writing “The question of foreigners at the Hochschule now plays a major role” for the Ministry. He urged Schreker that he should only propose to fill the most critical vacancies, lest he make the situation more difficult by encountering avoidable but completely predictable resistance along the way.³⁸ While Kestenberg was upset that the Ministry was already questioning Schreker’s artistic wishes in personnel matters, he maintained it was necessary going forward for everyone at the Hochschule to “take all political and financial factors into consideration” when making decisions.³⁹

³⁶ “Bei allen neuen Kombinationen bitte ich Sie herzlich, auf die inzwischen etwas veränderte politische Situation Rücksicht zu nehmen.” Letter from Kestenberg to Schreker, March 25, 1920. Leo Kestenberg Papers, Archive of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Die Ausländer Frage an der Hochschule spielt jetzt ein große Rolle, und ich bitte Sie dringend, die zweifellos zu erwartenden Widerstände nicht dadurch ins Ungemessene zu häufen und nicht jetzt derartige Berufungen, die nicht absolut unbedingt notwendig sind, vorzunehmen.” Ibid.

³⁹ “Ich bin recht verzweifelt, daß das Ministerium gezwungen ist, Ihren künstlerischen Wünschen jetzt schon gewisse Beschränkungen auferlegen zu müssen. Aber es ist

Faced with diminished autonomy and growing insurrection among his most talented students (detailed later in the chapter), Schreker began losing interest in actively leading the Hochschule, leaving a good deal of the daily responsibilities to his managing director Georg Schünemann. A career bureaucrat and ally of Kestenberg, Schünemann intuitively understood the political and financial issues facing the Hochschule and was instrumental in its reform during the Weimar years. Though outwardly prestigious, the directorship took a large personal and professional toll on Schreker; it seems he was not interested in pursuing the specific policy goals outlined by Kestenberg and Bekker: unlike them, he was not a creature of the political Left and found the dizzying rate of change bewildering. With the advantage of hindsight, Ernst Krenek wrote that Schreker bit off more than he could chew in Berlin. In Vienna, Schreker was “clearly left of center” because of the rather shocking nature of his early compositions. Krenek noted that he made his reputation because he was a strict and conscientious teacher with a penchant for unusual compositions, but that neither of these attributes prepared him for the continuously shifting environment of the Hochschule.⁴⁰ Because of Kestenberg’s influence, the Hochschule was always “in flux” and a spirit of “often unsettling” experimentation prevailed.⁴¹ An ideal candidate, therefore, would have needed to be of a profoundly sharp mind possessing the ability to comprehend and organize “all of the

unumgänglich notwendig, daß wir von hier aus alle politischen und finanziellen Faktoren in Betracht ziehen, die Sie und auch wir anstreben.” Ibid.

⁴⁰ “In der Akademie hatte er eindeutig links von der Mitte gestanden, und wenn er Anerkennung erhalten wollte, hatte er sie sich durch besondere und ungewöhnliche Anstrengungen, wie die bemerkenswerten Aufführungen des Philharmonischen Chors, verschaffen müssen.” Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 301.

⁴¹ “Er sah sich plötzlich an der Spitze einer riesigen Bildungseinrichtung, der viele heterogene Persönlichkeiten angehörten und die durch Kestenberg’s rastlosen Geist ständig im Fluß und in einem oft beunruhigenden experimentellen Zustand gehalten wurde.” Ibid. 302.

sparkling ideas that were constantly carried over the threshold” of the Hochschule.⁴² Schreker, according to Krenek, did not have these abilities, nor did he have any interest in the ideas themselves.⁴³ Because of this apathy toward Kestenberg’s specific policy initiatives, Schreker also failed to be an effective mouthpiece outside of the Hochschule, contributing little to public discourses on music and education apart from the published remarks he made after joining the Hochschule.⁴⁴ In the end, Krenek placed more of the blame for the poor fit on Kestenberg, who had completely misjudged Schreker’s character and was regretting his hire already in 1922.⁴⁵ Though it was a “fatal mistake” for Schreker to accept the position, according to Krenek he “simply could not resist the temptation.”⁴⁶ The many personal and professional difficulties endured by Schreker during this period eventually resurfaced in *Christophorus*.

Compositional Crisis

This deep commitment to both his students and the reform of the Hochschule seems to have taken a toll on Schreker’s ability to generate new ideas for composition. After the success of *Der Schatzgraber* (premiered in 1920 and composed before his appointment), Schreker struggled to find the inspiration for new projects. The only large-scale project

⁴² “...um alle die sprühenden Ideen zu verfolgen, die ständig an und über die Schwelle der Schule getragen wurden.” Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 301.

⁴⁶ “Es war Schrekers verhängnisvoller Fehler, daß er diesem Ruf gefolgt war...und er hatte der Versuchung einfach nicht widerstehen können.” Ibid.

the composer finished between 1920 and 1925 was *Irrelohe*, whose libretto was completed and published already in early 1920.⁴⁷

By the time *Irrelohe* was finally performed in 1924, reviews were decidedly mixed. What was immediately apparent to most critics, including Paul Bekker, was that Schreker was not the “messiah” he appeared to be in 1918.⁴⁸ Adolph Weissmann objected to the heavy symbolism of the libretto, which appeared at odds with what he perceived to be Schreker’s growing penchant for cheap theatrical spectacle.⁴⁹ The Cologne premiere was a gala event, with Universal Edition sparing no expense. Though ultimately *Irrelohe* was not a complete failure and received several subsequent performances, Universal was not able to recover the enormous amount of money it spent on the preparation of the score and advertising. Although Schreker was one of the composers most responsible for the success of Universal Edition, the financial failure of *Irrelohe* changed the relationship between the composer and his publisher, and not for the better.

Between the premieres of *Der Schatzgräber* (1920) and *Irrelohe* (1924) Schreker worked on several small projects and began writing the librettos that would eventually become *Der singende Teufel* (1928) and *Christophorus* (1929). As he developed these projects, Schreker communicated frequently with Bekker and Emil Hertzka at Universal

⁴⁷ The entire libretto to *Irrelohe* was published in the 1920 Schreker issue of *Anbruch*.

⁴⁸ Bekker’s less than enthusiastic reception of *Irrelohe* created friction between the two friends. Around the time that Schreker began work on *Christophorus* Bekker wrote to him clarifying his position on the opera, stating that it wasn’t that he was skeptical of the opera, but that he did not feel it was a good enough work to win over foreign audiences, and that the success that *Irrelohe* received was in large part a consequence of residual goodwill towards Schreker on the part of German audiences. Letter from Bekker to Schreker January 6, 1927, in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 217.

⁴⁹ Adolph Weissmann, “Schrekers *Irrelohe*,” *B.Z. am Mittag* (March 28, 1924).

Edition about his progress. In reading this correspondence, two things become immediately clear: Schreker was acutely aware of the pressure he was under to produce a success after *Irrelohe*, and that pressure, combined with the rapidly changing musical landscape brought on in part by the success of his own students, made him increasingly insecure.

During these years, Schreker's relationship with Universal grew very tense: he felt that they were not spending enough money advertising performances of his existing operas and that they were not fully committed to making a success out of his newest work. Hertzka and Universal Edition were hesitant to commit the enormous amount of money it took to produce a Schreker opera, especially as it became clear that Schreker was no longer as commercially viable as he had been in the immediate postwar period. By the mid 1920s, earlier Schreker operas like *Der ferne Klang* and *Die Gezeichneten* were falling out of the repertory, replaced by new operas by composers of the younger generation. The dwindling number of performances had a direct effect on Schreker's finances: as Germany tumbled into hyperinflation, the composer's salary as director of the Hochschule did not amount to much, and the majority of his income was earned through performances of his operas. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that Schreker (unlike Strauss) was rarely performed outside of German speaking countries, which meant that he was denied access to stable foreign currency to bolster his financial position. To add insult to injury, Schreker felt his work was being ignored in *Anbruch*, a journal published by Universal Edition and dedicated in large part to the exposure of its composers. In early 1926 Schreker wrote a caustic letter to Hertzka, complaining:

For a publisher's own journal to try in such a manner slowly and insidiously to discredit an author who is certainly not among the firm's least significant, who, to

the extent the younger generation has amounted to anything at all, is (with Schoenberg) largely responsible for their education, and on whose *Ferner Klang*...an entire range of distinguished gentlemen feed in imitation—is an unknown *unikum* in which U[niversal] E[dition] is without equal.⁵⁰

Working on both *Der singende Teufel* and *Christophorus*, Schreker vacillated on which work to publish first. He was confident that each work represented a new development in his style, with *Christophorus* marking a more extreme departure from his previous work. The composer eventually settled on *Der singende Teufel*, which was set to premiere December 9th, 1928.

Der singende Teufel and Critical Rejection

Musically, *Der singende Teufel* shows the influence of post-war trends in composition: Schreker's scoring, the thickness of which had been his calling card, was reduced drastically, producing a drier, more austere sound. He also focused quite a bit on contrapuntal forms and linear constructions more than in his earlier works. In this manner Schreker was participating in the nascent neoclassical movement, and critics made note of this new, compressed style, although at least some thought the shift in direction purely pragmatic and less that effective. Some saw an amelioration with newer compositional techniques and textures as inevitable; Weissmann believed that Schreker's very credibility as a composer and as a composition teacher was at stake.

[Schreker] had seen that on the path on which he had gained his reputation he could not go without losing his prestige—even in those circles which appreciated him. So he adopted a new attitude toward operatic problems. He decided not to delight in the false splendor of the orchestra, but to be simpler. This led him to a certain asceticism, laying bare the very origin of his strength, or rather weakness,

⁵⁰ Quoted in Hailey, *Franz Schreker*, 207.

as a composer. For behind the veil it was clearly seen there was very little substance.”⁵¹

Even before the December premiere at the Berlin State Opera, the composer was nervous about the opera’s reception, with good reason: he had never given the world premiere of an opera in Berlin, and the critics and audiences of the city had historically been rather cool in their reception of his earlier works. Furthermore, the subject matter of *Der singende Teufel* could not have been further from the light, sarcastic, and satirical plots of the new *Zeitopern* that had dominated opera houses over the course of the last year. Instead, *Der singende Teufel* is of a piece with Schreker’s *Die Gezeichneten* in that it is a vague sort of artist-opera with an allegorical plot and resembles both *Die Gezeichneten* and *Irrelohe* with its forboding medieval setting. *Der singende Teufel* is set during a time of intense struggle between Christians and pagans in the early middle ages. Amandus Herz, an organ maker, is encouraged by a priest, Pater Kaleidos, to finish a large organ begun by Amandus’s father. While Amandus believes that the organ can be used to bring about reconciliation and understanding between the Christians and the pagans, he quickly realizes that Kaleidos wishes instead to use the new technology of the organ to subdue opposition to the church. When the pagans assault the church, the tones of the organ ring out, stupefying them and causing them to drop to their knees. Kaleidos then orders the slaughter of the pagans while Amandus flees, taking refuge with Lillian, a pagan to whom he was once betrothed. Lillian, knowing that Amandus is racked by guilt over the evil caused through his organ, sets the church on fire, thus destroying the organ.

⁵¹ Adolf Weissmann, “Schreker’s New Opera,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Jan. 12, 1929): 12.

Critical reception to the Berlin premiere was, to quote Universal Edition's Hans Heinsheimer, "crushing."⁵² Reviewers excoriated Schreker for the libretto, which in their view suffered from an overwhelming amount of symbolic obscurantism coupled with an unbecoming and mildly absurd claim to philosophical profundity, resulting in an opera that combined of the worst parts of *Les Huguenots* and *Parsifal*. Alfred Einstein, reviewing the premiere for the *New York Times*, was barely able to take the work seriously. He wrote,

Let us be serious, as serious as we should regarding the work of a man who expended an enormous amount of work and faith on this naïve, bizarre, schoolboyish and yet pretentious text. Schreker has lost the creative core of his identity without finding a new one...now triviality is made to parade under the guise of deep meaning; now an ideal is proclaimed to us the seriousness of which is below our taste level.⁵³

According to Einstein, *Der singende Teufel* was the most anticipated Berlin premiere of the year, which made its failure all the greater. While Einstein praised Schreker for a certain amount of inventiveness in the scoring of the opera and noted that the production itself was excellent, the work seemed out of place to him in the modern repertory.

Other critics were even more negative. Max Marschalk, writing in the *Vossische Zeitung*, asked regarding the libretto "Is this poetry? Perhaps one can call it puberty-poetry; in any case it is pseudo-poetry. Our half-poet has become a pious person, and perhaps even a bigot; once upon a time he was capable of other things, back then he delved into the erotic."⁵⁴ Adolph Weissmann, long one of Schreker's harshest critics, saw

⁵² Quoted in Hailey, *Franz Schreker*, 223.

⁵³ Alfred Einstein, "THE SINGING DEVIL": Schreker's Opera Produced in Germany—Bizarre Work Shows Little Inspiration," *New York Times* (13 January, 1929): 117.

⁵⁴ "Ist das Poesie? Vielleicht kann man es Pubertätspoesie nennen; Pseudopoesie ist es auf jeden Fall. Ein Frommer ist unser halber Dichter geworden; und wohl gar ein Frömmeler; einst konnte er es anders; einst wühlte er in Erotik." Max Marschalk, "*Der*

little to no redeeming value in Schreker's new opera. According to Weissmann, the work had no place in the schedule of the State Opera on the strength of its artistic merits; rather, it was only performed there because it was dedicated to the Opera's director, Hans Hörth.⁵⁵ Weissmann believed that Schreker had lost all touch with his audience with the new opera and had perhaps even lost touch with reality, stating that *Der singende Teufel* showed Schreker "in a hair-shirt," conjuring images of a wild-eyed mystic preaching apocalyptic sermons in the desert.⁵⁶ Weissmann went on, calling Schreker's opera "an act of self-flagellation," dismissing the work with only a very summary review.

Adolf Diesterweg, writing in the *Zeitschrift für Musik*, noted at the end of his review that many critics saw in *Der singende Teufel* (as in all of Schreker's post-war operas) a certain dramatic affinity with Pfitzner's *Palestrina*, specifically in the "ethical attitude of the music," though this observation is not explained further.⁵⁷ Joachim Beck expanded on the similarities between *Palestrina* and *Der singende Teufel*, though he believed that Schreker's opera was a nonsensical mixture of philosophy and spectacle. Trying to make sense of the work, he wrote:

The author probably had the Schopenhauerian idea in mind that the history of the arts and sciences, innocent and undefiled, develop alongside world history proper. Hans Pfitzner has found a valid expression of this [philosophy] in his *Palestrina*.

singende Teufel: Franz Schreker in der Lindenoper," *Vossische Zeitung*, December 11, 1928.

⁵⁵ "Der singende Teufel zeigt Franz Schreker sozusagen im Büssergewand." Adolph Weissmann, "Oper," *Die Musik* 21/5 (February, 1929): 375.

⁵⁶ "Seine Oper ist ein Akt der Selbstkasteiung." Ibid.

⁵⁷ "...daß an der neuen Oper Franz Schrekers deutliche Einwirkungen des Pfitznerschen 'Palestrina' zu erkennen sind, eine Hinwendung zu einer ethischeren Haltung der Musik..." Adolf Diesterweg, "Berliner Musik," *Zeitschrift für Musik* (February, 1929): 87.

With Schreker there is only meaningless, lengthy dialogues and unmotivated, comic events barging in.⁵⁸

Whether or not *Der singende Teufel* is an artist or composer opera in the conventional sense, it is clear that critics viewed the dramatic subtleties of the opera as such. The issue for critics who noted the similarities between Pfitzner's work and Schreker was the opacity of the symbolic references in Schreker's operas. What exactly does the organ stand for? Is Amandus an allegorical Schreker? If so, in what capacity? These questions remain open; indeed, frustratingly so. Some scholars, including Christopher Hailey, have suggested that the creation of the organ in the opera is a metaphor for the dangers inherent in the creation and subsequent explosion of mass technology in the interwar period. In the right hands, the organ—and mass technology—is a positive force in society. If mismanaged, however, the powerful forces of the pipe organ/mass technology can prove very dangerous and destructive, indeed. Subsequent historical developments, namely the interest in the value of mass communication as a vehicle for propaganda by authoritarian ideologies on the rise in Europe around the time of *Der singende Teufel*'s premiere, certainly make this interpretation a tantalizing possibility. The opera would seem to call out for such an explicitly metaphorical interpretation; many famous composer operas utilize historical distance in order to make a contemporary ideological argument (*Die Meistersinger*, *Palestrina*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos* all come immediately to mind). And yet, if Schreker had such a specific critique of mass culture and technology in

⁵⁸ “Dem Autor stand wohl die Schopenhauersche Idee vor Augen, daß die Geschichte der Künste und Wissenschaften, schuldlos und unbeflekt, neben der eigentlichen Weltgeschichte hergehe. Hans Pfitzner hat in seinem ‘Palestrina’ dafür einen gültigen Ausdruck gefunden. Bei Schreker gibts nur sinnlose, langatmige Wechselreden und unmotiviert, komisch hereinplatzende Ereignisse.” Joachim Beck, “Schreker und Krenek,” 24.

mind, most contemporary reviews and correspondence would not appear to bear it out. If anything, Schreker believed that part of the work's value was in the sheer theatrical spectacle of it, apart from any metaphysical considerations. But, as these reviews testify, critics roundly rejected the use of spectacle for its own sake, apart from underlying dramatic or ideological motivations. With *Der singende Teufel*, Beck believed Schreker's downfall complete, declaring, "...Franz Schreker has been reduced from genius to local celebrity."⁵⁹ Increasingly irrelevant both as an opera composer and as the director of the Hochschule, Schreker turned once more to *Christophorus*, a work that cast off historical settings and vague metaphors in favor of an up-to-the-minute contemporaneity. *Christophorus* shows Schreker at his most pessimistic, lashing out at critics and students alike.

Christophorus

Christophorus marked the first time since *Der ferne Klang* in 1912 that Schreker used a contemporary setting for an opera, which was surely influenced by the rapid rise and commercial dominance of *Zeitoper* in the second half of the 1920s. The public acceptance of operas that traded in the everyday provided an interesting space for composers to take their aesthetic theories and economic concerns directly to the audience without metaphor or historical distance. Yet even with a modern setting, Schreker was unable to free himself from the heavy psychology and symbolism that dragged down his previous two operatic efforts. The resulting admixture of the metaphysical and the mundane was an uncomfortable fit for publishers and theaters, who saw little merit in the

⁵⁹ "...Franz Schreker hat sich vom Genie zur Lokalgröße erniedrigt." Ibid. 25.

opera. Despite the fact that it failed to gain an audience, however, *Christophorus* is valuable as a window into the professional and artistic struggles of one of Germany's most famous interwar composers.

Beginning with *Irrelohe*, Paul Bekker attempted to coax Schreker away from spectacular Middle Age plots and encouraged him to write for a more contemporary setting, but to no avail (see *Der singende Teufel*). When Schreker first wrote to Bekker about *Christophorus* he acknowledged Bekker's misgivings about his latest project, telling him that his new venture—a “modern legend in three acts with a prologue and epilogue”—was not “sacred (so don't be alarmed).”⁶⁰ Schreker also noted that although it was a substantial work, there was more to it than mere theatricality, perhaps proactively defending against criticisms of the empty spectacle of his recent work.⁶¹ Whether or not the opera would make him “popular” again was questionable, he wrote, but all that mattered to him was that he continued to work to the best of his ability.⁶² Although he downplayed the chances of its success, Schreker clearly tailored the opera's libretto and musical style to reflect emerging trends in opera, led by *Intermezzo* and Krenek's *Der Sprung über den Schatten*.

Schreker composed *Christophorus*, which is subtitled, “the vision of an opera,” in two acts bookended by a dramatic prelude and postlude. In the prelude, which is set in a composition classroom with several students, we meet the main characters: Anselm,

⁶⁰ “Es ist, so glaube ich ausgezeichnet geworden und heißt (dies aber vertraulich) ‘Christophorus’. Eine moderne Legende in 3 Akten Vor- und Nachspiel. Das Ganze ist aber gar nicht—heilig (damit Sie nicht erschrecken.)” Letter from Schreker to Bekker, November 28, 1925, in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 204.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Ob es geeignet ist mich ‘beliebt’ zu machen ist sehr fraglich, aber das macht nichts. Immerfort nach bestem Können und Gewissen.” Ibid.

Christoph, Lisa, and Meister Johann. Anselm, who serves as a kind of anti-hero, is a talented but troubled young composer inclined toward brutality and power. Christoph, his fellow classmate, is good-natured but not nearly as talented as Anselm. In the published Introduction to the opera, Schreker described Christoph's music as "The fashion of the day before yesterday, the classicist symphony (imitation of genuine "classicism")."⁶³ Christoph, the modestly talented neo-classicist, is engaged to Lisa, a dancer and Meister Johann's daughter. Lisa, for her part, serves as the catalyst in a love triangle involving Christoph and Anselm: though she marries the upright Christoph, she is attracted to the mysterious and brutal Anselm in a dangerous and highly sexual way.

The libretto of *Christophorus* and the structure of the drama is, at times, confusing, operating on multiple levels: it is an opera about the composition of an opera, and the opera being composed within the drama is somehow being experienced by Anselm in real time. In his literary introduction to the work, Schreker writes that Anselm "proceeds through his own piece by direct experience."⁶⁴ In Anselm's opera, the ancient story of St. Christopher is given "contemporary dress" because, "how can it be surprising that the boy Anselm perceives the events of an earlier time as modern occurrences and transfers them to the emotions of our everyday life?"⁶⁵ In fact, Anselm is writing the opera about himself, using the other characters (Lisa, Christoph, Meister Johann, etc.) to fill the various roles. That much is made clear in Act I Scene III, a short scene that shows

⁶³ Franz Schreker, *Christophorus oder 'Die Vision einer Oper,'* Kiel Opera Chorus and Kiel Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Ulrich Windfuhr, CPO 999 903-2, 2005, libretto in liner notes, 67.

⁶⁴ "Gerät doch auch Anselm, der miterlebend durch sein eigenes Stück schreitet..." Ibid.

⁶⁵ "...im Kostüm der Zeit...wie kann es wundernehmen, das der Knabe Anselm die Ereignisse einer vergangenen Zeit modern empfindet und sie auf die Emotionen unseres Alltags überträgt?" Ibid., 66.

Anselm alone with his thoughts, composing while muttering to himself: “The second act forms itself clearly, but the role I intended for myself is dubious, and not without danger.”⁶⁶ One can imagine that an opera in which the main character composes an opera starring himself and his friends acting out an ancient legend in contemporary dress might prove difficult to follow, and it does. One of the main challenges is determining what is happening in the “real world” of the opera, that is, outside of Anselm’s mind, and what is taking place in the opera-within-the-opera. It is clear that the prelude and postlude serve as a frame, representing the “real world” of the opera. At the beginning of Act I, the boundaries between the outside dramatic world and Anselm’s opera are fairly easy to determine: scenes I and III are short scenes in which Anselm alone muses over the plot of his work, interrupted by scenes of dialogue with other characters. After Act I, scene IV, however, this distinction ceases, and as the events become more fantastic and violent, the line between the different dramatic realities disappears completely, returning only with the epilogue, though even here the lines are unclear. Schreker does little to define the boundaries in his introduction, and actually encourages the listener not to think too hard about the opera, but to succumb to the “spectacolo” of the production.⁶⁷ Schreker concludes the introduction by writing, “We think too much, and especially in the opera all thought is of evil [effect]. One should surrender oneself to an impression regardless of when and how it finds its way from the stage to us.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ “Der zweite Akt, der formet sich klar, doch die Rolle, die selbst mir zgedacht, ist zweifelhaft und nicht ohne Gefahr.” Ibid., 81.

⁶⁷ Spectacle, whether visual or sonic, was a key component to the success of *Zeitopern* like *Jonny spielt auf*. Ibid., 67.

⁶⁸ “Wir denken zu viel und speziell in der Oper ist alles Denken von Übel. Man gebe sich einem Eindruck hin, wann immer und welcher Art immer er von der Bühne zu uns den Weg findet.” Ibid., 68.

We find in the prelude that Meister Johann has tasked his students each to write a string quartet on the legend of St. Christopher. While the students initially balk, Meister Johann steps in and gives an example of how the project might be done, eliciting cheers of “bravo” and “truly a magnificent subject” from all of the students except for Anselm.⁶⁹ Anselm has decided the genre of the string quartet to be insufficient and the topic too sentimental; instead, he will write an opera, casting Lisa (whom he simultaneously loves and loathes) in his version of the St. Christopher legend in the role formerly occupied by the devil.⁷⁰ In choosing Lisa, we see Anselm’s ambivalence towards her: “Instead of the Devil in the legend, I choose for the drama: Lisa, Lilith, the snake, the sweet Satan. Ah, my goddess! Lisa, most beautiful, I worship you!”⁷¹ Lisa overhears Anselm, who has been speaking his plot ideas out loud, and slaps him in the face for his insult. Christoph runs in and separates the two and declares that he wishes nothing more than to serve art, which he regards as the highest calling in life. The prelude ends with Frederik (another student who writes “linearly”) quietly mocking Christoph’s idealism.

The first act proper takes place a year after the prelude and starts in Meister Johann’s home. Anselm is deep in thought, working through ideas for his opera, when the music critic Starkmann enters the house. Starkmann, who publishes a journal called the *Neutöner*, is looking for Christoph. Starkmann believes that Christoph and his neo-classical style is “just what we need in this time of eccentricity” and is interested in interviewing him, stating that if all goes well he will write “a dazzling feuilleton on the

⁶⁹ “Wahrlich ein herrlicher Stoff.” Ibid., 75.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁷¹ “Statt des Teufels in der Legende wähl ich zum Drama: Lisa, Lillith, die Schlange, die holden Satan. Ah, — meine Göttin! Lisa, du Schönste, ich bete dich an.” Ibid.

wedding day.”⁷² Anselm is less than impressed with Starkmann and sends him away with an insult, which prompts Starkmann to threaten that Anselm will pay for his actions.⁷³ Anselm goes back to composing and is soon interrupted by Christoph and Lisa. The three quarrel about the appearance of Starkmann, while the emotional and sexual tension builds between Anselm and Lisa. Christoph speaks to Lisa of bearing another child, and Lisa, while clinically reviewing her dancer’s body in a mirror, rejects the notion of motherhood outright. Instead, she chooses to dance in Anselm’s opera. In rehearsing the scene with Anselm, Lisa gives over to her attraction to him. Though her advance is not reciprocated by Anselm, Christoph sees the event unfold, and, in a trance-like state, shoots her dead. After realizing that he has killed his wife, he and Anselm escape together, bringing the first act to a close.

In the second act, Christoph and Anselm are incognito, playing jazz in a club named the Montmartre, which either simply serves to mark the dangerous and degenerate behavior within its walls as French or (more provocatively) is a gloss on Krenek’s much publicized trip to France in 1925, which Krenek claimed provided much of the aesthetic inspiration for *Jonny spielt auf*. Christoph is addicted to opiates and is tormented by his deeds. He attempts to contact Lisa through a séance and somehow receives a vision of his abandoned child, who is being raised by Meister Johann. Anselm, who cannot bear it any longer, flees. As Christoph beholds his child and Meister Johann, now reduced to the

⁷² “Der junge Christoph ist das, was wir brauchen in dieser Zeit der Verstiegheit.”
 “...schreib ich ein blendendes Feuilleton am Tage der Hochzeit...” Ibid., 80.

⁷³ Ibid., 81.

station of beggar street-musician, he exclaims, “My boy! My child! Father! I’m coming—I’m coming!” thus bringing the second act to a close.⁷⁴

The Epilogue returns to the classroom, with Lisa and Meister Johann observing Anselm, who is feverishly working on his composition, lost in himself. As Lisa calls for Meister Johann to help Anselm through the obvious torment the opera is causing him, Meister Johann explains that Anselm “lives in his work” and would see himself through it.⁷⁵ As reality and the fantasy of Anselm’s own imagination begin to blur again, he sets aside the opera and, following Meister Johann’s exhortations, walks to the chalkboard and begins work on a string quartet.

In *Christophorus*, Schreker articulates at least three of the anxieties consuming his professional life during the second half of the twenties: the relationship between teachers and students and the moral authority of the former over the latter, the juxtaposition of the truly creative composer (Anselm) with the merely popular or vogueish (Christoph), and inability of critics to tell the difference. Over the course of Schreker’s multi-leveled critique of the modern composer’s (read: his own) fate at the hands of his own students and critics, the composer manages to ridicule several contemporary trends in musical composition, including neo-classicism, twelve-tone composition, and, most noticeably, jazz. In the end, we should not be surprised to find that Schreker maintains the superiority of his own methods and beliefs over the emerging styles and ideologies that threatened to render him obsolete.

Although the musical surface is much different, the dramatic core of *Christophorus* is similar in many ways to Wagner’s *Meistersinger*. In both operas, the

⁷⁴ “Mein Knabe! Mein Kind! Vater! Ich komme—Ich komme!” Ibid., 131.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 133-134.

most important relationship is that of a wise, worldly teacher and a talented but misguided student—in *Meistersinger* Hans Sachs and Walther, and in *Christophorus* Meister Johann and Anselm. And, just as Wagner himself lurks behind both the characters of Sachs and Walther, Schreker is at equal turns Meister Johann and Anselm. As someone who “lives in his work,” Anselm is cut from the same cloth as another of Schreker’s famously self-referential characters: Fritz, the talented young composer who recklessly pursues the ineffable muse of the distant sound, destroying himself and everyone around him in its pursuit. On one level, Anselm represents Schreker as the composer imagined himself: artistically potent and perhaps even dangerous, imbued with such a strong sense of purpose and creative inspiration that new and challenging music poured forth almost unconsciously. Anselm’s moral superiority and defiance in the face of Starkmann the critic, who prefers the music of the less talented Christoph, mirrors the attitude that Schreker took with his critics after the failure of *Der singende Teufel*. In Act I, scene II, Starkmann enters Meister Johann’s house looking for Christoph, only to meet Anselm instead. Starkmann is arrogant and assumes that Anselm must have heard of him. When Anselm facetiously tells Starkmann that he had not had the pleasure, Starkmann introduces himself as the publisher of a progressive music journal called the *Neutöner*, known by many. Anselm is again dismissive, and when Starkmann asks whether Anselm, too, is a man devoted to art, Anselm refers to himself as a “genius,” and concludes that neither he nor Meister Johann give “a hoot” about Starkmann or what he thinks.⁷⁶ Even at the height of his success Schreker was acutely sensitive to negative criticism in the press and, as seen earlier in the chapter, had to be dissuaded from publicly

⁷⁶ “...und bin ein Genie.” “...Der auf Sie pfeift. Hinaus! Hinaus!” Ibid., 81.

firing back at critics by Bekker. The letters between the two men often discussed the critical reception of Schreker's works and the composer's hostility toward negative reviews. This virulent disdain for critics only increased as Schreker's personal fortunes waned. Writing to Bekker in the aftermath of the disastrous Berlin premiere of *Der singende Teufel*, Schreker insisted that his work was not subpar, only misunderstood. While the critics claimed he was hopelessly out of style, Schreker insisted that his opera was written five to ten years too soon;⁷⁷ in other words, it would take years for the rest of the critical class to catch up to Schreker's genius and afford it the respect it deserved. Schreker believed himself to be in a no-win situation with critics: on the one hand, critics almost unanimously disliked his attempt at *rapprochement* with emerging musical styles; on the other, had he remained true to his reputation as a "producer of musical narcotics," the critics "would have been just as annoyed and would have found that I no longer fit into this austere post-war period, in which the big city audience and those who educate them get into the steel-bath of Negro-Revue-Operettas and Sketch-Opera in order to rescue themselves from the last offshoots of the corrupting influences of Romanticism."⁷⁸ Anselm's fidelity to his inner artistic impulse regardless of critical popularity (and in spite of all-out hostility) mirrors Schreker's own confidence in the quality of his works, despite their commercial and critical failure.

⁷⁷ Franz Schreker, "Der singende Teufel," Franz Schreker Collection in the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University (Yale Schreker Collection).

⁷⁸ "...Klangkünstler, Erzeuger musikalischen Rauschgiftes usw. Wäre ich dabei geblieben, hätten sie sich ebenso geärgert und gefunden, ich passe nicht mehr in diese herbe Nachkriegszeit, in der das Großstadtpublikum und seine Erzieher sich in dem Stahlbad der Neger-Revue-Operetten-u. Sketch-Oper Gesundung von den verderblichen Einflüssen der Romantik und ihrer letzten Ausläufer holen." Ibid.

Ultimately, it is Anselm's belief in his own talent that causes him to come into conflict with Meister Johann, the beloved composition teacher. This conflict between student and teacher lies right beneath the surface of the entire opera; all of the distressing events that Anselm experiences over the course of the drama are the direct result of his decision to compose an opera, rather than the assigned string quartet. As a character, Meister Johann embodies the values of Schreker's pedagogical style. While he allows his students to pursue several modes of musical expression, Meister Johann is clearly the one who, to paraphrase Schreker's open letter to the people of Berlin, operates as the "giver," sowing the seeds of progress in his students.⁷⁹ Both of these aspects of Schreker's pedagogy are evident within the first few minutes of the opera. As the prologue opens, the students in the composition classroom take to arguing with one another about style while complaining about their new assignment. The argument leads to an amusing exchange between Frederik, who writes "linearly," and some of his classmates over the merits of twelve-tone composition. Frederik is attempting to work on his quartet at the board, when Heinrich comes over and examines it critically:

Heinrich *goes to the blackboard and takes a critical look at what is written on it:* My God—what are you doing here? That sounds really—

Frederik: I write linearly.

Ernst (laughing): Aha—anyone can!

Heinrich: Disgusting!

Frederik *irritated*: But don't you see: Pizzicato for the violins, col legno for the cello, the violas tremolando on the bridge! Contrast of the colors!

Heinrich: Swindle!

⁷⁹ Schreker, "Musikhochschule," Yale Schreker Collection.

Frederik: Uncultured and conservative!

Heinrich: And you—

Frederik *throws down the chalk in anger*.: Oh—! The old man’s crazy idea, this assignment he gave us! A string quartet in four movements after the legend of “lanky Christoph”!⁸⁰

Intentionally or not, this scene bears a striking resemblance to portions of Act I in Pfitzner’s *Palestrina*, which also features young students criticizing the old ways while yearning to compose in a modern style. Paul Bekker noticed this affinity between the two operas almost immediately upon receiving the libretto in early 1927 and thought it a cause for concern. Although Bekker emphasized that the similarities between the two scenes would not bother him so long as the overall design of the opera showed that the scene arose out of a strong, fully original concept, Bekker clearly thought the scene problematic and in qualifying his criticism was likely trying to spare Schreker’s feelings and confidence, which was at an all-time low.⁸¹ Here Bekker’s critique begins to sound remarkably like Hofmannsthal’s critique of Strauss’s proposal for *Intermezzo* a decade earlier: while Bekker understood Schreker’s need to “write from the soul,” he had serious reservations about how many of Schreker’s personal matters should be set before

⁸⁰ “Heinrich *tritt an die Tafel und mustert kritisch das Geschriebene*: Mein Gott—was machst du den da? Das klingt ja— / Frederik: Ich schreibe linear. / Ernst *lacht*: Aha— das kann jeder! / Heinrich: Abscheulich! / Frederik *irritiert*: Siehst du denn nicht: Pizzicato die Geigen, col legno das Cello, die Bratschen tremolando am Steg! Kontrast der Farben— / Heinrich: Schwindel! / Frederik: Banause und konservativ! / Heinrich: Und du— / Frederik *wirft unmutig die Kreide weg*: Ach—! Verrückte Idee des Alten, diese Aufgabe, die er uns gestellt! Ein Quartett in vier Sätzen nach der Legende des ‘langen Christoph’!” Schreker, *Christophorus*, libretto in liner notes, 71-72. St. Christopher is often depicted as being very tall and thin.

⁸¹ Letter from Bekker to Schreker, January 25, 1927 in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 224.

the public.⁸² Bekker believed that by sharing the details of his personal experience with the audience, Schreker would weigh down a large, serious artwork with “petty” issues.⁸³

As one of Schreker’s closest confidants, Bekker was well aware that the subtext for the opening scene of *Christophorus* stemmed from Schreker’s own struggles and frustrations with the students in his composition class, specifically a rather ugly dispute between Schreker and his star pupils Krenek and Hába. Even though they had learned about as much as they could technically from Schreker by 1922, he was not convinced that they had matured fully as professional composers. Schreker disapproved of the fact that publishers, including Universal Edition, clamored after the works of his students and widely promoted their new compositions. In addition to over-eager publishers, Schreker felt that the new music festivals rapidly proliferating around Europe were to blame for encouraging unseasoned composers by performing works that were not ready for the stage. Teaching during this time was “an ordeal” for Schreker because correcting his students was practically impossible. For one thing, Schreker wrote to Bekker, his students were incessantly searching for new and original styles. Schreker’s students, “especially the talented ones”, were unhappy if they had not “found a new style every week.”⁸⁴ He cited the case of Hába as an example, who, after completing a string quartet for quarter-tones, declared his desire to eschew traditional methods in order to devote himself totally to this newly acquired technique. Schreker thought the work to be an

⁸² “Ich finde es durchaus begreiflich, daß man sich manches von der Seele schreiben muß, eine andere Frage ist, wie weit solche Dinge dann vor die Öffentlichkeit gehören...” Ibid., 225.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Wenn so ein junger (und zumeist sind es die begabten!) Mensch, nicht alle 8 Tage einen neuen Stil gefunden hat, ist er nicht glücklich.” Letter from Schreker to Bekker, July 7, 1921, in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 152.

interesting experiment, though he was unable judge the quality of the piece because nobody could play it.⁸⁵ Schreker found himself therefore in a difficult position: on the one hand, he did not wish to stifle Hába's inspiration. On the other, Schreker felt "a certain responsibility" toward his students to guide them on paths that would lead to their success, and writing unplayable musical works exclusively was not an obvious path to success. Once they became published composers, however, Schreker's students often refused to listen to his advice and admonitions, leaving Schreker to declare in an essay that if it had not been for the oath he took as a civil servant he would simply have quit.⁸⁶ In Schreker's view, each time a student published a composition without his approval, his moral authority as their teacher was eroded.⁸⁷ Already in a letter to Leo Kestenberg of dated February 9, 1922 Schreker expressed his frustration with his students in great detail, while actively discouraging Kestenberg from aiding Hába and Krenek in securing funds for a performance without first receiving the blessing of their composition teacher. Apparently, he had asked Krenek to reorchestrate a symphony before submitting it for publication and Krenek refused. Schreker wrote that he felt that his students should allow their works to sit unpublished for a while rather than rush them off with the ink scarcely dry. He then blamed publishers like Hertzka for making his job more difficult, noting that once they were published it was difficult to exert any influence over them.⁸⁸

Despite Schreker's protestations, Hertzka and Universal Edition went ahead and began publishing the works of both Krenek and Hába, much to Schreker's chagrin. To

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934: A Cultural Biography*, 156.

⁸⁷ Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 301. Krenek would later write that the public success of his students caused Schreker quite a bit of fear and anger.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934: A Cultural Biography*, 161-62.

complicate matters further, Schreker's authority over Krenek's career was undermined by Schünemann and Kestenberg, both of whom sought to secure funding and performance opportunities for Krenek against Schreker's wishes and/or without his knowledge.

Krenek eventually stopped consulting Schreker all together and submitted compositions for performance and publication unseen by his teacher. By the time Schreker penned the libretto of *Christophorus*, Krenek was already a rapidly rising star in German music circles and was only months away from the monumental premiere of *Jonny spielt auf*, one of the most successful operas of the interwar period.

While Bekker was right to see shades of Schreker's difficulties with his students in the opening scene of *Christophorus*, the scene does more than simply poke fun at the "petty" disagreements between them: it provides a platform for the audience, through the character of Meister Johann, to see Schreker the composition teacher as Schreker saw himself. Schreker literally composes his hands-on teaching style into the scene. After overhearing both the argument among students and Frederik's outburst, Meister Johann enters the classroom and confronts Frederik concerning his objections to the topic of St. Christopher. Frederik immediately becomes "very embarrassed," because, as it turns out, he is not familiar with the legend. His criticisms of Meister Johann and his assignment are not well reasoned; Frederik judges what he does not understand and places his ignorance on display for the rest of the class. Seeing Frederik red-faced and repentant, Meister Johann reasserts his authority while leading his students through the various details of the St. Christopher legend, which culminates with him providing a musical outline of the quartet for the class. His outline is very broad, however, and is not prescriptive of a particular style, "linear" or otherwise. At the end of Meister Johann's

lesson, all of the students (except for Anselm) shout, “Bravo, Master! Truly a magnificent subject.”⁸⁹

Indeed, the opening scene of *Christophorus* is a not-so-subtle repudiation of the aesthetic fatalism favored by Pfitzner in the famous opening scene of *Palestrina*. Pfitzner’s deeply held conviction that the compositional process had little to do with pedagogy and everything to do with the sort of quasi-divine inspiration permeating *Palestrina* ran completely counter to Schreker’s belief that the older generation had not only the ability but also the obligation to instruct the younger generation, developing their natural talents in a systematic yet flexible way.⁹⁰ In Pfitzner’s opera, Palestrina dismissively notes that Silla’s new style of playing might represent the future, but he never seeks to mediate or influence Silla’s progress as a composer. In Schreker’s opera, however, Meister Johann seeks to guide his students’ progress directly, even if they compose, like Frederik, in a style foreign to his own. Despite the fact that the preferred musical style of his students was different from his own, Meister Johann’s expertise and experience is still relevant and necessary for the development of his pupils in the opera, even Anselm. The character of Meister Johann thus operates as Schreker’s image of the ideal pedagogue, while also pointing to the growing anxiety Schreker felt about his influence over his students in a society that promoted novelty over experience.

Schreker also uses Meister Johann to illustrate the difficulties of teaching, telling Christoph that years of instruction has left him a shell of himself, unable to create in any meaningful way. Talking with his daughter’s betrothed, Meister Johann remarks that he

⁸⁹ “Bravo Meister! Wahrlich ein herrlicher Stoff!” Schreker, *Christophorus*, libretto in liner notes, 75.

⁹⁰ The numerous reminiscences of Schreker’s students in the 1928 Schreker issue of *Anbruch* reinforce this position.

too wished at one time to become “the greatest in my Art.”⁹¹ But then a woman, Lisa’s mother, entered his life, and his existence of “struggle, work, and restless striving dropped out of sight and became madness.”⁹² She demanded of him “the deed that would bring wealth and a life of splendor”—a masterpiece composition—but he was unable to complete it, his “brain fried” and his “heart empty and dead.”⁹³ In the aftermath of his failure she left him old and broken, and he turned to teaching. “Now as schoolmaster I trudge through my days, teaching young men the craft.”⁹⁴ Meister Johann pays a price, however: his students “suck me dry and feed on me as my wife once did, greedily taking the last pitiful piece that was left of me—and they too will go.”⁹⁵ Here Schreker relates just how mentally and emotionally taxing the act of teaching was for him. By the time he composed *Christophorus*, he no longer held the idealistic view of himself as the benevolent giver of an eternally renewed harvest; rather, his own creativity was sapped by his students. Perhaps most remarkable is the end of Meister Johann’s monologue, in which he states that after his students have taken everything from him they, like Lisa’s mother, will leave him. This line embodies Schreker’s sense of betrayal by his students (especially Krenek), who, in his mind, used up what they could of him before “leaving” him in order to compete with their former teacher for publication revenues and performance opportunities.

⁹¹ “Der Größte werden in meiner Kunst.” Schreker, *Christophorus*, libretto in liner notes, 88.

⁹² “Dies Dasein des Kampfes, der Arbeit, rastlosen Strebens, versank und wurde zum Wahn.” Ibid.

⁹³ “...das Hirn verbrannt, das Herz leer und tot.” Ibid.

⁹⁴ “Als Schulmeister schleppe ich nun meine Tag, Lehren den Jungen das Handwerk. Ibid.

⁹⁵ “Sie saugen mich aus, zehren von mir, wie einstens die Frau, nehmen mir gierig das armselige Letzte, was nur doch blieb—auch sie werden gehen!” Ibid.

The dichotomy between Anselm and Christopher, as well as the relationship of both to the critic Starkmann, articulates another problem experienced by Schreker during this time; namely, his relationship with critics. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, the critical reception of Schreker's work was increasingly negative over the course of the twenties, and Schreker's response to his critics became increasingly strident and defensive as the years progressed. In *Christophorus*, Starkmann gushes over Christoph while ignoring Anselm, all the while displaying a total lack of feeling for "true" art. Like Wagner's Beckmesser, he is an object of ridicule in the opera, and, just as the inspiration for Beckmesser was taken from Eduard Hanslick, Wagner's most vocal critic, the character of Starkmann was inspired by the influential Berlin critic Adolf Weissmann, whose reviews of Schreker's operas were often breathtakingly negative.⁹⁶

Throughout the opera, Schreker goes out of his way to portray Starkmann as vain, petty, self-absorbed, and ill informed. In Starkmann's first exchange with Anselm in Act I, scene II, the critic posits, "The young Christoph is what we need in this time of extravagance." Anselm retorts that, "wherever in the world there was found a dilettante with modern airs, you beat the drum for him." Undeterred, Starkmann informs Anselm that he intends to write a "dazzling feuilleton" in support of Christoph on his wedding day.⁹⁷ Although Anselm, representative of the "true" artist, sees right through Starkmann, Christoph, one of the aforementioned "dilettante[s] with modern airs," is quite taken with Starkmann. When Anselm warns Christoph to beware of Starkmann's advances, Christoph replies that he found the critic "charming, enchanting, enthralling. A man—

⁹⁶ Weissmann, one will recall, was the critic who would later refer to *Der singende Teufel* an "act of self-flagellation," among other things.

⁹⁷ Schreker, *Christophorus*, libretto in liner notes, 80-81.

and full of spirit!”⁹⁸ Schreker immediately discredits Christoph’s opinion of Starkmann by showing the young composer to be just as shallow and gullible as the critic. When Lisa defends Christoph’s symphony by saying that he will never compose anything greater than this work, born of his love for her, Anselm (who regards Christoph’s symphony as nothing more than a “beginner’s piece—schoolwork”) replies sneeringly that it was very possible that Christoph would never compose anything better. Of course, Christoph fails to pick up on the sarcasm, believing that Anselm truly liked his work until Lisa informs him otherwise.⁹⁹

In Act II, Schreker uses Starkmann to imply a withering critique of jazz, the use of which was at the height of its popularity among the new generation of composers, including Krenek, whose jazz-infused *Jonny spielt auf* received its premiere in Leipzig just weeks after Schreker finished the libretto for *Christophorus*. Schreker uses a dissonant and jagged musical texture suffused with characteristic jazz rhythms to paint a picture of decadence and moral decline. While several composers of Krenek’s generation looked to jazz for the renewal of European music, Schreker clearly believed it to be a dangerous narcotic.¹⁰⁰

Having gone on the run in the wake of Lisa’s murder, Christoph and Anselm find themselves incognito playing jazz at a place called the “Hotel Montmartre.” The audience soon learns that the club doubles as an opium den, and that Christoph has become an

⁹⁸ “Ein Dilettant mit moderne Allüren.” “Ich fand ihn charmant, entzückend, bezaubernd. Ein Mensch—und voll Geist.” Ibid., 82.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 82-83.

¹⁰⁰ “Ich halte die Einrichtung einer Jazz-Klasse an einem ernstgeleiteten Konservatorium für reichlich verfrüht. Die Einrichtung der einer derartigen Klasse an der Hochschule für Musik in Berlin kommt nicht in Betracht.” “Die Frankfurter Jazz-Akademie im Spiegel der Kritik,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (1927): 1247. Schreker went on the record arguing against the inclusion of jazz education at the Hochschule or other conservatories.

addict, unable to cope with the fact that he murdered his wife. The first character with significant lines in the act is a psychologist, Dr. Hartnung. He paints a bleak portrait of the Hotel Montmartre's clientele:

There are worse cases. A kind of asylum for all the disinherited, despised by life. Interesting for us psychologists, at any rate. Here you'll find everything. Tainted souls, ruined spirits; the body which hunts for new pleasures; those disappointed in their professions, underappreciated artists, inventors, geniuses!¹⁰¹

In scene II, Anselm and Christoph finish their set and are clearly disgusted with the routine nature of their lives as jazz musicians. As the crowd compliments their "rhythm of wildness" infused with the "scent of exotic power," Christoph throws down his violin (also Jonny's instrument of choice) in disgust. Even for a moderately talented composer like Christoph, the musical shallowness of jazz proves hard to take.

Starkmann is present in the audience but does not recognize Christoph and Anselm. Ever susceptible to the changing winds of popular taste, Starkmann has thrown off the "eternal concerts with classical trash" and now considers himself an expert jazz critic.¹⁰² He goes on to state that there is nothing new in classical music and pontificates to his date Rosita, "From across the big ocean salvation comes our way," a phrase lifted almost verbatim from the libretto of *Jonny spielt auf*.¹⁰³ Coming from the mouth of the pseudo-intellectual Starkmann, this proclamation provides a bitterly ironic commentary on Jonny's famous prophecy. Schreker reinforces the notion of Starkmann as an intellectually bereft windbag shortly after his *Jonny* paraphrase. When Rosita decides she

¹⁰¹ "Es gibt Schlimmeres. Ein Art Asyl für alle Enterbten, Verachteten des Lebens. Für uns Psychologen auf jeden Fall interessant. Hier finden Sie alles: verdorbene Seelen, zerstörte Geister; den Leib, der nach neuen Genüssen jagt; Enttäuschte ihres Berufes, verkannte Künstler, Erfinder, Genies!" Schreker, *Christophorus*, libretto in liner notes, 113.

¹⁰² "Die ew'ge Konzerte mit klassischen Schmökern!" Ibid., 115.

¹⁰³ "Vom großen Wasser herüber winkt uns das Heil." Ibid.

wants to mount the stage to sing a new song by one of the resident jazz musicians at the Hotel Montmartre (the cleverly disguised “Anselmus Lu”), Starkmann begins to muse on the disconnect between life and art, causing Rosita to shut him up for the rest of the opera by shoving half a lemon in his mouth.¹⁰⁴ In Rosita’s song Schreker makes the connection between jazz and a life of decadence and drug use musically explicit: Rosita sings her song, entitled, “The Poison,” while, at the same time backstage, Christoph is being injected with opium and carrying on a conversation with Dr. Hartnung. The two events occur simultaneously in the score with both conversations weaving in and out of each other, creating a web of musical discord and confusion.

Just as he disapproved of Schreker’s depiction of the issues between student and teacher in the first act, Bekker also disapproved of Schreker’s pointed satire of critics, specifically Weissmann, in the libretto. In a letter dated January 23, 1927 Bekker wrote that everything in the libretto about the figure of “Dornbusch” (later renamed Starkmann) had him “positively displeased.”¹⁰⁵ Bekker implored Schreker to eliminate any allusions to the “small news related to musical taste,” which almost certainly referred to Schreker’s grotesque lampoon of the jazz-inflected works garnering critical acclaim around Europe, continuing that if Schreker was going to criticize other musicians directly in the opera, he

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Bekker to Schreker, January 23, 1927, in Bekker and Schreker, *Briefwechsel*, 222. The original choice of the name Dornbusch for the critic is interesting for its probable allusion to the character of Beckmesser. During Walther’s improvised trial song “Fanget an,” the hero responds to Beckmesser’s attempts to derail his song through excessively loud marking by singing, “In a thorn-hedge (Dornhecken) consumed by jealousy and grief, winter, grimly-armed, had to hide himself away: with dry leaves rustling about him he lies in wait and plans how he might harm this joyful singing.”

ought to deal only in serious and fundamental things, rather than what Bekker considered to be personal trifles.¹⁰⁶

But, according to Schreker's introduction to *Christophorus*, these allusions to contemporary musical styles, whether the twelve-tone "linear" compositions of Frederik or the jazz of the Hotel Montmartre, are more than mere trifles; they are integral to our understanding of *Christophorus* as a testimony to the problems of the modern opera composer, as mediated through Schreker's personal experience. He wrote, "Today...Hamlet and similar things [are played] in tail-coats, how can it be surprising that the boy Anselm experiences the events of a previous time as modern occurrences and transfers them to the emotions of our everyday existence?"¹⁰⁷ Schreker used *Christophorus* as a vehicle to vent his frustrations over his students, his audiences, and his critics, in the process laying himself bare in a way that even made him somewhat uncomfortable.¹⁰⁸ Schreker was truly disturbed by the rapid pace of musical and social change in Germany and satirized the constantly shifting aesthetic sand of the Weimar era in his composer opera.

Despite the fact that Schreker believed *Christophorus* was capable of commercial success, the opera was never performed. After reviewing the score and libretto,

¹⁰⁶ "Das Gleiche gilt von allerlei kleinen Aktualitäten bezüglich musikalischer Geschmacksrichtung." Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ "Man spielt heute...Hamlet und anderes ähnliches im Frock, wie kann es wundernehmen, daß der Knabe Anselm die Ereignisse einer vergangenen Zeit modern empfindet und sie auf die Emotionen unseres Alltags überträgt?" Schreker, *Christophorus*, libretto in liner notes, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934: A Cultural Biography*, 249.

Universal refused to publish the opera.¹⁰⁹ Representing Universal, Hans Heinsheimer wrote to Schreker:

As far as *we* can judge the current state of the theater and the mentality of the public, we consider the chances for this work quite extraordinarily problematic and according to our judgment, which is of course subjective, we cannot anticipate any success from this work... Under the circumstances we can only see one way open to us, that is, to decline use of our right to the work and return it to you.¹¹⁰

Schreker insisted that Universal had no right to refuse his work and lobbied Hertzka himself for redress. Hertzka, while more sympathetic to Schreker's position, nonetheless asked the composer to consider what yet another failure would mean for the company and for the composer's legacy.¹¹¹ Without a publisher, Schreker was initially unable to secure a theater for a production. When the theater at Freiburg agreed to mount the opera in 1933, the performance had to be cancelled because of National Socialist protests, and the work remained unperformed until the 1970s. Within the space of less than a decade, Schreker went from being hailed as the "Messiah of German Opera" to an irrelevancy who could not find a venue for his new opera. Schreker's fortunes at the Hochschule declined rapidly in the late 1920s, and he was eventually forced into "retirement" by the increasingly influential National Socialist elements of the government. Schreker was temporarily placed at the head of a master class at the Akademie der Kunst in 1932, but was forced out of public life altogether after the enactment of the Civil Service Law in 1933 that barred Jews from most positions in German public institutions. His pension was drastically cut as well, which, when combined with few performance opportunities

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 250-251.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Ibid., 250-251. Universal did authorize the publication of a piano/vocal score but the full score has never been published. A facsimile resides in the Yale Schreker Collection.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 252.

for his work, caused Schreker to endure a good deal of financial hardship over the last few years of his life. He died two days before his fifty-sixth birthday on March 21, 1934, receiving only the most perfunctory death notice in German periodicals.

Conclusion

Schreker's career both as a composer and educator illustrate the economic and aesthetic instability of the Weimar era. His experiences at the Hochschule indicate how closely music education was tied to party politics, as Kestenberg and others sought to professionalize not only music performance but also music education in the Republic. The slow, gradual change in institutional practices preferred by many of Schreker's generation was an impossible ideal in a political environment in which party majorities and alliances continuously shifted, thus necessitating immediate and sweeping action. As a leading composition teacher, Schreker saw first-hand the rapid proliferation in musical styles among his students as well as the expansion of opportunities for young composers. The compression of time allowed for the development of an individual compositional voice bewildered Schreker, causing him to lash out at his best students. Furthermore, his commitment to teaching—an area that became necessary for his economic survival as his operatic fortunes waned—may have played a role in his decreased output and the failure of his Weimar-era operas to gain an audience. As a composer, Schreker found that the overwhelming spectacle and vague symbolism that enraptured pre-war audiences were passé in the ultra-modern environment of Berlin. Forced to write explicitly with commercial success in mind, Schreker attempted to mimic the dissonant, contrapuntal, and dance influenced styles of his students, but with very little success. All of these

anxieties, both personal and professional, are on full display in *Christophorus*, an opera that speaks directly to the harsh realities experienced not just by Schreker, but by many composers of his generation in Weimar Germany.

Chapter 6

“Kreneks Palestrina; oder sein Ferner Klang”: *Jonny spielt auf* as Composer-Opera

Perhaps more than any other opera of the period, Ernst Krenek’s *Jonny spielt auf* embodies the myth of the so-called “Golden Twenties” in Germany, representing an all too brief flowering of a socially and aesthetically progressive culture freed from the repression of the pre-War Empire, only to be brutally snuffed out by the ascent of the Third Reich in 1933. This interpretation is made all the more plausible when one considers that Krenek left Germany in the 1930s and counted himself as one of the so-called “exiled” composers in America after the Second World War, and that *Jonny* eventually became a symbol of the infamous 1938 *Entartete Musik* exhibition, a xenophobic project dedicated to exposing the supposed “degeneracy” of Weimar cultural artifacts.

The success of *Jonny*—easily the most performed new opera of the decade—was driven in large part by the opera’s explicit embrace of the trappings of modern, urban life, replete with radios, loudspeakers, automobiles, and express trains. Even more central to the success of *Jonny spielt auf* was its portrayal of American “jazz,” mediated through the madcap antics of the title character, an African American jazz violinist. Jonny stands opposed to Max, an introverted European composer incapable of getting out of his own way. In the end, it is Jonny and the aesthetic embodied by him that wins the day: the opera ends with Jonny playing his violin literally on top of the world.

Most of the subsequent historiography concerning *Jonny* has focused on the *Zeitgenössische* and jazz elements in the opera, concluding that Krenek intended for *Jonny* to be a celebration of modern (American) popular culture and a repudiation of a

European art tradition exhausted by decadence and alienation. A closer look at the decidedly ambivalent stance toward the opera taken by both critics and by Krenek himself, however, reveals that *Jonny* was not intended to be a naïve celebration of modernity. Rather, the composition of *Jonny* was a calculated move on Krenek's part, explicitly designed to score a commercial "hit" with audiences who had little interest in his "serious" atonal works. Furthermore, *Jonny*, far from celebrating popular culture uncritically, displays several of the deep anxieties prevalent in Germany concerning the relationship of the artist to modern society. *Jonny spielt auf* was the most successful opera of its era and continues to be one of the most important cultural symbols of the Weimar period. In this chapter I will argue through the use of contemporary reviews and editorials that despite its commercial success, the critical reception of *Jonny* was decidedly ambivalent and often downright hostile, displaying an unease toward jazz and popular music that cut across political and cultural affiliations. Additionally, I will argue that Krenek's adoption of popular idioms was in large part motivated by economic necessity and serves an ironic, rather than affirmative, purpose within *Jonny*.

Furthermore, I will shown through the composer's own writings that Krenek himself displayed a deep ambivalence toward popular culture in the work, identifying personally with the character of Max and regarding him not as a ridiculous caricature (as he is often portrayed) but as a serious character central to the ideological underpinnings of the opera. Interpreted as a composer-opera, *Jonny spielt auf* complicates the myth of the Weimar Republic as a golden era and exposes the deep cultural and artistic fissures in interwar German society.

Krenek's Career before *Jonny*

The outline of Krenek's early career illustrates that material concerns were never far from his mind, and that *Jonny* was conceived, at least in part, out of a desire to compose a "hit" that would net the composer a substantial financial profit. Although the years before *Jonny* were marked by several high profile performances and polarizing critical reviews for Krenek, his status as a leader among the younger generation of German modernist composers gained him little financial reward. Krenek's family was not particularly well off, and a great deal of their savings were lost to the war years and subsequent inflation, which meant that Krenek had in large part to fend for himself when he moved to Berlin from Vienna in 1920, relying often on the financial patronage of others to survive.

Krenek quickly found a personal champion and advocate in Georg Schünemann, vice-director of the Hochschule. Although relations quickly cooled between Schreker and Krenek (as outlined in the previous chapter), Schünemann proved invaluable to Krenek's development, finding him a job as a pianist in a movie house and arranging for him to write incidental music for a production of Schiller's *Fiesco*.¹ Indeed, Krenek grew very close to Schünemann, often dining at his house.² When Krenek's odd jobs and small stipend proved insufficient to sustain him, Schünemann arranged for a friend to gift Krenek a thousand marks to pay for tuition and living expenses.³ Through Schünemann Krenek was introduced to several influential people, including the composer and concert

¹ John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 29-30.

² Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 221.

³ Stewart, 30.

pianist Eduard Erdmann and, through Erdmann, Artur Schnabel, the famous pianist who provided Krenek with his first exposure to American dance music.⁴

In 1921 Alois Hába, another of Schreker's Viennese students who followed him to Berlin, introduced Krenek to Emil Hertzka, the powerful head of Universal Edition.⁵ Universal specialized in publishing contemporary music, and Krenek was already familiar with the publisher through Schreker, who was also published by Universal. For his part, Hertzka knew of Krenek's musical talents through *Anbruch* and his correspondence with Hába and accepted a piano sonata of Krenek's for publication. Krenek and Universal enjoyed a nearly exclusive relationship for the next seventeen years, severing ties only in 1938 after the firm came under National Socialist control.⁶ Krenek himself later recalled this important moment in his career, writing, "It really was a great day when I entered the office of the bustling publishing house not as a volunteer copy-editor, but as a composer who would receive a contract for the publication of his work."⁷ Krenek, like most young composers, failed to read the fine print: his contract stipulated that Universal had an option on all of his future compositions for the next ten years, a circumstance that, Krenek later noted, created some difficulties over the years.⁸ On the whole, however, the relationship would prove mutually beneficial, as the unrivalled advertising power of the firm played no small role in the *Jonny* sensation that followed the opera's premiere.

⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Es war wirklich ein großer Tag, als ich das Büro des betriebsamen Verlagshauses nicht als volontierender Korrektor, sondern als Komponist betrat, der einen Vertrag für die Veröffentlichung seines Werkes erhalten sollte." Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 190.

⁸ Ibid.

Throughout 1921 and 1922 Schünemann continued to advance Krenek's interests, often explicitly against the wishes of Schreker, who was very possessive of his Viennese students and took any meddling in their affairs as a personal affront.⁹ As a board member of the ADMV, Schünemann arranged for Krenek's String Quartet no. 1, Op. 6, to be played at the society's 1921 composers' festival held in Nürnberg. This was a great boon for an unknown composer like Krenek, and the performance of the work—Krenek's first atonal composition—generated a great deal of critical attention.¹⁰ Despite the fact that most of the reviews were negative, Krenek's quartet created enough of a sensation that he caught the ear of Leo Kestenberg, who convinced Krenek to stay in Berlin another year despite his estrangement from Schreker and offered to help the young composer however he could.¹¹ Schreker was incensed—not for the last time—at the performance and publication of Krenek's quartet, in large part because it was composed entirely without his knowledge or approval.

Krenek quickly capitalized on the uproar caused by his first quartet, and his *Serenade* op. 4 (the style of which was not as radical as the quartet) received a performance and a warm reception at the first Donaueschingen festival alongside works by Hába, Paul Hindmeith, and Philipp Jarnach.¹² These high-profile performances earned Krenek the respect of Paul Bekker, who used his influential post at the *Frankfurter*

⁹ Krenek noted that Schünemann's attempts to help him without Schreker's consent caused a rift between the two administrators. *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁰ Stewart, 31.

¹¹ Letters between Paul Bekker and Leo Kestenberg in the Yale Bekker Collection speak to Kestenberg's ongoing interest in Krenek's career. Kestenberg asked about Krenek in several of his letters to Bekker, who was at that time Krenek's supervisor at Kassel.

¹² Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 291.

Zeitung to advocate for the young composer, and who later helped to move Krenek temporarily away from atonality toward the more accessible style heard in *Jonny*.

And yet, despite the rather prestigious performance and publishing opportunities afforded Krenek, he saw very little financial benefit from his newly minted status as a leader of the avant-garde. Krenek wrote later of this time period:

I was very happy because my bold decision to go my own way, heedless of Schreker, was now justified, and the tumult that I had caused put me in high spirits. It has remained my “life’s pattern” that I was never able to cash in on these situations or make political capital. . . . I saw no way of exploiting these situations and was too lazy and too disinterested to develop appropriate contacts [and socialize] with “important” people.¹³

Indeed, Krenek—much like the composer Max in *Jonny spielt auf*—was a retiring sort and not given to the kind of gregarious glad-handing necessary to separate himself in a crowded musical marketplace. Were it not for the consistent advocacy of patrons like Schünemann, Bekker, and others, his works likely would have been passed over in favor of works by Hába or Hindemith, both of whom were tireless in promoting their own interests.¹⁴

The discrepancy between Krenek’s burgeoning reputation and his precarious financial status is illustrated by the premiere of his first symphony. Hermann Scherchen, editor of the influential journal *Melos* and a lecturer at the Hochschule, saw the

¹³ “Ich war sehr froh, denn mein kühner Entschluß, meinen eigenen Weg zu gehen, ohne Schreker zu beachten, war nun gerechtfertigt, und der Tumult, den ich hervorgerufen hatte, versetzte mich in Hochstimmung. Es ist mein ‘Lebensmuster’ geblieben, daß ich nie in der Lage war, aus solchen Situationen finanziell oder machtpolitisch Kapital zu schlagen. . . . ich sah keine Möglichkeiten, diese Situationen auszunutzen, und ich war zu faul und zu desinteressiert, um geeignete Kontakte mit ‘wichtigen’ Leuten zu knüpfen.” *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁴ Stewart, 45.

unfinished score and immediately offered to conduct it in Berlin.¹⁵ He had no permanent post as a conductor, and as a result the ad hoc groups he often recruited were under prepared for the ambitious scores he chose to perform. Schünemann, who persuaded a Dr. Wolffheim to pay for the copying of the parts, worried that a poorly rehearsed performance would be a disaster and suggested that Scherchen use the Hochschule orchestra.¹⁶ Schreker objected to the use of the orchestra for a score he considered to be “impossible” and even attempted to have Kestenberg use his influence over Scherchen to get the whole performance dropped.¹⁷ Krenek believed that Schreker feared a poor performance would damage his reputation as a teacher, despite the fact that Schreker worked closely with Krenek on the project.¹⁸ In spite of Schreker’s protestations, Krenek continued with Scherchen, who had to raise over six thousand marks in the middle of the Berlin General Strike to pay the orchestra he hired for the premiere.¹⁹ Even after successful performances at music festivals in Nuremberg and Donaueschingen, Krenek still relied heavily on the largesse of others for the performance of his work and his material well-being. Although he admired Schoenberg and his circle for their principled stance on the “incompatibility of serious and entertainment music,” Krenek—who soon left the confines of the Hochschule without a diploma—now needed the income from his compositions more than ever to provide both for himself and his soon-to-be bride, Anna Mahler.

¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶ Ibid., 34. Dr. Wolffheim was also the man recruited by Schünemann to help pay Krenek’s tuition.

¹⁷ “Schreker fürchtete angeblich, daß mein ‘unmögliches’ Stück seinem Prestige als Lehrer schaden könnte.” Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 301.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Stewart, 34.

Krenek reckoned that the quickest and easiest way to “make a lot of money,” as John Stewart put it, was to write opera.²⁰ Krenek was well aware of Richard Strauss’s massive financial success and desired the same for himself. He also took note of the rapid ascent of Paul Hindemith, largely due to his 1921 opera *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*.²¹ Krenek’s first foray into the theater was *Die Zwingburg*, a “scenic cantata” composed in 1922. Set to a text by his friend Fritz Demuth (later revised by Franz Werfel), the work displayed much of the same high-minded seriousness as Krenek’s early instrumental works but also signaled a softening of his strictly contrapuntal and largely atonal idiom in the face of text setting and other practical considerations.²² Owing to delays and difficulties in settling on a venue for the premiere, *Zwingburg* did not receive its first performance until October 21, 1924, at the Berlin State Opera. Despite favorable reviews, *Zwingburg*, like the rest of Krenek’s early works, received little attention from the general public and quickly fell out of the repertoire.

The commercial failure of *Zwingburg* was not as bad as it might have been, because Krenek’s style and general aesthetic had shifted quite a bit in the years between the writing and actual performance of the work. His second opera, *Der Sprung über den Schatten*, received a successful premiere in June 1923 and was remarkably different in dramatic tone and use of musical materials, marking Krenek’s first large scale attempt in adopting a commercially accessible style through the use of jazz and other popular dance idioms. Despite the positive reviews for *Der Sprung*, however, Krenek still found himself in a tenuous financial position, with few performance opportunities looming and

²⁰ Ibid., 28.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Peter Tregear, *Ernst Krenek and the Politics of Musical Style* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2013), 13.

no new patron in sight. After visiting his parents in Vienna, Krenek and Anna Mahler travelled to Winterthur to hear the premiere of his First Piano Concerto, performed by Krenek's friend Eduard Erdmann, again under the direction of Herman Scherchen.²³ In attendance was Werner Reinhart, whom Krenek would later describe as "one of the greatest benefactors of contemporary musicians I have ever known."²⁴ Reinhart was so impressed by the performance that he gave Krenek a gift of one thousand Swiss francs so that the composer could spend a Christmas holiday in the mountains.²⁵ In reality, Reinhart's gift was worth much more than a Christmas holiday; indeed, hyperinflation in Germany was at its zenith at the end of 1923, making a thousand Swiss francs an almost unimaginably large sum of money. Krenek recalled that he had "never in [his] life seen so much money, and certainly not such beautiful bills as the heavy, beautifully embossed notes of the Swiss National Bank."²⁶ Reinhart's timely financial gift allowed Krenek and Anna (who were married in a civil ceremony in January 1924) to spend the next several months in Switzerland, living in a *pension* near Lake Zürich.²⁷ This period of Krenek's life proved pivotal for his personal and professional fortunes, and many of his experiences during his time in Switzerland found their way, whether consciously or not, into *Jonny*.

Krenek loved the peaceful and solemn nature of his mountain home in Switzerland, where he found himself able to work independently and undisturbed by

²³ Stewart, 50.

²⁴ "...einen der größten Wohltäter zeitgenössischer Musiker, die ich je kannte..." Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 400.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Ich hatte noch nie im Leben so viel Geld gesehen, und schon gar nicht so wunderschöne Geldscheine wie die schweren, prächtig geprägten Banknoten der Schweizerischen Nationalbank." Ibid.

²⁷ Stewart, 50.

financial concerns. Anna, on the other hand, despised the couple's isolation; although she occupied herself with private painting lessons, she longed for the cosmopolitan and free wheeling atmosphere of Berlin.²⁸ The couple's relationship deteriorated quickly, and after the two took a vacation to visit Anna's mother Alma in May 1924, Anna stayed behind while Krenek travelled to Frankfurt to supervise rehearsals for a production of *Der Sprung*.²⁹ Although Anna eventually joined him for the premiere in June, the couple spent increasingly large amounts of time apart. Krenek tried to keep up the appearance of domestic bliss for his parents, writing to them that their gramophone played fox-trots all day, but the marriage effectively ended less than a year after it began when Anna left for Rome to study painting with Giorgio de Chirico.³⁰ From Anna's perspective, the marriage was doomed almost from the start. As she recounted to John L. Stewart many years later, "It [the move to Zürich] ended the marriage."³¹

Shortly after his marriage dissolved, Krenek went to Paris, a trip that by all accounts impacted him greatly. Krenek was struck by the pace and vibrancy of the city, and he took every opportunity during his two-week stay to avail himself of Paris's many cultural offerings, including the city's burgeoning night club scene that featured not only the surrealism of Cocteau, but also early examples of American jazz and dance music. Upon his return to Zürich he wrote to Bekker, "I believe that my sojourn to Paris will have a wholly decisive significance for me. ... The people understand something there which we never got or have forgotten: to live. Thus art occupies a completely different

²⁸ Ibid., 50.

²⁹ Reviews were again good, but the opera failed to score a decisive "hit" with audiences.

³⁰ Ibid., 51.

³¹ Ibid., 52.

sphere, and daily I experience new surprises...”³² While in Paris, Krenek hoped to arrange for a performance of his new opera, *Orpheus und Eurydike*, set to an Expressionist reworking of the Orpheus myth by Oskar Kokoschka. Once there, however, he realized that performing the dark and complex work would be an impossibility in Paris.³³ “To perform *Orpheus* in Paris,” he wrote to Bekker, “would be like translating *Palestrina* into Chinese. No one would understand the piece.”³⁴ Perhaps moved by the juxtaposition of the violent text and music for *Orpheus* against the lighter atmosphere of Paris, Krenek determined to be more flexible in his aesthetic outlook, declaring to Bekker, “my absolutism will slowly but surely be cured.”³⁵

Paul Bekker was to have an increasingly large influence on Krenek’s aesthetic and professional life. Leo Kestenberg named Bekker as Intendant of the State Opera House and Theater in Kassel in May 1924, which gave Bekker an opportunity to implement many of the theories he espoused in his widely read books and newspaper articles. His encyclopedic knowledge of opera was not enough to overcome his lack of administrative experience, however, and Bekker soon realized he needed an assistant in managing the day-to-day affairs of the opera. Having been a critical champion of Krenek’s since 1921, Bekker invited the composer to take the position in mid-1925. Krenek originally refused, in large part because he enjoyed his relative autonomy in

³² Quoted in Susan C. Cook, *Opera for a New Republic: Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 83.

³³ Tregear, 15.

³⁴ Quoted in Cook, 83.

³⁵ Quoted in Stewart, 55.

Switzerland. He eventually relented, however, as his financial position was more desperate than ever and he was in great need of a steady source of income.³⁶

While at Kassel Krenek had the opportunity to analyze the components of dramatically and commercially successful theater. He came around to the idea, long espoused by Bekker, that music—especially opera—should be a reflection of the society in which it was created, not alienated from it. Writing later at the height of *Jonny*'s popularity Krenek displayed a similar outlook when he took on critics that accused him of degrading the culture with his opera, “Art develops on the basis of a culture. It is neither the intention nor the ability of art to create a culture.”³⁷ Throughout his long career, Krenek spoke of his works from this era in terms of being reflective of and accessible to the larger public. Writing later in his life Krenek explained,

I decided that the tenets which I had followed so far in writing ‘modern music’ were totally wrong. Music according to my new philosophy had to fit the well-defined demands of the community for which it was written; it had to be useful, entertaining, practical.³⁸

It was during this period, after several years of critical successes and commercial failures and armed with a new and less idealistic view of his art, that Krenek began work on *Jonny*.

³⁶ Stewart, 61.

³⁷ “Die Kunst entwickelt sich auf der Basis einer Kultur, ist aber weder berufen noch imstande, eine Kultur zu schaffen.” Ernst Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” in Ernst Krenek, *Im Zweifelsfalle: Aufsätze über Musik* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1984), 16.

³⁸ Ernst Krenek, “Self-Analysis,” *New Mexico Quarterly* 23/1 (1953): 14.

Jonny spielt auf

In his memoirs, Artur Schnabel (one of Krenek's early mentors) recounted a conversation he had with Krenek and Eduard Erdmann that nicely encapsulates the composer's thinking around the time of *Jonny*'s composition:

Ernst Krenek and Eduard Erdmann told me one day that they were going to write light opera, to make quicker money than with the heavier type of music they usually composed. ... They had studied all the most popular and effective work in the field and would simply imitate it—on purpose—and probably do it better.³⁹

The idea to write a “light” and broadly appealing opera was heartily encouraged by Krenek's publishers at Universal Edition. Already in 1924 Emil Hertzka passed along the libretto for an English comedic farce called *Bluff*, suggesting that Krenek use it to compose an operetta.⁴⁰ Although Krenek had a hard time seeing the humor in this supposedly comedic text, he trusted the commercial instincts of his publisher and began working on the project in earnest, eventually visiting Baron von Levetzos the librettist at his home in Corsica.⁴¹ Krenek and the librettist envisioned a modern, urban setting for *Bluff*, and Krenek hit upon several ideas that later figured prominently in *Jonny*, including a lengthy scene in a train station and scenes involving automobiles and airplanes.⁴² Stylistically, the work was to be a mixture of “German comic opera, Offenbach, American Jazz, and Viennese schmalz.”⁴³

Despite the fact that Universal Edition originally pushed the *Bluff* project on Krenek, they eventually rejected Krenek's proposal, citing the fact that a Viennese

³⁹ Artur Schnabel, *My Life in Music* (New York: St. Martin's, 1963), 79.

⁴⁰ Stewart, 57.

⁴¹ Krenek, *Im Atem der Zeit*, 507.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 517.

⁴³ “Stilistisch war das Ganze eine Mischung aus deutscher komischer Oper, Offenbach, amerikanischem Jazz und Wiener Schmalz.” *Ibid.*

operetta needed a song about Old Vienna (how Universal expected Krenek to shoehorn an ode to Vienna into an operetta set in Scotland is anybody's guess). Krenek, who was already growing weary of the project, let it drop, but the experience inspired him to begin sketching the scenario for *Jonny* in late 1925. He continued working on the piece throughout the first half of 1926, completing the score and libretto (which were composed concurrently) on June 19.⁴⁴

Interestingly, the character of Jonny was not of Krenek's invention. Rather, the inspiration for Krenek's title character—including the name with its idiosyncratic spelling—came from a popular German cabaret song written in 1920.⁴⁵ The lyrics of the song by Friedrich Hollaender describe what later became the operatic Jonny to the smallest detail: Jonny is a black violinist who makes white women swoon with his playing, winning a “new white girlfriend” every night.⁴⁶ Krenek did not admit the source of his title character until much later, and contemporary reviews do not seem to have made the connection between the two.⁴⁷ Whether or not audiences associated Krenek's Jonny with Hollaender's song, the figure of the black jazz musician as a seducer of white women was already fixed in the popular imagination by the mid-1920s and had already proven to be a commercially successful conceit, pointing to Krenek's commercial adroitness with regard to the music and libretto of *Jonny*.

The most obvious site for the premiere would have been Kassel, but Bekker was already committed to performing *Orpheus und Eurydike* that year. Even before it was

⁴⁴ Tregear, 25.

⁴⁵ Alan Lareau, “Jonny's Jazz: from *Kabarett* to Krenek,” in *Jazz and the Germans*, ed. Michael J. Budds (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁷ Ernst Krenek with Will Ogdon and John L. Stewart, *Horizons Circled: Reflections on My Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 38.

performed, *Jonny* proved controversial: it was turned down in both Hamburg and Darmstadt before Gustav Brecher agreed to produce it in Leipzig.⁴⁸ Brecher liked the opera the moment he saw the score and thought that the scenario would provide ample opportunities for his stage director Walther Brüggemann to create daring, over-the-top stage effects. Brüggemann relished the project, and as a result the Leipzig premiere of *Jonny spielt auf* on February 10, 1927 was a technical marvel, incorporating a large express train riding on working tracks for the climactic final scenes, as well as an animated film projected on stage.⁴⁹ The sheer visual impact of the production was overwhelming, and the audience reaction was wildly enthusiastic, leading to twenty-five performances in Leipzig alone over the next year—a nearly unheard of number for a new, contemporary opera. Many reviews, though otherwise negative, nonetheless raved about the stage design and effects. Paul Bekker noted the importance of the staging to the work's success in a letter to Schönemann, writing that the failure of the Berlin production to match the standard set in Leipzig contributed to its lackluster reception in that city and had, at least for the moment, slowed the momentum of the work.⁵⁰ Writing for the *Musical Courier* Adolf Aber also insisted that a great deal of the opera's success was predicated on the sheer visual and sonic spectacle of the production. Aber was impressed with Krenek's ability to write music that truly sounded like modern life, pointing in particular to Krenek's musical depiction of a running engine. According to Aber, such modern effects had rarely been achieved on the operatic stage, and this alone was enough to make the opera worthwhile, without regard to the actual words and music (which Aber

⁴⁸ Stewart, 86.

⁴⁹ Cook, 88-89.

⁵⁰ Letter from Bekker to Schönemann, October 18, 1927, in the Paul Bekker Papers, Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University.

thought were “inspired” nonetheless). Despite Aber’s generally high opinion of *Jonny*, he still believed that “the opera could not have been the success it was with a less marvelous production.”⁵¹ In fact, Aber believed that the production itself was so critical to *Jonny*’s success that he concluded, “Perhaps, after all, it was more a success for Walther Brüggemann than anyone else.”⁵² Even Paul Bekker believed that *Jonny* was little more than an excuse (no matter how successful) to attempt the grandest visual spectacle possible. In a published open letter to Krenek he asked, “What, however, was *Jonny* really?” Bekker believed that, at bottom, the staging of *Jonny* was an attempt by a number of talented and exuberant artists working in the theater industry to combine all of the possibilities of the theater in a crazy whirlwind of effects combined with music and dancing.⁵³ Despite the fact that the critics, he continued, attempted to find a moral or aesthetic argument in the opera and provide a withering critique of the work, they “stood and marveled.”⁵⁴ In Bekker’s view, the critics marveled that a work that was intended simply as a test of Krenek’s technical stage knowledge became an overnight sensation in Germany.⁵⁵ Even Paul Schwers, who otherwise criticized *Jonny* harshly, recognized the genius in Brüggemann’s staging, remarking that such effects were necessary to ensure a proper performance of the opera.⁵⁶ Leipzig was only the beginning of *Jonny*’s

⁵¹ Adolf Aber, “A Musical Masterpiece,” *The Musical Courier* (March 10, 1927): 5.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Paul Bekker, “An Ernst Krenek,” in Paul Bekker, *Briefe an zeitgenössische Musiker* (Berlin: Max Hesse Verlag, 1932), 93-94.

⁵⁴ “Sie aber standen und staunten.” Ibid., 94.

⁵⁵ “Sie staunten darüber, daß dieser "Jonny", den Sie selbst nur als übermütigen Zeitvertrieb angesehen hatten, und dessen Aufführbarkeit eigentlich nur die Probe auf das Maß ihrer technischen Bühnenkenntnisse sein sollte - daß der über Nacht zu einem theatralischen Weltwunder geworden war.” Ibid.

⁵⁶ Paul Schwers, “Jonny spielt auf,” *Allgemeine Musik Zeitung*, (February 18, 1927): 152.

unprecedented run of commercial success.⁵⁷ Over the course of the 1927-1928 season the opera appeared on fifty different stages—including Paris and New York City—and was translated into several different languages.⁵⁸ *Jonny* spawned a number of imitators, including Eugen D’Albert, whose *Die schwarze Orchidee* featured a libretto by the same author of the failed *Bluff* project.⁵⁹ For a brief period, *Jonny* was more than an operatic sensation: it was a genuine cultural phenomenon, as evidenced by the sudden appearance of “Jonny” brand cigarettes in Germany.⁶⁰

The plot of *Jonny* is rather simple: In the first scene we see Max, an introverted composer who enjoys living in the solitude of a mountain glacier. Into this rarefied world steps Anita, a singer who has lost her way. Though she has never met Max, she has sung the lead in one of his operas. Max is taken by Anita and attempts to convince her of the glacier’s charm but she insists on leaving, begging him to accompany her. After living a short time together in Anita’s home, she must leave Max in order to sing in a Paris production of one of his operas. This saddens Max, and he tries to convince her to forsake her career for the sake of their love, but she insists on leaving. Scene three takes place in a modern Parisian hotel. Here we are introduced to Jonny, the black jazz band leader, and to Daniello, a famous traveling violin player. Both Jonny and Daniello are womanizers, and both men have eyes for Anita, who misses Max despite the success of her performance. Anita runs into Jonny on her way to the hotel restaurant, where he crudely insinuates that they should spend the night together. Daniello intervenes and

⁵⁷ Susan C. Cook wrote that *Jonny* might well have been the operatic sensation of the decade in Germany. Cook, 3.

⁵⁸ Stewart, 87.

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Rogge, *Ernst Kreneks Opern: Spiegel der zwanziger Jahre* (Wolfenbüttel and Zürich: Möselag, 1970), 19.

⁶⁰ Taylor-Jay, 91.

chases Jonny away, becoming in the moment Anita's dinner companion. After dinner Daniello seduces Anita, who puts up no resistance. As Daniello and Anita spend the night together, Jonny exacts his revenge on Daniello by stealing his violin, which he does by placing it in Anita's banjo case, intending to follow Anita home and steal the priceless Amati out of her house.

The next morning, Anita tells Daniello of her love at home and her decision to leave, and he attempts to keep her by playing his violin for her, at which point he discovers the theft. Daniello is incensed and accuses the entire staff. Yvonne, a maid and one of Jonny's lovers, is hired by Anita to accompany her on her forthcoming trip. Daniello arranges for Yvonne to give Max a ring given to him by Anita as a remembrance of their night together, thus exacting his revenge. During the commotion, Jonny resigns his post at the hotel in order to follow Anita (and the violin). When Anita gets home to Max she is tense and soon retires to her room. Yvonne shows the ring to Max, who, upon realizing her infidelity, abandons Anita for the quietude of his glacier. Jonny takes this opportunity to crawl through the window and capture the violin for himself.

Max is back in the mountains when the glacier itself speaks to him, urging him to go back to the land of the living. He suddenly hears Anita's voice singing one of his arias over a loudspeaker at a nearby mountain hotel. Overcome, he rushes toward the sound, hoping to find her. After Anita, the sounds of Jonny's jazz band come on the radio, and Daniello, upon hearing the tune, recognizes the sound of his violin and realizes that Jonny has stolen his most prized possession. A wild chase ensues, leading to a train station. A comedy of errors and mistaken identities punctuate the climactic scenes. Max

is wrongfully arrested for the theft of the violin, and when Daniello attempts to stop Yvonne from clearing his name, she pushes him onto the tracks in front of an oncoming train. Yvonne is finally able to convince Jonny, who is making his last attempt at stealing the violin, to save Max. Jonny knocks out a policeman, dons his uniform, steals his car, and takes Max to the train station where he is reunited with Anita, who is leaving for a tour of America. The opera ends with Jonny playing wildly on top of the world, having conquered Europe through jazz and dance music.

Jonny's Contemporary Reception

Despite the undeniable commercial success of the opera, the contemporary critical reception of *Jonny spielt auf* both inside and outside of Germany was complex and ambivalent. A few early reviews were largely positive on the merits of *Jonny*. For some reviewers, including Adolf Aber and Oskar Bie, *Jonny* represented the future of opera, and they reveled in Krenek's use of contemporary topics and modern dance music.

Writing in the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, Aber exclaimed, "Now, at last a bit of current events recorded to the fullest extent in a musical work. Thrilling and entertaining both, effective as a grotesque and a review."⁶¹ Oskar Bie was particularly impressed by the fast-paced tempo of the work, a tempo that reflected the frenetic pace of modern life. Reviewing the Berlin premiere of *Jonny*, Bie declared the work to be "one of the most fantastic works of all opera history" and gushed over Krenek's synthesis of romanticism with the "technical poetry of today."⁶² Similarly positive reviews appeared in *Anbruch*

⁶¹ Quoted in Cook, 103.

⁶² Quoted in *ibid.*, 104.

and *Auftakt*, though, as both journals were imprints of Krenek's publisher Universal Edition, this was not unexpected.

Outside of these Krenek-friendly publications, however, praise for *Jonny* was rarely unqualified and often revealed deep-seated anxieties about both the position of the composer in modern society and the invasion of foreign *Zivilisation* into the land of *Kultur*. Even reviewers who were otherwise positively impressed by the excellent production of the Leipzig premiere expressed grave doubts about the vision of a European culture subjugated by the American jazz emanating from Jonny's stolen fiddle. Max Marschalk's mostly positive review of the opera's first night serves as an informative entrance into this debate, as he staked out many of the issues that would feature prominently in the critical discourse surrounding *Jonny*. After beginning his article by declaring the premiere a "great and undisputed success," he quickly noted that the opera, which was set for a future production in Berlin, was already encountering opposition.⁶³ Posing a series of questions, he asked of *Jonny*'s detractors whether their objections were "aesthetic or ethical in nature." Listing some of the aesthetic grounds upon which *Jonny* was criticized he continued,

Are they alarmed by the topsy-turvy nature of the words and music, the unusual stage images, the sequence of scenes, the sometimes thorny situations, the banality or the audacity of so many a word, the nonchalance with which the modern dance rhythms of American origin are used, or do they take offense that Jonny, the Negro, sings "Everything that is good in the world is mine. The old world created it, but it no longer knows what to do with it. The new world is coming over the sea with splendor and takes over old Europe through dance." Do they take offense at the attitude that speaks forth from these words?⁶⁴

⁶³ "...einen großen und unbestrittenen Erfolg." Max Marschalk, "Jonny spielt auf," *Vossische Zeitung*, October 10, 1927.

⁶⁴ "Was ist es, das die Gemüter erregt? Sind die Erregungen der Widersacher ästhetischer oder ethischer Natur? Schreckt sie das Kunterbunt in Text und Musik, das Ungewöhnliche der Bühnenbilder, der Szenenfolge, das heikle einiger Situationen, die

Marschalk was particularly perceptive in his analysis of the issues surrounding *Jonny*. Several critics did decry the simplistic and sensationalist plot as beneath the dignity of both Krenek and his audience—Marschalk’s “aesthetic objections.” Always close at hand, however, was the deeper sense of an impending moral crisis made manifest in *Jonny*: one that was illustrated not only in the character of Jonny, as Marschalk suggested, but also in Max.

Writing in the *Allgemeine Musik Zeitung*, Wilhelm Matthes criticized Krenek both for his “terribly cold cynicism” and for his “uncanny instinct for the baseness of the soul, for the animal in humanity.”⁶⁵ For Matthes, the success of *Jonny* marked nothing less than the end of civil society. He continued rhetorically, “Have the opera communities been able to keep the rubbish of *Zivilisation* away from their doorstep? Was the Leipzig success then not the benchmark for the depravity of our civil society?”⁶⁶ Referencing a provocative publicity ad for *Jonny* that featured the likeness of the musician “taking over” fifty opera houses throughout Germany, Matthes concluded, “50

Banalität oder die Frechheit so manch eines Wortes, die Unbekümmertheit, mit der moderne Tanzrhythmen amerikanischer Herkunft verwendet werden, oder nehmen sie Anstoß daran, daß Jonny, der Neger, singt: ‘Mir gehört alles, was gut ist in der Welt. Die alte Welt hat es erzeugt, sie weiß damit nichts mehr zu tun. Da kommt die neue Welt übers Meer gefahren mit Glanz. Und erbt das alte Europa durch den Tanz’, nehmen sie Anstoß an der Gesinnung, die aus diesen Worten spricht?” Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Der ‘Jonny Krenek’, der junge Komponist mit seinem erschrecklich kalten Zynismus eines abgelebten Weltmannes, mit seinem unheimlichen Instinkt für die Gemeinheiten der Seele, für das Animale im Menschen.” Wilhelm Matthes, “Schwarze Schmach,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (October 7, 1927): 1011.

⁶⁶ “Haben die Operngemeinden den Zivilisationskehrriech von ihrer Schwelle fernhalten können? War der Leipziger Erfolg damals nicht der Maßstab für die Verkommenheit unserer bürgerlichen Gesellschaft?” Ibid.

Jonny stages.’ The laconically triumphant advertisement says it all.”⁶⁷ Matthes believed that *Jonny* signaled nothing less than the unwelcome invasion of *Zivilisation* into the land of *Kultur*. Writing about the Leipzig premiere, Harry Cassin Becker for the *New York Times* remarked that Krenek presented the characters “without regard for ethics or conventions” and that each character was “more depraved than the other.”⁶⁸ The reviewer was equally critical of Max and Jonny, writing that Max “fairly nauseates because of his unbridled weakness” while Jonny, who was “unable to distinguish between good and bad, greedily tastes of everything that comes his way.”⁶⁹ For this reviewer, both characters reflected negatively upon modern society, though it made for entertaining theater. Paul Schwerts had a decidedly negative reaction upon viewing *Jonny*, highlighting what he felt was the impropriety of the plot: “Previously our high art sites were...places of refuge; is it now time also to contaminate these places with the blight of the mundane, with the jazz-ruttings of a depraved middle-class society? It seems so, if the Leipzig ‘success’ serves as a benchmark.”⁷⁰ Despite the fact that Schwerts believed Krenek was still an excellent composer based on his earlier work, he lamented, “so much talent was wasted on an artistically bad, unworthy project.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ “‘Die 50 Jonnybühne’. Diese lakonisch triumphierende Reklamenotiz sagt alles. Händereibend diktieren sie die Wiener und Ernst Krenek ihrem Propagandachef in die Maschine.” Ibid.

⁶⁸ Harry Cassin Becker, “A Grotesque Premiere,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 1927.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Bisher wäre nun unsere hohen Kunststätten solche Zufluchtsorte; ist es an der Zeit, sie nun auch mit der Pest des Alltags, mit den Jazzbrünsten einer heruntergekommenen bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu verseuchen? Es scheint fast so, wenn man den Leipziger ‘Erfolg’ als Maßstab zugrunde legt.” Schwerts, “Jonny spielt auf,” 151.

⁷¹ “Es bliebe allein das Bedauern, daß viel Talent an eine im künstlerischen Sinn schlechte, unwürdige Sache vertan wurde.” Ibid.

Although the post-war reception of *Jonny* hailed the work as a positive creative innovation in Krenek's career, contemporary critics were confused by what they believed was, at best, a cynical attempt at commercial success and, at worst, a regression in Krenek's career. An article in *Melos*—the same journal edited by one of Krenek's early champions—characterized the music of *Jonny* as a low point in Krenek's development, making a poor compromise between Romantic opera and jazz.⁷² The author thought that the music was unorganized and was fitted poorly to the text. Furthermore, he wrote, the “present time is not truly represented; rather, its most blatant attributes are unscrupulously thrown around.”⁷³ Hans Schaub lamented that Krenek was “too good a musician” to be judged solely on the merits of *Jonny*.⁷⁴ Based on the music of *Jonny*, Krenek transformed from “a disciple of atonality” into a “backwards-looker, whose *Jonny* is full of self-conscious reactions.” Schaub commented that he “[could] not rejoice with this transformation.”⁷⁵ Schaub believed that *Zwingburg* had made Krenek a leader among the younger generation of composers, but that “the Krenek of yore was preferable to the Krenek of today.” Throughout his review Schaub's writing maintained an aura of disbelief, writing that those who believed *Jonny* represented the future of music were

⁷² “Meloskritik: *Jonny spielt auf*,” *Melos* 7 (1928): 24.

⁷³ “Zeit ist nicht gestaltet, sondern ihre aufdringlichsten Attribute werden skrupellos hingeworfen.” *Ibid.* Krenek may have had this article in mind when he later characterized his critics as studiously counting syllables like “Beckmesser of old” while missing the larger dramatic arc of the text and music.

⁷⁴ “Dazu ist Krenek ein viel zu guter Musiker und begabter Erfinder.” Hans Schaub, “Kreneks *Jonny* in Hamburg Staatstheater,” *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (June 17, 1927): 731.

⁷⁵ “Aus dem Anhänger des Antonalitätsprinzips wurde ein Rückschauender, dessen ‘Jonny’ voll bewußter Reaktionen ist... Ich kann mich dieser Wandlung nicht freuen.” *Ibid.*

either “idiots or consummate hypocrites.”⁷⁶ Schaub concluded that even if *Jonny* was only intended as satire—which he believed it was—it was beyond his reckoning how a composer of Krenek’s talent could write such a vulgar work.⁷⁷

New York Times critic Olin Downes, a keen observer of German artistic life, found nothing but cynicism emanating from Krenek’s opera and viewed *Jonny* as a withering critique of contemporary life. Speaking of the general cultural forces in Krenek’s generation that made *Jonny* possible, Downes wrote,

They seldom live in the country and they do not believe in Santa Claus. Moral or romantic sentiments touch them not, or at least find them incredulous. The changed environment of modern life, from the rural to the urban aesthetic, has left its sting and blight on them. And this is the generation of Krenek.⁷⁸

For Krenek, the anxiety caused by the transition from the peaceful surroundings of the country to the hectic pace of the city was all too real. Like Max, he preferred to live in the mountains quietly contemplating his work. The city, with its noise and constant external stimuli, held little interest for him. Downes continued that *Jonny* could only have been written by a “youthful, scornful, and sharp-tongued satirist of the moment.”⁷⁹ Downes recognized in the depictions of modern life and culture in *Jonny* a blistering critique of the lifestyle it purportedly celebrated. Far from embodying any real sense of the American experience, *Jonny* was “a European reaction to the post-war currents and environments, including those advanced forces of our civilization, jazz, radio, and the

⁷⁶ “...daß uns der Krenek von einst lieber war als der von heute.” Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Wer nach dem Genuß dieser Oper sich gebärdet, als erblickte das Heil der Musik in einer Weiterentwicklung der im ‘Jonny’ eingeschlagenen Bahnen, der ist entweder ein Dummkopf oder ein vollendeter Heuchler.” Ibid.

⁷⁸ Olin Downes, “Jonny spielt auf,” *The New York Times*, January 13, 1929.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

movies.”⁸⁰ Contrary to many other reviews, in Downes’s telling, Max is the “hero,” though he hardly embodies any of the traits of a hero as such, and Jonny is the villain: “Max is the sorry hero, whom the composer jeers at in his libretto, and probably, in so doing, jeers at himself. He is sentimental, weak neurasthenic, helpless in the modern world.” On the other hand,

The ‘villain’ is Jonny, the Negro musician from America: gross, impudent, and amorous, who at last steals from the virtuoso his heavenly violin and with it sounds jazz, crowns the planet and sets the universe a-dancing to his abandoned and demoralizing strains.⁸¹

Here Downes exposes the fundamental ambivalence in *Jonny*: in the end, is the triumph of “American” popular music and culture any victory at all? For Downes, and for Krenek, the answer was decidedly no. Everything, wrote Downes, is “resentfully caricatured” in the opera.⁸²

In a later review of the New York premiere of *Jonny*, Downes reinforced his earlier interpretation of Krenek’s work and intent. Far from celebrating popular culture in *Jonny*, “Krenek satirizes Europe and European tastes and customs in a world demoralized and vitiated by sensuality, vulgarity, and materialism and jazz.”⁸³ In particular, the figure of Jonny is no hero, no hope for the renewal of European culture; rather, he is “a symptom and a bitter burlesque of this particular time, even let us say, decade.”⁸⁴ In the end, although Downes perceived some of the deeper aesthetic ambivalence and autobiographical resonances with which Krenek imbued the opera, his

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Olin Downes, “‘Jonny spielt auf’: Opera of This Age,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 1929.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

objections to the work were similar to those of his European counterparts. Downes believed that Krenek was cynically exploiting a morally bankrupt public, using shock value to promote his career.

Some reviewers sensed more than mere opportunism, noting the underlying aesthetic seriousness of the work. Heinrich Strobel's review in *Melos* delved almost immediately into the ideological significance of the work, noting, "The play about Jonny, the jazz band fiddler, rests on an ideological foundation. ... Its core content is the struggle between dying Romanticism and American *Sachlichkeit*."⁸⁵ Max, who is "internally inhibited" and yields helplessly to all of his emotions while "striving for distant fantasies" is opposed to Jonny, who for Strobel represents the "ruthless, brutal and vital man of today."⁸⁶ The two ideologies battle for supremacy, but in the end, "the 'new age' wins. With dance it has conquered rotten Europe."⁸⁷ In his retelling of the ideological core of the opera, Strobel remarks presciently "Not without resignation does Krenek pronounce this admonition."⁸⁸ Strobel went on to state that the "strangely erratic development" of Krenek's career lay behind the ambivalence of *Jonny*.⁸⁹

Hans Pringsheim also intuited a deeper ideological significance in *Jonny*, though he too interpreted the use of jazz and popular elements in the opera as a cynical attempt at

⁸⁵ "Das Spiel um Jonny, den Jazzbandgeiger, ruht auf weltanschaulichem Fundament. ... Sein Kerngehalt ist der Kampf zwischen absterbender Romantik und amerikanischer Sachlichkeit." Heinrich Strobel, "Ernst Krenek 'Jonny spielt auf,'" *Melos* 6 (1927): 130-131.

⁸⁶ "Der innerlich gehemmte, allen Gefühlsregungen willenlos nachgebende, nach phantastischen Fernen strebende Komponist Max steht gegen Jonny, den rücksichtslosen, brutalen und vitalen Gegenwartsmenschen." *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸⁷ "Die 'neue Zeit' siegt. Im Tanz erobert sie das morsche Europa: finde jeder den Anschluss, damit er vom neuen Lebenstempo nicht überrannt werde." *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ "Nicht ohne Resignation spricht Krenek diese Mahnung aus." *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ "Das wird nicht Wunder nehmen, wenn man die seltsam sprunghafte Entwicklung dieses Musikers kennt." *Ibid.*

commercial success on the part of Krenek. In his review of the Berlin premiere, he expressed the view that, although “silly” and “kitschy” and having a certain affinity with trashy films, the plot of *Jonny* exhibited the marks of a *Künstlerroman*.⁹⁰ While the madcap adventures of Jonny and the wanderings of the stolen violin took up most of the evening, they were only the “frame and trappings” of the opera. When boiled down to its essence, the main action of *Jonny* consists of the “*Künstlerdrama*,” represented most vividly in the character of Max.⁹¹ Pringsheim even went so far as to compare the verisimilitude between Krenek and Max to other famously autobiographical artist-operas, referring to it as “Krenek’s *Palestrina* or his *Ferner Klang*.”⁹² He noted that Max cares nothing for the material trappings of this world, asking, like Palestrina, “What is fame?”⁹³ Like Schreker’s Fritz, who is obsessed with attaining the distant sound, Max has lost his heart in the distant highlands, in the mountains.⁹⁴

Despite his recognition of *Jonny* as an artist-opera, however, Pringsheim’s review was, on the whole, rather ironic and facetious in tone. Remarking that the glacier spoke to Max in a manner similar to the Erdgeist in Goethe’s *Faust*, Pringsheim humorously

⁹⁰ “Handlung: Ein läppisch=kitschiger Künstlerroman, in idealer Konkurrenz mit einem Schundfilm: Irrfahrten der gestohlenen Geige.” Hans Pringsheim, “‘Jonny spielt auf’: Erstaufführung in der Städtischen Oper,” in *Schönheit und Verfall: Beziehungen Zwischen Thomas Mann und Ernst Krenek (Mehr Als) Ein Tagungsbericht*, ed. Matthias Henke (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015), 295.

⁹¹ “Das nimmt die Hälfte des Abends ein; trotzdem es nur Rahmen ist nur Drumherum; darein gezwängt, eingeklemmt als Hauptaktion: das Künstlerdrama.” Ibid.

⁹² “Krenek’s *Palestrina*; oder sein *Ferner Klang*. Ein Bekenntniswerk (mit Einblicken).” Ibid.

⁹³ “Gerade wie Palestrina: ‘Was ist Ruhm?’” Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

quipped, “Krenek has much sense of style.”⁹⁵ Pringsheim’s description of the final scenes of the opera is dripping with irony:

[The glacier] pushes the “poor son of the Earth,” away from himself, back into this most jazz-corrupted of all worlds, and Max—what else can he do?—springs to Anita in the departing express train that has just run over Daniello’s body—departing where? Heading straight ‘to America’ (by Kellermann’s blessed tunnel, no doubt). America, however, ‘the new world, coming across sea with splendor, conquers old Europe through dance.’ This is the most difficult part, because now the symbolism breaks out.⁹⁶

This final moment of the opera, wrote Pringsheim, when the “jazz bomb bursts and America takes over Europe through dance” was “incredibly beautiful and powerful” as an effect in itself, which Pringsheim believed was the ultimate goal of the work—a series of spectacular effects.⁹⁷ Apart from the visual impact of the opera, however, Pringsheim concluded that Krenek “delivered a product, all in all, of frightening inferiority.”⁹⁸ For Pringsheim, the “inferiority” of *Jonny* as an artistic product was the result of Krenek’s cynicism and opportunism:

He was more honest when he was still an emotionless constructivist. Here, however, the intent ‘to popularize the music’ (Namely: to have a widespread success with music) yielded a kind of music whose inner wretchedness, whose staleness, emptiness, and desolation is indescribable.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ “...der Gletscher persönlich ins Reden, er spricht ungefähr wie der Erdgeist bei Wolfgang von Goethe. (Krenek hat sehr viel Stilgefühl.)” Ibid.

⁹⁶ “Den ‘armen Erdensohn’ stößt er von sich, zurück von neuem in diese jazzverderbteste aller Welten, und Max, was bleibt ihm auch anderes übrig, springt zu Anita in den eben, über Daniellos Leiche hinweg, abfahrenden D=Zug—abfahrend wohin? Geradeswegs ‘nach Amerika’ (durch Kellermanns seligen Tunnel, ohne Zweifel). Amerika jedoch, ‘die neue Welt, kommt übers Meer gefahren mit Glanz und erbt das alte Europa durch den Tanz’. Das ist das Härteste; denn nun bricht das Symbolische aus.” Ibid.

⁹⁷ “...wenn endlich, die Jazzbombe platzt und Amerika durch den Tanz Europa erbt, das ist, ganz im Sinne der Aufgabe, ...nun ja, ‘unglaublich schön und gewaltig’”. Ibid., 296. Ellipsis in original.

⁹⁸ “...diesmal hat er ein Product von, alles in allem, erschreckender Minderwertigkeit geliefert.” Ibid.

⁹⁹ “Er war ehrlicher, als er noch gefühlfeindlicher Konstruktivist war. Hier aber hat der Vorsatz, ‘die Musik zu popularisieren’ (nämlich: mit Musik breiten Erfolg zu haben)

Although the over-the-top visual spectacle, provocative plot, and use of American dance idioms delighted audiences and mostly dismayed critics, these elements ultimately served to obscure the fact that both Krenek and many of his critics viewed the opera as more than a mere farce, which helps to explain the rather strong language of the reviews. Despite the fact that Krenek clearly designed *Jonny* to be a popular success, he also imbued it with his own ambivalence about the role of the artist in contemporary society, as well as his cynicism regarding popular culture. Though most modern writers have focused on the progressive triumph of Jonny and his jazz, Krenek meant for the character of Max and the implications of his artistic undoing at the hands of Jonny to be taken seriously as well.¹⁰⁰ Although *Jonny* looks and sounds very different from *Palestrina* or *Meistersinger* (or *Intermezzo*, for that matter), it is an artist-opera in the same sense as these other, more outwardly profound works.

Jonny as Composer-Opera

When reading Krenek's own writings about *Jonny*, both those dating to the period of the opera's creation and those written later in the composer's life, it becomes clear that Krenek viewed *Jonny* first and foremost as an artist-opera, and that the ideological significance of the work rests more with Max than any other character. Indeed, the character of Max is intensely autobiographical and speaks to the inner turmoil Krenek (and many of his contemporaries) experienced in the 1920s. Additionally, the use of

eine Sorte Musik gezeitigt, deren innere Armseligkeit, deren Abgestandenheit, Leere, Oede unbeschreiblich ist." Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The tendency to treat Max as an absurd character and an object of ridicule was on full display in the first modern production of *Jonny* in 1980. Max was dressed in costumes based on Surrealist paintings, which rendered his complaints and soliloquies on the nature of art comical and ridiculous. Stewart, 89.

popular jazz and dance in *Jonny*, while a savvy business move, did not constitute an unqualified endorsement of the idioms on Krenek's part. In fact, the media sensation caused by his use of jazz caused Krenek a great deal of consternation because it distracted audiences and critics from the very serious issues he was attempting to raise about the place of the composer in a modern, technology driven society.

Already in 1928 and 1929—at the height of the *Jonny* sensation—Krenek attempted to downplay the notion that *Jonny* was primarily a “jazz opera,” insisting that while his use of jazz was a natural consequence of writing an opera set in the present day, its importance to the work was vastly overstated:

When I composed *Jonny* I had to take into consideration the taste of my public. ... In the streets and cafés of Germany the public sing or listen to American “jazz.” ... The public thus dictated my choice: I had to take jazz as my basis and to create from it a new style of music. It is right that any composition should be given life and actuality by means of musical elements which convey something to the audience which it understands. Mozart and Beethoven used popular dances in composition; they utilized the then-fashionable gavotte and minuet. Yet the critics did not call *Don Giovanni* a minuet opera and so dismiss it.¹⁰¹

Krenek chose to incorporate jazz styles as a means of drawing audiences in by communicating with them in an idiom they enjoyed but saw little difference between this practice and the use of other popular dances by earlier composers. Here Krenek's stylistic elitism is on full display: he felt it was his duty to take something popular and banal and elevate it to the status of high art, as Mozart and Beethoven had done with the minuets and gavottes of their era. Earlier in his interview with the *Manchester Guardian*, Krenek suggested that audiences were fundamentally lazy and passive, which explained why they preferred watching football to opera. Seen in this context, jazz serves as the

¹⁰¹ “‘Jonny spielt auf.’ A Talk with Herr Krenek,” *The Manchester Guardian*, February 21, 1929.

hook to engage audiences in a more lofty conversation. In a short 1927 *Vossische Zeitung* article, the author quotes Krenek as explicitly endorsing the use of jazz as a means of audience elevation: “He wants to ‘outwit the public with jazz’ and lead it ‘to higher spheres.’”¹⁰²

Over and over again in writings from this era Krenek comes back to the idea that his use of jazz as a marker of contemporaneity was no different from earlier efforts by other master composers. In a 1928 essay Krenek again invoked *Don Giovanni* and the minuet, while also comparing *Jonny* to a more recent example of an opera that used music redolent of its dramatic place and time: Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*. Krenek wrote: “The jazz elements are thus initially introduced into the work only because of the dramatic requirements of the libretto, just like the waltz elements in *Rosenkavalier*.”¹⁰³ In his interview with the *Vossische Zeitung* Krenek extended the historical precedents for his opera, comparing the car chase and the train scene to Siegfried’s sword forging scene or Kaspar’s bullet casting in *Der Freischütz*.¹⁰⁴ Krenek invoked these canonic examples in order to elevate the discourse surrounding *Jonny*, a discourse that he felt had been hijacked by his controversial use of jazz.

Writing in 1953, Krenek addressed the mixed reception of *Jonny*, observing that there was very little middle ground for critics: he was either “praised as the creator of a new operatic style,” or “condemned as a hard-boiled cynic who wanted to get rich

¹⁰² “Er will das Publikum ‘mit dem Jazz überlisten’ und ‘zu höheren Sphären’ führen.” “Ernst Krenek über seinen ‘Jonny,’” *Vossische Zeitung*, November 2, 1927.

¹⁰³ “Die Jazzelemente sind also zunächst nur auf Grund der dramaturgischen Erfordernisse des Buches in das Werk eingeführt, etwa so wie die Walzerelemente im *Rosenkavalier*.” Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” 29.

¹⁰⁴ “Ernst Krenek über seinen ‘Jonny’.”

through sensation-mongering.”¹⁰⁵ The critical reception cited in the previous section certainly bears out Krenek’s observation. Whether critics enjoyed or hated the opera, however, the consensus, according to Krenek, was that the opera “was a big joke,” and not to be taken seriously for its ideological or dramatic content.¹⁰⁶ Krenek wrote that this critical reaction hurt him considerably, because he believed he had produced a “serious piece of work that deserved to be taken seriously.”¹⁰⁷ Of particular consequence to Krenek was the fate of Max, whom he would later write was a “deeply autobiographical character.”¹⁰⁸ Through Max, Krenek attempted to reconcile his predilection toward ivory-tower aestheticism with his recently acquired belief that art is only truly alive when it is rooted in the soil of the artist’s homeland and is composed with the contemporary audience in mind rather than a gauzy conception of eternity or history.¹⁰⁹ According to Krenek, to create solely for the “papery eternity of libraries” smacked of intellectual hubris, the end result of “pathetic arrogance and vanity.”¹¹⁰ For Krenek, the danger of contemporary art—of succumbing to aesthetic formalism—was “always evident and threatening in the years after the War.”¹¹¹ Krenek imputed Max with these impulses; he was, like Krenek before *Jonny*, “A man who has had outer success... and yet remains

¹⁰⁵ Ernst Krenek, “Self Analysis,” 17.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁹ Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” 18.

¹¹⁰ “...seine Werke für die papierene Ewigkeit von Bibliotheken zu schaffen, wo sie hoffnungslos verdorren. ...Solche gibt es, und ihr Mittel zur Selbsterhaltung, ohne das sie rettungslos eingehen würden, ist ein grenzenloser geistiger Hochmut, eine erbärmliche Arroganz und Eitelkeit...” Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Diese Gefahr der zeitgenössischen Kunst wurde mir persönlich jedenfalls in den Jahren nach dem Krieg immer evidenter und bedrohlicher.” Ibid.

lonesome.”¹¹² Through Max, Krenek attempts to answer the following questions: “What is he [the composer] to do with his many faces? The people of his time listen to his things, but what, ultimately, do they want from him?”¹¹³ In his writings about *Jonny* in the late 1920s, Krenek shows Max to be more central to the ideological message of the opera even than its title character.

Like Max, divided between his love for the glacier and his love of Anita, Krenek saw himself as being caught between two worlds in the 1920s: between a desire to pursue his own artistic goals unfettered from the shackles of quotidian existence and the desire, in no small way motivated by economic considerations, to achieve “practical results” in the everyday world.¹¹⁴ Krenek greatly enjoyed the artistic freedom and isolation afforded him by his life in the mountains of Switzerland. When he was forced for financial reasons to return to Germany and work for Bekker in Kassel, Krenek felt as if he had been “driven out of paradise into a humiliating exile. I had hoped that I could establish myself in the charming ‘outside’ world which had tempted me so strongly, and I dreaded my return to the nebulous and brooding atmosphere of Germany.”¹¹⁵ Krenek found the political and aesthetic pressures of Germany to be stifling, and he disliked the manic pace of Berlin. Seen in this light, the opening lines of *Jonny*—the possible pun on Schoenberg’s name notwithstanding—are most certainly autobiographical:

You beautiful mountain!
You attract me,

¹¹² “Aus diesem Gedanken und Gefühl schuf ich die Figur des Komponisten Max im *Jonny*. Ein Mann, der wohl äußere Erfolge hat, wie wir sie alle mehr oder minder gehabt haben, und doch einsam bleibt.” Ibid., 19.

¹¹³ “Wohin mit der Fülle der Gesichte? Die Menschen seiner Zeit hören sich seine Sachen an, aber was wollen sie schließlich von ihm?” Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Krenek, “Self Analysis,” 17.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

You urge me to go forth
 From my homeland,
 From my work.¹¹⁶

The sight of Max speaking to the glacier as though it might talk back (which it eventually does) would certainly have seemed comic to audiences and critics, especially in light of the contemporary German obsession with outdoor life, particularly mountains. But beneath the comic surface rests Krenek's personal abiding affection for the solitude embodied in the glacier. Later in life he would refer to his two years in Switzerland as "an extremely happy period"; this, despite the fact that his move to Switzerland almost certainly ended his marriage to Alma Mahler almost as soon as it began.¹¹⁷ The glacier in *Jonny* functions not only as biographical reference but also as a symbol of the detached German modernism of which Krenek was so enamored in his early compositions. Even though Krenek wished to put his skills as a composer to "practical use," that is, to compose music that was deliberately comprehensible to its intended audience, Krenek "secretly admire[d] the saint who rises above the challenge and temptations of 'this world.'"¹¹⁸ Similarly, Max wishes to conquer the mountain for its own sake, just as Krenek desired to create for purely aesthetic reasons:

Now to meet you...
 ...after a short rest!
 This very day I'll conquer you,
 You beautiful mountain!¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ "Du schöner Berg! der mich anzieht, der mich antreibt, zu gehn fort von der Heimat, fort von der Arbeit." Ernst Krenek, *Jonny spielt auf*, Leipzig Operchor and Gewandhaus Orchester, Decca B004B41I9I, 1993, libretto in liner notes, 36.

¹¹⁷ Krenek, "Self-Analysis," 14.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁹ "Jetzt dir entgegen...nach kurzer Rast! Noch heut' bezwing' ich dich, du schöner Berg! Krenek, *Jonny spielt auf*, libretto in liner notes, 37.

Indeed, the notion that the mountain glacier represents the art of musical composition in its purest and most abstract form is reinforced when Max, a little while after he meets Anita, attempts to convince her of its charms. He soliloquizes about the glacier, extolling the “life in its rigidity.” The glacier is for Max nothing less than “a symbol of form, of ordered nature, of contained life.”¹²⁰ It is exactly this purity of form and the desire to impose order on musical material that animated Krenek’s early compositions, and even more so his compositions after *Jonny*, the musical language of which was informed largely by twelve-tone technique and Krenek’s developing relationship with Adorno.

Anita, who is lost and finds her way to the glacier by accident, serves as a biographical gloss on the cosmopolitan women in Krenek’s life like Anna Mahler, and also as a representative of modern culture and taste, one that eschewed quiet contemplation in favor of the fast-paced, noisy life of the city. Unlike Max, who delights in the rarefied mountain air, Anita is scared of the glacier; its otherworldly coldness leaves her ill at ease. She asks herself,

Who will lead me back to the people
whom I love,
who will lead me away from the ice
away from the terror of death?¹²¹

Immediately Anita identifies death and dread with Max’s beloved glacier. For Anita, a life of solitude is no life at all. When Max takes notice of her, quickly dismissing her fawning recognition of him as a famous composer, Anita admits that she is scared of the glacier, to which Max replies, “I feel at home here. How can anyone be scared of the glacier?” Anita corrects him; she is not scared of the glacier, rather of the “endless

¹²⁰ “Er ist mir Symbol der Gestalt, der geformten Natur, des gefaßten Lebens.” Ibid., 40.

¹²¹ “Wer führt mich zurück zu den Menschen, die ich liebe, wer führt mich aus dem Eis, aus dem Grausen des Todes?” Ibid., 37.

death” it represents.¹²² Krenek wrote about their opposing natures, “For her the movement of life is elemental; for him it is disquieting chaos. He only feels comfortable in the unchangeable eternity of the high mountains.”¹²³ Convinced by Anita to leave the mountain, Max finds it difficult to adjust to life in the city. Although Anita loves him, his constant moroseness leads her to exclaim: “You take things much too seriously. You are a man of the glacier.”¹²⁴ When she needs to leave to sing in a performance of Max’s new opera, Max creates a scene and begs her not to go. He is jealous that his own creation “robs” him of Anita. Despite her best efforts to calm him, Anita finally can take no more exclaiming,

Oh, I love you so much!
Just don’t be so sad around me,
It presses on my heart,
I am often unable to breathe in the presence of your love!¹²⁵

Max’s seriousness stifles Anita; despite her love for him, he is somehow repellent to her in these moments. Instinctively she knows that the weight pressing on Max will drag on her as well if she remains close to him, thus stifling her own development.¹²⁶ She must flee from him, eventually taking refuge in the arms of Daniello.

Of all the characters in *Jonny*, the character of Daniello is the least understood and most often ignored. In Claire Taylor-Jay’s study of *Jonny* as an artist-opera, she

¹²² “Hier bin ich zu Haus. Wie kann man Angst habe vor dem Gletscher?” Anita: “Vor dem unendlichen Tod!” Ibid., 39.

¹²³ “Für sie ist die Bewegung des Lebens Element, für ihn ist es beunruhigendes Chaos, er fühlt sich nur wohl in der unveränderlichen Ewigkeit des Hochgebirges.” Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” 19.

¹²⁴ “Du nimmst die Dinge viel zu Ernst. Du bist ein Gletschermench.” Krenek, *Jonny spielt auf*, libretto in liner notes, 41.

¹²⁵ “Ach, ich hab’ dich ja so lieb! Nur sei mir nicht immer so traurig, das drückt mein Herz, ich kann oft nicht atmen vor deiner Liebe.” Ibid., 45.

¹²⁶ Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” 19.

marginalized the importance of Daniello on the grounds that, unlike Max or Jonny, he is a “performing musician, rather than a creative one...”¹²⁷ For Taylor-Jay, Daniello has little to do with the underlying ideological argument of the opera; rather, he functions only “as a prop to the main plot.”¹²⁸ Certainly audiences would have seen in him a caricature of the traveling virtuoso, often of Sinti-Romani extraction, that played light classics and dance music throughout Europe. In fact, according to J. Bradford-Robinson, most Weimar-era Germans and Austrians would have more readily associated a character like Daniello with popular and dance music than Jonny.¹²⁹ But Daniello is more than simply a “cheesy, Mediterranean matinee idol,” as he is described in the libretto. According to Krenek, the character of Daniello functions as Max’s opposite in terms of European art music.¹³⁰ Daniello is, in Krenek’s words,

...the vain, empty headed but instinctive performer who proliferates with the precious, but orphaned heritage of our artistic culture—a spiritual imposter—and unworthy of the noble Amati violin with which he manages in an emptied age to deliver up the legacy of a better past.¹³¹

Daniello is a cynical opportunist, both in music and in love, and is a truly immoral character. Rather than seeking to build up or renew the European artistic tradition, he takes what he can from it for his own personal gain. Daniello cheapens and destroys what Max toils in solitude to create. In Krenek’s conception, Daniello and Jonny are

¹²⁷ Taylor-Jay, 91.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ J. Bradford Robinson, “The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany,” *Popular Music* 13/1 (January, 1994): 5.

¹³⁰ Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” 19.

¹³¹ “Dem Komponisten Max habe ich als Vertreter europäischer Kunstgegenwart den Violinvirtuosen Daniello beigestellt, als den entgegengesetzten Typus unserer Zeit: den eitlen, hohlköpfigen, aber instinktsicheren Betriebsmacher, der mit dem kostbaren, aber verwaisten Erbgut unserer künstlerischen Kultur wuchert und—ein geistige Hochstapler—unwürdig der edlen Amatigeige, die er handhabt, einem ausgeleerten Zeitalter das Erbe einer besseren Vergangenheit ausliefert.” Ibid.

similar characters: they both have ravenous sexual appetites, they both live in the moment, and they both act only out of base self-interest. The only difference, according to Krenek, is that Jonny cannot help but act the way he does. He is the embodiment of the “noble savage;” he is an elemental force, at one with Nature.¹³² The instinctiveness and impulsiveness displayed by Jonny is a kind of virtue for Krenek; when Daniello acts in a similar manner, however, it is an act of moral failure. Daniello is nothing more than the “European version of the Negro,” combining Jonny’s “vitality” with an “acceptably manicured exterior for white *Zivilisationsmenschen*.”¹³³ Daniello’s “manicured exterior” comes at a price, however. He is all flash with a complete lack of the “inner worth and substance” that was once the hallmark of the European *Kulturmenschen*.¹³⁴

Daniello’s seduction of Anita—often dismissed by critics as a cynical attempt on Krenek’s part for shock value and sex appeal—serves an important role in Krenek’s ideological vision of the opera.¹³⁵ In his 1928 essay, the composer mused about this moment in the opera rather at length. Remarking that the character of Anita and her actions in the opera had given rise to a good amount of misunderstanding, he dismissed the notion that Anita’s infidelity was a gratuitous appeal to the salacious appetites of his audience: “People want to see in her a reprehensible, slatternly figure conceived ‘so truly

¹³² Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” 20.

¹³³ “Daß sie aber anstatt dessen Daniello als Möglichkeit ihres Lebens empfindet, liegt daran, daß er, in gewissem Sinne die europäische Ausgabe des Negers, die Lebensnähe und Vitalität Jonnys mit einer für den weißen Zivilisationsmenschen annehmbaren gepflegten Außenseite verbindet.” Ibid.

¹³⁴ “Diese Außenseite bezahlt er aber mit dem völligen Mangel an innerem Wert und Gehalt, den das Wesen des europäische Kulturmenschen einmal braucht.” Ibid.

¹³⁵ Pringsheim, for instance, lightly dismisses the scene and ironically remarks that the less than virtuous morals displayed by Anita (and Yvonne, who is upset that she couldn’t have Daniello for herself) are “pretty Parisian.”

of our time.’ Nothing is sadder and more foolish.”¹³⁶ Anita’s love for Max is genuine, but, asks Krenek, how long can she be expected to live with an artist who cannot love her fully back, whose heart ultimately belongs to the glacier?¹³⁷ Anita is attracted to life and vitality (symbolized by references to “hot” and “cold” blood); when she meets Jonny, though she is repulsed by his brutal manner and crude come-ons, she is inexplicably drawn to the force of his nature. Even as she cries for him to leave her alone, she finds herself saying, “There it is again, the blood against which I cannot [resist]!”¹³⁸ When Jonny presses her, bragging of his sexual prowess, she finds herself revolted by him, yet unable to resist his advances. Daniello’s entrance and forcible removal of Jonny is ostensibly the only thing that keeps Jonny from having his way with her. Daniello is no saint: he dispatches Jonny only so that he can seduce Anita. Although Daniello dresses up his seduction with the trappings of chivalry and high society, taking Anita to dinner and engaging her in personal conversation, it is, in the end, the “hot blood” that flows between the two of them that seals the deal.¹³⁹

Krenek lays the blame for Anita’s infidelity not at her feet, and not even at Daniello’s, but at Max’s. Ultimately, Max’s detachment drove Anita into Daniello’s arms. Krenek insisted that this scene was no “frivolity,” nor were Anita’s actions the result of her leaving her senses temporarily. Rather, it was the “natural consequence of

¹³⁶ “Man will in ihr einen verwerflichen, dirnenhaften Typus sehen, ‘so recht aus unserer Zeit heraus’ konzipiert. Nichts ist trauriger und törichter.” Krenek, “Jonny spielt auf,” 19.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ “Da ist es wieder, das Blut, gegen das ich nicht kann!” Krenek, *Jonny spielt auf*, libretto in liner notes, 54.

¹³⁹ Daniello: “Komm, fühl die Wärme des Blutes, das in mir wie in dir kreist!” Ibid., 60.

Max's inability to hold on to Anita."¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Anita's infidelity is symbolic of the consequences of aesthetic detachment on the part of composers in a general sense. If one thinks about this scene in "purely artistic terms," wrote Krenek, "Shall we complain about it and pillory people accused of spinelessness and inferiority because they indulge in lesser pleasures if we are unable to give them something better?"¹⁴¹ In other words, Krenek asks rhetorically, how can we blame audiences for indulging in the "lesser pleasures" of dance and jazz music provided by people like Jonny and Daniello if German art composers and *Kulturmenschen* do not offer a better alternative? "Certainly we see a weakness of character, his worthlessness, his wretched figure," wrote Krenek, but Anita—as symbolic of the general public—cannot be blamed for temporarily falling victims to the charms of a man (or music) so full of life.¹⁴²

The musical, cultural, and aesthetic worldview represented by Jonny and Daniello in *Jonny spielt auf* is not, as Taylor-Jay has written, representative of Krenek's personal aesthetic, nor is Jonny's eventual triumph symbolic of a "new, progressive identity for the Weimar Republic."¹⁴³ In Krenek's conception, the music and the lifestyle embodied

¹⁴⁰ "Das ist kein Leichtsinne und kein absurder Ausbruch einer übernormalen Sinnlichkeit, wie es darzustellen beliebt wird. Es ist die natürliche Konsequenz aus der Unfähigkeit von Max, Anita festzuhalten." Krenek, "Jonny spielt auf," 20.

¹⁴¹ "Wenden wir die Situation auf das rein Künstlerische an: Sollen wir uns darüber beklagen und den Menschen den Vorwurf der Charakterlosigkeit und Inferiorität machen, daß sie sich minderen Genüssen hingeben, wenn wir nicht imstande sind, ihnen Besseres zu geben?" Ibid.

¹⁴² "Gewiß, *wir* sehen seine Charakterschwäche, seinen Unwert, seine Jammerfigur, aber wir sollen Anita keinen Vorwurf machen, daß sie diesem Mann, der so bestechend im Leben steht, in das ihr Max nie wird folgen können, diesem so sicher über alles Schwierige elegant Hinübertanzenden vorübergehend zum Opfer fällt." Ibid., 19-20. Italics in original.

¹⁴³ Taylor-Jay, 191.

by Jonny and Daniello in the opera are the (negative) results of Max's abdication of his moral and artistic responsibilities to the public. Krenek stated as much in 1928, writing,

Whoever has followed me thus far [through his analogy of Anita's infidelity] will understand what I am saying when I call on the valuable, but weak and fearful people of Max's ilk not to withdraw themselves and despair about the world in comfortable resignation, but in sorrow and pain to forge a connection with the world, lest it go irretrievably to the dogs because the best ones let it down.¹⁴⁴

Max chooses to "return to life" not because he desires the lifestyle of Anita or the music of Jonny, but out of a moral obligation to *Kultur* and to his vocation as an artist. For Krenek, the stakes could not have been higher. Once those of the intellectual class realized that a retreat into abstraction and an abandonment of the cultural high ground to the Daniellos and Jonnys of the world results in a foreign jazz musician fiddling on top of a conquered Europe, wrote Krenek, they would "like Max, strive with every fiber 'to reach the train, which leads to life.'"¹⁴⁵ Seen in this light, *Jonny spielt auf* is not a celebration of jazz or popular culture; rather, it is a cautionary tale. Jonny's triumphant fiddling on top of the world is ironic—his victory signals the downfall of the German artistic tradition, a tradition that Krenek loved and saw as his legacy.¹⁴⁶

Despite its modern trappings and spectacular production, *Jonny spielt auf* is concerned with precisely the same underlying questions that motivated Pfitzner's

¹⁴⁴ "Wer mir bis hierher gefolgt ist, wird verstehen, wenn ich sage, daß ich die wertvollen, aber schwachen und ängstlichen Menschen vom Schlage Maxens aufrufe, sich nicht zurückziehen und in bequemer Resignation an der Welt zu verzweifeln, sondern in Leid und Schmerzen sich den Anschluß an eine Welt zu erringen, die sonst rettungslos vor die Hunde geht, weil sie von ihren Besten im Stich gelassen wird." Krenek, "Jonny spielt auf," 21.

¹⁴⁵ "Aber wenn wir daran denken werden, daß uns dann die Daniellos die Frauen und die Jonnys die Kunst stehlen werden, dann wird unsere feige Matigkeit weichen, und wir werden wie Max mit allen Fasern danach streben, den 'Zug zu erreichen, der ins Leben führt.'" Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Rogge, 66.

Palestrina. Both works reflect fears about the future of German art and a deep ambivalence for the future; furthermore, both works seek to examine the composer's responsibility to society in the face of massive cultural and artistic shifts, though Krenek and Pfitzner differ in their answers to these questions. At the end of *Palestrina*, Pfitzner's composer remains "on the glacier," so to speak: he answers only to the eternal dictates of art without regard for the society that surrounds him. Krenek reflects this impulse throughout the opera, perhaps most poignantly during Max's conversation with the glacier. Krenek himself was sympathetic to the glacier's charms, writing: "We all know moments of tiredness and relaxation where we long for the nirvana of any unchanging glacier, undisturbed by hectic chaos, where no continuous agitation from minute to minute will impose new responsibility."¹⁴⁷ Despite this affinity for the autonomy of the artist Krenek also believed, like Bekker, that the composer has a duty toward the public—not simply to entertain them, but to elevate entertainment to edification, hence Max's renunciation (albeit painful) of the glacier. Audience tastes mattered for Krenek to the extent that if they were ignored completely, his works would have a difficult time getting a hearing in the continuously shifting economic landscape of the Weimar Republic. "What is a theater without an audience?" asked Krenek rhetorically.¹⁴⁸ In the end, however, it was still the responsibility of the composer to take those modish elements like jazz and dance music and refine them, absorbing the disparate

¹⁴⁷ "Wir alle kennen die Augenblicke der Ermüdung und Entspannung, wo wir uns in das Nirwana irgendeines unwandelbaren Gletschers sehnen, wo uns kein bewegtes Chaos beunruhigen, keine fließende Bewegtheit von Minute zu Minute neue Verantwortung auferlegen wird." Krenek, "Jonny spielt auf," 21.

¹⁴⁸ "Was ist den ein Theater ohne Publikum?" Ibid., 23.

influences of other cultures and fashioning from them something fit for the keepers of *Kultur*.¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

Jonny spielt auf proved to be an operatic and cultural juggernaut in the last years of the 1920s, and Krenek rocketed to international fame almost overnight. In addition to the unprecedented number of performances the opera achieved, the sheer amount of contemporary reception—both positive and negative—generated by the opera speaks to the cultural impact of the work. This reception, which often alternated between fawning praise and outright condemnation created a certain amount of confusion and misunderstanding concerning the underlying meaning of the work. This confusion over the symbolic or ideological meaning of *Jonny* forced Krenek to reveal his intentions in a public and extensive way that exposes among other things the ongoing artistic and political antagonisms between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, as his 1928 essay and other writings from the period testify. By identifying himself publicly with Max, Krenek, like Strauss in *Intermezzo* or Schreker in *Der ferne Klang* and *Christophorus*, attempted to provide audiences with a rare insight into the inner concerns of the composer, both aesthetic and economic. *Jonny spielt auf* is not farce, though it often uses that mode of humor to connect with audiences. Rather, it is Krenek's attempt to problematize the diminishing role of German artists in German society due to their increasing (often

¹⁴⁹ This attitude is displayed in Marschalk's review of *Jonny*: "Some say that the opera...strikes a blow for the future, that jazz, that voracious music, will grow and devour everything...I think that the old world will be far from being devoured from the new world. On the contrary, [the old world] will swallow and process jazz, the American import, so that real art, what has always counted as true art, will not be damaged." Marschalk, "Jonny spielt auf."

intentional) alienation from audiences, a situation that Krenek clearly thought produced a negative outcome for German society. By expounding on the ironic nature of *Jonny* in print and in speeches urging intellectuals to reengage with society rather than retreat from it, Krenek implicitly engages with—and rejects—the aesthetic fatalism of *Palestrina*, arguing instead that composers needed to embrace “life” and their audiences in order to remain relevant in modern society.

Conclusion

One of the central purposes of this dissertation has been to account for the relative groundswell in the production of baldly ideological and autobiographical artist-operas during the Weimar Republic. A close examination of the operas and their context presented in the preceding pages has revealed that composers like Strauss, Krenek, and Schreker used the vehicle of the artist-opera to express personal and professional anxieties wrought by the artistic and economic instability of the period. Despite the differences between these composers in terms of musical style, aesthetic outlook, and economic position, all of them struggled with similar questions and concerns in their artist-operas, especially those surrounding the ambiguous professional position of the German composer in society. Each opera in its own way reflects the fundamental disconnect between the exalted position of composers in the German cultural imagination and their often marginalized status in real life: Robert Storch, the world-famous composer, is hen-pecked by his wife and gets very little respect at home; Max is portrayed as a neurotic intellectual hopelessly out of step with modern urban culture; and Meister Johann is an educator and composer worn down and exhausted by the demands of his students and his profession. It was precisely this cognitive dissonance between the imagined nobility of the composer as cultural icon and the harsh realities of gaining a footing in contemporary German society that prompted composers to exploit the artist-opera as a vehicle for presenting their predicament to audiences, critics, and policy-makers. Eschewing the historical distance used by Wagner and Pfitzner in favor of up-to-the-minute contemporaneity, these operas served in part to humanize their composers, demonstrating that they saw themselves not as isolated geniuses but as members of the

larger community, professionals who deserved the same representation and protection afforded to those in other walks of life.

The genre of the self-consciously topical or biographical artist-opera that thrived in the chaotic cultural, artistic, and economic atmosphere of the Weimar Republic almost ceased to exist after 1933, and it is my contention that this cessation may have been due in part to the fact that the founding of the Reich Culture Chamber (Reichskulturkammer) and its musical sub-unit, the Reich Music Chamber (Reichsmusikkammer), in 1933 promised to alleviate many of the economic and artistic concerns of German composers and other artists, thus rendering the composition of artist-operas unnecessary. Furthermore, evidence suggests that many artists welcomed this manifestation of *Gleichschaltung*, or coordination and centralization, believing the creation of these centralized agencies to be a necessary step toward the creation of professional standards that were both uniform and enforceable, something that mostly eluded artists during the Republic.¹

One of the initial priorities of the Nazi government was to find ways to regulate musical and artistic life better than their Weimar predecessors had done. To that end, Joseph Goebbels lobbied for the creation of a central agency, eventually known as the Reich Culture Chamber, to administer all aspects of artistic life in Germany through its seven subchambers for music, theater, visual arts, literature, film, radio, and the press.² According to the First Degree for the Implementation of the Reich Chamber of Culture

¹ Pamela Potter, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 14-15.

² Steinweis, 44. Steinweis's work thoroughly investigates all aspects of the Reich Culture Chamber and its activities throughout the Third Reich.

Law of November 1, 1933, the basic purpose of the Chamber was to “promote German culture on behalf of the German *Volk* and Reich, to regulate the economic and social affairs of the cultural professions, and to bring about a compromise between [the groups] belonging to it.”³ The Weimar system of professional representation was haphazard and decentralized. By and large, the administration of cultural affairs was left to local municipalities, resulting in an almost immediate loss of economic security for many musicians because of strained budgets. Local practices also varied greatly from place to place, creating confusion and uncertainty.⁴ During the Republic there existed many hundreds of interest groups representing all aspects of musical and artistic life, with memberships ranging from a few dozen to tens of thousands. Many of these organizations were either redundant or in constant competition with the many other interest groups in seeking redress for their pet concerns.⁵ Under the Chamber system, all of these competing groups would be brought under the same umbrella, and the divisive competition of the Weimar era would end for good. Additionally, the Chamber would set national standards for the administration of the arts and provide funding in a rational, uniform manner. Many artists greeted this move toward centralized control with optimism; it represented long sought after order and stability in the professional arena and paved the way for comprehensive reform.

Goebbels displayed a good deal of savvy in selling the Chamber system to musicians by agreeing to help solve some of their most pressing needs in exchange for their support. Many influential composers—most notably Richard Strauss—believed

³ Quoted in Steinweis, 44.

⁴ Potter, *Art of Suppression*, 10.

⁵ Potter, *Most German of the Arts*, 10.

that, as Alan Steinweis observed, “a declaration of loyalty to the new regime might salvage autonomy and yield material benefits.”⁶ The issue of copyright reform clearly illustrates this impulse toward *quid pro quo*. Composers like Strauss saw an opportunity with the creation of the Chamber to reform copyright and royalty laws to benefit him and other “serious” composers. For his part, Goebbels saw an opportunity to patronize a high profile and influential segment of cultural life (a move that provided legitimacy to the nascent regime) and bring the administration of copyright and royalty payment under state control at the same time. The end result was the formation of the cumbersomely named Staatlich genehmigte Gesellschaft zur Verwertung musikalischer Urheberrechte or STAGMA, the first German organization that enforced royalty payments for musicians. Unsurprisingly given Strauss’s involvement in the process, STAGMA paid an especially high rate for art music composers.⁷

Goebbels also appealed to musicians by reassuring them of his respect for their talent and for all genuine art, as well as his disdain for popular music and kitsch. Although the Chamber would serve as an umbrella group for arts activity, Goebbels allowed for the various interest groups to maintain a certain amount of autonomy, using the principle of “self administration under state supervision.”⁸ In attempting to convince the various musicians unions and interest groups to join the chamber rather than the German Labor Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, or DAF), a group that challenged Goebbel’s growing authority in the arts arena, Goebbels’s appealed to the higher calling of German artists. He claimed that artists would be just one of many voices in the DAF and that

⁶ Steinweis, 35.

⁷ Ibid, 36. STAGMA was the forerunner of Germany’s current copyright collection agency, known as GEMA.

⁸ Ibid., 41.

their concerns would not be a priority, remarking that “artists are not merely employees,” but rather were “bearers of a special professional duty and profound responsibility.”⁹ This appeal to the unique importance of the arts within German society resonated with artists eager to see their lot in life improved.

Richard Strauss lent immense credibility to the new regime both within Germany and internationally when he agreed to become the head of the Reich Music Chamber in 1933. Although Strauss later fabricated the idea that he was forced into the position, archival research by Gerhard Splitt revealed that he was asked to assume the position and accepted.¹⁰ Strauss was not a National Socialist; rather, he was among those who saw an unprecedented opportunity in the formation of the Reich Music Chamber to reform key aspects of German musical life, specifically copyright. In a speech given in February 1934 Strauss said that he believed the creation of the chamber would “make possible a new vigor in our musical life.” He also stated that, in contrast to the Weimar Republic, “the new Germany is unwilling to let artistic matters slide.”¹¹ Strauss was instrumental in the creation of STAGMA and also in convincing Goebbels to support the extension of the copyright from thirty to fifty years in December 1934, something Strauss had lobbied for since the 1890s with no success. Strauss’s success as president of the Reich Music Chamber would be short-lived, however. He refused to implement explicitly anti-Semitic policies in the chamber and roused the ire of Goebbels. When Strauss refused to stop his collaboration with Stefan Zweig—who was Jewish—on his opera *Die schweigsame Frau*, he caused a controversy that culminated in the Gestapo intercepting a letter to

⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰ Pamela Potter, “Strauss and the National Socialists: The Debate and its Relevance,” in Gilliam, *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, 105.

¹¹ Quoted in Steinweis, 47.

Zweig in which he was critical of the regime, which in turn resulted in Strauss's forced resignation in mid-1935.¹² Strauss's leadership of the Reich Music Chamber is indicative of the initial promise seen by many artists in the early days of the new regime, but also demonstrates the fickle nature of Nazi cultural politics. In following Strauss's lead, Goebbels was demonstrating a flexibility and pragmatism that usually has not been conveyed with accounts of Nazi cultural policy. Most of his decisions were at least partly improvised and were designed to ingratiate the new regime with as many artists as possible.

Another reform that the chamber instituted and for which musicians had lobbied during the Weimar Republic was compulsory testing and licensing for professional musicians and music teachers. For decades German professional musicians faced rampant underemployment due to competition from amateur and dilettante musicians who were willing to undercut their professional counterparts. In order to protect the professional class of musicians, the chamber greatly curtailed the amount and types of performance opportunities available to amateur musicians and ensembles. In order to determine who was competent enough to be called a "professional," the chamber instituted comprehensive exams aimed at weeding out dilettantes. As Steinweis documents, the results of these exams demonstrated that many of the musicians calling themselves professionals were in fact totally incompetent, much to the chagrin of the examiners.¹³ Fearing that these exams would result in a number of older musicians losing their livelihood, Goebbels decreed that a certain leniency should be showed to the older generation in order to avoid social unrest. The younger musicians, however, were drilled

¹² Potter, "Strauss and the National Socialists," 96.

¹³ Steinweis, 85-86.

in music theory, history, and performance.¹⁴ Though many musicians applauded these measures, they ultimately were short-lived because of the impossibility of effectively enforcing them. Goebbels unilaterally ended the practice of entrance exams in November 1935, feeling that they were too restrictive for amateurs and promoted bureaucracy at the expense of artistic creation.¹⁵ The implementation of wage and price controls for musicians—affecting things like hiring practices, breaks, sick leave, standard pay, and other working conditions—proved much more successful in controlling competitive amateurs or unscrupulous club owners who wished to undercut the wages of professional musicians.

Arts criticism, especially in music, was widespread and often problematic for composers in the Weimar period. All of the composers discussed in the preceding chapters detailed their disdain for critics in one form or another, most obviously in the character of Starkmann in Schreker's *Christophorus*, who himself is reminiscent of Wagner's Beckmesser (believed to be inspired by Eduard Hanslick, Wagner's most vocal critic). Composers believed that critics—whom they regarded as unqualified to pass judgment on their works to begin with—held too much power over the success or failure of their work. In the cutthroat world of the daily newspapers, critics often competed with each other for the most extreme or incendiary language, creating an atmosphere in which a critic could refer to *Jonny spielt auf* as “jazz ruttings” or to Schreker's librettos as “puberty drama.” Moreover, influential critics had the power to make or break a career. Here again Schreker's experience is relevant: the constant positive promotion he received from Paul Bekker played a key role in establishing him as the “Messiah of

¹⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹⁵ Ibid., 89.

German Opera” in the late teens and early 1920s. Once Schreker’s fortunes waned and Bekker and the writers of *Anbruch* stopped promoting his work, there was little to counterbalance the visceral, often hyperbolic attacks of critics like Adolf Weissmann, thus hastening the composer’s artistic demise. For Krenek, the intense critical scrutiny surrounding *Jonny*—both positive and negative—may have influenced his decision to step back from writing music incorporating popular or sensationalist elements and to retreat to the ivory tower of twelve-tone composition.¹⁶ Taking his cue in part from disgruntled composers, Goebbels enacted a ban on arts criticism (*Kritikverbot*) in 1936. As Pamela Potter has noted, the exact motives and effects of the ban remain unclear, but evidence suggests that these measures were received positively by many who believed the ban would protect their interests, at least initially.¹⁷

Goebbels argued that a ban on criticism (all arts commentary in daily papers was relegated to straight reportage) was necessary to protect creative German artists from their uncreative—and implicitly Jewish—critics. In a 1936 speech honoring the composer Anton Bruckner, Goebbels observed that a “hostile, journalistic branch of criticism, with its incessant torments, embittered [Bruckner] to his rich life of work.” He went on to charge that Eduard Hanslick went so far as to tell Bruckner “I destroy whoever I wish to destroy!”¹⁸ Goebbels referred to critics as “intellectual carpetbaggers” who “used their esteemed stations as judges to set down sentences...about [Bruckner’s] music, whose form-creative innovation they simply could not understand.”¹⁹ Spinning his

¹⁶ Stewart, 184.

¹⁷ Potter, *Art of Suppression*, 18-19.

¹⁸ John Michael Cooper, trans. “Appendix: Joseph Goebbels’s Bruckner Address in Regensburg (6 June 1937),” *The Musical Quarterly* 78/3 (Autumn, 1994): 606.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 607.

argument forward to the present, Goebbels concluded, “If the public practice of art commentary has been restricted by law in the *new* Germany, then we believe we have also resolved a debt of gratitude to the master who struggled in solitude, tortured up to the moment of his death by his tormentors.”²⁰ Though a ban on criticism seems draconian in the present day, it was enacted in the spirit of protecting composers and other artists, to allow them to create and perform their works for audiences without constant mediation from critics.

In practice the ban was almost completely unenforceable, relying mostly on self-censorship and voluntary cooperation from newspapers and journals. The sheer number of German periodicals ensured that Goebbels’s measures could never be enforced with any consistency. Many publications balked at the decree and defied it from the outset, while publications with Nazi sympathies who self-censored were unable to counterattack.²¹ The real-life consequences of the ban have likely been overstated since 1945, but the symbolism of Goebbels’s decree—that in the “new Germany” the protection of the integrity of artists was paramount—resonated powerfully in its day.

Despite several high profile advances for securing musicians’ well-being, including extension of the copyright, the restructuring of royalty payments, the enactment of licensing exams and wage scales, and the ban on criticism, the lives of German composers and musicians improved only marginally during the 1930s. Steinweis reports that the number of unemployed musicians fell from 24,000 to about 14,500 from 1933 to 1936, but that the vast majority of professional musicians still barely made any money

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Potter, *Art of Suppression*, 19.

from their musical activities.²² Conditions did improve more dramatically for a small number of musicians in the top five percent of German musical life, in part because of the priority given to serious composers and performers over entertainment musicians in the chamber's reforms. For what Steinweis terms the "musical proletariat," conditions remained about the same as they were in the Weimar Republic because the government failed to enforce restrictions on amateur and semiprofessional musicians.²³

Despite the fact that the Music Chamber failed to provide sweeping change in the long term, the prospects for material improvements for composers seemed very good from the vantage point of 1933. The new regime promised to restore the honor and dignity to German composers, who often had difficulty securing performances in the unstable economic environment of the previous decade and who were hounded by a hostile critical class when performances were mounted. In addition to the promise to restore composers to their rightful place in the cultural hierarchy, the chamber also promised professional protections that would bring the musical professions into line with other non-artistic vocations, thus providing composers with an economic standing befitting their cultural prestige. In short, the new regime promised to provide all of the material and aesthetic improvements that composers of Weimar era artist-operas lobbied for onstage. Once these challenges were alleviated (at least in the abstract), it is conceivable that composers no longer felt the need to write such intensely autobiographical and ideological operas.

This investigation of the Weimar-era *Künstleroper* has shown that several prominent composers of the time chose active engagement with their audiences over

²² Steinweis, 96.

²³ *Ibid.*, 97.

ivory tower alienation, often working out their professional concerns (both material and aesthetic) on the operatic stage. This study also opens up questions about the very nature of musical modernism on the one hand, and modern society in Weimar Germany, on the other. It contributes to the ongoing reappraisal of musical modernism in the early twentieth century, moving beyond the notion that tonality (or a lack thereof) is a defining marker of modernity. Even though they are tonal, all of the operas in this dissertation address issues of modernity and the challenges of modern life in frank and innovative ways. Although it is not discussed here, Alban Berg's *Lulu* also participates in the same discourse mapped out by Strauss, Schreker, and Krenek, albeit with a different dramatic and musical syntax. Despite the use of twelve-tone technique in *Lulu*, Berg's opera uses all of the scenic and instrumental trappings of the *Zeitoper*—including modern urban settings like cabarets and stock markets, as well as extensive use of the saxophone and vibraphone to signify jazz and popular dance music. The composer in *Lulu* (Alwa) is an extension of both Max (and to a lesser extent, Anselm): he is weak and controlled by Lulu, whose every impulse is destructive. In the character of Lulu we see Anita run amok. Continuously failed by the weak men in her life, she moves from one to the next, leaving a trail of despair and murder in her wake. As a canonic example of “high-modernism” *Lulu*'s resonances with operas like *Christophorus* and *Jonny spielt auf* demonstrate the porous and shifting aesthetic boundaries of the early twentieth century. As scholars like Richard Taruskin and Walter Frisch have argued, modernism is a worldview, a self-conscious and often ironic way of looking at modernity and the human condition, and is not reducible to a particular musical or artistic style. In this way, works like *Intermezzo*, *Jonny spielt auf*, and *Christophorus* are more than just notes on a page;

they are valuable for their ability to provide insight into the complexities of Weimar culture.

Future investigations of these artist-operas might also address ways in which race, class, and gender operate in these works, deciphering how they communicate with the rapidly changing makeup of the audience for opera in Weimar Germany, ideas of the “New Woman,” and evolving notions of masculinity within the Republic. In terms of audience, the older, cultured middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*) that patronized opera houses for generations was almost completely obliterated by the hyperinflation. Composers found themselves having to compete for the entertainment dollars of young men and (increasingly) women enamored with the fast pace of film and carefree attitude of cabaret. All of the operas in this dissertation reflect the influence of these emerging popular entertainments on opera: *Intermezzo* was designed to move at the rapid pace of film, *Christophorus* and *Jonny* both use jazz music and modern cabaret settings, and *Jonny* actually featured a film projection as part of its set. This experimentation on the part of these composers (all of whom were personally skeptical of new media) illustrates their need to reach new audiences and maintain social relevancy in order to survive professionally.

In contrast to the conclusions put forth in prior scholarship, the German artist-opera of the early twentieth century was not a retrograde phenomenon yearning for the past; rather, it was a thoroughly modern affair that provides a fascinating glimpse into the economic, social, and aesthetic challenges faced by composers before 1933. As a form of *Zeitoper*, it was more than a celebration of modernity; it also problematized the role of the composer within a rapidly changing society. Strauss, Krenek, Schreker, and—

arguably—Berg, manifested their concerns in a direct and unallegorical way through their use of the popular and up-to-the-minute trappings of the *Zeitoper* for their 1920s artist-operas, a fact that can aid in a more nuanced understanding of that short-lived but important and fascinating genre.

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