

“They Called Me An Alien”:

Hanns Eisler’s American Years, 1935–1948

by

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ABSTRACT

In the 1930s, with the rise of Nazism, many artists in Europe had to flee their homelands and sought refuge in the United States. Austrian composer Hanns Eisler who had risen to prominence as a significant composer during the Weimar era was among them. A Jew, an ardent Marxist and composer devoted to musical modernism, he had established himself as a writer of film music and *Kampflieder*, fighting songs, for the European workers' movement. After two visits of the United States in the mid-1930s, Eisler settled in America where he spent a decade (1938–1948), composed a considerable number of musical works, including important film scores, instrumental music and songs, and, in collaboration with Theodor W. Adorno, penned the influential treatise *Composing for the Films*. Yet despite his substantial contributions to American culture American scholarship on Eisler has remained sparse, perhaps due to his reputation as the “Karl Marx in Music.”

In this study I examine Eisler's American exile and argue that Eisler, through his roles as a musician and a teacher, actively sought to enrich American culture. I will present background for his exile years, a detailed overview of his American career as well as analyses and close readings of several of his American works, including three of his American film scores, *Pete Roleum and His Cousins* (1939), *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), and *None But the Lonely Heart* (1944), and the String Quartet (1940), Third Piano Sonata (1943), *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* (1941), and *Hollywood Songbook* (1942–7).

This thesis builds upon unpublished correspondence and documents available only in special collections at the University of Southern California (USC), as well as film scores in archives at USC and the University of California, Los Angeles. It also draws on Eisler studies by such European scholars as Albrecht Betz, Jürgen Schebera, and Horst Weber, as well as on research of film music scholars Sally Bick and Claudia Gorbman. As there is little written on the particulars of Eisler's American years, this thesis presents new facts and new perspectives and aims at a better understanding of the artistic achievements of this composer.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Granny Kay. Thank you for everything you have done for me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During a time of great social change and upheaval, Austrian composer Hanns Eisler rose to prominence as a significant progressive composer both in Europe and in the United States. His teacher Arnold Schoenberg, although irked by Eisler's political fervor, considered him one of his finest students.¹ His revolutionary songs were passionately sung by large crowds of young politically engaged people and disgruntled workers in many countries. Like Schoenberg and countless other individuals who had to flee Nazi-terrorized Europe, Eisler settled in the United States. Here he spent almost a decade (1938–1948) and composed a considerable number of musical works. He set dozens of Bertolt Brecht's texts to music and also wrote several important film scores, two of which were nominated for an Academy Award. In addition to these musical endeavors, he co-authored with Theodor W. Adorno an influential treatise on film music with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. He also lectured at the New School for Social Research in New York and taught composition and counterpoint at the University of Southern California.

Considering his substantial contributions to American culture and the import of these achievements, it is baffling that American scholarship on Eisler is so sparse in comparison to European, and especially German, scholarship. This is certainly due, at least in part, to his unique European career as an influential leftist composer of popular

¹ Arnold Schoenberg to Fräulein Goldbecker, 31 August 1922, in *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein (London: Faber, 1964), 75.

revolutionary songs and his lingering reputation as the “Karl Marx in music.”² Sixty years removed from the unfortunate chapter of American history known as the Second Red Scare, Eisler is still remembered as one of the first artists in Hollywood to be blacklisted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations and driven out of the United States. Enough time, however, has passed that scholars can now look back with an unprejudiced eye and analyze Eisler’s exile in America from a fresh perspective.

The purpose of this thesis is to reconsider selected examples from Eisler’s American oeuvre in order to counter past misconceptions about this period in his career. Existing Eisler studies, especially those concerning his American sojourn, expose a variety of shortcomings. First, such American works as the *Woodbury-Liederbüchlein*, the Third Piano Sonata, and many of his film scores have been largely ignored and never

² The actual statement by Representative Robert Stripling was: “My purpose is to show that Eisler is the Karl Marx in the Communist field of music.” Quoted in “Mrs. Roosevelt Aided Eisler in Visa Case, Welles Testifies,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 September 1947.” Numerous music history textbooks printed in America do not mention him at all or overemphasize his Communist beliefs. K. Marie Stolba, *The Development of Western Music: A History* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1990); Glenn Watkins, *Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1995); Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: Norton, 2001); Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003); and J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 8th edition (New York: Norton, 2010) do not mention him. Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007, p. 295) refers to Eisler as “the man in charge of coordinating international Communist activity in the musical area.” Don Michael Randel, *Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999, p. 206–207) supplies a short entry explaining that he joined the Communist Party in 1926 and that “subsequent works reflect his leftist political stance.” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001) contains a lengthy article on Eisler, but concerning his American compositions, only his Brecht collaborations are mentioned.

received close readings. Second, many European studies do not mention Eisler's influence on American music, particularly his interactions with the so-called ultramodernist composers. Third, little attention has been paid to Eisler's acculturation to American culture while in this country. Eisler, in fact, was very involved with the artistic community, participated in many American leftist social and artistic events, and even influenced some members of the early American folk movement, jazz artists and experimental composers after World War II.

I. Literature Review

Some scholars have already begun to suggest new perspectives on Eisler and other exiled artists in America, and their advances have been a valuable resource for the present study. Joy Calico's analyses of the work of German émigrés in America (2008), particularly Brecht, have helped me evaluate the playwright's relationship with Eisler while in America.³ She also wrote a couple of important articles on Eisler in America.⁴ Sabine Feisst's work on Schoenberg in America (2011) and Brigid Cohen's research on Stefan Wolpe and other exiled composers (2012) have strengthened my understanding of

³ Joy Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴ Joy Calico, "The Karl Marx of Music: Hanns Eisler Reception in the United States after 1947," *Hanns Eisler: 's müßt dem Himmel Höllenangst werden*, ed. Maren Köster, *Archive zur Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. 3 (Hofheim: Wolke, 1998): 120–136; and "Hanns Eisler: Marxist Polyglot," *Audiophile Audition*, last accessed 23 March 2013, <http://www.audaud.com/audaud/NOV02/eisler.html>.

exiled Jewish artists in America and provided a model for my own research.⁵ Composer Ernst Krenek also wrote from a personal perspective on the subject.⁶

In addition to these studies, general works on exiled artists have been examined, including those by Anthony Heilbut (1983) and Martin Jay (1985).⁷ *Driven Into Paradise* (1999), edited by Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff (1999), is an excellent source concerning this topic even though Eisler's American years are not covered in this volume.⁸ *Amerika, Amerikanismus, Weill* (2003), edited by Hermann Danuser and Hermann Gottschewski, and *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and His Contemporaries, 1915–1933* (1990) by Beeke Sell Tower have provided extensive information on the German view of America between the world wars.⁹

⁵ Sabine Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World: The American Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Brigid Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁶ Ernst Krenek, "America's Influence on Its Émigré Composers," *Perspectives of New Music* 8 (Spring-Summer 1970): 112–117.

⁷ Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America, from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: Viking Press, 1983); and Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁸ Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff, eds., *Driven Into Paradise: The Musical Migration from Nazi Germany to the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁹ Hermann Danuser and Hermann Gottschewski, eds., *Amerikanismus, Americanism, Weill: Die Suche nach kultureller Identität in der Moderne* (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2003); and Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and his Contemporaries, 1915–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, 1990).

In her dissertation on Eisler and Copland, Sally Bick investigated the film music of these two composers and provides a lengthy discussion on Eisler and Adorno's book *Composing for the Films* and Eisler's film score for *Hangmen Also Die* (1942).¹⁰ Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook* is discussed in the dissertations by David Steinau (2003), Nancy Krajewski (2009), and Stanley E. Workman, Jr. (2009), as well as in an article by Philip Bohlman (2007).¹¹ For a more acute understanding of Jewish history and identity I have gathered information from publications by Hannah Arendt (1978), Steven Beller (1989), and Philip Bohlman (1998 and 2008).¹²

Major primary sources for this thesis have been the several editions of Eisler's collected works, letters, speeches, and lectures, especially the *Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe*, a continuing project from the International Hanns Eisler Society. Many

¹⁰ Sally Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front: Aaron Copland and Hanns Eisler in Hollywood" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2001).

¹¹ David Steinau, "The Artist in Exile in Wartime Los Angeles: Hanns Eisler's Expressive Goals in the 'Hollywood Songbook'" (DMA diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003); Nancy Krajewski, "The Hollywood Songbook: Hanns Eisler's Hollywood Song Cycle" (MLA diss., Stanford University, 2009); Stanley E. Workman, Jr., "Hanns Eisler and His 'Hollywood Songbook': A Survey of the Five Elegies (Fünf Elegien) and the Hölderlin Fragments (Hölderlin Fragmente)" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2010); and Philip Bohlman, "(Un)Covering Hanns Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook*," *Danish Yearbook of Musicology* 3 (2007): 13–29.

¹² Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978); Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1838–1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Philip Bohlman, ed., *Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Philip Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

of these documents are accessible thanks to Manfred Grabs's editions.¹³ Other primary resources include Brecht's writings on the theatre, his journals, and his collected letters.¹⁴ Eisler's interviews with Hans Bunge provide a plethora of information on the composer's relationship with Brecht, Charles Laughton, and Charlie Chaplin.¹⁵ I have also consulted interviews, letters, and memoirs of other associates of Eisler, including Joseph Losey, Schoenberg, Salka Viertel, and Clifford Odets.¹⁶ I have drawn on the memoirs of Eisler's opponents, particularly Martin Dies, Robert Stripling, J. Edgar Hoover, and Louis Budenz.¹⁷ For Chapters 3 and 4, I have examined articles in such newspapers as the

¹³ Hanns Eisler, *Gesammelte Werke* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, c1968); *Musik und Politik: Schriften 1924–1948*, ed. by Stephanie Eisler and Manfred Grabs, 3 vols. (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973); *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978); and *Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe: Briefe 1907–1943*, Ser. IX, Bd. 4, 1, ed. Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 2010).

¹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, *Werke* (Berlin: Aufbau; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988–1998); *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955*, ed. by John Willett, trans. Hugh Rorrison (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁵ Hans Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Hanns Eisler im Gespräch* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1976).

¹⁶ Joseph Losey and Michel Cement, *Conversations with Losey* (London: Methuen, 1985); Arnold Schoenberg, *Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein (London: Faber, 1964); Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969); and Clifford Odets, *The Time is Ripe: The 1940 Journal of Clifford Odets* (New York: Grove Press, 1988).

¹⁷ Martin Dies, *The Trojan Horse in America* (New York: Arno Press, 1977); Robert Stripling, *The Red Plot Against America* (Drexel Hill, PA: Bell, 1949); J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Holt, 1958); and Louis F. Budenz, *The Cry is Peace* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952).

Daily Worker, *New Masses*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Sun*, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. I also draw heavily upon information provided in the transcript of the House Un-American Activities Committee interrogation.¹⁸

Unfortunately, the only English-language biography available on Eisler is a translation of Albrecht Betz's study *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician*, a book published when Germany was still politically divided and many sources were not readily available.¹⁹ His coverage of Eisler's film music is largely based on *Composing for the Films* and does not include analysis of film music. The only American composition discussed at length is the *Hollywood Songbook*, although Betz's analysis is selective. Other American works only receive a few paragraphs or sentences and pale in comparison to the attention given to Eisler's pre- and post-American exile works. Other European Eisler biographers including Heinz Alfred Brockhaus (1961), Eberhardt Klemm (1973), Fritz Hennenberg (1987), Christian Glanz (2008), and Friederike Wißmann (2012) treat Eisler's American works with undeserving brevity.²⁰ Fortunately, Jürgen Schebera and Horst Weber have

¹⁸ Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Hanns Eisler: Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eightieth Congress, First Session, Public Law 601 (Section 121, Subsection Q (2)) Sept. 24, 25, and 26, 1947* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1947).

¹⁹ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician* (Munich: Edition text und kritik, 1976; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

²⁰ Eberhardt Klemm, *Für Sie porträtiert: Hanns Eisler* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973); Fritz Hennenberg, *Hanns Eisler* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987); Christian Glanz, *Hanns Eisler: Werk und Leben* (Vienna: Edition Steinbauer, 2008); and Friederike Wißmann, *Hanns Eisler: Komponist, Weltbürger, Revolutionär* (Munich: Edition Elke Heidenreich, 2012).

written more extensively on Eisler's American period, but their studies are in German and many important aspects are left unmentioned.²¹

My research also draws upon archival material available in the Hanns Eisler Collection at the Doheny Library at the University of Southern California. Several of his film scores available at the RKO Studios Archives at the University of California, Los Angeles were considered. For the discussion of the FBI investigation, media reaction, correspondence, and the government reports were consulted.

II. Methodologies

Several methodologies are employed as appropriate for this study. In an historiographic analysis, I consult existing research, both European and American, and highlight various misunderstandings due to one-sided agendas of certain authors, national or regional bias, and/or information exclusion. To provide a more refined understanding of Eisler's American life, including his social milieu and family life and their relevance to his American oeuvre, I peruse primary sources including Eisler's correspondence with friends, colleagues, business affiliations, and family, as well as interviews.

Comparative studies are made for a nuanced perspective of the life of an émigré. I examine the biographies of other exiles in America, including Brecht, Paul Dessau, Schoenberg, and Weill, and consider how their individual experiences are similar to Eisler's. Since some of his American works have been previously ignored, I offer case

²¹ Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern und Dokumenten* (Mainz: Schott, 1998); Horst Weber, *I Am Not a Hero, I Am a Composer: Hanns Eisler in Hollywood* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2012).

studies of selected compositions, include close analyses of the music, and place the works within Eisler's socio-political and cultural environment. Furthermore, my analysis of his film music probes its compliance with theories advanced in Eisler's *Composing for the Films*. These case studies of individual works also address their reception, so that contemporary impact of the works are weighed and assessed.

III. Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into seven chapters and a conclusion. The second chapter will be a discussion of Eisler's youth in the Weimar Republic and his early understanding of American culture before his exile. I will trace American impact upon Austrian and German culture during the interwar period, especially its effect on film, music, and literature, and show how this helped shape Eisler's early views of America and its people against the background of his political leanings. In the third and fourth chapters I will present a general background of Eisler's American exile, discussing particularly his social milieu and acculturation to American life.

The remaining chapters will contain analyses of some of his American compositions. The fifth chapter will be a survey and brief analysis of some of Eisler's music for American cinema, with particular focus on three films: *Pete Roleum and His Cousins* (1939), *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), and *None But the Lonely Heart* (1944). The sixth chapter will center on some of Eisler's American chamber works: the String Quartet (1938), and the Third Piano Sonata. The last chapter will be devoted to a comparison of

two collections of vocal music Eisler composed while in America: the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* (1941) and the *Hollywood Song Book* (1938-43).

It is my hope that my research on Eisler's life in America will be a beneficial source of information not only to musicologists but also to professionals in the fields of American studies, Jewish studies, and sociology. I hope that this thesis will lead to a better understanding of the lives of Jewish exiles in America. I wish that Eisler's importance as an American film composer will be reconsidered. Finally, my goal is to inspire further discussion of these works and a rejuvenation of their performance in all American venues, from recording to the concert hall to the city fair.

CHAPTER 2: BEFORE THE FLIGHT: EISLER'S WEIMAR YEARS

Hanns Eisler (1898–1962), a Leipzig-born Austrian composer of Jewish descent, spent the first three decades of his life during a turbulent period of European history. If one wishes to understand the experience of his American exile (1938–48) and his artistic, sociopolitical and Austro-German and Jewish identities during these years, one must not only first consider the contexts of Eisler's early years, the state of economic and political affairs in the German lands in the early twentieth century, but also the situation of Jews in that society at that time. One must also envisage Eisler's development as a composer under the guidance of Arnold Schoenberg and his artistic and political activities in Berlin in the mid-1920s and early 1930s. This chapter will explore how Eisler's career in Austria and in Germany's politically volatile climate before World War I and between the two world wars unfolded and explain how Eisler absorbed elements of American culture and developed ideas about the United States before he settled in that country in the 1930s.

I. Eisler's Political Awakening in Weimar Germany

Eisler was born in Leipzig to a middle class and intellectual family. With Hanns barely a toddler, the Eislers moved to Vienna in 1901. During World War I, in 1916, he enlisted in the army, but was wounded and released in 1918. Eisler's experiences within the social climate of the interwar period would have permanent effects on his sociopolitical views. After the First World War, the British Navy's defeat of the lionized *Kriegsmarine* and the plunge of the *Deutschmark* to infinitesimal worth, followed by astronomically large reparations owed to the Allied Powers, prompted substantial

political changes in Germany. In October 1918, in order to better negotiate with the Allied Powers, a parliamentary government was established, and Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated his throne over a month later.¹ National Assembly elections were held in early 1919. In February the Assembly approved a constitutional outline, which led to the establishment of the Weimar Republic, the first German democratic government.²

The first president was the moderate Social Democrat, Friedrich Ebert, but the new government was constantly troubled by social unrest and contests for power among political parties, particularly the Social Democrats (SPD), the Communist Party (KPD), and the National Socialist (Nazi) Party. As Berlin-born artist George Grosz puts it: “Everybody was hated: the Jews, the capitalists, the gentry, the communists, the military, the landlords, the workers ... and again the Jews.”³ The SPD and the KPD wrestled for the proletarian vote. Organized workers tended to endorse the SPD, who sought stabilization of the economy—the party supported the Dawes Plan—and avoided extremism.⁴ Independent Socialists and Communists were inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution, which had deposed the tsarist monarchy. German Communists sought a

¹ Richard Bessel, “Germany From War to Dictatorship,” in *German History Since 1800*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997), 235–237.

² Ibid., 240.

³ George Grosz, *George Grosz: An Autobiography*, trans. by Nora Hodges (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 149.

⁴ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician* (Munich: Edition text und kritik, 1976; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 19, 35–36.

similar social revolution to a classless society with economic egalitarianism and common distribution of property.

However, many right wing politicians and their followers considered democracy a very liberal idea. A large percentage of the population still had monarchist loyalties and loathed the new parliamentary government. From the beginning, efforts were made to suppress radical leftists. Before the drafting of the new constitution, Chief Quartermaster General Wilhelm Groener promised the army's support of the young parliament if such radicalism was opposed. Instead of the old regime which had led the country into war, socialists and revolutionaries were blamed by many for the financial and economic instability.⁵ Many also blamed Jews for the loss of the war, so xenophobia and nationalism became dominant features of the new Weimar Republic. The National Socialist Party was established in 1920, but it was Socialist only in name and had nothing to do with Marxism.⁶ The *Sturmabteilung* (Brown Shirts), the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party, committed terrorist acts, disrupting political gatherings of its opponents and

⁵ Bessel, "Germany From War to Dictatorship," 238–240.

⁶ Through propaganda, the Nazis took advantage of the middle-class fears of Bolshevism, Americanism, mass culture, and modernism. The party purported the prejudice that German culture was being ruined by American materialism and Jewish decadence. As Elizabeth Harvey explains, "[National Socialism was] a synthesis of the 'best elements' in nationalism and socialism" seeking "the victory of German Kultur over 'civilization.'" Elizabeth Harvey, "Culture and Society in Weimar Germany," in *German History Since 1800*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997), 292.

intimidating Jewish citizens throughout the 1920s.⁷ It was in this divisive climate that Eisler developed his sympathies for Communism which marked his life and works.

As a young man in interwar Austria and Germany, Eisler actively attempted to change his sociopolitical environment. Considering his family life in conjunction with the political climate, Eisler gravitated toward Marxism. During his years in Vienna, his father, a neo-Kantian philosopher, introduced the young Eisler to Marx but detested communism and extremism.⁸ In secondary school Eisler joined a Socialist debate team. His two older siblings were involved early on with Communist groups. With dwindling hopes for a successful Communist party in Austria, they both had left in the 1910s for Berlin, the center of the German workers' movement.⁹ Hanns's brother, Gerhart, was a leading functionary for the Communist Party (KPD) in the 1920s.¹⁰ He was active as a journalist but opposed his sister Ruth Fischer's more radical activities.¹¹ She had co-founded the Communist Party of Austria (KPO) in 1918 and was a leading figure of the KPD from 1924–5.¹² Her extreme views may have estranged her from her brothers quite

⁷ William Carr, *A History of Germany: 1815–1990* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1991), 314.

⁸ Betz, *Political Musician*, 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler im USA-Exil 1938–1948* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1978), 94.

¹¹ Eisler's sister's name was formerly Elfriede Eisler. She adopted her last name after her mother's maiden name.

¹² Betz, *Political Musician*, 36–37.

possibly because she perpetuated the idea that Jews were financially backing the Nazis. She once said: “Crush the Jew capitalists, hang them, smash them!”¹³

Instead of following his siblings to Berlin, from 1919–1923, Eisler decided to study with the controversial modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg, who resided in Vienna and offered to teach him for free. During this time Schoenberg developed the so-called twelve-tone technique or dodecaphony. Eisler adopted this technique in his settings of Christian Morgenstern’s humorous poems in *Palmström*, op. 5 (1925) which was his first attempt at composing with twelve tones.¹⁴ But Eisler’s Socialist inclination and anti-bourgeois sentiments would soon estrange him from his composition teacher whose political views were conservative.

Eisler moved to Berlin in September 1925 and became heavily influenced by the social unrest in that city, but especially by agitprop theater.¹⁵ Stephen Carr explained that, even before the war, the Socialists had set up a culture of their own within German

¹³ Quoted in Amos Elon, *The Pity of it All: A History of Jews in Germany, 1743–1933* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 385. The existence of the “self-hating Jew” is yet to be fully explained, but Paul Reitter pointed out that anti-Semitism, even among Jews, served as a cultural code that signified one’s alliance with conservative values. The anti-Semitic writings of many German Jews, including Otto Weininger or Karl Kraus, are often laced with ironic or masochistic qualities. Paul Reitter “Karl Kraus and the Jewish Self-Hatred Question,” *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 78–81.

¹⁴ Betz, *Political Musician*, 23. German poet Christian Morgenstern’s (1871–1914) life coincides with the short peaceful period between the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War. He was an anti-materialist and anthroposophist seeking spiritual meaning in everyday life. His poems, *Galgenlieder* (1905) and *Palmström* (1910), both set by Eisler, often reflect a grotesque character. Eric P. Hofacker, *Christian Morgenstern* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

communities: “Socialists continued to live as a race apart, almost a state within a state, developing their own cultural, educational, and sports associations in their anxiety to avoid the corruption of capitalism.”¹⁶ While living in Berlin, Eisler’s preoccupation with Communism marked his compositions as well as his social activities. In March 1927, Eisler began writing reviews and articles about music and the Berlin theater scene for the Communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* [The Red Flag]. In November he joined the troupe *Das Rote Sprachrohr* [The Red Mouthpiece] as a composer, pianist, and conductor and wrote so-called *Kampflieder* [fighting songs]. Many of them, some of which are discussed below, were written for this group.¹⁷ Around the same year, Eisler also briefly joined the *Novembergruppe*. The group focused on art as social commentary and included such musicians as Stefan Wolpe, Kurt Weill, Jascha Horenstein, and the American composer George Antheil.¹⁸ Eisler did not stick with them very long because he believed the group’s efforts were not effective enough.¹⁹ In the autumn of 1928, Eisler began teaching music at the Marxistische Arbeiterschule (Marxist Workers School).²⁰

In this milieu, Eisler turned against Schoenberg. In 1924, in an article in *Musikblätter des Anbruch* on Schoenberg’s fiftieth birthday, Eisler emphasized

¹⁶ Carr, *History of Germany*, 184.

¹⁷ Fritz Hennenberg, *Hanns Eisler* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 32.

¹⁸ Christopher Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878–1934: A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 124.

¹⁹ Betz, *Political Musician*, 59.

²⁰ Hennenberg, *Hanns Eisler*, 32.

Schoenberg's conservatism: "He is the true conservative: indeed, he accomplished a revolution to be reactionary."²¹ In 1926, Eisler confided his doubts about the relevance of twelve-tone music to Schoenberg's brother-in-law and former composition teacher Alexander Zemlinsky who then related this information to Schoenberg.²² In a letter to his teacher, Eisler said:

Modern music bores me, and it does not interest me. I hate much of it and even despise it. In fact, I want nothing to do with the "modern." ... Also, I understand nothing of 12-tone technique and music (not even the outlying elements). However, I am enthusiastic about your 12-tone works, especially the Piano Suite, which I have thoroughly studied.²³

At this time, Eisler's ideas about modern music appear in his writings. In his essay "On Old and New Music" (1925), he mentioned a rift between composer and listener due to unfamiliarity with modern experiments: "It is precisely this lack of familiarity that makes it hard for the listener to understand modern music."²⁴ He thought that the modern audience did not know how to listen to modern music composed by Schoenberg and his followers. In "On the Situation in Modern Music" (1927), written for *Die Rote Fahne*,

²¹ Hanns Eisler, "Arnold Schönberg, der musikalische Reaktionär," in *Hanns Eisler: Gesammelte Werke*, Serie III, Band I: *Musik und Politik: Schriften 1924–1948*, ed. Stephanie Eisler and Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1985), 15. Translated by the author.

²² Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World, and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searle (New York: Schirmer, 1977), 311.

²³ Hanns Eisler to Arnold Schoenberg, 9 March 1926, in *Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe: Briefe 1907–1943*, Ser. IX, Bd. 4, 1, ed. Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010), 41. Translated by the author.

²⁴ Hanns Eisler, "On Old and New Music," in *Hanns Eisler: Rebel in Music*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978): 22.

Eisler stated: “An empty officiousness celebrates orgies of inbreeding, while there is a complete lack of interest or participation of a public of any kind.”²⁵ He pleaded that modernist composers break their isolation and write music relevant to modern people. Two years after his letter to Schoenberg, however, Eisler seemingly found his understanding of twelve-tone music. He called his teacher “the greatest modern bourgeois composer,” for his music in elite concert halls actually exposed the apparent emptiness of capitalism and forced the audience to confront the “chaos and ugliness of the world.”²⁶ Although Eisler could not reconcile himself with Schoenberg’s support for monarchism, he could value his artistic approach as a weapon against capitalism, which explains Eisler’s occasional use of dodecaphony.

Although Eisler applied for membership in the Communist Party in 1926, he was never accepted as a member, because he never paid his dues.²⁷ However, around this time he began to apply to his music a key Marxist idea, *dialectical materialism*. Eisler’s early opinions of American culture were influenced by Marx’s polemics on capitalism. In *Das Kapital*, Marx analyzed capitalist society and noticed that all material value was based on an abstract concept, money, which is used as a scale for the value of labor to the benefit of the ruling class.²⁸ Dialectical materialism is a philosophic interpretation of socialism,

²⁵ Hanns Eisler, “On the Situation in Modern Music,” in *Rebel in Music*, 29–31.

²⁶ Hanns Eisler, “On Schönberg,” in *Rebel in Music*, 75.

²⁷ Peter Chametzky, Introduction to “Avant-Garde Art and the Popular Front” and “To Inherit Art,” by Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler, trans. Chametzky, *Critical Texts* 4, no. 3 (1987): 5.

²⁸ Margaret R. Jackson, “Workers, Unite! The Political Songs of Hanns Eisler, 1926–

and Eisler decided, in order to be relevant as an artist and progressively conscious, a composer's works must be attentive to the contemporary social cataclysm.²⁹ Considering the sociopolitical climate in Weimar Germany, Eisler believed that music was only relevant when it enticed the proletariat toward revolution. He saw that capitalism extended into popular music and functioned to "intoxicate" the worker, helping him ignore the oppressive strains of labor. Indeed, he said:

The sharp contradiction between work and leisure peculiar to the capitalist mode of production divides all intellectual activities into those serving work and those serving leisure. Leisure, however, is a system for reproducing labor power. ... Leisure is dedicated to non-production in the interests of production. This is the socio-economic basis for the peculiar form of musical practice in capitalism.³⁰

He believed that subscription concerts, printed and recorded music, and radio—all the facets of modern mass media—alienated people from each other. Thus according to him, if society is to transform, there must be a return to collective live performance with music focusing on anti-sentimental aesthetics.³¹

One of Eisler's best friends, playwright Bertolt Brecht, held similar ideas about the social importance of contemporary art. At first fascinated by Richard Wagner's operas, he soon opposed them as a precursor to fascism and pursued a modern form of

1932" (PhD diss., The Florida State University, 2003), 12.

²⁹ Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler, "Avant Garde Art and the Popular Front" and "To Inherit Art," trans. Peter Chametzky, *Critical Texts* 4, no. 3 (1987): 7.

³⁰ Hanns Eisler, "The Builders of a New Music Culture," in *Rebel in Music*, 39.

³¹ Jackson, "Workers, Unite!" 13–14.

opera and theater that avoided “narcotic” effects upon its audience.³² Brecht and Eisler met regularly at the Romanisches Café, which had a large Jewish and Communist patronage.³³ While living in Berlin, Brecht collaborated with Eisler on *Die Massnahme* [*Measures Taken* or *The Decision*, 1930] and *Die Mutter* [*The Mother*, 1930–32], as well as several unrealized productions.³⁴

While working in Berlin, Eisler increasingly sought to infuse his compositions with a message of collective solidarity. His first attempts at creating a relevant music were for the workers choruses. Eisler noted in one of his articles that since the 1860s, workers choruses used so-called *Tendenzmusik*, literally “tendency music” or socially conscious music, to arouse class awareness and struggle.³⁵ A fine example of such a choral song by Eisler is “Kohlen für Mike [Coal for Mike]” (1930). The text by Brecht tells the story of an Ohio coalminer’s widow, who heats her home with coal secretly supplied from a train by her late husband’s fellow coalminers. The song “commends such

³² Joy Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 2–7.

³³ Jürgen Schebera, *Damals im Romanischen Café: Künstler und ihre Lokale im Berlin der zwanziger Jahre* (Braunschweig: Westermann, 1988), 132. Regular visitors to the café included employees of the leftist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne*, journalist Egon Erwin Kisch, economist Emil Lederer, and artist Otto Dix. Matheo Quinz, “The Romanic Café (1926),” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 415–417.

³⁴ The unrealized productions include *The Good Soldier Schweyk*, *Aufbau des Neuen Menschen*, *The Joys and Sorrows of the Smaller Pirates*, and *Goliath*. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 8, 43.

³⁵ “The old Tendenzmusik has the task of winning the non-class-conscious worker through the class-conscious worker.” Eisler, “The Builders of a New Music Culture,” in *Rebel in Music*, 54.

camaraderie.”³⁶ It never strays from the minor mode, which Eisler always liked for its serious character, and there are several passages where the voices mimic the sounds of a chugging train. Eisler chose a homophonic setting because in his opinion this style represents an earlier revolutionary aesthetic.³⁷ Feeling that those Germans who would hear or sing this song could apply the Ohio woman’s story to their own situation in the Weimar Republic, Eisler underscored that workers and their families were suffering in America just as they were in Germany due to the strains of work and the maximization of time and productivity that the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism had fostered. Eisler soon decided that the choral society tradition was too steeped in nineteenth-century petty bourgeois ideologies and aesthetics, exemplified by operettas and fake folk songs. He realized that a new even more activist and effective *Tendenzmusik* must be written.³⁸

This led to his creation of the *Kampflied*, a fighting song whose powerful music so enhances the text that it would inspire its performers to start a revolution. He kept the music simple and accessible, often employing a verse-chorus structure typical of Tin Pan Alley, a style with which the average German worker was already familiar. He also had

³⁶ Richard Bodek, “Red Song: Social Democratic Music and Radicalism at the End of the Weimar Republic,” *Central European History* 28, no. 2 (1995): 223.

³⁷ “This bourgeois function of pleasure, of the harmonious development and upholding of the individual personality, led to the great development of homophonic music in the nineteenth century. The early revolutionary individual is reflected in the beginnings of this bourgeois music development.” Eisler, “The Builders of a New Music Culture,” in *Rebel in Music*, 45–46.

³⁸ “This kind of music [Tendenzmusik] must be superseded by a revolutionary art whose main character is militant and educative.” *Ibid.*, 55.

no problem using elements of jazz, or what passed as jazz, in his fighting songs. Even though he considered jazz light music, the political import of its use would fill it with meaning.³⁹ He also kept composition simple so that the music could be performed by practically anyone and with any group of instruments, be it piano and voice or a small band. From 1929, he and the singer Ernst Busch traveled throughout Europe singing his *Kampflieder* before throngs of unemployed and angry workers, and all those eager to see political change. Eisler and Busch would sing along with them.⁴⁰

One of the most popular fighting songs Eisler wrote in collaboration with Brecht for the Socialist movement was “Solidaritätslied,” which was featured prominently in the film *Kuhle Wampe* (1931). Young Socialists are depicted marching in the streets singing the song. It is a march in a minor key that uses verse-refrain structure. Margaret R. Jackson noted that Eisler’s melodies “are compact, encouraging concise declamation of text free from ornamentation or artifice.”⁴¹ Ulrich Gregor observed that this early sound film was revolutionary in more ways than one:

The alienated performances by many of the actors, the dramaturgical originality and the musical counterpoint of the film provided new criteria for the possibilities offered by cinematographic realism. *Kuhle Wampe* was not only a social commentary but also a point of comparison and a proclamation of new methods in filming.⁴²

³⁹ Betz, *Political Musician*, 70.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴¹ Jackson, “Workers, Unite!” 19.

⁴² Ulrich Gregor, “Film in Berlin,” in *Berlin: 1910–1933*, trans. Marguérite Mounier, ed. Eberhard Roters (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), 204.

The film, which emphasizes the importance of solidarity in order to achieve revolutionary goals, was banned in Weimar Germany for its morose depiction of society. The film features a suicide which was seen by censors as an inappropriate interpretation of unstable economic and social conditions.⁴³ Only after some scenes were deleted was the film approved for public release. The deleted scenes have been forever lost.⁴⁴

II. Eisler as a Jew in Weimar Germany

The fact that Eisler, whose background was Jewish, was participating in the workers movement, a significant cultural movement in Weimar Germany, can be interpreted within the context of assimilated Jewry in German culture. For centuries, Jews had begun to actively participate in the cultures that existed outside the Jewish home and synagogue. For example, at the turn of the eighteenth century, Jewish philosophers such as Christian Wolff and Gottfried Leibniz facilitated the use of German, in the place of Latin, as a proper literary language.⁴⁵ German Jews had increasingly enjoyed participation in German culture, ever since the Haskalah (or Jewish Enlightenment) inspired by German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn in the mid-1700s. Mendelssohn called for an end to Jewish cultural and intellectual isolationism, inspiring

⁴³ Theodore F. Rippey, “*Kuhle Wampe* and the Problem of Corporal Culture,” *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 1 (2007): 3.

⁴⁴ Gregor, “Film in Berlin,” 204.

⁴⁵ Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 33.

European Jews to participate in the societies of their respective nations.⁴⁶ Active involvement continued into the twentieth century. Steven Beller points out that the culture of fin-de-siècle Vienna was largely a creation of Jews, even though Jews comprised a minority of the population.⁴⁷ The establishment of the Weimar constitution held particular importance to German Jews, because for the first time they could actively participate in German politics. They could vote and hold public office.⁴⁸

Andrea and Philip Bohlman pointed out that Eisler was not raised as a Temple-going Jew, but that he grew up “in the world of the assimilated Jewish culture of Vienna.”⁴⁹ Eisler’s grandparents on his father’s side were Czech Jews.⁵⁰ From his father’s bloodline, Eisler could trace his ancestry back to a historically prominent figure, the Prague Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, a Jewish mystic who created the most famous legend of the Golem.⁵¹ Eisler’s relationship to religion was summarily dismissive, and it does not seem to have held any influence upon his worldviews. As biographer Friederike Wißmann puts it, “[for Eisler] each religion ignores the basic questions of world affairs

⁴⁶ Elon, *Pity of it All*, 1–4.

⁴⁷ Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867–1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴⁸ Elon, *Pity of it All*, 358.

⁴⁹ Andrea Bohlman and Philip Bohlman, *Hanns Eisler: “In der Musik ist es anders,”* Jüdische Miniaturen No. 126, ed. Hermann Simon (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2012), 9.

⁵⁰ Friederike Wißmann, *Hanns Eisler: Komponist, Weltbürger, Revolutionär* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 2012), 36.

⁵¹ Bohlman and Bohlman, “*In der Musik ist es anders*,” 9.

and fogs the mind like an opiate.”⁵² In his extant letters and writings prior to exile, he does not particularly discuss Judaism or his own Jewish identity. Using Nazi terminology, he once jokingly referred to himself as a “half Jew” (*Halbjude*) in a 1935 letter to Brecht.⁵³

Before reflections of Jewishness of Eisler’s music can be discussed, it must first be noted that the definition of “Jewish music” is quite nebulous and constantly debated among scholars. As Sabine Feisst indicates, “Jewish art music as a national and cultural concept is a complex subject open to ideological exploitation.”⁵⁴ At the First International Congress of Jewish Music in 1957, Curt Sachs defined Jewish music as “made by Jews, for Jews, as Jews.”⁵⁵ This definition is quite problematic, because the Jewish identities of such composers as Ernst Bloch, Mark Brunswick, Kurt Weill or Eisler prove difficult to ascertain or establish. The statement says nothing concerning the non-Jewish audience who happens to hear the music. Moreover, who can confirm when a Jewish composer is or is not composing as a Jew? Edwin Seroussi notes that, although the religion is over 3000 years old, the concept of “Jewish music” was not formulated until the nineteenth century. Today the term is used to encompass many disparate genres, including

⁵² Wißmann, *Hanns Eisler: Komponist*, 35.

⁵³ Hanns Eisler to Bertolt Brecht, 1 June 1935, *Briefe*, 101.

⁵⁴ Sabine Feisst, *Schoenberg’s New World: The American Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 97.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Stephen J. Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (Hanover, NH; London: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 1999), 88.

traditional, popular, and art music, “as long as its historical background and ideological connotations are borne in mind.”⁵⁶

Eisler did not write any liturgical Jewish music for the synagogue, but he certainly contributed numerous works to popular and art music. These include his works for the workers choruses, his fighting songs, his incidental music for theater projects in Berlin, and his collaborations with Brecht. He was merely doing what many other German Jews were doing at the time. As mentioned earlier, Eisler had grown up in the assimilated Jewish culture of Vienna. As Jews had helped fashion turn-of-the-century Viennese culture, they too greatly contributed to Weimar culture, and this was certainly aided by their new freedom to actively participate in their government. Amos Elon lists several examples of Jewish contributions to Weimar society, including Schoenberg’s explorations of atonality and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis. Moreover, he states, “Much of what is remembered today as the golden age of Weimar culture was created by German Jews.”⁵⁷ Elon elaborates that Jewish participation in German culture was not an act of self-denial, but a desire to help foster a tolerant society capable of accepting all cultures and creeds. In interwar Berlin, Jewish influence upon German society reached a summit where “artists and intellectuals strove as never before to transcend nationality and religion.”⁵⁸ Thus, although Eisler’s religious Jewish identity may be hard to pinpoint, his efforts to

⁵⁶ Edwin Seroussi, “Jewish Music, §1: Introduction,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and J. Tyrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), xiii: 24.

⁵⁷ Elon, *Pity of It All*, 358.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 359.

change German culture and society through his music—even if the end result were revolution—can be historically linked to the efforts of many other Jewish artists at this time.

While living in Weimar Germany, Eisler set the words of several Jewish playwrights and poets to music. By 1932 he had written incidental music to plays by such writers as Lion Feuchtwanger (*Kalkutta, 4 Mai*, 1928), Anna Gmeyner (*Die Bergarbeiter*, 1928), Walter Mehring (*Der Kaufmann von Berlin*, 1929), and Karl Kraus (*Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, 1930). All of these productions took place in Berlin. Concerning Eisler's music for *Der Kaufmann von Berlin*, critic Ferdinand Junghans wrote: "Even though the composer Eisler did not quite summon his quiet rage with his military marches, for a kilometer every drop of milk turned sour."⁵⁹ For some of his songs, Eisler used texts from several Jewish poets. His *Vier Balladen*, op. 22 (1930), feature the song "Ballade von der Wohltätigkeit" with a text by Kurt Tucholsky. There is also "Anrede an ein neugeborenes Kind," op. 37/1 (1931) by Mehring and "Bauer Betz" (1932) by Friedrich Wolf.

There are only a few examples of Eisler using or quoting from Jewish folk music. For the movie *Niemandsländ* (1931), produced by Viktor Trivas, Eisler did compose music for a Jewish wedding scene: a march and "The Father's Song and Dance."⁶⁰ For

⁵⁹ Quoted in Hans-J. Weitz, *Drei jüdische Dramen: Mit Dokumenten zur Rezeption* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1995), 352.

⁶⁰ Tobias Faßhauer, "Film-Musik-Montage: Beobachtungen im Niemandsländ," in *Kompositionen für den Film: Zu Theorie und Praxis von Hanns Eislers Filmmusik*, ed. Peter Schweinherdt (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2008), 71.

the march Eisler quoted the wedding march from Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Granted, the use of Mendelssohn's march is an old trick, since film composers used it for wedding scenes since the early silent era.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the music's appearance in *Niemandsländ* emphasizes its double identity as not only clichéd source music but also Jewish music. For the second cue, Eisler quotes from a well-known klezmer tune: *Der rebe hot geheysn freylekh zayn*, which is also known as *Tantst, tantst, yidelekh* and *Ma yofus*. Eisler recycled this music for his Orchestral Suite No. 2, op. 24, of the same year, retitling it in the second movement as *Capriccio über jüdische Volkslieder*.⁶²

As a student of Schoenberg, Eisler adapted dodecaphony from the man who “invented” it. Several scholars have discussed the connection between Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique and Jewish monotheism. Specifically, they have related the Jewish idea of one omnipresent God to the fact that a twelve-tone row, with all its transformations and permutations, completely defines and unifies the entire space of a musical piece.⁶³ André Neher sees a Jewish relation to dodecaphony since it is a system concentrated on the number twelve, which is also the same number of the tribes of Israel.⁶⁴ Additionally, it must be noted that Schoenberg's unfinished opera *Moses und*

⁶¹ Max Winkler, “Max Winkler: ‘The Origin of Film Music’ (1951),” in *The Hollywood Film Music Reader*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

⁶² Faßheuer, “Film-Musik-Montage,” 71.

⁶³ Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World*, 99.

⁶⁴ André Neher, *They Made Their Souls Anew*, trans. David Maisel, SUNY Series in

Aron, which glorifies monotheism, is also a twelve-tone work based on one twelve-tone row. However, the argument that Eisler used dodecaphony to express his Jewish identity is difficult to prove. Due to twelve-tone music's often unmarketable qualities, Eisler considered the technique a mighty weapon against capitalist, bourgeois concert hall music.⁶⁵

In any case, Eisler, early in his career composed dodecaphonic works, including the song cycles *Palmström*, op. 5 (1923/24) and *Zeitungsausschnitte*, op. 11 (1926). Eisler penned his opus 5, with the subtitle "Studies of Twelve-Tone Rows," after Schoenberg's suggestion to write something similar to *Pierrot lunaire*, which is not a twelve-tone piece. However, Eisler sought to distance himself from *Pierrot*'s dark magical world, and thus wrote a humorous song cycle parody based on texts from Morgenstern, who was noted for his nonsense poetry.⁶⁶ The opus 11, an homage to Schoenberg's use of *Sprechstimme* and *Pierrot* ensemble, is a cynical response to the war and an early reflection of Eisler's use of music as social commentary. Albrecht Betz noted that here is an early example of Eisler using music to increase the impact of the text, which he would fully develop in his later fighting songs.⁶⁷ *Zeitungsausschnitte* uses texts from news publications rather than the expected collection of art poems. The result is a

Modern Jewish Literature and Culture, ed. Sarah B. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 153.

⁶⁵ Hanns Eisler, "On Schönberg," *Rebel in Music*, 75.

⁶⁶ David Blake, "The Early Music," in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, ed. David Blake (New York: Harwood, 1995), 32–34.

⁶⁷ Betz, *Political Musician*, 16–30.

song cycle that borrows elements from the documentary film, as each text addresses the effects of the war upon various individuals.⁶⁸ The songs are meant to be performed in a straightforward fashion without seriousness for the purpose of a more emotionally honest effect upon the listener. Eisler's concern with an appropriate audience response would be developed in his epic theater collaborations with Brecht. As dodecaphonic pieces, opus 5 and opus 11 were written within the context of Schoenberg's circle, and after a hiatus of several years, Eisler would resume his use of dodecaphony in some of his American works. These two compositions are early examples of Eisler's desire to compose music that was not only technically modern but also conducive to a relevant social function. Finally, this attitude toward composition is a result of the composer's Socialist sympathies.

III. Eisler's Encounter of *Amerikanismus* in Weimar Germany

Eisler's hatred of capitalism is just one aspect of his perception of America in the early twentieth century. If we are to more fully understand Eisler's early view of America, we must look at how Weimar Germany perceived the nation across the Atlantic. German-born American composer Kurt Weill noted that people in any age have always been fascinated by a place that comes to symbolize an exotic Other: "In Mozart's time, it was Turkey. For Shakespeare, it was Italy. For us in Germany, it was always America."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 45–46.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Kim Kowalke, "Kurt Weill and His American Identity," American Composers Orchestra, last accessed 15 October 2012, <http://www.americancomposers.org/weillinamerica.htm>.

Long before the war, Germans were fascinated with America, but their understanding of this exotic locale was mostly grounded upon what they read in books and newspapers and, later, upon what they saw in films. James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking* novels were highly popular in nineteenth-century Germany. These novels perpetuated the stereotype of Native Americans as noble savages and cowboys as hard, independent and self-made men. The Old West was a symbol of escape and individualism. German writer Karl May copied Cooper's style in his *Winnetou* and *Old Shatterhand* novels. Grosz, who grew up reading these books, created for himself a cowboy alter-ego, and the Old West became a frequent topic in his paintings, drawings, and sketches.⁷⁰ Other American writers Germans respected include Edgar Allen Poe and Walt Whitman. Novelist Franz Werfel was particularly fond of Poe.⁷¹ In a letter to Clifford Odets, Eisler noted that he had known and loved Whitman since his youth.⁷²

Following the war, for the first time, the United States became the leading military and economic world power. The German people soon looked to America as a model for its own new democratic government and economy. Germany attempted to create a mirror image of America (*Amerika*), upon which it hoped to recover its broken cultural

⁷⁰ Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and His Contemporaries, 1915–1933* (Cambridge: Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, 1990), 17–32.

⁷¹ Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America, from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 269.

⁷² Hanns Eisler to Clifford Odets, 12 April 1943, *Briefe*, 254.

identity.⁷³ This idea is known as *Amerikanismus*. Already prior to the war, Germany had possessed a skilled labor class and was mining the iron ore deposits in Alsace-Lorraine and the coal fields in the Ruhr region. At the turn of the century, business, industry, and banking was expanding with Germany's overseas exports.⁷⁴ Germany began to embrace American ideas of capitalism and mass production, such as Henry Ford's assembly line and Frederick Winslow Taylor's efficient division of labor into time and movement. With the view of Ford as the exemplary self-made American, German businessmen traveled to the United States to study the organization of labor in his Detroit automobile factories.⁷⁵ After his visit in 1935, Eisler reported to the First International Workers Music Olympiad that automobile workers were "in a bad way," because they performed monotonous work only a few months a year for an oversaturated market.⁷⁶

Yet the German perception of America was two-sided and prompted by such guides to success as Andrew Carnegie's widely read *The Empire of Business* (1902): "Let no one, therefore, underrate the advantage of education; only it must be education adapted to the end in view, and must give instruction bearing upon a man's career if he is

⁷³ Hermann Danuser and Hermann Gottschewski, eds., *Amerikanismus Americanism Weill: Die Suche nach kultureller Identität in der Moderne* (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2003), 12.

⁷⁴ Carr, *History of Germany*, 168.

⁷⁵ Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 149.

⁷⁶ Hanns Eisler, "A Musical Journey Through America," in *Rebel in Music*, 92.

to make his way to fortune.”⁷⁷ America was seen as the bastion of modernism, dedicated to commercialism, industry, technology, and efficiency, but also as a young and groundless, rudimentary, and excessive culture. The older America of the Old West cowboys and Indians was now paired with the America populated by the metropolitan businessman and gangster. As Kim Kowalke explained, the “romanticism of the legendary Wild West” was irrevocably associated with the “cold modernity of an urban jungle.”⁷⁸

This image was further enhanced by how America presented itself in films, many of which were exported and screened in Germany. Westerns were highly popular and most of them built on the models provided by Cooper and May. Detective films and slapstick farces were popular, as well. Many Germans considered the English-born comic actor Charlie Chaplin who worked in American film since the mid-1910s a superstar.⁷⁹ On this silent film icon, Prague-born writer Egon Erwin Kisch said: “He is one of the righteous for whose sake America must be spared the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.”⁸⁰ When Eisler moved to America, Chaplin would become one of his close friends and

⁷⁷ John Czaplicka, “Amerikabilder and the German Discourse on Modern Civilization, 1890–1925,” in Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America*, 41; and Andrew Carnegie, *The Empire of Business* (New York: Doubleday, 1902), 112.

⁷⁸ Kowalke, “Kurt Weill and His American Identity,” Accessed 9 October 2012.

⁷⁹ Daniel J. Leab, “Screen Images of the ‘Other’ in Wilhelmine Germany & the United States, 1890–1918,” *Film History* 9, no. 1 (1997): 61.

⁸⁰ Egon Erwin Kisch, “Working with Charlie Chaplin” in Harold B. Segel, *Egon Erwin Kisch, The Raging Reporter: A Bio-Anthology* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1997), 249.

supporters.⁸¹ Some of the Big Seven Hollywood firms had an increasing presence in Weimar Germany. The Ufa (Universum Film AG), which controlled over 600 movie theaters, including the largest in Europe (Berlin's Ufa-Palast am Zoo), signed a distribution contract with MGM and Paramount in 1925. In this year Eisler moved to Berlin and the city was inundated with American films.⁸² With such exposure, Eisler certainly grew familiar with early Hollywood film and constructed an early idea of America through them.

Berlin became very much like a European New York. An apocalyptic vision of this Berlin is depicted in Fritz Lang's silent film *Metropolis* (1926). In this film, which critiques America's speed and efficiency, workers are kept underground to maintain a giant machine that resembles a blast-furnace Moloch. Workers file in like robots with heads bowed, completely devoid of any individuality.⁸³ Grosz mentions that no moral code predominated in Berlin and that guns were easily attainable.⁸⁴ German writer Klaus Mann, in his first novel *The Pious Dance* (1925), depicts a decadent Berlin underworld full of prostitutes, alcoholics, cocaine addicts, and people displaying slovenly behavior.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Schebera, *Hanns Eisler im USA-Exil*, 93.

⁸² Jan-Christopher Horak, "Rin-Tin-Tin in Berlin or American Cinema in Weimar," *Film History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 54–55.

⁸³ Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 223–225.

⁸⁴ Grosz, *An Autobiography*, 119.

⁸⁵ Klaus Mann, *The Pious Dance: The Adventure Story of a Young Man*, trans. Laurence Senelick (New York: PAJ Publications, c1987).

He says:

[The novel is] about a young man and his adventures; his relentlessness, his sorrows, his elations; a young man, and this time—the anarchy and promise of the twentieth century. He was a child during the Great War, and in adolescence finds himself confronted with a messed up, but colorful world.⁸⁶

This passage reflects an angst that many young German artists felt throughout the Weimar period. Of course, as mentioned earlier, Eisler had responded to this angst by immersing himself in Berlin culture and working to change the social structure.

In music, for young composers like Eisler, Krenek, and Weill, jazz typified a new sound in stark contrast to the still prevalent turn-of-the-century Romanticism and Wilhelmine German Expressionism.⁸⁷ This music's syncopations, timbres and city-bustle sound seemed to encapsulate America's free democracy and modernism, although, as J. Bradford Robinson indicates, "the German jazz craze thrived on a musical surrogate developed by German musicians."⁸⁸ Following the war, the Allied blockade and the worthlessness of the *Mark* kept American musicians and new jazz records from entering the country. Sam Wooding, who brought the first authentic African-American jazz band to Germany, did not tour Berlin until the summer of 1925.⁸⁹ Before economic

⁸⁶ Klaus Mann, *The Turning Point: Thirty-Five Years in This Century: The Autobiography of Klaus Mann* (New York: Markus Wiener, 1984), 114.

⁸⁷ Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 201.

⁸⁸ J. Bradford Robinson, "The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany," *Popular Music* 13, no. 1 (1994): 4.

⁸⁹ Michael Kater, "The Jazz Experience in Weimar Germany," *German History* 6, no. 2 (1988): 145.

stabilization in the mid-1920s German composers had to rely on the printed covers of sheet music and the word of supposed jazz fanatics for tips on jazz style. The result was nothing that sounded like the original Dixieland. Instead, German jazz incorporated the elements of old American ragtime into military band, salon orchestra, and gypsy band music. The early leading figures of this type of jazz were Hungarian or Slavic *Stehgeiger*, which explains the German association of the violin with jazz.⁹⁰

Indeed, Ernst Krenek's hybrid "jazz" opera *Jonny spielt auf* (1927) features an American negro jazz fiddler.⁹¹ Later Krenek admitted that his jazz was not really jazz: "Of the real America I knew hardly more than that it was the land of gangsters and prohibition, and neither aspect was inviting."⁹² Mann calls jazz "the great balm and narcotic of a disconcerted, frustrated nation," for it was used by many young composers as a weapon against capitalism.⁹³ Brecht and Weill's *Mahagonny-Songspiel* (1927) as well as *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) are Socialist critiques of capitalism. The works are written for cabaret rather than opera singers and they prominently feature Germanized forms of jazz music.

⁹⁰ J. Bradford Robinson, "The Jazz Essays," 4–5.

⁹¹ Krenek was inspired to write the work after seeing a performance of Sam Wooding's jazz revue *Chocolate Kiddies*, but Alex Ross noted that "Krenek's engagement with African-American music went about as deep as the blackface painted on the singer playing Jonny." Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, 203.

⁹² Ernst Krenek, *Horizons Circled: Reflections on My Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 26–27.

⁹³ Klaus Mann, *The Turning Point*, 86.

Jazz elements appear in Eisler's music during these years as well. A well-known example is from his collaborative work with Brecht *Die Massnahme* (1931). In the song "Supply and Demand," a merchant, in straightforward and strident Tin Pan Alley verse-chorus style, reduces the value of a man to his price.⁹⁴ Eisler heightens irony by using jazz band instruments. Also, the Eisler song "The Ballad of Nigger Jim" (1930), scored for jazz instruments including banjo, resembles greatly the style of an Irving Berlin Broadway tune, while implying a critique of American racism. German audiences could hear this song and apply it to their own class struggle.

IV. Into Exile

Despite Eisler's and his fellow leftwing companions' efforts, by the early 1930s, the Nazis had clearly become the dominant party in the Weimar Republic. The mutual smear campaigns of the SPD and the KPD had split the proletarian vote. The KPD's anti-capitalist message horrified anyone with a soupcon of interest in capitalism. Most importantly, the Nazi Party had successfully created a strong and organized image of itself, and Hitler, the great orator, encapsulated the no-nonsense leader that many voters desired after two economic depressions within a decade.⁹⁵ President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor in 1933. When Hindenburg died in August 1934, the titles of

⁹⁴ Betz, *Political Musician*, 100.

⁹⁵ Jill Stephenson, "The Rise of the Nazis: 'Sonderweg' or Spanner in the Works?" in *German History Since 1800*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997): 298–314.

Chancellor and President were combined, establishing Hitler as the Führer and burying the last remnants of democracy in the Weimar Republic.

Nazi propaganda, with heavy elements of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and religious fervor, promised to annihilate decadent Weimar culture. The Party's accusing finger was pointed at an international culture that threatened true German culture. The conservative *Zeitschrift für Musik* noted that "Decadence comes when a composer—or a people—ceases to obey the instinct of his nation-race," and Jews were viewed as the ultimate nationless (international) race.⁹⁶ The works of many artists, especially Jewish ones, were declared *entartet* (degenerate) and banned and discredited. The artists included such composers as Eisler, Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Krenek, Paul Hindemith, and Weill. Modernist music was judged inferior to music of the past. Indeed, Hans Ziegler, the superintendent of the Weimar National Theatre, declared that "the decay of musical art was due to the influence of Judaism and capitalism."⁹⁷ Nazi cultural theorist Alfred Rosenberg in his *Der Sumpf* [The Mud] (1930) doggedly attacked Jewish, Bolshevik, black, and other seemingly "degenerate" elements of Weimar culture.⁹⁸ Inspired by xenophobia and racism, the bourgeoisie and the political right also railed against jazz not only for its African-American roots but also for its perpetuation by

⁹⁶ Joel Sachs, "Some Aspects of Musical Politics in Pre-Nazi Germany," *Perspectives of New Music* 9, no. 1 (1970): 77.

⁹⁷ "Musical Notes from Abroad," *Musical Times* 79, no. 1146 (1938): 629.

⁹⁸ Harvey, "Culture and Society in Weimar Germany," 295.

Jewish composers and songwriters.⁹⁹ As Michael H. Kater noted: “‘Nigger-Jew jazz’ became a Nazi catchword.”¹⁰⁰ Although never officially banned by the Nazi regime, it was declared un-German and Eugen Hadamovsky, the Reich Broadcast Leader, removed jazz from German airwaves in 1935.¹⁰¹ This censorship and terrorism prompted many composers to leave Germany and Austria, re-locating elsewhere in exile. About half of the Jewish German exiles eventually went to the United States.¹⁰²

When the Reichstag was set ablaze on 27 February 1933, Eisler was in Vienna for rehearsals of a workers’ concert, which was to take place the following month. Since he had received an offer from Trivas to compose the music for *Niemandsländ*, Eisler chose to flee to Paris in the early days of March.¹⁰³ He had plenty of reasons to fear for his own life: he was a Jew and a Communist; he had worked with many leftist individuals, including Brecht and Erwin Piscator; he had written fighting songs that were much beloved by the Socialist movement; and he had been a member of Schoenberg’s circle, indebted to modernist art, which was also condemned by the Nazis.

⁹⁹ Kater, “The Jazz Experience,” 153–154.

¹⁰⁰ Michael H. Kater, “Forbidden Fruit? Jazz in the Third Reich,” *American Historical Review* 94, no. 1 (1989): 15.

¹⁰¹ Michael Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124.

¹⁰² Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*, 26.

¹⁰³ Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster, “Commentary,” in *Hanns Eisler: Briefe, 1907–1943* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010), 332.

Eisler would spend five years in European exile, visiting the United States a few times before deciding to move there in 1938. His initial American tours and his life in American exile are the subjects of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: “I AM READY TO HELP YOU”: EISLER’S AMERICAN ODYSSEY: 1935–1936

While in the United States, Hanns Eisler engaged in a rich array of activities, working as a lecturer, teacher, and as a composer both for the theater, concert hall, and motion picture. Despite visa problems and other hurdles throughout his American years, Eisler was able to make significant contributions to America’s political and artistic scenes. He composed important scores for films, collaborated with established European immigrant and American filmmakers and interacted with popular American artists. He co-wrote the pioneering film music treatise *Composing for the Films* (1948), a two-year study of the Hollywood film industry sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. He also composed vital works for the concert hall, promoting a modern style of composition. As a teacher at the New School for Social Research, the University of Southern California, and the University of California, Los Angeles, Eisler influenced a league of American artists that would enrich the American musical world. During his ten-year American exile (1938–1948), he formed friendships with many influential Americans in the political, theater, film and music arenas. In this chapter, I will outline Eisler’s first sojourn in America. First, I will trace his initial 1935 concert and lecture tour and the resultant contact with the members of the New York Composers Collective. Next, I will discuss his teaching stint at the New School for Social Research and his further involvement with the Collective. I will also survey his early social and creative activities in New York before his move to the United States in 1938.

I. A Cross-Country Concert and Lecture Tour

On 6 April 1933, Hitler fired many of Germany's great scholars, university professors, progressive thinkers, and intellectuals. Most of them were Jewish. On 10 May 1933 was the first infamous book burning; in 1935 the Nuremberg Laws prevented Jews from maintaining their German citizenship and annulled their social rights. Three hundred thousand Jews left Germany and 132,000 of them eventually settled in the United States.¹ Migration scholar Maurice Davie referred to this influx of individuals as "the refugee movement." He determined that Jews constituted nearly four-fifths of the total number of refugees to America in that time frame.²

It proves difficult to determine which word is appropriate to use when discussing persons who left their homeland. Laura Fermi acknowledges certain linguistic difficulties in exile studies. "Immigrant" presupposes the person's intention to settle in a new place. She claims that "exile" and "expatriate" indicate that the persons always intend to return to their homeland and not become repatriated elsewhere. "Émigré" is used when people left their homeland for political reasons.³ Reinhold Brinkmann notes that scholarly debate on exile nomenclature is politically charged since the idea of the "immigrant" in "exile" arose in the writings of leftist immigrants. By the 1970s, the term "emigration"

¹ Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise. German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 23–26.

² Maurice Davie, *Refugees in America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), xviii.

³ Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930–1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 15.

eventually suggested “voluntary migration,” although it is unlikely that those who migrated from Nazi Germany left under voluntary circumstances. Brinkmann says the word “exile” has multiple associations “covering the act of expulsion, the process both of leave-taking and of arrival in the new land, and the status of the immigrant.”⁴ It is with this understanding including the fact that Eisler himself used the word “exile” that in this thesis I will apply the concept of “exile” to Eisler’s situation. Eisler’s interest in socialism constituted one of his primary reasons for flight; therefore, the classification “émigré” also applies to him. Since he fled Europe because of the possibility of mortal danger, he may also be called a refugee. In this thesis, these words will be used alternately with choice determined by context.

Eisler exited from Vienna in 1933 and found himself in various places across Europe—Czechoslovakia, Paris, London, Denmark, and Spain—fighting fascist terror from afar with new works for an exiled Socialist movement. In 1934, he composed “Saarlid” and “Einheitsfrontlid” both based on Brecht texts for the blossoming United Front movement, a joint effort of the Communist and Socialist parties forced into exile by the Nazis. These new songs are in the same vein as “Solidarit tslid”: simple, militant, and instantly memorable. The “Saarlid” was written for the Communist Party in Saarland during the elections of 1934–35 to counteract the influence of the Nazis, which however met with 90-percent approval. The European premiere of “Einheitsfrontlid”

⁴ Reinhold Brinkmann, “Reading A Letter,” in *Driven Into Paradise: The Musical Migration from Nazi Germany to the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.

occurred at the First International Workers Music Olympiad under the auspices of the International Music Bureau (IMB) in Strasbourg in June 1935.⁵

However, the actual world premiere of “Einheitsfrontlied” took place in the United States in February at a concert organized by the Composers Collective, a group of leftist American composers who, since 1931, were seeking a new form of protest song in opposition to extant American folk music. David King Dunaway, who has written extensively on the Collective, notes that the group emerged from the Pierre Degeyter Club, a branch of the Workers’ Music League and so-named for the writer of the “Internationale” (1871). Many well-known composers participated in the Collective, including Henry Cowell, Marc Blitzstein, and Wallingford Riegger. The group also included Charles Seeger, the noted ethnomusicologist, and Elie Siegmeister. Many members of the group, accustomed to living in large cities, seemed alienated from the numerous and diverse sources of American folk music. Thus, the Collective “were strangers to the folk masses, strangers in their land.”⁶

This was not the case, however, for Earl Robinson (1910–1991), also a member of the Composers Collective and more familiar with American folk music. In performance, he simply accompanied himself on guitar. According to Eric Gordon, “no composer was as successful as Earl Robinson in disseminating the values of the United Front to the

⁵ Christian Glanz, *Hanns Eisler: Werk und Leben*, Neue Musikportraits, Bd. IV, ed. Manfred Wagner (Vienna: Edition Steinbauer GmbH, 2008), 84–87.

⁶ David King Dunaway, “Unsung Songs of Protest: The Composers Collective of New York,” *New York Folklore* 5 (Summer 1979): 1–3.

American public.”⁷ Drawing upon the spirit of the American Revolution and the Civil War, Robinson’s songs like “Joe Hill” and “Abe Lincoln” related that America’s revolutionary past was still relevant in the modern era.⁸ Robinson said that Eisler’s mass songs were a huge influence on his own style. He would later study with Eisler in California. He recalled that Eisler once stressed to the Collective that a revolutionary song had to be singable for the common worker. In any case, Robinson admits that most members of the Collective were individualists interested in modern dissonances and Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique.⁹

Nevertheless, the group’s mission mirrored Eisler’s, to pursue new and socially relevant musical paradigms. In an article titled “On Proletarian Music,” Seeger called for an American music that is national in form and revolutionary in content, thereby echoing Stalin’s celebrated call for cultures “national in form and socialist in content.”¹⁰ The composer’s purpose, he said, is to educate the proletariat on social inequities and prepare him for the revolution. He lamented that the public was still attracted to old bourgeois forms, but believed that American workers do have an interest in modern music and that

⁷ Eric A. Gordon, “Robinson, Earl” in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 701.

⁸ Ibid., 701.

⁹ Earl Robinson, *Ballad of an American: The Autobiography of Earl Robinson*, American Folk Music and Musicians, No. 3 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 68.

¹⁰ Marina Frolova-Walker, “‘National in Form, Socialist in Content’: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 334.

their choruses could successfully sing songs written in a modern idiom. He suggested that the new bourgeois music coming out of Europe, like that of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Hindemith, if affixed with socially cognizant content, could produce a new, modern proletarian music appropriate for the modern worker. As an example of this music, he pointed to a new publication from the Workers' Music League featuring compositions from members of the Collective: the *New Song Book* or the *Worker's Songbook* (1934). Most of the songs in the collection barely resemble any form of American folk song and reflect the Collective's appreciation for European models.¹¹

Before Eisler arrived in the United States for his 1935 concert and lecture tour, his music and his importance to the worker's movement in Europe had already been discussed in the American press. Some members of the Collective participated in this discussion. In an early 1930 issue of *Modern Music*, Hans Gutmann wrote about the plethora of new and distinct musical trajectories in Weimar Germany following the war. Briefly, he mentioned that Eisler had broken away from Schoenberg and – associated with the Communists – now wrote worker's songs and incidental music “only in serving the cause of the proletariat.”¹² In that same edition of *Modern Music*, Cowell, misidentifying him as a Dutch Jew, lists Eisler as an important composer of new European vocal music. Cowell focused entirely on Eisler's works for unaccompanied men's chorus. Although commending his modern harmonization and use of rhythmic

¹¹ Dunaway, “Unsung Songs,” 10.

¹² Hans Gutmann, “Young Germany, 1930,” *Modern Music* 7, no. 2 (February–March 1930): 6.

vitality, he ultimately decided that Eisler's music is "technically crude and he makes no attempt to improve it."¹³ In 1934, Seeger mentioned Eisler along with Stefan Wolpe and Dmitri Shostakovich among many other European composers, who were writing workers songs.¹⁴

Eisler's American odyssey began with a concert and lecture tour of various American cities. In April 1933, Lord Dudley L. Marley of England instigated plans for the tour through his International Help Committee for the Victims of Hitler Fascism (The Marley Committee). The tour was to raise money for abandoned children in the Soviet Union. The concerts were sponsored by many leftist organizations in the United States, including the Anti-Nazi Federation, the Workers Music League, the John Reed Club, the League of Workers Theaters, and the Workers Dance League. The Anti-Nazi Federation was a group that provided financial relief to victims of the Nazi regime.¹⁵ The other organizations were institutions initiated by the Communist Party of America to provide a cultural outlet for "Proletcult enthusiasts."¹⁶ The tour not only offered Eisler a platform to introduce his music to the American public, but also allowed him to express his opinions

¹³ Henry Cowell, "Vocal Innovators of Central Europe," *Modern Music* 7, no. 2 (February–March 1930): 38.

¹⁴ Charles Seeger, "On Proletarian Music," *Modern Music* 9, no. 3 (March–April 1934): 122.

¹⁵ Michael G. Burd, "More About Eisler Concert," *Daily Worker*, 13 March 1935.

¹⁶ Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade: The Classic Work on Communism in America During the Thirties* (1941; New York: Arlington House, 1971), 137–138.

on the social function of music and to inform Americans of the conditions of the working class under the Nazi regime.

With a three-month nonimmigrant passport issued to him in London, Eisler arrived in America for the first time on 13 February 1935.¹⁷ One of his first actions, after disembarking the *Berengaria* was to send a letter to Brecht, wherein he said that fifteen concerts were planned in various American cities and that he was “somewhat nervous.”¹⁸ These cities included New York, Brooklyn, Chicago, St. Louis, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia.¹⁹ Eisler’s worried anticipation was well founded, for not only did he have three months of touring ahead of him, but the actual number of concerts was expanded to over fifty.²⁰

Upon Siegmeister’s recommendation, Eisler chose baritone Mordecai Bauman, a graduate of Juilliard and Columbia College, as the vocalist to accompany him on the tour. Playing the role Ernst Busch had performed in Europe, Bauman became the first major vocal interpreter of Eisler’s songs in America, with the composer accompanying him on

¹⁷ Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern und Dokumenten* (Mainz: Schott, 1998), 124. Information concerning the passport is given in Committee of Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Hanns Eisler* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 99.

¹⁸ Hanns Eisler to Bertolt Brecht, 10 February 1935, in *Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe: Briefe 1907–1943*, Ser. IX, Bd. 4, 1, ed. Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010), 96.

¹⁹ Mordecai Bauman and Irma Commanday Bauman, “In Praise of Learning: Encounters with Hanns Eisler,” in *New Essays on Brecht = Neue Versuche über Brecht*, ed. Maarten Van Dijk, *Brecht Yearbook* 26 (Madison, WI: International Brecht Society: University of Wisconsin, 2001), 15.

²⁰ Hanns Eisler to Bertolt Brecht, 10 February 1935, *Briefe*, 352.

the piano at the various scheduled events across the country. The two men became close friends. Bauman later related that Eisler consistently ironed out details at rehearsals, hated a “pearl-shaped tone,” and aimed at “sense, not sensibility.”²¹

On the evening prior to the New York concert at the Pierre Degeyter Club, Eisler presented a lecture on German fascism and the crisis in bourgeois music.²² He said, “During recent years we have witnessed many crimes against the working class and the intelligentsia in many countries but the greatest of all crimes is Hitler’s.”²³ He called for Americans to adopt the dream of solidarity that many workers and progressives strived for across the Atlantic, saying that every victory for the working class in Europe was also a victory for workers in America. He stressed that oppressed workers cannot simply wait for change but must actively struggle to achieve it. On the musical crisis, he lamented that as technology improves and modern media like the radio and gramophone bring music to a wider audience, music’s integrity decreases. In reaction to shrinking audiences, composers sought new musical styles, while ignoring the importance of music’s social function. Therefore, the rift between composer and audience became ever greater. Eisler’s solution was to integrate the experimental forms of music that arose from

²¹ Bauman and Bauman, “In Praise of Learning,” 16.

²² Charles Seeger, “World of Music: Concert and Reception for Hanns Eisler,” *Daily Worker*, 6 March 1935.

²³ Hanns Eisler, “[Ansprache bei Solidaritätskonzerten],” in *Hanns Eisler Gesammelte Werke* [HEGW] Serie III, Band I: *Musik und Politik: Schriften 1924–1948*, ed. Stephanie Eisler and Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1985), 266.

the crisis with the social needs of the working class.²⁴ Eisler hoped that his *Kampflieder* and workers chorus songs would provide an example of such music to the American audiences.

Almost from the moment Eisler set foot on American soil for the first time, annoyed conservatives wanted to see him deported.²⁵ A preview concert of the tour was given at the Repertory Theater in Boston. George O. Brisbois, the chief of police in Phoenix, Arizona, read an article in the 23 February edition of the *Daily Worker*, which announced the event and referred to Eisler as a “revolutionary German refugee composer.” Troubled by the news, he reported to the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization that there were already plenty of Socialist agitators in the country and demanded that Eisler be deported. On 16 March, J. E. Wilkie, the secretary-treasurer of the Arizona Peace Officers’ Association, approached the Department of Labor requesting the same. The immigration department considered sending Eisler to Ellis Island for questioning, however on May 8, John Baxter wrote to Deputy Commissioner Edward Shaughnessy: “At the present time probably very few Americans outside of Communist circles have ever heard of Eisler ... [nevertheless,] a rousing Communist song might have more explosive revolutionary force than a hundred pamphlets or speeches.”²⁶ But at this

²⁴ Ibid., 267–269.

²⁵ Although the socialist movement in America increasingly attracted new members, there were also ultra-conservative and Nazi organizations active in the country.

²⁶ HUAC, *Hearings*, 98–99.

time, Eisler was already on his way back to England, so he avoided any repercussions from this investigation.

The tour officially began in New York on 2 March at the Mecca Temple, which at the time was the second largest music venue in the city next to Carnegie Hall.²⁷ The *Daily Worker* provided a photo of the event. The picture shows Eisler surrounded by a crowd of people all giving the Communist salute, a raised fist.²⁸ According to the press, Eisler led over 1000 voices in the singing of his mass songs.²⁹ Dave Grunes led the Pierre Degeyter Symphony Orchestra, which accompanied the choral singing. In addition to the music, theater skits and dance numbers were presented as well. Jane Dudley performed a dance improvised upon the *Comintern*, and the Theatre Collective presented “Improvisations” denouncing fascism in Germany, Cuba, and Spain.³⁰

Supposedly premiered at this concert was Eisler’s arrangement of a song that became somewhat popular in the United States, the “Peat-Bog Soldiers.” The song had arisen in 1933 in the Börgermoor prison camp as a resistance piece, a trope upon a Nazi military song. The public became aware of the song through released prisoners. Eisler

²⁷ Schebera incorrectly quotes Mordecai Bauman as saying that the Mecca Temple concert took place on his birthday, 22 February. The Mecca Temple concert actually took place as reported by newspapers on 2 March, Bauman’s twenty-third birthday. Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 124. Bauman and Bauman, “In Praise of Learning,” 16.

²⁸ Manfred Grabs, ed., *Wer war Eisler?* (West Berlin: Verlag das Europäische Buch, 1983), 97.

²⁹ Joe Foster, “Hanns Eisler: Revolutionary Composer,” *Daily Worker*, 1 March 1935.

³⁰ “Eisler Music Presented: Anti-Fascist Concert in Mecca Temple Largely Attended,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1935.

learned of the song while in England and set the melody to his own piano accompaniment.³¹ Eisler reported that, although the song is not political, it is “regarded as dangerous” and “it is a revolutionary song, created spontaneously by the workers out of their very oppression and fascist persecution.”³² “Peat-Bog Soldiers” served as the finale of every concert, but the song may not have been performed at the Mecca Temple performance due to an early dismissal.³³

European scholars have neglected to mention an interesting but important detail about Eisler’s New York concert: apparently, faulty staging resulted in a disastrous performance. The stage was very small and not equipped to fit the horde of singers and instrumentalists that the concert required. The chorus, unable to see Eisler’s conducting, faltered, resulting in a sudden termination of performance to the chagrin of the audience. Seeger reported:

Five hundred of our best voices had waited on the stage for about three hours, some of the time cramped behind a drop-curtain. When they stood up to sing, the front line obscured most of the rest from a view of the conductor, Hanns Eisler himself. They were, therefore, unable to keep time or let out their voices at full strength. The result was a thin, confused sound of no agitational effect and no musical value.³⁴

³¹ Manfred Grabs, “Commentary to ‘The Birth of a Worker’s Song’,” in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 81.

³² Hanns Eisler, “Peat-Bog Soldiers,” *New Masses* 14 (12 March 1935): 14.

³³ Grabs, Commentary to “Worker’s Song,” 81.

³⁴ Charles Seeger, “World of Music: Concert and Reception for Hanns Eisler,” *Daily Worker*, 6 March 1935.

Ashley Pettis said the concert drew an oversized audience “but had concentrated so much on making a financial success that sufficient consideration was not given to the program itself, and the eventual fulfillment of its promise.”³⁵ The Anti-Nazi Federation, which had arranged the concert, confirmed that details of staging and music had been left to the musicians, because the relief group had focused on publicity and the maximization of ticket sales, which resulted in a net \$1213.41 (equaling circa \$20,000 in 2012).³⁶ Upset, Seeger insinuated that “anarchy in the music movement in New York” may have been the cause of the disaster.³⁷

Eisler continued his tour into the heart of the country. After New York, he visited Pittsburgh, which Eisler described as “hell on Earth.”³⁸ He lamented that Pittsburgh had an emaciated cultural life, with the movies providing the only entertainment to the masses. However, he praised the city’s workers for instigating their own musico-cultural groups, using New York as a model.³⁹ The concert was such a success that Jessie Lloyd O’Connor, wife of writer Harvey O’Connor, suggested that an impromptu performance be held at the nearby steel town of McKeesport, a town with high unemployment. In a

³⁵ Ashley Pettis, “The Eisler Concert,” *New Masses* 14 (12 March 1935), 27.

³⁶ Michael G. Burd, “More About Eisler Concert,” *Daily Worker*, 13 March 1935.

³⁷ Seeger, “World of Music: Concert.”

³⁸ Hanns Eisler, “A Musical Journey Through America,” in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 88.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

tiny room with a piano, Eisler and Bauman performed before a small group of union members. Bauman said the songs were “over their heads.”⁴⁰

After Pittsburgh, he traveled to Chicago, probably wondering if the city was as horrible as depicted in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. The concert was held on 11 March at the recital hall on Wabash and Congress.⁴¹ Eisler returned to the city for a second concert on 9 April at the Peoples Auditorium. Aside from Bauman and the Freiheit Gesangs Verein, this second concert also featured the appearance of Chicago’s Ukrainian Workers Choruses.⁴² Eisler praised the beauty of Lake Michigan but was disgusted with the appearance of Chicago’s stockyards and slaughterhouses. He compared the slaughter of cattle to the daily exploitations committed by the privileged upon the working class.⁴³

From Chicago, Eisler traveled to Denver, across the Rocky Mountains, to Salt Lake City, where he noted that deeply religious Mormons had become modern businessmen. From there, Eisler took the railroad further westward until he arrived in San Francisco. His first impression of California, which would be his future home in his American exile, was a positive one. He called San Francisco “one of the most beautiful cities in the world” and praised it as the home of Cowell, who held a large influence upon its musical community.⁴⁴ While there, Eisler met local figures and was treated as an

⁴⁰ Bauman and Bauman, “In Praise of Learning,” 16.

⁴¹ Concert advertisement, *Daily Worker*, 8 March 1935, 8.

⁴² “Program by Eisler in Chicago Tuesday,” *Daily Worker*, 8 April 1935.

⁴³ Eisler, “Musical Journey,” 89.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

honored guest. Eisler was eager to meet the prisoner Thomas Mooney, the leader of the California Federation of Labor and at the time serving a sentence for the murder of ten people during the bombing of the 1916 Preparedness Day Parade in San Francisco.⁴⁵

With the help of Louise Branston, who was working to prove Mooney's innocence and had arranged the Berkeley concert, Eisler visited the prisoner at San Quentin. Eisler asked him several questions about his life in prison, and Mooney inquired about current events in the Soviet Union.⁴⁶

From San Francisco, Eisler flew to Los Angeles, where he was giving a concert on 22 March at the Mason Opera House. In the so-called City of Angels, where Eisler would spend the later years of his American exile, he got his first taste of Hollywood glamor. He was met at the airport by the chairman of the League Against War and Fascism, the sponsor of his Hollywood concert. According to Bauman, a procession of thirty limousines accompanied them to an enormous room at the Biltmore Hotel, where they were given roses. In other cities Eisler and Bauman were boarded in the home of one of the committee members. From the hotel, Eisler gave a press interview, where he discussed the reality of Germany's concentration camps, whose existence at the time was considered a fallacy by many Americans. The Hearst Press, which would continue to serve as Eisler's bane in the 1940s, chalked up the conference as pure "Communist

⁴⁵ Mooney had actually been many blocks away when the bomb exploded. Later, reports surfaced that the evidence against Mooney had, in fact, been fabricated. Dan Georgakas, "Mooney-Billings Case," in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 511.

⁴⁶ Hanns Eisler, "Mein Besuch bei Tom Moony," in *Musik und Politik*, 281.

propaganda.” After the interview, Eisler and Bauman learned that the League had rented the hotel room only for the pageantry of the interview and that they were actually staying at “a movie star’s house, plus swimming pool.”⁴⁷

While in Los Angeles, Eisler instigated his first study of the Hollywood film studios, which would years later grow into a huge project sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. He toured the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, where he marveled at the technologically advanced spherical microphones. He balked at the large difference between the fees of a stage worker and a movie star. He was appalled to learn that a Hollywood score was actually the conglomerate work of a department of composers, where each composer specializes in a few styles: one for jazz numbers, one for marches, one for Viennese waltzes, and so forth. He considered the standards of Hollywood film direction and music to be abysmal. He said: “Although films could be an excellent means of entertainment and education in modern society, in the hands of the private industry they are solely for profit and a means of lulling the masses.”⁴⁸

From Los Angeles, Eisler travelled to Chicago for an encore concert, and then took Route 66 to St. Louis.⁴⁹ He stayed at the home of Elisabeth Hauptmann, a German

⁴⁷ Bauman and Bauman, 18.

⁴⁸ Eisler, “Musical Journey,” 90–91.

⁴⁹ There is discrepancy over the order of concert appearances. Bauman lists St. Louis and the arm injury as falling in-between the trips to Pittsburgh and San Francisco, however Eisler said he went from Los Angeles to St. Louis and then to Detroit. Since his second Chicago concert fell on 9 April, after his Los Angeles appearance, I must conclude that Eisler travelled from Los Angeles, to Chicago a second time, and then to St. Louis. Bauman and Bauman, 17. Eisler, “A Musical Journey,” 92.

writer who had collaborated with Brecht on *The Threepenny Opera*. One night, he got out of bed to use the restroom and fell down a flight of stairs, fracturing his arm. Hauptmann nursed his injury so that he could continue his tour, but a pianist had to be hired for a few performances.⁵⁰ After St. Louis, Eisler gave a concert in Detroit, the capital of America's automobile industry. The weather was poor for the concert, which did not draw a large crowd compared to the other events.⁵¹ Eisler visited one of Henry Ford's automobile factories and reported on what he witnessed. The Depression had hit Detroit particularly hard and most workers only spent a few months in the factory, earning enough money to last only part of the year. He said that workers could not clothe their families and performed monotonous tasks all day for a market that is oversaturated with automobiles.⁵²

While in Detroit, Eisler began sketching a new composition, a "Concentration Camp Symphony."⁵³ In the following decades he continued to work on this piece, which became his celebrated *Deutsche Sinfonie*, a monumental anti-fascist statement in eleven movements.⁵⁴ The work was not finished until shortly before its 1959 premiere in Berlin and it features a variety of musical forms and styles including a funeral dirge, a march,

⁵⁰ Bauman and Bauman, "In Praise of Learning," 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 16.

⁵² Eisler, "Musical Journey," 92.

⁵³ Hanns Eisler to Bertolt Brecht, 20 July 1935, *Briefe*, 106.

⁵⁴ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 126.

and twelve-tone technique.⁵⁵ Eisler constructed the symphony as a giant crescendo on Brecht texts, which lament the actions of the Nazi regime and serve as a call to action for the workers movement, suggesting “the enemy is the class enemy.”⁵⁶

Next the tour rolled in to Philadelphia for a concert given on 16 April at the Garrick Theater.⁵⁷ Along with Eisler’s music, a performance of one of Alexander Mosolov’s string quartets was given by the Pierre Degeyter String Quartet.⁵⁸ On 17 April, Eisler and Bauman were back in New York and appeared at the 86th Street Lyceum in Yorkville before a packed house.⁵⁹

On 19 April, Eisler appeared at the Brooklyn Academy of Music for his farewell concert, which avoided the glitches of the New York performance in March. Fifty musicians from the Academy were given permission to perform with the Degeyter Orchestra for the event. Eisler’s suite from the film music for *Kuhle Wampe* was presented.⁶⁰ The concert also featured the New Singers, directed by Lan Adomian, performing Eisler’s European polyphonic workers songs. Seeger reported that the

⁵⁵ Eberhardt Klemm, *Für Sie porträtiert: Hanns Eisler* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973), 26.

⁵⁶ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician*, trans. Bill Hopkins (1976; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 157.

⁵⁷ Concert advertisement, *Daily Worker*, 6 April 1935.

⁵⁸ The members of the string quartet included Leon Zawisza and Arthur Cohn (violins), Gabriel Braverman (viola), and Roland Cresswell (cello). Concert advertisement, *Binghamton Press* (New York), 14 April 1935.

⁵⁹ Charles Seeger, “World of Music: A Week of Music,” *Daily Worker*, 22 April 1935.

⁶⁰ “Music Notes,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1935.

amateurism of the group was obvious but their rhythmic vigor was more impressive than that delivered by the Brooklyn Arbeiter Saengerchor, whose style was more traditional. He concluded that in the future such concerts could be improved with clearer programming through the presentation of some works by American composers or only works by Eisler. After the concert, the Composers Collective presented Eisler with an album of “new and original compositions.”⁶¹

II. Return to the United States: Teaching at the New School

Eisler travelled to England on 8 May but would return to the United States at the end of 1935. In the interim, he continued his work for the global workers movement. From London, he went to Paris and then to Strasbourg for the First International Workers’ Music Olympiad (8–10 June). Just before his departure, Eisler had been invited to give a lecture at the event and to serve as chairman of the jury. Members of the Olympiad’s honorary committee included Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger.⁶² On 7 June he broadcasted a report of his American tour from a Strasbourg radio station. His transmission was cut short when he started describing the condition of the American worker in Ford’s Detroit factories.⁶³

⁶¹ Charles Seeger, “Eisler Farewell Concert Highly Successful Event,” *Daily Worker*, 23 April 1935.

⁶² Hanns Eisler, “Musical Journey,” 93.

⁶³ Grabs, Commentary to “Musical Journey,” 94.

Next Eisler attended the Northern Bohemian Workers Music Festival at Reichenburg, where he spoke on 15 June on behalf of the International Music Bureau (IMB). He then went to Moscow for the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern. There, at the end of July, he was awarded the position of chairman of the International Music Bureau.⁶⁴ At the time, Eisler hoped to help solidify a strong European United Front. He went to Prague for the Thirteenth Festival of the International Society of New Music (IGNM) on 15–16 September. He hoped to unite the International Association of Singer-Workers (IDAS) with the IGNM, but this resulted in failure. European exiles were unable to organize a sound United Front, and the same was true with exiled musicians.⁶⁵

On 26 September Eisler sailed from Le Havre back to New York. Government documents indicate that Eisler presented the same passport he had been issued in London in January. He also answered negatively to all questions constructed to mark a visitor as an undesirable alien. On 4 October, he was admitted into the United States for a period of six months. J. E. Wilkie continued following news of Eisler printed in leftist periodicals and reporting it to the government.⁶⁶ On 26 October the New Singers greeted Eisler with a concert that also featured the finale of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, a work that Stalin condemned following a Moscow performance on 26 January 1936.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 129–130.

⁶⁵ Betz, *Political Musician*, 148.

⁶⁶ HUAC, *Hearings*, 98.

⁶⁷ “New Singers Will Greet Hanns Eisler,” *Daily Worker*, 26 October 1935.

Back in America, he began his first stint as a “visiting professor” at the New School of Social Research. Charles Beard had founded the New School in 1919 in opposition to Columbia University and its president, Nicholas Butler, who had released several professors for opposing America’s entry into World War I. In its early days, the New School focused heavily on the social sciences and was “committed to an expansive notion of academic freedom” and to training potential participants in a projected reorganization of American society.⁶⁸ The adult education courses, which generally took place in the evenings, were immensely popular.⁶⁹ Alvin Johnson, who had served on the board since its inception, took over the New School in 1922. He believed that the educated could provide a profound political and social influence on those who could not afford a university education and that it was “of the utmost importance that the educated mind remain clear and steady.”⁷⁰ He initiated a research program for professors, demanded better salaries for them, and, in order to save the school from debt, reorganized the curriculum to focus heavily on adult education. In 1923, more art and theater courses were added. Prominent figures like Seeger, Cowell, Aaron Copland, and Paul Rosenfeld were hired as professors.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Peter Rutkoff and William Scott, *New School: A History of the New School for Social Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 1–11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁰ Alvin Johnson, *Pioneer’s Progress* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 274.

⁷¹ Rutkoff and Scott, *New School*, 30–33, 38.

In 1933 Johnson established a new faculty at the New School, which he called the “University in Exile.” Even though America was deep in the Depression, the government set up relief agencies to help European refugees find work. Many American universities had positions available for scholars in various fields. The chance to hire European refugees proved doubly advantageous to these institutions because not only could they temporarily fill these vacant positions with leading academics, but they could also come off as appearing devoted to “academic freedom.”⁷² The New School was one of those institutions that participated in the relief of refugee intellectuals. Johnson said that never since the age of the Greeks had there been such a flowering of intellectualism, now vanquished by the Nazis. American institutions provided the German exiles an opportunity to exercise academic freedom once again. Indeed, Johnson declared: “There is not a university in America which could not profitably make room for a number of German scholars on its faculty.”⁷³ Johnson began recruiting refugees to the New School, which outspent the Rockefeller Foundation in financial assistance toward social scientists. His recruits included the philosophers Max Wertheimer, Emil Lederer, and Max Ascoli.⁷⁴

As a visiting professor, Eisler came to the New School when the music department was just in its beginning stages. Cowell, leading the music faculty, organized

⁷² Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants*, 28–30, 71–72.

⁷³ Alvin Johnson, “Intellectual Liberty Imperiled,” *The American Scholar* 2, no. 3 (July 1933): 319.

⁷⁴ Rutkoff and Scott, *New School*, 96–124.

numerous concerts and festivals, including the annual folk festival “Dances of Many People.” The music faculty was made up of prominent composers interested in modern ideas. Copland was recognized for incorporating jazz and folk elements in his works, Cowell was known for his use of tone clusters and pioneering of the string piano, and Ernst Toch, hired at the same time as Eisler, had earned fame for writing music for speaking chorus.⁷⁵

In the *Daily Worker* Siegemeister reported about Eisler’s experience in the “highly developed” German workers music movement would be of profound benefit to the struggling American workers movement. Eisler was to teach two courses at the New School. In a musical composition course Eisler was to provide instruction on how to write choral music and mass songs. Second, in a course titled “The Crisis in Modern Music,” Eisler would analyze modern music in relation to the ongoing social and economic crises. He would focus particularly on the chasm between modern music and modern life, the compositional reasons for the chasm, and criticism of works by modern composers like Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Hindemith.⁷⁶

Unfortunately, Eisler’s classes were not very well attended. According to attendance records at the school, no more than eight students attended Eisler’s winter composition course and only three attended “The Crisis of Modern Music.” Apparently, for the semester Eisler earned only \$100 (equaling circa \$1,600 in 2012); the New School

⁷⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁶ Elie Siegemeister, “The Return of Hanns Eisler,” *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1935.

suffered a loss of \$34.77 (circa \$600 in 2012) from those courses.⁷⁷ For the spring semester, in February Eisler was scheduled to offer two more courses. The first was a course on composition and the second was titled “Schoenberg and Stravinsky: An Introduction to Modern Music.” According to testimony given to the HUAC, the New School had promised Eisler a salary of \$2000 (circa \$33,000 in 2012) for the school year, but Eisler actually only received fifty percent of his students’ attendance fees.⁷⁸

When Eisler returned to the New School in 1938, his courses were just as poorly attended as they were in 1935. For the spring semester at the New School Eisler offered courses in counterpoint and composition, as well as a lecture series on “The Future of Music.” According to the HUAC investigation, this last series was cancelled after the first lecture on 2 February. Only seven students signed up for his composition course, and only one attended his counterpoint lectures. Eisler’s contract promised a salary of \$3000 (circa \$48,000 in 2012), but he only received \$163.25 (circa \$2600 in 2012) for his work.⁷⁹ In the winter semester of 1938, Eisler taught courses in composition and “Music as Human Expression.” As before, he only received fifty percent of the attendance fees. This would continue to be the case for the rest of his tenure at the New School. His last two years at the institution seem to be his most successful. Although he only taught “The Art of Listening to Music” from October 1940 to May 1942 (four semesters), this course

⁷⁷ HUAC, *Hearings*, 81. Calculations come from the inflation calculator at <http://www.westegg.com/inflation> last accessed 12 April 2013. All inflation figures in this thesis are generated from that source.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 80–81.

earned him \$928.80 (circa \$14,000 in 2012). From 1935 to 1942, Eisler's total earnings from teaching at the New School add up to \$2,026.06 (circa \$30,000 in 2012).⁸⁰

On 19 November, New York's Theater Union hosted a performance of his music for Brecht's play *The Mother*. Audience and press reaction to this show, however, may have indicated to Eisler that America would not so warmly receive his artistic endeavors as pre-Hitler Europe had. Since October, the Union had been negotiating for the rights to produce an American version of *Die Mutter* (1931), one of Brecht's didactic plays about the mother of a worker who urges his fellow workers to strike. The play is based on a novel by Maxim Gorky. Paul Peter sent his translated adaptation to Brecht, who was living in Denmark at the time. Known for his controlling personality, Brecht so hated it that he came to America to sit in on rehearsals and offer critique.⁸¹ Two days before the premiere, both Eisler and Brecht were kicked out of the rehearsals.⁸² *The Mother* was a complete failure, receiving terrible reviews. Brooks Atkinson praised Eisler's music and liked the idea of using title cards, picture slides, and choral singing in theatre. However, he said "the conscious simplicity of the dramatic method turns 'Mother' into an animated lecture on the theme of revolution, which may have an educational value but which is desultory theater."⁸³ The *Daily Worker* said that "the realism of the Theater Union often

⁸⁰ Ibid., 83–84.

⁸¹ Bruce Cook, *Brecht in Exile* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 24.

⁸² Hans Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Hanns Eisler im Gespräch* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1976), 233.

⁸³ Brooks Atkinson, "The Play: 'Mother' Learns and Teaches the Facts of Life at the Theater Union in Fourteenth Street," *New York Times*, 20 November 1935.

violated the special realism required by Brecht's conception and his jeopardized artistic unity."⁸⁴ The *Daily Mirror* said it was "poor stuff, amateurishly presented."⁸⁵ The production only ran until 15 December, but Eisler did receive \$240.47 (equating circa \$4,000 in 2012) from the royalties.⁸⁶

Several issues contributed to the disastrous performance. First was an irreconcilable difference of opinion about performance style. American theater groups were utterly ignorant of how to appropriately perform an epic drama as Brecht demanded it and they leaned toward a more socialist realist interpretation as practiced by Stanislavsky.⁸⁷ Second, Brecht was not at all familiar to American audiences. Prior to the Theater Union performance, left-wing periodicals, like *New Masses* and *Daily Worker*, only mentioned Brecht in passing. Finally, by 1935 global Communist interests had changed. Now, Communist focus was on uniting "men of good will of all classes against Hitler."⁸⁸

⁸⁴ M. J. Olgin, "Mother: The Theatre Union's New Play," *Daily Worker*, 22 November 1935.

⁸⁵ Werner Hecht, *Materialien zu Bertolt Brechts Die Mutter* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976), 75–79.

⁸⁶ Bertolt Brecht to Maxim Gorky, 18 December 1935, in *Letters: 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Routledge, 1990), 226.

⁸⁷ Cook, *Brecht in Exile*, 24.

⁸⁸ Lee Baxandall, Introduction to *The Mother*, by Bertolt Brecht (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 11.

In 1935 Eisler became reacquainted with American composer Marc Blitzstein, a member of the Composers Collective, whom he had met in 1927.⁸⁹ Blitzstein considered *Die Massnahme* [The Decision] and *Die Mutter* masterpieces and admired Eisler's alternation of speaking, singing, and shouting in *Die Massnahme*.⁹⁰ He also adopted elements of Eisler's musical style and philosophy and echoed Eisler's New School lectures in a 1936 article for *Modern Music*. He said that when it comes to the music of composers such as Eisler and Wolpe:

The dominant entry of the working class into our midst, say these men, is no fluke ... It answers the problems of the crisis ... The individual composer achieves his pure ultimate undisturbed individuality only on the basis of a smooth and balanced machinery; it is his function as a musician to aid in the building of such a machinery.⁹¹

He added that this has resulted in the creation of two musical forms, mass song and the *Lehrstück*. Blitzstein wrote these words around the same time he was working on the revered *The Cradle Will Rock* (1936), a work of musical theater about the struggle of trade unions against big business that reflects the strong influence of Brechtian epic theater and Eisler's *Kampflieder*.⁹²

⁸⁹ Howard Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein: His Life, His Work, His World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 106.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹¹ Marc Blitzstein, "Coming—The Mass Audience!" *Modern Music* 13, no. 4 (May–June 1936): 29.

⁹² Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 140.

In November 1935, Timely Recording released three 78-rpm discs featuring Eisler's songs. Eisler's "Rise Up!" ("Steh auf!") and "In Praise of Learning" from *Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe* (Round Heads and Pointed Heads, 1936) appear on one disc as well as the "Solidaritätslied" re-labeled as "Forward! We've Not Forgotten" and the "Internationale." The third is the first ever recording of Eisler's "Einheitsfrontlied" ("United Front"). The other side of the disc includes a recording of lawyer and trade union activist Maurice Sugar's "The Soup Song." These recordings featured Adomian and the New Singers, with Bauman as soloist and Blitzstein on piano. Eisler accompanied "In Praise of Learning" on the piano. These three discs are the first American phonograph recordings of revolutionary songs.⁹³ They were played at a concert at Webster Hall on 20 December. Before the needle was dropped, the performers from each disc presented a live performance of each song.⁹⁴

At the end of 1935, Eisler participated in several concerts and lectures with members of the Composers Collective; the events reflect the Collective's efforts to incorporate more American music into the discussion of modern revolutionary music. At New York City's Town Hall, a lecture-concert with the title "The Appreciation of Music" was given on 1 December. All of the music of this concert, except for Eisler's, was written by Americans, including Evelyn Berckman, Paul Creston, Otto Luening, Blitzstein, Siegmeister, and Cowell.⁹⁵ On 7 December Eisler gave a lecture titled

⁹³ "Working Class Song Records," *Daily Worker*, 19 December 1935.

⁹⁴ "Music: Revolutionary Songs," *Daily Worker*, 26 December 1935.

⁹⁵ "Music," *Daily Worker*, 11 December 1935.

“Music’s Purposes in Society” at a symposium called “Music in the Crisis” at New York City’s Town Hall. Among the other participants in the event were Copland, Cowell, Bauman, and music critic Oscar Thompson.⁹⁶ Music presented at the symposium included songs by Charles Ives, Schoenberg’s Five Piano Pieces, op. 23, Cowell’s “March,” and Eisler’s workers chorus songs.⁹⁷

On 20 January 1936, to celebrate the twelfth anniversary of Lenin’s death, the New York District of the American Communist Party organized a mass Lenin Memorial Meeting at Madison Square Garden. The event was expected to attract about 30,000 participants.⁹⁸ Eisler was actively involved in this historic event, the first ever communist mass gathering of its size in the United States. His songs were the feature in the musical portion of the program. The International Workers Order Band and the Freiheit Gesangs Verein, comprising a group of over 500 people, performed “Comintern,” “Red Front,” and “United Front.” Additionally, Eisler arranged a version of the “Internationale” that one observer considered “the most stirring interpretation yet made of the international anthem of the revolutionary working class.”⁹⁹ This arrangement was sung by the capacity crowd at the meeting’s initiation and conclusion.

⁹⁶ Hanns Eisler, “The Composer in Society,” *Daily Worker*, 5 December 1935.

⁹⁷ “Concert-Forum Held: Composers and Critic Give Talks on Present-Day Music,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1935.

⁹⁸ “Lenin Memorial Mass Meeting At Garden to Draw 30,000,” *Daily Worker*, 19 January 1936.

⁹⁹ “Eisler Songs Will Feature Lenin Meeting,” *Daily Worker*, 18 January 1936.

Prior to the event, Eisler met with members of the IWO Band at a rehearsal. Eisler asked for an interpreter. Even though his English was good, he said, “Sometimes, you see, I get too excited, and it’s only German that comes out.”¹⁰⁰ In his typical animated and restless spirit he said to them: “You are too isolated in this room. You must work with the workers’ organizations ... I am ready to help you. The revolutionary music is the inheritance of the American people.”¹⁰¹ He told them that they should not play just Beethoven and Bach, but also work with modern composers. Finally, he suggested that some of them attend the New School so that they could be trained to explain music to ordinary workers. His comments were met with applause.¹⁰²

In late January Eisler wrote the song “Mother Bloor” in honor of Ella Reeve Bloor, a women’s rights activist and strike leader, who helped recruit many new members to the Communist Party in the 1930s. The song was written for performance at an anniversary banquet at the Hotel Lismore honoring her forty-five years in service of the labor movement. The song, complete with text and musical notation, appeared in the *Daily Worker* the day of the banquet. As with his *Kampflieder*, Eisler clearly set Kenneth Hunter’s text with a memorable melody, and the refrain is lively with Scotch snaps.¹⁰³ This song was reprinted in 1971 in *The Liberated Woman’s Songbook*, where it appeared

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Sidney Streat, “IWO Orchestra Making American Music History,” *Daily Worker*, 17 January 1936.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Kenneth Hunter and Hanns Eisler, “Mother Bloor: A Song,” *Daily Worker*, 28 January 1936.

alongside works by American folk artists Joe Hill, Aunt Molly Jackson, Pete Seeger, and Woody Guthrie.¹⁰⁴

With his New School courses poorly attended, Eisler jumped at the opportunity to work as a musical supervisor on the Karl Grune film *Pagliacci* for British International Pictures.¹⁰⁵ A farewell concert was given in his honor on 1 February at Steinway Hall. Adomian and the New Singers presented the American premiere of the “Mother” Cantata, op. 25, which featured music from the play. Bauman and Hester Sondergaard were the soloists.¹⁰⁶ On 12 February, he attended a rehearsal of the Daily Worker Chorus, led by Siegmeister. He voiced his opinion of bourgeois music to the members:

What is the voice of the worker? Untrained. He can’t read notes. It’s not much individually. If it were, you can bet the bourgeoisie would try to take that away from you too. ... The forms of entertainment the workers have today are harmful. Your duty is to bring them here. It will be much more interesting for them. ... The bourgeoisie tells you to sing about something else—the American moon, you know. But the things offered by the bourgeois music are harmful.¹⁰⁷

In his last interview with the *Daily Worker* before his departure, Eisler thanked the New Singers and listed Adomian, Blitzstein, Copland, Cowell, Colin McPhee, Robinson,

¹⁰⁴ Eisler and Brecht’s “Herr Doktor, die Periode” (“Ballad to Paragraph 218”), a song protesting the section of the Weimar Constitution that forbade abortion, also appeared in this compilation. Jerry Silverman, *The Liberated Woman’s Songbook* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

¹⁰⁵ Eisler states the job as the reason for his departure in his unread statement to the HUAC and his article “Fantasia in G-Men.” Hanns Eisler, “Fantasia in G-Men,” *New Masses*, 14 October 1947.

¹⁰⁶ “Hanns Eisler Will Receive Musical Adieu,” *Daily Worker*, 28 January 1936.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Sidney Streat, “The Moon, Workers, and Song,” *Daily Worker*, 17 February 1936.

Seeger, Siegmeister and others, as among the “best, revolutionary and left composers.”¹⁰⁸

On 25 February, Eisler wrote to Czech composer Alois Hába from the *Ile de France*, which had left New York’s harbor on 21 February.¹⁰⁹ Even though Eisler had been hired to teach a full academic year at the New School, it is very likely that he considered his financial prospects better back in Europe. In less than two years, Eisler returned to the United States and would stay for a whole decade. I discuss this time period in the next two chapters.

¹⁰⁸ Anita Garrett, “Eisler Praises Chorus Group,” *Daily Worker*, 24 February 1936.

¹⁰⁹ Betz, et al., Commentary to Hanns Eisler to Alois Hába, 25 February 1936, *Briefe*, 370. “Ocean Travelers,” *New York Times*, 21 February 1936. Schebera sets 11 April 1936 as the date of Eisler’s return to Europe, but his reasons for this are not explained. Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 141.

CHAPTER 4: “I LIVE HERE IN AN ABOMINABLE HEAT”: EISLER’S AMERICAN EXILE, 1938–1948

Before Eisler returned to the United States in 1938, he continued his social and musical association with the Communist movement in Europe. Yet from 1936 to 1937, Hitler’s control over Germany stabilized and his party acquired even greater popularity. Fascism also secured a stronger hold on Italy. In 1936, the Spanish Civil War erupted. Many European socialists were on the side of the Republicans, and the Comintern called for worldwide support of those resisting General Francisco Franco. On 10 January 1937, Eisler visited Spain for about two weeks, working with Spanish choir director Carlos Palacio. Eisler wrote two songs on texts by poet Herrera Petere for a Spanish radio broadcast: *Marca del 5th Regimento* and *No pasaran*. When he visited the Eleventh Brigade with poet Ludwig Renn, he wrote *In dem spanischen Land* and *Lied vom 7. Januar*.¹

Eisler’s marriage to his first wife, Lotte, was annulled on 14 May 1935. After stays in Moscow and Prague, she eventually moved in March 1939 with their son Georg to London, where they lived in exile until 1942.² In 1933 Eisler had met Louise “Lou” Jolesch, who was a Communist but never a member of the party. Her Austrian father owned a large piece of real estate, and her Jewish mother was the daughter of a paper mill

¹ Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern und Dokumenten* (Mainz: Schott, 1998), 146–148.

² *Ibid.*, 132. Georg Eisler (1928–1998) became a renowned painter.

worker in Vienna.³ Lou showed a picture of Eisler to her friends saying she had been flirting with him and that he looked like a funny Franz Schubert (“aussieht wie ein komischer Franz Schubert”).⁴ Apparently, Lou was tired of her luxurious life in Iglau with her first husband, author Frank Jolesch, and she wished to flee Nazi tyranny.⁵

Hanns and Lou’s marriage was most certainly prompted by the need for visas. Paris and Prague were exile centers, but they were very soon to fall under Nazi control. Moscow was not the best option, probably because Lotte and Georg were living there at the time, and they did not have enough contacts in London.⁶ The only remaining option was New York. So once again Eisler turned to the New School for help. From Prague, Eisler wrote to Clara Mayer, the New School’s associate director, who apparently had written him about a possible job. He said, “I wish to thank you most cordially; for your letter proves to me anew in what a comradely way you have stood up for me.”⁷ On 12 November, Alvin Johnson again offered Eisler a professorship at the New School for the term beginning on 1 February 1938. Even though Eisler had a letter of invitation to work

³ Maren Köster, “Einleitung: Louise Eisler-Fischer. Schriftstellerin – Lebensgefährtin,” in Louise Eisler, *Es war nicht immer Liebe*, ed. Maren Köster, Jürgen Schebera, and Friederike Wißmann (Vienna: Sonderzahl Verlagsgesellschaft, 2006), 7–9.

⁴ Ernst Fischer, *Das Ende einer Illusion: Erinnerungen 1945–1955* (Munich: Molden, 1973), 247.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 247. Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 159.

⁶ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 159.

⁷ Hanns Eisler to Clara W. Mayer, 4 October 1937, in *Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe: Briefe 1907–1943*, Ser. IX, Bd. 4, 1, ed. Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010), 127.

at an American university, this did not prompt immigration authorities to issue him the appropriate non-quota visa, as would be expected. Instead, on 14 December the U.S. Consulate in Prague, probably because of his title as “Visiting Professor,” provided the Eislers with visitor’s visas, which were only good for six months.⁸ Thus, the Eislers’ marriage on 7 December may have been a desperate act to insure that they would both travel together. The Eislers only planned to stay in the United States for a few months, but Hitler’s invasion of Austria in March prompted them to stay in the country.⁹

I. New York

The Depression had deeply affected American workers; unemployment had been on the rise even before 1928. The federal government did not act to provide financial relief until 1932 with the Emergency Relief Act, but this required that states request federal money with the promise of repayment. Thus, in the early 1930s, the burden of relief lay heavily on public and private relief groups. People fled the city and set up shanty towns outside America’s metropolises. Economic weakness, loss of jobs, and political inaction led to the largest mass movement of the unemployed in America’s history. The American Communists led many protests and hunger marches and won many new people over to their party.¹⁰ In the midst of this national desperation, Democrat

⁸ HUAC, *Hearings*, 80. Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 161.

⁹ Hanns Eisler to Dorothy Thompson, 5 November 1938, *Briefe*, 138.

¹⁰ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 61.

Franklin D. Roosevelt won the 1932 presidential election on a campaign of production regulation, unemployment aid, and federal work programs that he called the “New Deal,” which in the coming years would pull the country out of its financial slump and put people back to work.¹¹

Great federal relief came to the country’s artists and musicians with the establishment of Federal One, an arts program under the Works Progress Administration in August 1935, where individuals could apply for labor and material aid for various artistic projects.¹² This program included the Federal Music Project, the Federal Writers’ Project, and the Federal Theater Project. Under Nikolai Solokoff, the Russian-born director of the Cleveland Orchestra, the Federal Music Project communicated with unions, distributed money to the states, organized public performances, provided research opportunities for music academics, helped with funding new compositions, and employed only professional musicians.¹³

Besides the aforementioned teaching opportunities, refugee performers also had the opportunity to join orchestras. However, exiled European composers were not met

¹¹ Ibid., 69–70.

¹² William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 126–127.

¹³ Ibid., 604–608. See also Tim Carter, “Schoenberg, Weill, and the Federal Arts Projects in Los Angeles, Spring 1937,” in *Ereignis und Exegese—Musikalische Interpretation, Interpretation der Musik: Festschrift für Hermann Danuser zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Camilla Bork, Tobias Robert Klein, Burkhard Meischein, Andreas Meyer, and Tobias Plebuch, 600–612 (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2011); Tim Carter, “Celebrating the Nation: Kurt Weill, Paul Green, and the Federal Theater Project (1937),” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5 (2011): 297–334.

with equal opportunity. On the one hand, in the 1930s, America was just finding its own unique musical voice on the international stage, and many struggling American musicians frowned upon European newcomers taking available jobs. Composer Mark Brunswick, chairman of the National Committee for Refugee Musicians, called this “the strongest negative factor encountered by the refugee musician on his arrival.”¹⁴

Nevertheless, Schoenberg had little difficulty finding high-paying jobs in America. First, he moved to the United States in 1933 and acquired a professorship at Malkin Conservatory. The following year he taught at the University of Southern California and, from 1936 to 1944, at the University of California, Los Angeles.¹⁵ Through Schirmer, Schoenberg was able to have many of his American works published, including his Violin Concerto, Op. 36 and his Fourth String Quartet, both in 1939, and his textbook *Models for Beginners in Composition* in 1942.¹⁶ Less than a month after entering the United States in 1935, Ernst Krenek was also teaching at Malkin Conservatory. His book *Music Here and Now* was published by W. W. Norton in 1939, and his composition primer for American students *Studies in Composition Based on the Twelve-tone Technique* was released by Schirmer in 1940. Afterward, he taught at the University of Michigan and Vassar College.¹⁷ Kurt Weill, Brecht’s collaborator on *Die*

¹⁴ Mark Brunswick, “Refugee Musicians in America,” *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 26 January 1946.

¹⁵ Sabine Feisst, *Schoenberg’s New World: The American Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 202–209.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 185–186.

¹⁷ John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of

Dreigroschenoper and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* also came to America in 1935 and helped develop new approaches to opera and the Broadway musical as a successful form of popular entertainment in the country. He wrote to Heinz Jolles: “Through the work I have done the entire picture of musical theater in this country has changed: the musical play, as I created it in Europe, is now the big vogue in America.”¹⁸ His major American successes include *Street Scene* (1947) and *Down in the Valley* (1949).¹⁹ Stefan Wolpe, who like Eisler had participated in Berlin’s agit-prop community, came to the United States in 1938 and struggled financially, often relying on unemployment checks. He was able to produce a series of works that influenced such American composers as Morton Feldman and Elliott Carter, as well as jazz musicians like George Russell. From 1952, he thrived as a composer and teacher at Black Mountain College.²⁰ Meeting with poorer luck, composer Paul Dessau, who also had written fighting songs in Europe, briefly worked on a chicken farm in New Jersey before he found better paying jobs.²¹ Eisler was fortunate to have the New School offer him a visiting professorship, especially considering the poor attendance of his earlier courses.

California Press, 1991), 216–223.

¹⁸ Quoted in Kim Kowalke, “Kurt Weill and the Quest for American Opera,” in *Amerikanismus, Americanism, Weill: Die Suche nach kultureller Identität in der Moderne*, ed. Hermann Danuser and Hermann Gottschewski (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2003), 283.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

²⁰ Brigid Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38–39, 255.

²¹ Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*, 73.

This amnesty is indicative of Johnson's continuing belief in the aid of refugee academics and in Eisler's importance as a professor of music.

Despite his ill luck with class attendance, Eisler's music was regularly performed in New York concerts, thanks to his associations with the Composers' Collective and the New School. Due to the numerous organizations sponsoring these events as well as the many people attending them, Eisler has clearly situated himself in a diverse American social milieu. On 6 February 1938, the journal *New Masses* hosted an evening of modern music at the Forty-Sixth Street Theater. Artists present at the event included Blitzstein, Copland, Robinson, Alex North, Virgil Thomson, and Count Basie's swing band. Actor Orson Welles was also in attendance. Listed by the *New York Times* as "among the most interesting items" were Eisler's songs presented by Bauman.²² The *Daily Worker* called Eisler's music "the most serious and formidable pieces on the program."²³ On 9 March, the *Chicago Daily Times* reported that Ernest Hemingway had written Eisler asking him to provide music for his latest play, but nothing seems to have come from this.²⁴ On 27 February, the American Music League hosted a concert in Eisler's honor at the New School. Participants in the event included Bauman, Blitzstein, and the Freiheit Gesang Verein.²⁵ On 27 March, the American Music League hosted a benefit concert for the

²² "New Masses Offer Modern Music," *New York Times*, 7 February 1938.

²³ "Concert of Contemporary Music Proves Huge Success," *Daily Worker*, 10 February 1938.

²⁴ Quoted in HUAC, *Hearings*, 100.

²⁵ "Programs of the Current Week," *New York Times*, 27 February 1938.

Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the American volunteers who were serving in the Spanish Civil War. Eisler, Copland, Thomson, Bauman, Robinson, and Morton Gould attended the event. On 1 April, Bauman and Eisler gave a lecture concert on German music at the Manhattan Chorus Auditorium.²⁶ The Composers' Forum-Laboratory, which was in operation from 1935 to 1940 and functioned under the Federal Music Project for the benefit of American composers, gave two concerts featuring Eisler's music on 6 and 20 April.²⁷ The first concert included several of his solo cantatas and numerous chamber works, among them the First Piano Sonata, Op. 1 (1923) and his *Acht Klavierstücke*, Op. 8 (1925) performed by former Schoenberg student Edward Steuermann who had emigrated to the United States in 1936.²⁸ The evening of 22 April, Eisler appeared on WQXR in a segment called "Listening to Music."²⁹ The following month, Eisler's music reached one of America's most hallowed concert venues. On 7 May, the Freiheit Gesang Verein, in celebration of its fifteenth anniversary, performed works by Eisler at Carnegie Hall.³⁰

On 25 June 1938, Eisler delivered a lecture to the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, which had a choir with a rich history of performance. His message built

²⁶ "Programs of the Current Week," *New York Times*, 27 March 1938.

²⁷ McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration*, 597, 624. "Concert and Opera Asides," *New York Times*, 6 March 1938.

²⁸ "W.P.A. Music," *New York Post*, 2 April 1938.

²⁹ "Today on the Radio," *New York Times*, 22 April 1938.

³⁰ "Other Music in Review," *New York Times*, 8 May 1938.

on his Marxist notion of dialectical materialism and the deleterious effects of the culture industry. He defined the modern crisis in music as a schism between entertainment and serious music brought on by the radio, whose listeners demanded more popular music and viewed classical music as snobbish, or “the prerogatives of rich ladies.”³¹ He argued that in “primitive” societies, sacred and secular music were united, and that up to Johann Sebastian Bach’s time the two frequently borrowed from one another. The Industrial Revolution destroyed folk music culture, as workers were forbidden to sing, forgot their songs, and began listening to sounds provided by the entertainment industry. Serious music and high culture was now available only to those who had the time and money to listen to it. After World War I, the young generation preferred what movie theaters, radio, and the jazz record had to offer. He told the audience that most choir repertoire was trash, and pieces must be chosen that are interesting for both the performers and the listeners. Even the modern rhythms of jazz and swing were acceptable, but not in the empty and socially irrelevant styles of Hollywood and Broadway. Finally, he said “the death of art is cheap sentimentality, empty bombast and vulgar imitations of folk songs,” and he asked the choir to “re-create culture despite all those wealthy women.”³²

In March 1938, Eisler asked the New School to help him attain a permanent visa from the U.S. consulate in Havana, Cuba. In June, Johnson heard from government officials that Eisler’s visa was put on hold because he had been addressed as “comrade”

³¹ Hanns Eisler, “Labor, Labor Movement and Music,” in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 135.

³² *Ibid.*, 146–147.

in the *Daily Worker*; with the government expecting a response, Johnson asked Eisler about his relationship with the Communist Party.³³ Eisler responded:

You know my sympathies are anti-fascistic, but I assure that I am not a member of any political party, neither the Communist Party. I am a composer. All my aims are musical ones, and I see everything from the musical point of view.³⁴

Eisler's speech to the Ladies' Garment Workers Union four days afterward strengthens his claim. His visa expired on 23 June, but he remained throughout the summer at the home of Joachim and Sylvia Schumacher in Valley Cottage, New York.³⁵ On 10 July, the Eislers were asked to appear at Ellis Island for questioning and he asserted that his music was anti-fascist, not communist, in character. He also identified as a half-Aryan half-Jewish political refugee and claimed to have \$750,000. Three weeks later, Hanns and Lou's visitor's visas were extended to 21 January 1939.³⁶

During the summer of 1938, Eisler resumed his work with Dutch-born filmmaker Joris Ivens who had settled in the United States in 1936. The result was Eisler's first music for an American film, *400 Millionen*, a documentary that Ivens hoped would be one of the first extended presentations of the Japanese invasion of China to an American

³³ HUAC, *Hearings*, 80–81.

³⁴ Hanns Eisler to Alvin Johnson, 21 June 1938, *Briefe*, 132.

³⁵ Manfred Grabs, et al., Commentary to Hanns Eisler to Alvin Johnson, 21 June 1938, *Briefe*, 389. Joachim Schumacher was a Marxist immigrant philosopher from Germany. He had recently published *The Fear of Chaos* (1937) in Germany, which correctly claimed that the rise of fascism would lead to war. Christian Schultz-Gerstein, "Kritik in Kürze," *Die Zeit* 52 (1972), accessed 24 March 2013, <http://www.zeit.de/1972/52/kritik-in-kuerze>.

³⁶ HUAC, *Hearings*, 100–101.

audience.³⁷ Ivens told Eisler that the battle music should depict both heroism of and disgust with modern warfare. Eisler's battle music was unconventionally quiet and featured elements of Chinese music. Ivens explained, "In every sequence his music had a different function, and helped to push the film forward as if leading to a final victory."³⁸ The film premiered on 7 March 1939 to mixed reviews. The *New York Times* called it "superficial and gap-toothed."³⁹ The Japanese paper *Trans-Pacific* said that the film provoked disgust from its American audience and that the destructive Japanese soldiers in the film were actually Chinese soldiers in disguise.⁴⁰

Considering Eisler's questioning on Ellis Island, it is understandable why he chose to remain incognito for his next project. Even though under American law a foreigner could be deported for associating with the Communist Party, Eisler contributed to a second major red event at Madison Square Garden, a celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of Lenin's death on 23 January 1939.⁴¹ Since he was still in New York with an expired visa, Eisler used the pseudonym John Garden, a play on his own name and the venue, when he wrote music to Hoffmann R. Hays's *A Song for America*.⁴² The play

³⁷ Joris Ivens, *The Camera and I* (Berlin: Seven Seas Publishers, 1969), 143.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁹ Frank S. Nugent, "The Screen: 'The 400,000,000,' Joris Ivens's Documentary Film of China, Has Its Premiere at the Cameo," *New York Times*, 8 March 1939.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Ivens, *The Camera and I*, 181.

⁴¹ Irma Bauman, "No Pearl-Shaped Tones: Mordecai Bauman and His Collaboration with Hanns Eisler," *Eisler-Mitteilungen* 44 (November 2007): 30–31.

⁴² Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 163. American composer and folklorist Herbert Haufrecht also contributed music to the show.

related the history of social equality since the American Revolution. One of the three songs Eisler wrote for the show “Sweet Liberty Land” was in the form of a Negro spiritual. Hays later said the song was “a hit with the left-liberal movement and for some time was practically the national anthem of the American Communist Party.”⁴³

Eisler also wrote music to Hays’s *Medicine Show*, a Broadway play that argued for a national healthcare plan. Directed by Jules Dassin, it premiered at the New York Theater on 12 April 1940 and it was the first Living Newspaper production since the demise of the Federal Theatre program. *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson found the play “more illuminating than most things the theater offers” and that it received “passionate applause.”⁴⁴ Eisler also planned to write music for Hays’s *The Life of Daniel Drew*, but he never began the project.

In October 1938, journalist Dorothy Thompson, a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, asked Assistant Secretary of State George S. Messersmith to help the Eislers acquire immigrant visas. Roosevelt also wrote Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles on the matter in January, but all were unsuccessful. Robert C. Alexander, a clerk at the Labor Department, wrote Messersmith saying Eisler was not eligible for the immigrant visa because although not a member of the Party, he was a Communist, had obtained past

⁴³ Betz, *Political Musician*, 167–168.

⁴⁴ Brooks Atkinson, “‘Medicine Show’ is a Living Newspaper Survey of the Health Problem in America,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1940.

nonimmigrant visas through fraud, and had “given the Communists in the United States and other countries aid, comfort, and active association in the promotion of their cause.”⁴⁵

On 2 March 1939 the Labor Department ordered the deportation of Hanns and Lou Eisler, who again had been living illegally in the United States since January with expired visas. A week later Eisler wrote Mexican labor union activist Vincente Lombardo Toledano, asking for help acquiring a visa to Mexico.⁴⁶ Since 1934, Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas had practiced clear antifascist politics, and many refugees from the Spanish Civil War had fled to his country, where there was also a small exile community of German and Italian communists.⁴⁷ With the help of Mexican composer Silvestre Revueltas, Eisler acquired a temporary Mexican residence permit and was hired as a lecturer at the National Conservatory of Mexico City. He and Lou left for Mexico on 12 April.⁴⁸

The Mexican press reported on Eisler’s appointment to the conservatory. Many famous Americans had written Cardenas in support of the Eislers, including Albert Einstein, Hemingway, Thompson, and Leopold Stokowski.⁴⁹ While teaching harmony and orchestration at the Mexican conservatory, Eisler lived in a posh house that was once

⁴⁵ At the time, the Labor Department oversaw the Immigration Service. HUAC, *Hearings*, 105.

⁴⁶ Hanns Eisler to Vincente Lombardo Toledano, 9 March 1939, *Briefe*, 143–144.

⁴⁷ Manfred Grabs, et al., Commentary to Vincente Lombardo Toledano, *Briefe*, 402.

⁴⁸ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 171.

⁴⁹ “Mexico Opens Its Doors to Hanns Eisler,” *Mexico Today*, 1 April 1939. The article also reported that Germany had put a bounty of 1500 marks on Eisler’s head.

the home of the Brazilian ambassador. Many friends, including Bauman, Ivens, and Hays, came to visit him. On some nights, Eisler held soirees, where he and Spanish refugees would sing at the piano. He also worked on music for Brecht's *Mother Courage* and *The Trial of Lucullus*.⁵⁰

On 7 September 1939, the Eislers received limited two-month visitors visas back in the United States—they had been hoping for non-quota visas since Eisler was still working at the New School. Even with the short time allotted to him, Eisler went back to New York and resumed teaching. When this visa expired, Eisler again chose to remain in the country illegally.⁵¹

II. Clifford Odets and the Rockefeller Project

Upon his return to New York, Eisler received a book contract from Oxford University Press to write a study on film music, *Composing for the Films*. This job would help relieve some of his financial difficulties, but Eisler asked Johnson to appeal to the Rockefeller Foundation for financial support.⁵² An official proposal was sent to the Foundation on 1 November 1939. Eisler stated that he would define the main problems with current film music and offer suggestions for practical solutions. He would also organize a film archive demonstrating these applications and record the music in a studio. In February 1940, the New School received over \$20,000 (circa \$323,000 in 2012) from

⁵⁰ Betz, *Political Musician*, 174–175.

⁵¹ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 173.

⁵² Betz, *Political Musician*, 176.

the Foundation for the project which lasted three years. Eisler was also given a yearly stipend of \$3000 (circa \$47,000 in 2012).⁵³

For further knowledge on the culture industry, Eisler consulted philosopher Theodor W. Adorno who was simultaneously working on a radio project for the Rockefeller Foundation at Princeton.⁵⁴ Both men were advocates of modernism and critics of popular culture. *Composing for the Films* combines Eisler's criticisms of commercial film and Adorno's critical analysis of the culture industry; their main target was Hollywood.⁵⁵ Horst Weber refers to *Composing for the Films* as a "foreign look at the culture of a guest land."⁵⁶ Weber's view, however, is a misconception, for Hollywood culture built upon imported elements of European culture, including nineteenth-century opera and operetta.⁵⁷ Sally Bick referred to the study as "a highly polemical Marxist

⁵³ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 175.

⁵⁴ When the time came to write the book in 1943, Adorno, along with his teacher Max Horkheimer, was already working on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. That work shares many ideas about the culture industry with *Composing for the Films*. Adorno was also helping Thomas Mann with passages about music for his *Doktor Faustus*. Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 95.

⁵⁵ Sally Bick pointed out that Eisler was not the first composer to challenge Hollywood standards. George Antheil and Copland had done this before him. Sally Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front: Aaron Copland and Hanns Eisler in Hollywood," (PhD diss., Yale University, 2001), 94.

⁵⁶ Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 97.

⁵⁷ Such operettas as *The Merry Widow* (1905) by Austro-Hungarian composer Franz Lehár were highly popular in early twentieth-century New York, where Rudolf Friml, an operetta composer from Prague, competed with Victor Herbert and the Englishmen W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan for stage successes. In early sound film, music either emulated or directly quoted classical music, opera and operetta. Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: Norton, 2001), 526–528; and Mervyn

critique of the culture industry.”⁵⁸ I will further discuss *Composing for the Films* in Chapter Five.

While Eisler was working in Mexico, Bauman had introduced him to the American playwright Clifford Odets, who became one of Eisler’s closest friends. Born to Lithuanian Jewish parents, he was among one of the many young writers and playwrights who during the Roosevelt Administration was troubled by the widespread unemployment, shoddy housing, and mass poverty. Like Brecht, he wrote in a style that is marked by an acute understanding of the colloquial. As Michael J. Mendelsohn explains, “Sometimes Odets dialogue combines the argot of the gangster with impassioned lyricism.”⁵⁹ With plays such as *Awake and Sing!* (1933) and *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), Odets had his greatest success while working with the Group Theater, founded in 1932 by director Harold Clurman and actors Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg.⁶⁰ Critical of a show-business machine that treated plays like merchandise, they were united by a “realist” method based upon Stanislavsky’s technique in contrast to more stylized acting, and they sought a

Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13.

⁵⁸ Bick, “Composers on the Cultural Front,” 3.

⁵⁹ Michael J. Mendelsohn, *Clifford Odets: Humane Dramatist* (Deland, FL: Everett/Edward, 1969), 46.

⁶⁰ Stella Adler, who was actually the only member to study directly with Stanislavsky, would continue to teach the method to aspiring actors at Erwin Piscator’s Dramatic Workshop at the New School for Social Research. In 1947 she established the Stella Adler Theater Studio in Los Angeles. Her students included Robert De Niro, Shelley Winters, Warren Beatty, and Candice Bergen. “Adler, Stella,” *Current Biography* (August 1985), 5; Lawrence Christon, “Stella Adler Sums Up Her Life in the Theater,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 September 1988.

“true” American theater rising as a central unit from a group of actors who shared a “central experience.”⁶¹

Eisler and Odets’ first artistic collaboration was the play *Night Music*. In contrast to many of Odets’s earlier plays, *Night Music* is a comedy, yet it is no less social commentary. The Greek-American Steve Takis (Elia Kazan) is plagued by insecurity due to the threat of unemployment. The aspiring theater actress Fay Tucker (Jane Wyatt) serves as his foil. The detective Abraham Lincoln Rosenberger (Morris Carnovsky), secretly suffering from cancer, represents an older, dying generation. He believes in the new generation’s ability to overcome the present day’s hardships through courage, hope, and self-determination. Eisler’s score for this play calls for clarinet, trumpet, piano, Hammond organ, and electric guitar. Blitzstein described Eisler’s music as virtuosic and particularly liked the versatile use of the guitar:

The music comes from an amplifier which so distorts the sound (deliberately and successfully) that you get the feeling you have never heard music like this before; what possible combination of instruments is playing, where are they, is this music, or is this something in my mind?⁶²

The play opened in New York on 21 February 1940 to poor reviews. Atkinson said that Odets “is now writing entirely without discipline and listening fondly to the sound of his

⁶¹ Clurman, “Critique”: 5.

⁶² Marc Blitzstein, “Theatre Music,” *Modern Music* 17, no. 3 (March–April 1940): 183.

voice.”⁶³ The *Daily Telegram* called the play “just plain goofy” and *Newsweek* said the play “talks too much at the wrong time.”⁶⁴

On 12 July, Odets wrote in his journal that Eisler had asked him to write something short that he could set to music. Odets proposed using five portions of his journal as a source. Eisler liked the idea and said he could call the work *Five Excerpts from a Writer's Journal (Clifford Odets)*. Eisler chose a passage about people singing a song in Europe (“Wind, Wind, Take Me Away with You”) and one of Odets’s musings about the loneliness of bachelorhood, but it is not known whether Eisler pursued this project further.⁶⁵ He would work with Odets again in Hollywood on the films *None but the Lonely Heart* (1944) and *Deadline at Dawn* (1946).

Eisler’s visa had been expired for seven months when the Immigration Department issued a warrant for his arrest. At the time, Eisler was in Hollywood working on his film music project. He and Lou, who still had Mexican residence permits, fled to the United States Consulate in Mexicali on 17 September and once again sought to attain non-quota visas. Although the Eislers had previously failed in attaining non-quota visas in Prague, Havana, and Mexico City, and despite the fact that the State Department had a file of previous statements concerning them, they were finally issued non-quota visas in

⁶³ Brooks Atkinson, “Group Theatre Produces Clifford Odets’s ‘Night Music,’ or Boy Meets Girl in Gotham,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1940.

⁶⁴ Mendelsohn, *Humane Dramatist*, 54.

⁶⁵ Clifford Odets, *The Time is Ripe: The 1940 Journal of Clifford Odets* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 207.

Mexicali on 20 September.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, they were stopped at the border by Calexico immigration officers, who probably noticed the discrepancy between Eisler's non-quota visa and the 1936 stop card issued by the State Department. They refused them re-entry into the United States. Eisler appealed this decision at Calexico and had to wait for a reply from the Immigration Department in Washington.⁶⁷ After nearly a month the Eislers were re-issued their non-quota visas on 22 October.⁶⁸

In November Eisler was hired by Frontier Films to write the music for Herbert Kline and John Steinbeck's semi-documentary *The Forgotten Village*. The people of the village play themselves in a story about "the conflict of primitive superstition and witchcraft with modern scientific advance."⁶⁹ Revueltas had originally been picked as composer, but he passed away on 5 October. Thus Eisler returned to Mexico a third time on 15 December, to the town of San Domingo about 80 miles from Mexico City. There, he studied the music of the people for two weeks.⁷⁰ Almost all of the film is set to music. Eisler did not use the typical, lush Hollywood orchestra, but rather a chamber ensemble, which at times sounds like a mariachi band.⁷¹ Following his success with the *Forgotten Village*, Eisler sought work on a major Hollywood film.

⁶⁶ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 173–174.

⁶⁷ HUAC, *Hearings*, 148–149.

⁶⁸ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 174.

⁶⁹ Bosley Crowther, "The Screen," *New York Times*, 19 November 1941.

⁷⁰ Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

III. Los Angeles

In the 1940s, Hollywood was in the middle of its Golden Age. Many aspiring artists, actors, writers, musicians, singers, and dancers moved to the West Coast in order to fulfill their aspirations and experience the glamorous life they read about in glossy magazines. In March 1942, Eisler moved to California so that he could finish work on his film project. Lou, who was still living in their New York apartment, would follow him later. Eisler composed eight scores for Hollywood: *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), *None But the Lonely Heart* (1944), *Spanish Main* (1944–5), *Jealousy* (1945), *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), *A Scandal in Paris* (1946), *So Well Remembered* (1947), and *Woman on the Beach* (1947). Five of these films were for RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum). The other scores were for independent studios. I will further discuss the first two films in Chapter Five.

With his move to Los Angeles, Eisler became part of an extant exile community living in the area. Many of its members were prominent artists, writers, and musicians. Brecht had been living in Santa Monica for nine months, and Adorno had moved to Los Angeles in November 1941.⁷² The Polish actress Salka Viertel, sister to Edward Steuermann, immigrated to America in 1928 when Europeans began to descend en masse to Los Angeles to work in the talkies. She became an American citizen in 1939 after writing several Hollywood screenplays for Greta Garbo. By forming a salon, she became the “social arbiter in California for the many refugees, both German and Austrian, in

⁷² Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 179. Richard Leppert, Introduction to *Essays on Music*, by Theodor W. Adorno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 7–8.

Hollywood.”⁷³ Europeans in this circle include the Eislers, the Schoenbergs, Brecht, Steuermann, film composer Dmitri Tiomkin, Los Angeles Philharmonic conductor Otto Klemperer, and the writers Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, and Franz Werfel with his wife Alma Mahler-Werfel.⁷⁴ Concerning the Eislers, Viertel said: “They were acclimatized to Hollywood, and popular in literary circles: Eisler because of his brilliant mind and jolliness, Lou because of her humor and intelligence.”⁷⁵

As a living environment, many members of the exile community found much to appreciate in Southern California, while others found its climate stifling and its culture vapid. Schoenberg wrote to Anton Webern: “You have no idea how beautiful it is here! ... There is rarely a day – supposedly also in winter – without sun.”⁷⁶ That same sun seemed Egyptian to Thomas Mann.⁷⁷ Living in Los Angeles since 1937, Krenek called California “Paradise.”⁷⁸ In contrast, Brecht called Los Angeles “Hell.”⁷⁹ Writer Vicki Baum, who won early Hollywood success with her screenplay for *Grand Hotel* (1932), hated the

⁷³ Oscar Levant, *A Smattering of Ignorance*, 67.

⁷⁴ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 199, 250.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World*, 49.

⁷⁷ Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America, from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 54.

⁷⁸ Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 206.

⁷⁹ Bertolt Brecht, “On Thinking About Hell” in *Poems 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen: 1976), 367.

traffic. On the disposition of a screenwriter she said:

Hollywood writers work very hard all the time, thinking up plots, brooding over angles and twists and gimmicks ... catering to producers' tastes and depending on the judgment of brigades of people. It's extremely hard work, and frequently you can't see the pie for all the fingers in it.⁸⁰

The first person to visit Eisler after his arrival in Los Angeles was Brecht, whom he had not seen in nearly four years. Now once again living in close proximity, they would continue their artistic collaboration. Hanns wrote to Lou in July:

I live here, in an abominable heat (and with extremely sparse finances) from meeting to meeting, from phone call to phone call, like an awful dream. This place is for me a hell of stupidity, of (truly indescribable!) corruption, and of boredom. The only good thing is my new little songbook.⁸¹

He refers to the so-called *Hollywood Songbook*, a collection of nearly fifty songs that document the often challenging experience of a person in exile. The collection is now considered a monumental twentieth-century addition to a line of great German songs that extends back to Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and Hugo Wolf. I will discuss the *Hollywood Songbook* in Chapter Seven.

Brecht had grown perturbed with his prospects as a screenwriter, but he was hired to write the screenplay for *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), an anti-Nazi flick directed by Fritz Lang, who was internationally acclaimed for *Metropolis* (1926).⁸² Leftist playwright John

⁸⁰ Vicki Baum, *It Was All Quite Different: The Memoirs of Vicki Baum* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1964), 333.

⁸¹ Hanns Eisler to Louise Eisler, 17 July 1942, *Briefe*, 228.

⁸² Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front," 303–304, 308.

Wexley served as Brecht's interpreter and collaborator.⁸³ Eisler and Brecht hoped to produce an American equivalent to *Kuhle Wampe* or *Die Massnahme*, as Bick explains:

Brecht and Eisler's perspective was to work along the lines of epic theater, that is, to invest the work with a sober, intellectual objective style, to engage the audience directly and dynamically and to eliminate the Hollywood tendency to emphasize mood and express emotion.⁸⁴

The story is loosely based on the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, Hitler's Deputy Reich Protector in Prague. Eisler started writing the music in January 1943, and he finished it in February. I will discuss this film further in the next chapter.

One of Eisler's closest friends in Hollywood was the silent film star Charlie Chaplin, whom he met in 1942 through the American writer Theodor Dreiser.⁸⁵ Since his early years in film, Chaplin was increasingly influenced by popular antifascist sentiments of the late 1930s. His comedic persona had benefited from his continued use of pantomime after the talkie had been introduced, but his wish to comment directly on social and political issues prompted him to speak in *The Great Dictator* (1940), a comic parody of Hitler and Nazism.⁸⁶ Eisler believed that, through numerous visits, he and

⁸³ Due to Brecht's inexperience with writing screenplays for an American production, Pressburger insisted upon Wexley's assistance. Unfortunately, Wexley soon demanded sole screen credit. He was backed by the Screen Writers Guild, which reasoned that Wexley would need the credit for future work, while Brecht, who was not a member, had been expressing the desire to return to Europe. While Brecht and Wexley were paid equivalent sums, only Wexley was given screen credit, but Lang says most of the story's elements belong to Brecht. Lotte H. Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 221–225.

⁸⁴ Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front," 317.

⁸⁵ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 188.

⁸⁶ Charles J. Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 162–165.

Brecht contributed to Chaplin's "radicalization."⁸⁷ Composer Serge Hovey, one of Eisler's students, told Albrecht Betz an anecdote demonstrating the common, humorous qualities of the two personalities:

Once I accompanied Eisler for a visit to Chaplin's house. When it was time to go, Eisler and Chaplin walked together to the exit. There began a strange ceremony. First, Chaplin opened the door wide. Then, both took twenty steps from each other, marching military style back toward each other and mutually saluted. Thereon Eisler made an about-face and marched through the open door, while Chaplin again saluted. Later Eisler told me that they at every visit always parted in this way.⁸⁸

A composer himself, Chaplin benefited from his friendship with Eisler by receiving help with the score to *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), a dark comedy about a swindling banker who marries women for their money and then murders them. At the end of the film, as he is led to execution, Chaplin's character declares that his crimes are no different from the acceptable killing of thousands during wartime. Eisler said that he dictated some of Chaplin's musical inspirations and arranged them. Chaplin commissioned Eisler when he planned to re-release his silent film *The Circus* (1928) with a new score. Eisler only composed a few sketches, which he used for his Septet No. 2 (1947).⁸⁹

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States entered the Second World War, and the lives of émigrés were deeply affected. People from Germany, like

⁸⁷ Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 224–225.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 188.

⁸⁹ Berndt Heller, "The Reconstruction of Eisler's Film Music: 'Opus III,' 'Regen,' and 'The Circus,'" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (1998): 551–552.

Eisler, were classified as “enemy aliens” and forced to follow an 8 PM curfew.⁹⁰ Under the Enemy Alien Act, an American law since 1798, the government may restrict the liberties or detain any citizen from a combatant nation.⁹¹ The law prompted great hostility toward Germans living in the United States and enabled Roosevelt to order the evacuation and incarceration of Japanese people living in California; many of them were American citizens.⁹²

Hanns and Lou, concerned for their loved ones in Europe, often sent money and CARE packages. Many of these went to Georg and Lotte Eisler. In late 1942, Hanns received a letter from his son, from whom he had not heard in three years.⁹³ In his second letter, Georg lamented that Hanns had Lou write a response instead of sending one himself.⁹⁴ On 21 January 1943, Lotte wrote to Hanns that they were in dire need of financial assistance:

I don't want to tell you in detail about the hard times we went through, but I feel perhaps the worst was for me, that I was not able to say to your child: 'Here is your father, composer of social music, who takes care of you and who expects you to become a man of decent character.'⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 180.

⁹¹ The Enemy Alien Act is still an American law. David Cole, “Enemy Aliens,” *Yale Law Review* 54, no. 5 (May 2002): 959.

⁹² Mina Yang, “New Directions in California Music: Construction of a Pacific Rim Cultural Identity, 1925–1945” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2001), 31–37.

⁹³ Georg Eisler to Hanns Eisler, undated, Hanns Eisler Archives, University of Southern California (HEA).

⁹⁴ Georg Eisler to Hanns Eisler, undated, HEA.

⁹⁵ Lotte Eisler to Hanns Eisler, 21 January 1943, HEA.

She continued that she wanted Hanns to remain in constant contact with them and to send him regular financial assistance. Throughout the war period, up to his departure from the United States, Eisler kept in contact with his son, giving him paternal advice and often sending money orders through the mail.

On 1 October 1943 a Writer's Congress under the sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization was held at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Mobilization had been founded with the mission "to mobilize all writers to dedicate their creative abilities to the winning of the war" and the Congress "belonged to anyone who sincerely pledged to prosecuting the war against the Axis enemy."⁹⁶ Eisler presented a paper in a panel on Music in the War that also included the American composers Sol Kaplan, Gail Kubik, David Raksin, and William Grant Still as well as the émigré Darius Milhaud. Eisler's presentation pulled from his research for the Rockefeller Foundation. He pointed out tired methods of film composition and favored "new musical materials" that allow a score to be more expressively flexible.⁹⁷

Shortly thereafter, in 1944, Eisler was hired as a guest professor at the University of California at Los Angeles. Danish actress and Brecht collaborator Ruth Berlau watched one of Eisler's lectures. She said that his classroom was full and "when he cannot find a word, he says the German word in American form."⁹⁸ In February 1946, the

⁹⁶ Francis Edwards Faragoh, Preface to *Writers' Congress: The Proceedings of the Conference Held in October 1943 Under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), x.

⁹⁷ Hanns Eisler, "Prejudices and New Musical Material," in *Writers' Congress*: 260–264.

⁹⁸ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 191.

University of Southern California hired Eisler as a professor of counterpoint and composition.⁹⁹ Eisler's colleagues included émigré composers Ernst Toch and Ingolf Dahl.¹⁰⁰ For six months, folk singer Earl Robinson took private lessons in composition from Eisler, who told him that he should write a fugue everyday:

Pudgy Hanns, seated at the piano, demonstrated what he meant. Rapidly, repeatedly, he thrust his arms into the air with astonishing violence. "Like setting-up exercises," he puffed. "Every day!"¹⁰¹

Eisler and Robinson helped launch the journal *Hollywood Quarterly*, now known as *Film Quarterly*, and they were both members of its Music Advisory Board.¹⁰²

In addition to his work in Hollywood and the university system, Eisler also participated in Los Angeles's record industry. On 8 September 1944, Eisler signed a contract with Decca Records to compose and conduct music for a phonograph release.¹⁰³ The recording was a selection of Charles Dickens's *Mr Pickwick's Papers* called "Mr. Pickwick's Christmas" read by British actor Charles Laughton.¹⁰⁴ Known in America for

⁹⁹ Betz, *Political Musician*, 195.

¹⁰⁰ Diane Peacock Jezic, *The Musical Migration and Ernst Toch* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 104; and Clarice Thurman, ed., *El Rodeo, 1946* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1946).

¹⁰¹ Earl Robinson, *Ballad of an American: The Autobiography of Earl Robinson*, American Folk Music and Musicians, No. 3 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 184–185.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ A copy of the contract is available in the HEA.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Laughton, *Mr Pickwick's Christmas*, Charles Dickens, Hanns Eisler 1 LP, (Los Angeles: Decca, 1944).

such roles as Captain Bligh in *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935, dir. Frank Lloyd) and Sir Simon de Canterville in *The Canterville Ghost* (1944, dir. Jules Dassin), Laughton began his career as a stage actor in London, where he had played the title role in *Mr Pickwick* (1928), directed by Basil Dean.¹⁰⁵ Eisler's tonal background score for small chamber orchestra quotes the English Christmas carol "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and paraphrases Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. Decca kept the copyrights to the music and paid Eisler \$1000 (circa \$13,000 in 2012) for his efforts. Gerhart Eisler, who was living in Woodside, New York, at the time received the record as a Christmas gift that year. The set came with two LPs and extensive liner notes with short biographies on the orator and the composer. In a letter to his brother, Gerhart lamented that he did not own a gramophone and could only look at his brother's picture in the booklet.¹⁰⁶

Eisler contributed underscoring to two more Christmas-themed Laughton recordings. The two sides of the 78 disc, released as Decca L3589, were titled "The Oldest Christmas Story" and "The Story of the Three Wise Men."¹⁰⁷ In the first, Laughton relates the story of the birth of Jesus Christ, accompanied by Eisler's music for a small chamber group (strings, flute, and clarinet) on the German hymn "Stille Nacht" ("Silent Night"). The opening solo violin melody contains a sequence that borrows from the final stanza of the hymn "Away in a Manger."

¹⁰⁵ Simon Callow, *Charles Laughton: A Difficult Actor* (London: Methuen, 1987), 302–308.

¹⁰⁶ Gerhart Eisler to Hanns Eisler, 18 November 1944, HEA.

¹⁰⁷ "Popular Record Releases," *Billboard*, 11 November 1944.

IV. The House Un-American Activities Investigation

When Germany capitulated to the Allied Powers on 7 May 1945, Eisler was thrilled. He was at a dinner party at the Odets' home when he heard the news. He walked about the room in tears telling everyone, "The war is over."¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, the war was just beginning for him. In 1938, Representative Martin Dies (Dem., Texas) spearheaded the Committee on Un-American Activities (later renamed the House Un-American Activities Committee, HUAC) to weed out possible Communist infiltrators in the American government.¹⁰⁹ In February 1940, the Committee had expanded its scope to include investigations of the film industry, because Dies believed Hollywood harbored an "unhealthy interest" in its pursuits.¹¹⁰

In November 1946, Louis Budenz, a former member of the Communist Party and editor of the *Daily Worker* turned anti-Communist activist, accused Gerhart Eisler of being a chief secret Soviet spy working in America. He and his wife had been living in the country since 1941 on visitor's visa and were trying to leave the country when Budenz made his claim. Gerhart had not been asked to testify on that occasion, but on 4 February 1947, he was arrested and sent to Ellis Island. It was believed that he was a flight risk pending his HUAC interrogation on 6 February.¹¹¹ On that day, testimony was given that linked him with a group of Communist spies that had stolen atomic

¹⁰⁸ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 194.

¹⁰⁹ Louis F. Budenz, *The Cry is Peace* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), 15.

¹¹⁰ "Dies Says Movies Fight His Inquiry," *New York Times*, 16 February 1940.

¹¹¹ "Eisler Held Here As Enemy Alien; Once Called 'Brains' of Communists," *New York Times*, 5 February 1947.

intelligence from Canada for Moscow. His sister Ruth Fischer testified that he had been a Comintern agent and came to the United States to “teach the stupid Americans’ how to run the Communist Party.”¹¹² Gerhart was charged with conspiracy to overthrow the American government, perjury, contempt of Congress, tax evasion, and visa fraud. Hubert Kay, a writer for *Life* magazine, explained:

Gerhart Eisler is no longer directly dangerous to the U.S. His usefulness as a Moscow agent here has been destroyed by publicity ... Nor can many believe that the U.S. Communist party will not continue to serve Soviet Russia slavishly under Stalin’s direction. There will be other Eislers.¹¹³

Due to his brother’s interrogation and his sister’s identification of Hanns as a composer of Communist songs, the media’s probing eye turned to Hanns. Since 1942, J. Edgar Hoover had ordered the FBI to follow Eisler, tap his phones, and break into his home to seize condemnatory materials. Based on Fischer’s statements and documents seized from Eisler’s home, the HUAC decided to interrogate him, as well.¹¹⁴ As committee member Richard M. Nixon (R., Calif.) explained, it was hoped that the Hanns Eisler investigation would create leads for the much broader investigation of the entire

¹¹² “Eisler Guilty of Passport Fraud; Faces a Jail Term Up to 5 Years,” *New York Times*, 16 August 1947. Fischer had been living in the United States since 1941, and since she was excluded from the German Communist Party in 1926, she had worked as a journalist and “felt herself a victim of Stalinist politics.” Betz, *Political Musician*, 197.

¹¹³ Hubert Kay, “The Career of Gerhart Eisler as a Comintern Agent,” *Life* 22, no. 7 (17 February 1947): 99. The same article mentions Eisler as a former writer of revolutionary songs now working in Hollywood as a film composer.

¹¹⁴ James Wierzbicki, “Hanns Eisler and the FBI,” *Music and Politics* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 2.

film industry. The HUAC hoped to find that the supposed Communist infiltration of Hollywood extended from the unions all the way to the highest paid stars.¹¹⁵

The Committee's chief investigator, Robert Stripling later scathingly wrote about Eisler and his brother in his memoir *The Red Plot Against America* (1949). When he approached Eisler at his home in Malibu Beach, Stripling said he found Eisler reclining by the water. When Stripling handed over a subpoena, Eisler said: "I have been expecting you. Now get out of here."¹¹⁶ On 12 May, Eisler appeared at the Biltmore Hotel for a meeting with the committee. According to Lou, the committee's questions were idiotic:

Question: What do you think of Karl Marx?

Answer: I think he is the greatest thinker in the history of mankind.

Question: What do you think of Lenin?

Answer: A great historical figure.¹¹⁷

Even though Lou believed Hanns had provided truthful answers, Stripling told the press he considered them evasive: "We asked him if he believed in the capitalist form of government ... He said that he believed in it under Mr. Roosevelt ... but he said he wasn't certain whether he would continue to believe in it under Mr. Truman."¹¹⁸ The Committee decided to call Eisler to Washington D.C. for a public hearing, which would take place on 24 September.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ "Congress Probe of Film Reds Starts in May," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 27 April 1947.

¹¹⁶ Robert Stripling, *The Red Plot Against America* (Drexel Hill, PA: Bell, 1949), 63.

¹¹⁷ Lou Eisler to Alan Bush, 27 August 1947, HEA.

¹¹⁸ "Hanns Eisler Hearing Halts: Evasion Charged and House Group Decides to Push Inquiry at Capital," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 1947.

¹¹⁹ The hearing was originally scheduled for 16 June but postponed to the later date. Lou Eisler to Alan Bush, 27 August 1947, HEA.

Eisler continued to defend himself and his brother in the press. Eisler said that he was proud of his musical achievements and should be understood as a composer: “I am not myself a politician. I am a composer, interested primarily in music. Naturally, I am not uninterested in what is going on in the world and therefore I have opinions about it. I hope that is permissible, no?”¹²⁰ Due to the media attention, Eisler lost his job as a university professor, but a French film studio commissioned him to write music for Lou Bunin’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1949). Eisler applied for an exit visa, which was denied by the State Department as an unlawful action.¹²¹

Eisler’s interrogation took place in Washington, D.C., and lasted from 24 to 26 September. He was not allowed to read an opening statement wherein he stipulated untruthfully that he had never participated in political activities. In initial questioning, Eisler provided information on his European background and visa troubles. When Stripling asked him if he had ever joined the Communist Party, Eisler initially said that he had applied and been accepted, but he was not allowed to add that he had never paid his dues. When asked if he had ever participated in any Communist Party meetings, he replied in the negative. Stripling brought up his work in the Soviet Union, his music for *Die Massnahme*, and the titles of his various *Kampflieder*, his association with the Pierre Degeyter Club, and presented into evidence numerous articles from the *Daily Worker*

¹²⁰ Quoted in Alvah Bessie, “Meet Hanns Eisler,” *New Masses*, 13 May 1947.

¹²¹ Lou Eisler to Alan Bush, 27 August 1947, HEA.

mentioning Eisler, including one with a photograph of Eisler giving the Communist salute.¹²²

The Committee concluded that, despite much evidence of his Communist activities on file, a consular slip in Mexicali led to Eisler's acquisition of a permanent visa. Of particular interest to the media was Eleanor Roosevelt's small role in the affair, even though Welles and Messersmith's lawyer, Norman Littell, stressed that her involvement was insignificant.¹²³ At the conclusion of the hearings, the committee recommended to the Justice Department that Eisler be charged with perjury and passport fraud and immediately deported. The HUAC's report stated: "Hanns Eisler was not only a 'mere' member of the Communist Party, as he has testified, but ... he has been an international Communist figure of extreme importance to the Soviet Union for many years."¹²⁴ On 2 October, the Justice Department ordered that the Eislers be arrested and immediately deported.¹²⁵ When Eisler "surrendered" to immigration officers in Los Angeles on 6 October, he was released on bail pending a hearing over his charges. He said:

¹²² HUAC, *Hearings*, 1–50.

¹²³ Evidence showed that Roosevelt had helped him find a home in 1939 and had written twice to Welles in favor of Eisler while he was in Mexico. William S. White, "Committee Demands Eisler Be Punished as a Perjurer," *New York Times*, 27 September 1947.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Mary Spargo, "Hanns Eisler Prosecution To Be Studied," *The Washington Post*, 27 September 1947.

¹²⁵ "Hanns Eisler's Arrest Ordered for Deportation," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 October 1947.

I recall when I read in a French paper in 1933 that Hitler had put a price on my head ... I was not surprised. But I never dreamed I'd experience the same thing in the United States, a country that I love.¹²⁶

Numerous American musicians and celebrities protested Eisler's case. Freyda Adler, the wife of Metropolitan Opera conductor and Austrian musician Kurt Adler, formed a "National Committee for Justice for Hanns Eisler" with Oona Chaplin and Bette Odets.¹²⁷ The committee organized protests with prominent people that included Leonard Bernstein and Copland. Following the release of *Monsieur Verdoux*, Chaplin was interviewed by the press and asked questions about his friendship with Eisler. Chaplin called him "a very dear friend" and said that their friendship had nothing to do with politics.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Chaplin successfully encouraged Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and numerous other French artists to write and sign a letter of petition.¹²⁹ In January 1948, numerous British artists, including Ralph Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten, Lennox Berkeley, and Michael Tippett sent a protest telegram to President Truman.¹³⁰

Eisler's deportation hearing took place on 6 February 1948 at the Immigration and Naturalization Office in New York. His testimony at the HUAC hearing was presented as

¹²⁶ "Hanns Eisler and Wife Surrender on Coast in Action Which Aims at Their Deportation," *New York Times*, 7 October 1947.

¹²⁷ Freyda Adler to Lou Eisler, 9 October 1947, HEA.

¹²⁸ Chaplin, *Autobiography*, 452.

¹²⁹ "Plea for Eisler Laid to Chaplin by Red Paper," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1947. "Picasso, Others Protest Eisler Deportation," *The Washington Post*, 12 December 1947.

¹³⁰ "Appeal For Hanns Eisler," *The Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1948.

evidence; Immigration Services concluded that Eisler had admitted to membership in the Communist Party. Eisler neither objected to this conclusion nor offered anything in his defense. He was told that if he returned after deportation he faced five years in prison.¹³¹ The deportation order from the Justice Department came on 12 February with the “privilege” to leave the country voluntarily to a destination of his choice.¹³² With the help of Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Chaplin, Albert Einstein, and American war journalist William L. Shirer, Eisler received a passport to Prague from Czech President Eduard Beneš.¹³³ Hanns and Lou Eisler flew from New York on 26 March 1948.¹³⁴

V. The Farewell Concert

After Eisler returned to Europe, he wrote the national anthem for the German Democratic Republic on a text by Johannes Becher.¹³⁵ Sally Bick indicated that Eisler borrowed music from his score to *Hangmen Also Die* for the opening strains of the anthem, so there is forever a delightfully bizarre connection between the former Communist Germany and capitalist Hollywood.¹³⁶

¹³¹ “Deportation Near for Hanns Eisler,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1948.

¹³² “Hanns Eisler Ordered Deported; To Go Voluntarily, Says Lawyer,” *New York Times*, 13 February 1948.

¹³³ Hanns Eisler to Eduard Beneš, 20 October 1947, HEA.

¹³⁴ “Eislars to Leave Today,” *New York Times*, 26 March 1948.

¹³⁵ “East Germany’s National Anthem,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 December 1949.

¹³⁶ Sally Bick, “Political Ironies: Hanns Eisler in Hollywood and Behind the Iron Curtain,” *Acta Musicologica* 75, no. 1 (2003): 79.

On 3 February, Eisler had announced plans for a new composition called “The Alien Cantata,” which he said would be a sad composition dedicated to himself. When asked if the HUAC inspired the piece, Eisler responded, “The gentlemen in Washington are not music lovers.”¹³⁷ The cantata was meant to be premiered at his farewell concert on 12 February in New York’s Town Hall, but he only completed the text, which expresses grief and disappointment over his treatment in the United States.¹³⁸ The concert, which featured many of Eisler’s American compositions, was sponsored by seven of America’s prominent composers: Bernstein, Copland, David Diamond, Roy Harris, Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, and Randall Thompson. Composer and pianist Leo Smit played his *Klavierstücke für Kinder* (1932–3). Russian Jewish violinist Tossy Spivakovsky performed the *Reisesonate* (1937). Also included on the program were his String Quartet (1938), some of his Brecht songs, *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain* (1940), and his two septets (1940, 1947), which drew from his material for *A Child Went Forth* and *The Circus*, respectively.¹³⁹

Eisler and his battle with the American government left an impression on many American musicians and artists, which lasts to this day. Woody Guthrie expressed his agitation and feelings of hopelessness in his poem “Eisler on the Go,” which was set to music by Billy Bragg and Wilco for their 1998 release *Mermaid Avenue*.¹⁴⁰ Today, there

¹³⁷ “Hanns Eisler Starts Work on ‘Alien Cantata,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 February 1948.

¹³⁸ Hanns Eisler, “The Alien Cantata,” *Masses and Mainstream* 1, no. 2 (April 1948): 26–27. The full text of the cantata is available in the Appendix.

¹³⁹ Sidney Finkelstein, “Hanns Eisler,” *Masses and Mainstream* 1, no. 2 (April 1948): 90.

¹⁴⁰ Decades later, these lyrics were set to music by Billy Bragg and Wilco and released on

are numerous videos on YouTube of young, amateur musicians covering this song. Agnes “Sis” Cunningham, who taught music at the Southern Labor School for Women in North Carolina, used Brecht-Eisler songs in her repertoire. She later toured Oklahoma with her agit-prop group the Red Dust Players and also joined the Almanac Singers with Guthrie and Pete Seeger.¹⁴¹ Singer and playwright Eric Bentley arranged several Eisler songs which he recorded for Folkways Records and published in the 1960s.¹⁴² Jazz double bassist Charlie Haden included Eisler’s “The United Front” on his album *Liberation Music Orchestra* (1969), featuring Dewey Redman on saxophone, Don Cherry on cornet, and Earl Robinson’s son Perry Robinson on clarinet.¹⁴³ Finally, experimental composer Christian Wolff, who greatly admired Eisler, quotes “Song for Peace” (1937) in his *Peace March* 8 (2002).¹⁴⁴

the album *Mermaid Avenue*. Billy Bragg and Wilco, *Mermaid Avenue*, 1 CD (New York: Elektra, 1998).

¹⁴¹ John Pietaro, “Sis Cunningham: 1909–2004,” *Z Magazine*, accessed 26 March 2013, <http://www.zcommunications.org/sis-cunningham-1909-2004-by-john-pietaro>.

¹⁴² Eric Bentley, *Songs of Hanns Eisler*, 1 LP, (New York: Folkways, 1964). Eric Bentley, *Songs of Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler* (New York: Oak Publications, 1967).

¹⁴³ Charlie Haden, *Liberation Music Orchestra*, 1 LP (New York: Impulse, 1969).

¹⁴⁴ James Saunders, “Mutual Effects: Organization and Interaction in the Orchestral Music of Christian Wolff,” in *Changing the System: The Music of Christian Wolff*, ed. Stephen Chase and Philip Thomas (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 120.

CHAPTER 5: EISLER'S AMERICAN FILM WORK

Eisler was involved in film projects early on in his career, and he worked with leading contemporary European artists and directors. Eisler would continue to write music for films in his American exile. He scored music for eight films at independent studios and in Hollywood. He collaborated with leading American artists, including John Steinbeck, Clifford Odets, Harold Clurman, Joseph Losey, and Charlie Chaplin.¹ His music for the puppet film *Pete Roleum and His Cousins* was heard by thousands of Americans at the 1939 New York World's Fair and his scores for the Hollywood films *Hangmen Also Die* (1943) and *None But the Lonely Heart* (1944) earned him two Academy Award nominations. He also conducted film music research and co-authored with Theodor W. Adorno *Composing for the Films* (1948). While some scholars such as Claudia Gorbman and Sally Bick have acknowledged Eisler's contributions to sound film and film theory, generally his efforts have not received much attention in American scholarship.² In this chapter Eisler's work in American cinema will be discussed and

¹ Eisler provided the score to John Steinbeck's *The Forgotten Village* (1941). Eisler had helped Chaplin with the music to *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). He was composing music for Chaplin's short *The Circus* (1928) when he was deported. He reworked the sketches into his Second Septet (1947). Nathan Notowicz, Hanns Eisler and Gerhart Eisler, *Wir reden hier nicht von Napoleon. Wir reden von Ihnen!* (Berlin: Verlag neue Musik, 1971), 195–196.

² Claudia Gorbman dedicates an entire chapter to Eisler and Adorno's *Composing for the Films* in her book *Unheard Melodies*. In her doctoral dissertation, Sally Bick discusses *Composing for the Films* at length, analyzes the score to *Hangmen Also Die* (1943) and compares Eisler's film theories with those of Aaron Copland. See Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Sally Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front: Aaron Copland and Hanns Eisler in Hollywood" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2001).

compared to his European film music to show how his style developed while in exile. *Composing for the Films* will be examined in depth, and Eisler's film scores will be tested for compliance with the theories presented in that study.

In his American film works, Eisler pioneered a style uniquely his own. Like many other exiled composers working in Los Angeles at the time, his is the voice of an artist yearning to pay homage to his European roots, especially to his teacher Arnold Schoenberg. He sought to put his own theories into practice while also adapting to the strictures of the Hollywood departmental machine. In America Eisler accommodated his musical ideas and practice with their European roots to his new cultural environment.³

I. Hanns Eisler and Early Sound Film

Eisler was involved with sound film almost from its very beginning. His first score to Walter Ruttmann's *Opus III*, an experimental film with moving geometric shapes, was heard at the 1927 Baden-Baden Music Festival, the same festival that featured Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Mahagonny Songspiel* and Paul Hindemith's *Zeitoper Hin und zurück*. Eisler's music is a passacaglia, a form he had used in his Sonata for Piano, op. 1 (1923), and would employ later in the soundtrack to the Hollywood film *Hangmen Also Die*.⁴ In 1926, only a year earlier, the first motion picture with sound, *Don*

³ Andrea Bohlman and Philip Bohlman, *Hanns Eisler: "In Der Musik ist es anders,"* Jüdische Miniaturen 126, ed. Hermann Simon (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2012), 59.

⁴ Horst Weber, "Eisler as Hollywood Film Composer, 1942–1948," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (1998): 564–565. The Ruttmann reel was presented in two formats: first as a silent picture accompanied by a chamber orchestra and also as a Tri-Ergon sound film. Berndt Heller, "The Reconstruction of Eisler's

Juan (directed by Alan Crosland, scored by William Axt and David Mendoza), had been released by Warner Brothers. On 6 October 1927, three months after Eisler's film music was heard at Baden-Baden, one of the first talkies *The Jazz Singer*, a pseudo-talkie, featuring Al Jolson, premiered.⁵

Eisler's work in film reflects his political views. As mentioned in the first chapter, his ideas about the appropriate social function of music were inspired by the philosophies of Marx, who saw that modes of economic production and exchange effected social hierarchies, an idea known as dialectical materialism. With modern production and technology being under control of the bourgeoisie, he saw that capital was being gained in favor of the ruling classes and at the expense of the working classes. Eisler believed that music's appropriate modern function should be to inspire the working class to revolution, but the commercial culture industry, with the new devices of the phonograph and radio, only served to "lull the people and blunt their intellect."⁶ To him the motion picture was another of these "hypnotizing" devices of distraction.

As Albrecht Betz noted, when music was first introduced into film, it served as a subordinate element. Such artists as Eisler opined that if serious composers wanted to earn money in film, especially in Hollywood, they often had to sacrifice their feelings of

Film Music: 'Opus III,' 'Regen,' and 'The Circus'," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (1998): 541.

⁵ Mordaunt Hall, "The Screen: Al Jolson and the Vitaphone," *New York Times*, 7 October 1927.

⁶ Hanns Eisler, "Unsere Kampfmusik," in *Gesammelte Werke* [EGW], Serie III, Bd. I, *Schriften und Dokumente*, ed. Manfred Grabs, Eberhard Klemm, Günter Mayer (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973).

prestige and write music that the studio heads considered suitable.⁷ As he observed, most early sound film music was usually a poor derivative of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century styles and its repeated use had led to a loss of impact:

Musically, this constant derivation from Wagner, Tschaikowsky [sic] and Ravel, has become so cliché that it can no longer hardly produce any dramatic effects at all. Aside from the more conventional clichés, there is also a kind of pseudo-modernism, a certain imitation of Debussy and Ravel, with a sprinkling of Stravinsky.⁸

Eisler initially reacted with disgust and heavy criticism to the American film industry. He realized that the rationalization of work and time found in factories across America also occurred within Hollywood's gilded gates. When he first visited the United States in 1935, he had the opportunity to tour a Hollywood studio and witnessed first-hand the challenging conditions that studio employees experienced. He submitted the details of his tour to the Moscow German-language paper *Deutsche Zentralzeitung* in June. He reported that, even though some earned high wages, many directors, producers, scriptwriters, actors, composers, and people of other vocations were migrating to the Communist Party because they were "disgusted with their work, because they know it's the end of any art if its only aim is to make profits for the film industry."⁹ He felt that writers must continuously crank out insubstantial works, while they desire to write

⁷ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 169–170.

⁸ Hanns Eisler, "Modern music and the movies [II]," in EGW III/I, 461.

⁹ Hanns Eisler, "Hollywood Seen From the Left" in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music*, ed. Manfred Grabs and trans. Marjorie Meyer (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 101.

socially relevant stories about American life in an economic depression. Concerning the music department, Eisler was appalled to learn that a score is not the work of a solitary composer, but a group of specialists, who have an incomplete knowledge of the film scenario. The result could be a music of poor quality. The department manager, who Eisler calls “absolutely unmusical,” would only accept a tune if he were able to sing it, and it is this process that guarantees hit songs and box office success.¹⁰

Eisler also considered film a very modern form of art but noticed that its music lagged behind compared to its cutting-edge technology. In a 1936 article for *World Film News* he critiqued film composers who mimicked the action on the screen, a technique used so frequently in cartoons that it came to be known as “mickey-mousing.” A descending melodic line may accompany a man running downstairs or sharp staccato chords may punctuate the thrusts of a pirate’s sword. Eisler also denounced the rampant use of what he called “sentimental” and “picturesque” music which heightens the images’ emotions and illustrates nature scenes in the old fashioned melodrama style, including violent music during a sea storm.¹¹

In this article, Eisler advocated music that stood in counterpoint to the image for the purpose of a new and provocative relationship between film score and visuals. He cites three of his European soundtracks as examples. First, in *Das Lied vom Leben* (1931), a scene depicting the birth of a baby is not accompanied by the usual nursery

¹⁰ Ibid., 102–103.

¹¹ Hanns Eisler, “Music and Film: Illustration or Creation?” *World Film News* 1, no. 2 (May 1936): 23.

music, but by a ballad on the gruesomeness of the world. This ballad contributes a new level of commentary, muting the wonder of birth by reminding the spectator of the strains of the world. In *Niemandsland* (1931), as young men gather into the streets to leave for the battlefield, warlike music enters pianissimo and builds to a fortissimo to suggest the turning of docile men into warriors. Finally, in *Kuhle Wampe* (1931), the camera shows a row of peaceful houses and the music becomes highly animated, “which suggested not only pity with the poor, but at the same time provoked protest against such a state of affairs.”¹² In all of these examples, music does not subordinate itself to the picture, but participates in the storytelling.

Eisler would later develop these ideas in his film project for the Rockefeller Foundation. He would also test his ideas in his experimental Hollywood film scores. One particular film helped him get his foot in the door in Hollywood: *Pete Roleum and his Cousins*.

II. *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*

After Eisler’s arrival in America in 1938, *Pete Roleum and His Cousins* was the second American film for which he provided music.¹³ Prior to his work on this film, Eisler’s music was known only to a very narrow audience, particularly American leftists. It was his work on *Pete Roleum and His Cousins* presented at the New York World’s Fair

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The first was *400 Millionen* (1938), a documentary by Joris Ivens about the Chinese struggle against the Japanese invasion. Eisler did this work for free and he reused portions of this music for his *Fünf Orchesterstücke* (1938). Betz, *Political Musician*, 172, 306.

in 1939 that introduced him to a much broader American audience. Yet partially due to the unavailability (until recently) of the film itself, very little scholarship on this score has been completed. Eisler's work on *Pete Roleum* would prove to be a worthwhile scoring project for him because this animated short received wide acclaim. Hundreds of thousands of visitors to the fair viewed it—some numerous times.

After a decade of economic turmoil, organizers of this Fair sought to rekindle hope and demonstrate America's technological innovations and prosperity. The fair's purpose was to symbolize a futuristic city with programs that both educated and entertained visitors. The fair was a major event for New York City. Fifteen days after its opening on 30 April 1939, attendance had reached 2.7 million.¹⁴ Music and film played a vital role in the fair's success. The fair grounds included more than twenty theaters, and approximately 2000 films were scheduled for screenings.¹⁵

The U.S. Oil industry and its administrative body jumped at the opportunity to soften their image with the American public through a commercial film, which would be exhibited in the fair's Petroleum Building. This triangular metal structure housed a theater that could seat 300 people. For the film's production, the organizers wanted a staff experienced in the most modern and cutting edge technology. American theater director Joseph Losey was chosen to oversee the film.¹⁶ Under the patronage of the Theatre Arts

¹⁴ "115,665 Visited Fair Yesterday," *New York Sun*, 16 May 1939.

¹⁵ Ezra Goodman, "Meet Pete-Roleum," *Sight and Sound* 8, no. 30 (Summer, 1939): 62.

¹⁶ Eugene Du Bois, "Building the Fair," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 28 December 1938.

Committee, Losey in mid-1938 had founded a political cabaret in New York.¹⁷ Eisler had contributed to this group, and he was chosen to compose the music for the oil industry's propaganda film. Eisler's assistant Harry Robin, who had been musically trained by Marc Blitzstein and had translated Eisler's New School lectures, was hired as the film's sound engineer.¹⁸ The film used puppets, which looked like anthropomorphic oil drops. They were designed by Howard Bay and animated by silent film veteran and animator Charles Bowers. Helen van Dongen, Joris Ivens's wife, acted as a co-director with Losey.

The twenty-minute film discusses the history and development of the oil industry. In the story, Pete Roleum, whose name is a play on the word *petroleum*, interacts with his friends Stinky Lube, Grease Boy, Soapy, Gassy, Miss Polish, and Hi Test. They participate in "a miniature saga of the history and developments of oil," where it is stipulated that modern society advanced from the days of the horse and cart to the modern, fast-paced era of the highway, the automobile, and the airplane because of oil and its refined products. Pete and his friends are heckled by an off-screen voice until they decide to quit the world, which falls into desolation, supposedly proving the "indispensability of oil in the modern world."¹⁹ As Losey explains: "The idea was to

¹⁷ An article in the *New York Times* announces a cabaret event at the Chez Firehouse featuring "one hour shows of liberal political commentary." Names mentioned include Eisler, Losey, journalist and lyricist Emmanuel Eisenberg, writer Kyle Crichton, and playwrights Hy Kraft, John Murray, and Allen Boretz. Jack Gould, "News of the Night Clubs," *New York Times*, 24 April 1938.

¹⁸ Betz, *Political Musician*, 167.

¹⁹ Bosley Crowther, "Films for the Fair: Motion Pictures Will Play a Big Role on the Flushing Flats This Summer," *New York Times*, 5 March 1939.

show that practically every product we live by these days has some element of oil in it.”²⁰ Some of these products include the oil in car engines, the grease that keeps wheels from squeaking, sun tan oil, the protective wax on produce, and nail polish. He had artistic freedom with the project, except for seventeen stipulations. In particular, oil representatives requested that the film claim that the petroleum industry only made a one-cent profit from every gallon.²¹

Eisler provided a background score as well as five musical numbers: “Bucket Song,” “Considering Everything,” “Love Terzet,” “We Are Pouring on the Oil,” and “Muscle and Strength.” Pianist and television personality Oscar Levant wrote the lyrics and also contributed a song, “I Have Got Something For You to Sing.” Unfortunately, footage for all of Eisler’s songs, except “Muscle and Strength,” have been cut from available versions of the film and that footage is now considered lost. The reason for the cuts is unknown. Based on scores available in the Oscar Levant Collection at the University of Southern California, I have divided the film into sequences and indicated in Table 1 where I believe the missing songs would have appeared.²² Although, or because,

²⁰ Joseph Losey and Michel Cement, *Conversations With Losey* (London: Methuen, 1985), 57.

²¹ David Caute, *Joseph Losey: A Revenge On Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 66.

²² A shortened version of the film is available in Charles R. Bowers, *Charley Bowers: The Rediscovery of an American Comic Genius*, 2 DVDs (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2004). Analysis is based on the film in the Bowers collection as well as orchestral and part scores available in the Oscar Levant Collection at the University of Southern California. The film is also available as an extra in Joseph Losey, *Time Without Pity*, 1 DVD (New York: Janus Film, 2004). A shortened version of the film is also available on YouTube. “Hanns Eisler - Pete Roleum and His Cousins (1939), accessed 15 June 2012,

Table 1. Hanns Eisler: Score for *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*, Time Chart

Indicates a Missing Song

Indicates an Included Song

Sequence	Missing from the Film	Time
	Titles	
	“Next Show”	
Opening (“Out of the Earth...”)		0:00–0:31
Horse and Wagon Sequence		0:32–1:23
Horseless Carriage Sequence		1:24–2:46
Modern City Sequence (Letter A)	Most of Letter A. Letter B.	2:47–4:10
	Love Terzet	
Modern City Sequence (Letters C-E)		
Flame Sequence (in-between “Modern City” Letters E and F)		4:11–4:55
Modern City Sequence (Letter F)		4:55–5:06
Explanation of Oil Profit (no music)		5:07–6:18
	Considering Everything	
Bug Sequence		6:19–8:04
Nightmare Sequence		8:05–10:38
	Bucket Song	
Watch Sequence		10:39–11:22
Drunkard Sequence		11:23–11:51
Beach Sequence		11:52–13:03
Transition to “Oil Men Song”		13:03–13:07
Muscle and Strength		13:08–13:56
	We Are Pouring on the Oil	
I Have Got Something For You To Sing		13:57–15:42

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAelwjyvoU&list=PL17FD16EEA21874E9>.

this film was produced for America's oil industry, Eisler's music contains several subversive elements, which counteract the film's advertisement for the American oil empire, demonstrating that he would not politely play the role of the devoted servant to one of the largest exponents of American capitalism.

Although Fritz Hennenberg asserted that Eisler found a sprightly experimental style free of cliché, there are a few instances of mickey-mousing in the film.²³ Eisler, in fact, had praised Walt Disney's animated shorts and said that illustrative musical methods, like mickey-mousing, are more appropriate for humorous or grotesque films rather than "serious feature films."²⁴ Perhaps because he viewed *Pete Roleum* as a humorous film, Eisler decided to use mickey-mousing in such places as the "Horse and Wagon Sequence," where an emaciated horse pulling a cart is accompanied by neighing trumpets. When the horse keels over in exhaustion the orchestra responds with a cymbal crash. Overall mickey-mousing is used sparingly, yet there are a few other such moments in the score. Eisler used the sea shanty "What Do You Do With a Drunken Sailor" for humorous purposes in the Modern City Sequence as Pete's sailor friend, Soapy, dances a jig around a bar of soap. In the "Watch Sequence," filigree in the winds and the xylophone approximates the sounds of a ticking watch and a carousel.

While the instrumental underscore may contain some mickey-mousing, popular song quotations, and other Hollywood clichés, some of the songs in fact counteract the messages that their texts should supposedly convey. The "Love Terzet" is a ballad in D-

²³ Fritz Hennenberg, *Hanns Eisler* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986), 69.

²⁴ Hanns Eisler, "From My Practical Work: On the Use of Music in Sound Film," *Rebel in Music*, 124.

flat major for tenor, baritone, and soprano sung by the characters Hi-Test, Champ, and Miss Polish. Despite the silliness of the words, the music's quality equals that of any memorable Tin Pan Alley ballad. The song probably appeared somewhere in the middle of the "Modern City Sequence." This sequence is divided into six sections, labeled A through F, and in existing versions of the film there are many abrupt cuts. The first cut occurs after Miss Polish is shown polishing the hood of a car. The removed footage probably featured Miss Polish, Champ, and Hi-Test singing this love song.

On the front of the copyist score, Eisler wrote a note to a Mr. Engeli, who was presumably the tenor at the recording session. It says: "In the section which uses the high tenor range, a parody of the 'tenor falsetto' is meant." Indeed, the tenor must belt out a high B flat as he is "gassing" of his love for Miss Polish (Figure 1).²⁵ The word "gas" could be interpreted to mean "to speak rapidly." Clearly, the song is not at all serious. Miss Polish is torn between her two courtiers: "Which shall I choose? Oil now, or gas? Both are fine, what a task! But if I take Sweet Hi-Test, I'll be sister to you, Champ." In a peculiar reconciliation, she chooses Hi-Test and consoles Champ saying they will be siblings. Perhaps this is a jab at the oil industry, since its animated representatives seem to miss the moral implications of incest.

²⁵ Hanns Eisler, *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*, "Love Terzet," Oscar Levant Collection (OLC), University of Southern California.

Figure 1. Hanns Eisler: *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*, “Love Terzett,” mm. 13–20.

Figure 1 shows a musical score for the piece "Love Terzett" by Hanns Eisler, measures 13–20. The score is for voice and piano. The lyrics are: "TANE STILLS MY HEART. LET ME GAS OF MY LOVE OH, MISS PO-LISH NONE CAN OUT-SHINE YOU NO NOT E-YEN, E-YEN THE". The score is marked with a diagonal line across the first system and a watermark "THIS MATERIAL FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY".

Figure 2. Hanns Eisler: *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*, “Considering Everything,” mm. 9–14, voice and piano reduction.

Figure 2 shows a musical score for the piece "Considering Everything" by Hanns Eisler, measures 9–14. The score is for voice and piano. The lyrics are: "Cavi - cade - ring av - ry - thing in - m - m - m We think to die - em - m - m". The score is marked with a diagonal line across the first system and a watermark "THIS MATERIAL FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY".

In the only scene without music, a handful of coins representing Big Oil's revenue is spilled onto a table. Pete says that this money pays for production costs: refineries, pipelines, oil derricks, rail cars, service stations, paychecks, and finally taxes. After all these deductions, only two pennies remain, which Pete says, he will keep as his profit—a penny more than what the oil industry had requested the film show as its profit per gallon. The scene ends with Pete asking, "It's not so much is it, considering everything?" followed by the song "Considering Everything," which belongs to the ironic type of didactic music that Eisler composed while in Europe (including "The Ballad of Nigger Jim"). All the characteristics of its composition indicate that it is a tongue-in-cheek, or perhaps tongue-stuck-out, melodramatic number typical of political cabaret. It is scored for a small chamber group that recalls jazz or cabaret music (see Figure 2).²⁶ Eisler divides the vocal line into short phrases that often follow the natural inflections of the spoken voice, and he meticulously follows its rhythm. The grotesque style of the vocal line is perfectly suited for a cabaret chanteuse, although notes in one vocal score in the Oscar Levant collection indicate that the vocal line was passed among several characters. The interspersed *mmhmm*'s and *uhhuh*'s provide a seedy and seductive comfort that is fleeting. Though the music remains tonal, these casual enunciations are without structural or harmonic function, like weakly considered afterthoughts. A moment of high irony occurs at the end of the second section on the line "Then he deserves this little sum for all

²⁶ Nils Grosch, "'You Cannot Get Something For Nothing': Exilierte Komponisten zwischen Gebrauchsmusik und amerikanischer Unterhaltungsindustrie," in *Jahrbuch des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung Preussischer Kulturbesitz* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 282.

he's done.” The harmonization here is very unstable and weak and sardonically questions the statement.

Figure 3. Hanns Eisler: *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*, “Muscle and Strength,” mm. 9–12, voice and piano reduction.



“Muscle and Strength,” is the only song Eisler composed for *Pete Roleum* that appears in extant versions of the film today. Like “Considering Everything,” it exhibits elements of subtle subversion. It occurs in the penultimate scene when Pete and his friends, against a black background, stand in a row and sing directly to the audience. The song is a march in D-flat major and 4/4 time with very common harmonic progressions. However, unlike in his *Kampflieder* where the text is set as clearly as possible for the listening and participating audience, here the text setting does not aid apprehension at all. As the puppets smile and flex their muscles, this march works against their solidarity and displays of prowess. In the first line (Figure 3),²⁷ Eisler weakens the word *strength* by

²⁷ Hanns Eisler, *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*, “Muscle and Strength,” OLC.

placing it on the fourth beat of the measure. Vocal lines are often elided and words are lost in-between. An average spectator would have had to listen to the song more than once in order to understand all of the words, if he could at all.

“We Are Pouring on the Oil” may have been the film’s closing number. Its score was not available to me. But Eisler scholar Nils Grosch examined it when it was in the possession of Eisler’s third wife Stephanie. Although he misidentified this song as “We Are Pouncing on the Oil,” he reported that it is a swing number in a four-part form (AABA) typical of American popular tunes.²⁸ The extant film version of *Pete Roleum* does not end with this song but rather a number written by Levant. “I Have Got Something For You To Sing.” It stands completely in contrast to the songs “Muscle and Strength” and “Considering Everything.” Levant’s song expresses the top-hat pageantry and sweet jazz of many American musicals of the 1930s. Indeed, the entire claymation cast, including the horse, performs the song on moving risers from a theater stage. The choral harmonies mimic those found in such Busby Berkeley films as *Footlight Parade* (1933). The words of Levant’s setting are crystal clear. Perhaps, someone thought Eisler’s song was not an appropriate piece for the film’s finale and had it replaced.

The film was a complete success and was lauded in the American press. Special attention was often given to Eisler’s music as well. *The New Yorker* considered the soundtrack “music to hear” at the exhibition.²⁹ The *New York Sun* praised Eisler’s score

²⁸ Grosch, “Exilierte Komponisten,” 280–281.

²⁹ Robert A. Simon, “Musical Events,” *The New Yorker*, 10 June 1939, 63.

as “highly imaginative” and “provocative.”³⁰ The *Brooklyn Eagle* called the film “colorful, imaginative, educational, and tuneful.”³¹ Levant, however, referred to *Pete Roleum* as a “lousy short,” and said Eisler’s music was “horrifically modern and difficult.”³² Nevertheless, he also said: “Not only was there pleasure in the brightness and clarity of his ideas, there was also distinction in the clean precision of his orchestration, the polish and finesse of his writing.”³³ Eisler was proud of his work on the cartoon. In a letter to Paul Kohner, an agent and fellow exile, he provided a list of all the films he had composed. He specifically points out *Pete Roleum* as an example of his versatility.³⁴ Later German Eisler scholar Jürgen Schebera, who probably did not have access to the score in the 1980s, concluded that Eisler failed to compose music on a par with the other more advanced elements of the production, and he referred to the soundtrack as a “finger exercise.”³⁵

³⁰ Irving Kolodin, “Soundtrack and Microphone,” *New York Sun*, 16 May 1939.

³¹ Herbert Cohn, “The Sound Track: ‘The City,’ Lorentz-Mumford Documentary, to Sound a Keynote at Fair—‘Pete-Roleum,’ ‘Ten Magic Minutes’ Brighten Exhibit Screens,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 21 May 1939.

³² Quoted in Sam Kashner and Nancy Schoenberger, *A Talent for Genius: The Life and Times of Oscar Levant* (Los Angeles: Silman-James, 1998), 229.

³³ Oscar Levant, *A Smattering of Ignorance* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1940), 149.

³⁴ Hanns Eisler to Paul Kohner, 1 April? 1941, *Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe: Briefe 1907–1943*, Ser. IX, Bd. 4, 1, ed. Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010), 251.

³⁵ Jürgen Schebera, “‘Modelle zur Befreiung des musikalischen Films ...’: Hanns Eislers Filmarbeit in den USA 1938–1947,” in *Hanns Eisler – Kompositionen für den Film: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Filmkompositionen Hanns Eislers*, Materialien zur Filmgeschichte Nr. 12 (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek: November 1982):

Eisler's score, however, should not be dismissed so easily. By contributing to the New York World's Fair, Eisler was among prominent composers who also wrote music for the fair, including Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, and Kurt Weill. The cartoon exposed millions of Americans from various classes to Eisler's music. It is not a light work, for his effort takes a subversive and critical stance against the oil industry. Many of the songs, which are on a par with his European *Kampflieder* and cabaret songs, possess a level of commentary that is independent of the film's story, a concept that Eisler and Adorno would later favor in *Composing for the Films*.

III. *Composing for the Films*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Eisler's treatise *Composing for the Films* was the culmination of a nearly ten-year-long study of the use of music in film, a joint effort which Eisler undertook with Adorno and which was financially supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. Eisler and Adorno address many concerns with the film industry in this book. Eisler had already expressed many of these problems in his previous writings. There are four issues brought up in the book: 1) the importance of modern music in film, 2) the relationship between the visuals and the music, 3) problems with recording, 4) problems with mixing. For the purposes of scope, this thesis will focus on the first two issues. As noted earlier, Eisler felt that capitalist entertainment and Hollywood forms of leisure were designed to make the audience forget their oppressive work routines, a thought that Adorno shared. Gorbman observed: "The Hollywood film is

accordingly shot through with the ‘pretense to immediacy’—a strategy designed to prevent the spectator from understanding the extent of his/her alienated condition.”³⁶

Thus, Eisler and Adorno hoped to expose the “narcotic” nature of the American film industry. In the first chapter they list the industry’s “bad habits,” many of which are typical elements of classic Hollywood music they saw as antiquated, manipulative displays of trickery “harking back to the days of spontaneity and craftsmanship, of medicine shows and covered wagons.”³⁷

The following is a list of some of those “bad habits”:

- Melody and euphony: the use of operetta-style melody providing a sense of balance and symmetry, but contradicting asymmetrical actions on the screen.³⁸
- Stock classical pieces: the clichéd use of such works as Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata to indicate night time;³⁹ the use of suspenseful string tremolos seen as “trashy devices intended merely for effect.”⁴⁰
- Wagnerian leitmotifs: the use of leitmotifs to sonically duplicate a character seen on the screen.⁴¹

³⁶ Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 106.

³⁷ Eisler and Adorno, *Composing for the Films*, 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴¹ Composer and fellow Austrian Max Steiner had earned great praise for his film scores, and the use of leitmotif was an element of his style. In particular, his score for *King*

- Visual rationalization: the undermining of verisimilitude through music when it is not visually justified in the diegesis, the story world; the presentation of fantasy as something real producing contrived actions; the reduction of music to a “plot accessory” because its function as a “genuine element of contrast” is usurped.⁴²
- Musical illustration: use of music miming screen action or setting mood in a clichéd manner, providing “unfortunate duplication” and serving as “a cheap mood-producing gadget;”⁴³ the use of folk or national music to establish a setting.⁴⁴

In order to compose a proper film score, Eisler and Adorno suggested a practice termed *planning*: “the free and conscious utilization of all musical resources on the basis of accurate insight into the dramatic function of music, which is different in each concrete case.”⁴⁵ Note that *all* music is included in the definition. Modernist music was suggested as the best alternative to outdated practices, because “autonomous music has developed

Kong (1932) uses three leitmotifs, which are developed throughout the motion picture. Steiner’s score was the first “full-blown symphonic [score] to emerge from Hollywood in the sound era.” Fred Steiner, Liner notes, *King Kong*, 1 LP (Chicago: Entr’acte, 1976), 1. Many other Hollywood composers used leitmotifs as well. David Raksin composed a leitmotif-like theme for the title character in Otto Preminger’s film noir *Laura* (1944). Martin Marks, “Raksin, David,” *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 11 February 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/49034>.

⁴² Eisler and Adorno, *Composing for the Films*, 12.

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14–15.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 80.

new resources and techniques that really correspond to the technical requirements of the motion picture.”⁴⁶ Eisler and Adorno point to the recent advancements of Schoenberg, Béla Bartók, and Igor Stravinsky, because their music develops through the individual demands of a piece’s particular structure, not through a prescribed formula. Absence of tonality provides the music with a quick-to-change quality adaptable to the asymmetrical images of the screen. If necessary, a passage can be expanded through developing variation, a technique advocated and used by Schoenberg and his followers, whereas traditional tonal music requires time to create tension and resolve it.⁴⁷ Eisler particularly promoted Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method and atonalism as “it had the capacity to fulfill a particular expressive dynamic and tone that could not necessarily be communicated by the over-used clichés and conventional treatments common to Hollywood film music.”⁴⁸ All in all, modernist music seemed capable to serve the picture both with “meaningful illustrations and genuine contrasts.”⁴⁹

Most importantly, with appropriate use of planning, the film score could work with the picture as an aesthetic unit, for music too is capable of providing a narrative voice. However, the convergence between music and picture is illusory. Due to the specific nature of the two media, they never actually coincide. According to the authors,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 32–39.

⁴⁸ Bick, “Composers on the Cultural Front,” 321.

⁴⁹ Eisler and Adorno, *Composing for the Films*, 43.

music never really refers to anything outside of itself, whereas a picture does.⁵⁰ On the other hand, music can successfully contrast and work against the picture:

The alienation of the media from each other reflects a society alienated from itself, men whose functions are severed from each other even within each individual. Therefore the aesthetic divergence of the media is potentially a legitimate means of expression, not merely a regrettable deficiency that has to be concealed as well as possible.⁵¹

Film theorists refer to these two relationships between music and visuals as *parallelism* and *counterpoint*, respectively.⁵² In the last chapter of *Composing for the Films*, Eisler and Adorno state again that the Hollywood picture is engineered to manipulate the audience's perception. Similar to Brecht's idea of alienation effect in theater, they recommend that film music should always keep the audience from confusing fantasy with reality due to "the mediated and alienated elements in the photographed action and the recorded words."⁵³

IV. Eisler's Music for the Rockefeller Project

Eisler and Adorno stress that the theories expressed in *Composing for the Films* are not sure solutions to a problem but rather possibilities. In the appendix to their book they illustrate how their ideas can be applied in practice. Eisler's new film compositions

⁵⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁵¹ Ibid., 74.

⁵² Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 15, 145.

⁵³ Eisler and Adorno, *Composing for the Films*, 123.

for the Rockefeller project are used as examples. Eisler acknowledges that his music was mostly for documentaries or news-reels, not feature films.⁵⁴ *Regen* (dir. Joris Ivens, 1929), *A Child Went Forth* (dir. Joseph Losey, 1939), and *White Flood* (or *Nature Scenes*, footage from William Osgood Field, 1943). He also composed new music to scenes from John Ford's *Grapes of Wrath* (1943), which was shot in a documentary style.

Eisler used the twelve-tone technique in his scores for *Regen* and *White Flood*. The music to both films also exists as independent chamber works: *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain*, op. 60, and *Kammersinfonie*, op. 69, respectively. This demonstrates that film music can also function autonomously. *Fourteen Ways* is an homage to Schoenberg and uses the ensemble of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. Concerning the score for *Regen* Eisler said: "Every conceivable type of musico-dramatic solution was considered, from the simplest naturalism of synchronized detail painting to the most extreme contrast effect, in which music 'reflects' rather than follows the picture."⁵⁵ At all times, Eisler stresses that the dramaturgical function of the music held the greatest authority. Thus, Eisler's new music, although modernist, often adheres to accepted film music standards and is not a complete negation of Hollywood practice.

Second, Eisler discusses music for *A Children's Camp* (*A Child Went Forth*), his second film collaboration with Losey following *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*.⁵⁶ Losey

⁵⁴ Ibid., 139.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁶ The title *I Child Went Forth* is taken from a Walt Whitman poem.

describes it as a half-hour film on an experimental interracial camp.⁵⁷ The soundtrack, often becoming stoic, nervous, or hysterical, “uses music generally not associated with children.”⁵⁸ However, in one sequence, Eisler employs tunes from the American nursery rhymes “Strawberry Fair,” “Sourwood Mountain,” and “Little Ah Sid.” As with “What Would You Do With a Drunken Sailor” in *Pete Roleum*, he wished to show that simple music could be presented effectively in new and unconventional ways. Finally, in the last scene, where the children are playing with farm animals and then run after a tractor, Eisler supplies militant music, in contrast to the pastoral scene, as if to indicate that one day these children will become soldiers chasing after a tank.⁵⁹

Eisler and Adorno were not alone in believing that music and visuals should be partners in the dramaturgical process or that modernist music could be successfully used in film. French composer Maurice Jaubert also experimented with ways music could participate with an individual voice in the film’s story, as in Julien Duvivier’s *Un carnet de bal* (1933).⁶⁰ Arthur Honegger also thought that screen image and music should be complementary and that one should assist the spectator in understanding the other.⁶¹ In the 1940s and 1950s, some film composers gravitated toward a more modernist style, and

⁵⁷ Losey and Ciment, *Conversations With Losey*, 55.

⁵⁸ Eisler and Adorno, *Composing for the Films*, 141.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 141–143.

⁶⁰ Mark Brill, “Jaubert, Maurice,” *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed 29 March 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/14203>.

⁶¹ Adriano Correia de Oliveira, Liner Notes, *Arthur Honegger: Mayerling, Regain, Le Demon de l’Himalaya*, 1 CD (Hong Kong: Marco Polo, 1994), not paginated.

atonality became more common. Scott Bradley, who composed jazzy-modernist cartoon scores, put a twelve-tone row in the MGM short *The Cat That Hated People* (1947).⁶² Leonard Rosenman used atonality in the score to Elia Kazan's *East of Eden* (1955). He used twelve-tone techniques for *The Cobweb* (1955) and electronic sounds for *Fantastic Voyage* (1966).⁶³ Miklós Rózsa employed dodecaphony in *King of Kings* (1961).⁶⁴ Of course, modernist and twelve-tone elements occur in Eisler's Hollywood film music, as well.

V. *Hangmen Also Die*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), a United Artists production directed by Fritz Lang and written by Brecht and John Wexley, was Eisler's first Hollywood score—the first of two that earned him an Academy Award nomination. His work on this film coincides with his Rockefeller Foundation research.⁶⁵ Despite the importance of the film as a collaborative work by exiled artists on the subject of Nazi terrorism, and the technical and practical advances of Eisler's innovative music, it is surprising that the music has only begun to receive serious attention from musicologists

⁶² Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 297–298.

⁶³ Sabine Feisst, "Serving Two Masters: Leonard Rosenman's Music for Films and the Concert Hall," *The Cue Sheet. Quarterly Journal of the Film Music Society* 23, nos. 1–2 (2008): 31–45

⁶⁴ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 194–198.

⁶⁵ Eisler comments upon his closing music for the film in *Composing for the Films*. Eisler and Adorno, *Composing for the Films*, 25.

in recent years.⁶⁶ This section of my thesis draws upon their findings. Although not the product of a major film studio, *Hangmen Also Die* did allow Eisler to put into practice some of his theories for the Rockefeller project.⁶⁷

Brecht and Wexley's story is loosely based on the assassination of Hitler's Deputy Reich Protector in Prague, Reinhard Heydrich, when the occupying Gestapo exercise control over the Czech people through fear, censorship, and violence. Although Dr. Franticek Svoboda is the assassin, the Czech underground frames Emil Czaka, a Nazi collaborator, for the crime. The Nazis realize that Czaka is not responsible, yet they choose to close the case since terror had failed to force the underground to give up the guilty person. Although this is not a victory, the solidarity of the Czech people persists against their oppressors.

With a film contract dating from 12 December 1942, Eisler started writing the music in January 1943 and finished it in February. Arnold Pressburger, the producer, did not have a music studio, so Eisler could trust that his music would not be scrutinized by the sort of uneducated department head he despised. A departure from the Hollywood norm, *Hangmen Also Die* is thinly scored, as throughout the first half silence heightens the dramatic impact of the film's serious content. Music is used only for the main titles and particularly poignant scenes in the film, which will be the focus here. As

⁶⁶ Drawing upon Claudia Gorbman (1991), Sally Bick (2001) was the first to discuss in detail Eisler's music. Horst Weber (2012) has also covered Eisler's music in his recent German publication on Eisler in America. Claudia Gorbman, "Hanns Eisler in Hollywood," *Screen* 32, no. 3 (1991): 272–285; Sally Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front," 303–366, and Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 91–109.

⁶⁷ The film was managed by independent film producer Arnold Pressburger. Lotte H. Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 221.

dramaturgical counterpoint for the narrative and visuals, Eisler uses both tonal music, for instance a song in his *Kampflieder* style, and high modernist music, such as dodecaphony, a fact that has gone largely unnoticed.⁶⁸ Eisler's music for the opening sequence is tripartite: 1) opening credits 2) scrolling text and establishing shots of Prague's Hradčany Castle 3) the Hitler portrait. The music in this first section is highly unconventional for a Hollywood film. Usually, the opening music operates as a hook to draw the spectator into the film's fantasy world, but here Eisler uses highly chromatic and fragmented melodies with a focus on the tritone, suggesting the Nazi menace.⁶⁹

In the music for the main titles, Eisler may be quoting a motif associated with death well-known to Czech audiences. The six-note figure (Figure 4),⁷⁰ a rising diminished octave followed by a falling tritone, is a variation of a motif from Czech composer Josef Suk's *Asrael Symphony* (Figure 5).⁷¹ Suk wrote the symphony in 1906 in reaction to the death of Antonín Dvořák. The symphony was performed in the Czech Republic during occasions of national mourning.⁷² Eisler also quotes the Czech national anthem, but it is so embedded in the dense sonic texture that it is hardly recognizable.

⁶⁸ Leonard Rosenman has been credited with being the first composer to use serialism in a Hollywood film (*The Cobweb*), but *Hangmen Also Die* came twelve years earlier. Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front," 320 and 343. See also, Feisst, "Serving Two Masters," 19–25.

⁶⁹ Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front," 335.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁷¹ Josef Suk, *Asrael: Symfonie pro Velký Orchestr*, op. 27 (Munich: Musikproduction Höflich, 2006), 1.

⁷² Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, "'Death, Where is Thy Sting?': *The Emperor of Atlantis*," *Opera Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (2000): 225.

Bick explains: “Eisler has integrated the materials as a symbolic gesture indirectly capturing the theme of the film, which concerns the solidarity of a unified Czechoslovakia against the occupational tyranny of the Nazis.”⁷³ Thus, Eisler’s quotation is not the sort of blatant borrowing he critiqued in *Composing for the Films* but rather an adaptation with deep psychological meaning.

Figure 4. Hanns Eisler: *Hangmen Also Die*: “Main Title,” mm. 1–2, trumpets.



Figure 5. Josef Suk: *Asrael Symphony*, first movement, mm. 6–11, viola, cellos, basses.



In the second section of the title music, Eisler uses dodecaphony to accompany scrolling text explaining the background story. Bick points out that dodecaphony

⁷³ Bick, “Composers on the Cultural Front,” 333.

alienates the spectators from the diegesis and forces them “to confront the serious intent of the picture’s overtones: the realities of Nazism.”⁷⁴ In *Composing for the Films*, Eisler had stated that the twelve-tone technique can appropriately express ideas that tonal music cannot, like “ironic detachment, empty waiting, and unfettered power.”⁷⁵ Eisler employs dodecaphony in *Hangmen Also Die* for this reason. Indeed, as the camera focuses on the Czech crest, the *Asrael Symphony* motif is heard again. The camera then pans down to reveal a portrait of Hitler as a ten-note “stinger” chord is heard in the orchestra. Although the “stinger chord” is a Hollywood cliché, Eisler uses it in a non-traditional manner.⁷⁶ Berg employed a similar ten-note chord in his opera *Lulu*, but it did not arise from dodecaphony. Berg may have borrowed the idea from ten-note chords used in Mahler’s Tenth Symphony.⁷⁷ The purpose of the “Hitler” chord may have been for shock, but Gorbman considers it unnecessary, as the shock of the picture alone would have been enough.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Bick, “Composers on the Cultural Front,” 334.

⁷⁵ Eisler particularly mentions Schoenberg’s *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*, op. 34, which is “full of a sense of fear, of looming danger and catastrophe.” Eisler and Adorno, *Composing for the Films*, 37.

⁷⁶ Bick, “Composers on the Cultural Front,” 343.

⁷⁷ Constantin Floros indicates that the famous chords in the Adagio to Mahler’s Tenth Symphony are actually nine-note chords. Mahler wrote his symphony while “haunted by thoughts of departure and death.” Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, trans. Vernon and Jutta Wicker (1985; Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2000), 300, 304. Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 100–101.

⁷⁸ Gorbman, “Hanns Eisler in Hollywood,” 277.

In a later scene, Heydrich lies dying in a hospital. Usually, a spectator would feel sympathy toward a dying person, but Eisler avoids an improper association with a terrorist by composing music in contrast to the picture. A lonely flute plays flighty, chromatic filigrees, while a piano supports it with dissonant triplets. Gorbman suggests that the music “seems to chuckle maliciously at the dying Heydrich.”⁷⁹ In any case, this detached and commentating music “permits the audience to understand the menacing nature of the fascist character.”⁸⁰ Music to the dripping blood is more in line with Hollywood expectations; pizzicato strings and high notes in the piano mimic the falling drops. The music here points to the blood, because Eisler wants the spectator to associate the Nazis with death and violence.⁸¹

In the final scene of the film, Eisler again provides music in contrast. Gestapo Chief Daluge reads the report of the supposed capture and extermination of Heydrich’s assassin. A march accompanies the reading, building from pianissimo to a grand fortissimo. Eisler remarks, “At the end, there is a long shot of the city of Prague, as though to show the real hero of the picture, the Czech people.”⁸² The picture itself would not have been able to convey this message without the aid of the music. In the end credits, as Czech people are marched to their deaths, they sing Eisler’s “No Surrender,” a final act of solidarity and defiance against their oppressors:

⁷⁹ Ibid., 278.

⁸⁰ Bick, “Composers on the Cultural Front,” 344.

⁸¹ Ibid., 346.

⁸² Eisler and Adorno, “Composing for the Films,” 25.

Fellow patriots, the time has come
Fellow patriots, there's work to be done
Raise the invisible torch ...

Die if you must for a cause that is just
But shout to the end, "No Surrender!"

Gorbman relates this scene to the "Solidaritätslied" scene of *Kuhle Wampe*, where young Berliners march and sing in protest to rampant unemployment. Bick finds that the words of the song reinforce the political message of the film: the fight is not yet over, but collective unity will triumph over oppression.⁸³ Thus, Eisler again continues to use didactic elements of his European film work re-interpreted in a Hollywood film for an American audience.

Reviews of *Hangmen Also Die* were mixed, leaning toward the negative. Perhaps the unconventional nature of the production did not sit well with critics accustomed to the usual Hollywood format. Walter Rubsamen, writing for *Arts and Architecture*, praised Eisler's blood-drip scene: "A Nazi composer would have written heroic music ... but to Eisler it was the death scene of a rat, not a moment for pity."⁸⁴ *Variety* considered the film "a triumph for Fritz Lang, who has succeeded with singular success in capturing the spirit of the Czech people in the face of the Nazi reign of terror."⁸⁵ However, the *New York Times* said *Hangmen Also Die* fails to portray the despair of the suppressed Czechs and

⁸³ Bick, "Composers on the Cultural Front," 348.

⁸⁴ Walter H. Rubsamen, "A Modern Approach to Film Music: Hanns Eisler Rejects the Clichés," *Arts and Architecture* 61, no. 11 (1944): 20.

⁸⁵ "Hangmen Also Die," in *Variety Film Reviews: 1943–1948*, ed. Debra Handy (New York: Garland, 1983), no pagination.

“is not the high tribute to courage it might have been.”⁸⁶ One *Time* critic stated: “Director Lang tells this story with real suspense, but seldom warms it with genuine emotion.”⁸⁷ Nelson Bell at first claimed that the film was a great homage to the “Spartan spirit of the Czechs.”⁸⁸ Two days later he lambasted the film for its length and obvious propaganda, which endangered the seriousness of the film’s intended message.⁸⁹ Weber noted that the producers cut several scenes, which had fatal consequences for the film and the music. He called *Hangmen Also Die* “a victim of the culture industry.”⁹⁰ Despite the movie’s negative reviews, Eisler’s music for *Hangmen Also Die* granted him his first opportunity to test in a Hollywood film the theories he had developed in his European works and writings and in his American film music treatise.

VI. *None But the Lonely Heart*

Eisler’s musical approach to *Hangmen Also Die* stands in stark contrast to his score for the Odets film *None But the Lonely Heart* (1944), his first film score for RKO Pictures.⁹¹ For the first time Eisler had to work with arrangers, as was the case with the

⁸⁶ Theodore Strauss, “At the Capitol,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1943.

⁸⁷ “Also Showing,” *Time* 41, no. 13 (29 March 1943): 40.

⁸⁸ Nelson B. Bell, “‘Hangmen Also Die’ is Super-Whodunit, Capitol,” *Washington Post*, 7 May 1943.

⁸⁹ Nelson B. Bell, “The Films Discover Happy Middle Course But One Loses Way,” *Washington Post*, 9 May 1943.

⁹⁰ Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 108.

⁹¹ RKO Pictures is considered one of the big Hollywood studios in the 1940s. Although RKO had experienced continuous financial difficulties throughout the 1930s and

following five scores for RKO.⁹² More lush orchestrations and quotations from folk song and classical repertoire occur. They were, however, hardly for cheap dramatic, but rather for elevated dramaturgical effect. Although he argued against such “bad habits,” this apparently did not hinder him from creating a highly original and effective score that worked as a distinct commentary to the drama.

Odets worked on the script over the late days of 1943 into 1944, and Eisler composed the music between May and July 1944.⁹³ The story, based on a novel by Richard Llewellyn, follows globetrotter Ernie Mott (Cary Grant), who temporarily returns home to London and learns that his mother (Ethel Barrymore) has cancer. His two romantic interests are Ada (Jane Duprez), the ex-wife of a mobster, and Aggie (Jane Wyatt), a girl he knew in his youth who is now a cello player. Ada aspires to run away to America, and she wishes for Ernie at first to accompany her. Aggie, secure in her musical education and community, has no desire to leave London. By the film’s end, Ernie realizes that his dreams of wandering the world are at an end, his mother is dead, Ada has left him, and he has no one to turn to for comfort. Although he desperately attempts to secure a better life for himself at home, his struggle is in vain and he will soon go to war to insure a better life for the generation after him. The film should have been especially

1940s, it produced many well-known and/or award-winning films, including *Cimarron* (1931), *King Kong* (1933), *The Informer* (1935), *Swing Time* (1936), and *Citizen Kane* (1941). Richard B. Jerwell with Vernon Harbin, *The RKO Story* (New York: Arlington House, 1982), 11.

⁹² Horst Weber, “Eisler as Hollywood Film Composer,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (1998): 563.

⁹³ Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 133.

appealing to Eisler due to its social relevance: it is a realistic look into London's horrid living conditions in the 1930s.

Figure 6. Piotr Tchaikovsky: "None But the Lonely Heart," mm. 1–7.



Unlike *Hangmen Also Die*, the Odets film, almost two hours in length, is more heavily scored and uses a full, lush orchestra more frequently. Eisler's music draws heavily upon three pieces of music: Tchaikovsky's song setting of "None But the Lonely Heart," from which the movie draws its title, the Irish tune "Kathleen Mavourneen," and the Scottish ballad "Annie Laurie." The quotations, however, are not barefaced examples of borrowing but specifically chosen as participants for the narrative. Tchaikovsky's "None But the Lonely Heart" (Figure 6),⁹⁴ takes the Goethe poem "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" as its text. The poem is a lament whose subject speaks of great loneliness in a very large world, while pining for a loved one who remains far away. Tchaikovsky's melody serves as the main theme and occurs in almost every scene

⁹⁴ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Various Songs* (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, n.d), 1.

featuring Ernie and Ada together. Most importantly, the song is not simply used as a conventional Hollywood film theme. Its silent text acts as a commentary upon scenes in which the music appears. Members of the audience fortunate enough to know the song and Goethe's poem are open to a narrative level unavailable to others.

Just as in *Hangmen Also Die*, Eisler's opening sequence for *None But the Lonely Heart* is tripartite in structure: overture, church sequence, scherzando. It is another example of his use of "planning" to compose not only masterly and modern sounds but also unified sections of music appropriate to their function within the film scenario. As the film begins, the first sounds the spectator hears is the fate motif from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony twice repeated, indicating that the "the essence of the story is not social conflict, but rather emotional conflict based on social conflict."⁹⁵ As the title card appears, the orchestra plays the theme to Tchaikovsky's song, prominently in fortissimo trumpets. Later, when the card with Eisler's name appears, the orchestra softly plays the inversion of the theme. Just as in *Hangmen Also Die*, Eisler is drawing attention to his credit, although in this case the pointing is much more subtle.

Following the credits, Eisler approximates the sound of a church organ through the plaintive murmurs of the oboe and viola.⁹⁶ Eisler refers to this section of the opening sequence as a passacaglia. As mentioned above, Eisler had used the passacaglia form in *Opus III* and his own opus 1. However, the church scene does not use a strict passacaglia

⁹⁵ Weber, "Hanns Eisler as Hollywood Composer," 564.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

form, rather music adjusts and adapts to screen visuals.⁹⁷ The strings play a passage that is derived from the main theme. A stinger chord blasts when the tomb of the Unknown Warrior is shown. The trumpets intone the main theme's head motive, and the narrator indicates that Ernie might one day be the unknown warrior of a second major war. Eisler varies elements of the main theme in original ways appropriate to the narrative of the picture. Since the passacaglia is a variation form, one that was highly admired by Bach, Brahms and Schoenberg, Eisler not only pays homage to his European roots, but also adapts a classical form in an effective and original way to cinema music.⁹⁸

In the close of the first scene, as Ernie leaves the cathedral, the passacaglia abruptly morphs into an Allegretto scherzando with playful staccato oboe and pizzicato strings. This segment completely negates the sobriety of the church scene and adds a bit of levity to the moment. Despite the Allegretto's jarring appearance and many tritones, specific elements are actually variants of motives found in Tchaikovsky's song. In Figure 7 the strings play downward minor sevenths followed by downward major sixths, which are variants of the main theme's head motive.⁹⁹ Weber believes that the scherzando style is meant to establish Ernie as sly and smart.¹⁰⁰ However, the varied motives from these two pieces also imply his tragic fortune to come. Eisler does not offer mere mickey-mousing, but sophisticated musical storytelling in a modernist style.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Franz Waxman wrote a powerful passacaglia for the final scene of the 1948 film noir *Sorry, Wrong Number*, directed by Anatole Litvak.

⁹⁹ Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 116.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 117.

The “Tchaikovsky” theme and its silent text are used as commentary upon Ernie’s romantic relationships. When Ernie walks Ada home from a bar, the orchestra plays the main theme and they kiss. Concerning this romantic moment, Eisler provides music that complies with convention and presents the song’s strains in a lush Hollywood-style orchestration. Nevertheless, recalling the words to the song, the music actually indicates that there is no future in this relationship. Indeed, Ada soon pulls away from him, saying: “In the end, you wouldn’t give me what I need: confidence.” Ada eventually betrays Ernie’s confidence by returning to her husband. Diegetically, the song first appears when Ernie sits in Aggie’s home. She plays the theme on her cello. Later, when Ernie tells her that he is in love with Ada, she says: “People are what they are and love what they love. I wouldn’t change for a buck in the opera what I feel for you, and you can’t take it from me.” He kisses her but the orchestra remains silent. The use of silence posits this kiss in opposition to Ernie and Ada’s kiss. There is no passion here.

Figure 7. Hanns Eisler: *None But the Lonely Heart*, opening sequence, mm. 37–42.



Figure 8. Frederick Nicholls Crouch: “Kathleen Mavourneen,” mm. 6–21.

The musical score for "Kathleen Mavourneen" by Frederick Nicholls Crouch, measures 6–21, is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "Kath - leen Ma.vour - neen! the gray dawn is break - ing, The horn of the hunt - er is heard on the hill; The lark from her light wing the bright dew is shak - ing, Kath - leen Ma -". The piano accompaniment features a prominent left-hand bass line with a steady eighth-note pattern and a right-hand melody that often uses chords and arpeggios. A piano dynamic marking (*p*) is visible in the first system.

The second musical source from which Eisler draws ideas is the Irish folk song “Kathleen Mavourneen” (Figure 8).¹⁰¹ The poem dates from the early 1800s, and the song was well known in the United States by the Civil War. In the poem, a man speaks to his sleeping beloved:

¹⁰¹ Frederick Nicholls Crouch, *Kathleen Mavourneen*, ed. N. Clifford Page (Bryn Mawr, PN: Oliver Ditson Company, 1907), 3.

Kathleen, mavourneen, the grey dawn is breaking,
The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill.
The lark from her light wing the bright dew is shaking,
Kathleen, mavourneen, what! Slumbering still?
Oh, hast thou forgotten how soon we must sever?
Oh, hast thou forgotten this day we must part?
It may be for years, and it may be forever,
Then why art thou silent, thou voice of my heart?
It may be for years and it may be forever,
Then why art thou silent, Kathleen, mavourneen?

The text does not explain the reason for his departure, be it work or war. But the subject of the song concerns two lovers who will be apart for a long time.

Like “None But the Lonely Heart,” “Kathleen Mavourneen” plays a heightened dramaturgical role in the story. In the diegesis, however, it is heard coming from modern music devices set in a popular style. Eisler delegated such work to RKO arranger Cil Grau.¹⁰² Nevertheless, he probably had a hand in the song’s selection and its narrative function within the film, because the song is nowhere indicated in Odets’ script (unlike “None But the Lonely Heart”). Just before Aggie’s first appearance in the film, Ernie walks by his neighbor’s window and hears an instrumental version of the ballad playing on his neighbor’s wireless radio. The script does not indicate the song, and actually calls for organ music from the radio.¹⁰³ Later, when Ernie and Aggie walk down the street together, she admits that if asked she would marry him. Ernie does not answer her, but “Kathleen Mavourneen” is heard coming from a phonograph in a shop window. The song answers for him—they are destined to be apart. At this point, Ernie is still planning on

¹⁰² Weber, “Eisler as Hollywood Film Composer,” 563.

¹⁰³ Clifford Odets, *None But the Lonely Heart*, motion picture script, American Film Scripts, accessed 25 July 2012, <http://solomon.afso.alexanderstreet.com>, 7.

leaving to America with Ada. For this scene, the script does not indicate the presence of diegetic music at all.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps it was Eisler's decision to include the song here.

One final musical quotation may be an example of Eisler slyly inserting a Socialist anthem into an American feature film. In the closing scene, Ernie, having lost everything, discusses with his friend Twite the state of the world. He asks, "When's the world coming out of its midnight?" Twite responds: "Something shuddering in the air these days, son. If there's a better world to be had, son, you'll have to make it." Ernie answers, "Support the man who'll fight for a decent human life!" A plane flying overhead prophecies the approaching war. Here, a street performer plays the Scottish folk ballad "Annie Laurie" (Figure 9)¹⁰⁵ on his clarinet. Odets' script does not call for a street performer, so it is quite possible that the decision to insert the song was Eisler's.¹⁰⁶

Figure 9. Hanns Eisler: *None But the Lonely Heart*, Bridge Sequence (Part 2), mm. 1–6.



¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 35–36.

¹⁰⁵ Weber, *Hanns Eisler in Hollywood*, 118.

¹⁰⁶ Odets, *None But the Lonely Heart*, script, 165–167.

“Annie Laurie” (Figure 10),¹⁰⁷ a popular Romantic ballad, was first published in 1838 and was sung by British soldiers in the Crimean War and by American soldiers during the Civil War.¹⁰⁸ The song would have been well known to many Americans in 1944. Actor and singer Deanna Durbin recorded the ballad in 1936. As with “Kathleen Mavourneen” and “None But the Lonely Heart,” the song provides another layer of commentary to the story if one is aware of the song’s military history and its lyrics, uttering a tender vow of self-sacrifice for love. The insertion of this song in the film makes perfect dramaturgical sense. The diegetic use of this Irish or British war ballad inspires Ernie to go to war for the women he loves and fight for the “decent human life.” Furthermore, according to Weber, the use of the song may have a Socialist undertone. Weber mentions that this tune resembles the “Internationale” (Figure 11),¹⁰⁹ an ubiquitous Socialist song in Europe, the Soviet Union, and America at the time. If Eisler deliberately chose an Irish tune that resembles a Socialist march, he has exercised subversion brilliantly.

¹⁰⁷ Jerry Castillo, arr. *Annie Laurie*, (Chicago: M.M. Cole, 1935), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Wayne Erbsen, Liner Notes, *Love Songs of the Civil War*, Wayne Erbsen, Laura Boosinger, David Holt, Bucky Hanks, 1 CD (Asheville, NC: Native Ground Music, 1999), not paginated.

¹⁰⁹ International Workers of the World, “The Internationale,” in *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent: The Little Red Song Book* (Ypsilanti, MI: Industrial Workers of the World; Oak Park, IL: IWW Hungarian Literature Fund, 1995), 2.

Figure 10. Scottish Ballad: “Annie Laurie,” arranged by Jerry Castillo, mm. 1–12.

Andante

Ukulele Chords

Guitar Chords

Max - wel - ton's braes are the
Her brow is like the

bon-nie Where ear-ly falls the dew, And 'twas there that An-nie Lau-rie Gave
snow-drift, Her throat is like the swan, Her face it is the fair-est That

me her prom-ise true Gave me her prom-ise true, And
e'er the sun shone on, That e'er the sun shone on, And

Figure 11. Pierre De Geyter: *Internationale*, mm. 18–27.

1st end.
D

2nd end.
G

Tis the fin - al con - flict, let each stand in their place. The

In - ter na - tion al Un - ion shall be the hu-man race. Tis the place. The

Reviews of the film reveal a generally positive reaction to Eisler’s music. Bosley Crowther remarked: “Eisler prepared for the picture a magnificent musical score and this has been worked, with sound and image, into a symphonic entity.”¹¹⁰ Rubsamen praises

¹¹⁰ Bosley Crowther, “The Screen: ‘None But the Lonely Heart’ in Which Cary Grant and

those scenes where the music exhibits parallelism with the visuals. He declared: “The first directorial venture of Clifford Odets is rich in moments that call for interpretive music.” He did not mention the quotation of song and classical music at all.¹¹¹ Philip T. Hartung is a bit more skeptical: “The lighting and photography fit the theme beautifully; and so does Hanns Eisler’s music; however the latter tends to distract at times by forcing itself above the visuals.”¹¹² It seems, in this case, that Eisler’s attempts at counteracting the film’s illusory effects were successful.

From his early career as a composer Eisler participated in the discursive and aesthetic development of the new medium of sound film. He continued his intellectual and practical explorations of film music and its dramaturgical role while living in the United States. *Composing for the Films* is his greatest contribution to the study of Hollywood film practice; it is also one of the earliest of its size and depth. *Hangmen Also Die* and *None But the Lonely Heart* are fine examples of Eisler applying his ideas to practice. In both cases, Eisler provided a score that utilized his theories while also often blending them with standard Hollywood practices. When he was critical of America’s capitalist enterprise, he was often subtle, as in *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*. Overall, he was trying to heighten the quality of America’s film industry so it suited the modernization for which America had been admired by Europeans. The next chapter discusses Eisler’s contributions to American chamber music.

Ethel Barrymore Star, at Palace—New Film Opens at Strand,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1944.

¹¹¹ Rubsamen, “Hanns Eisler Rejects the Clichés,” 38.

¹¹² Philip T. Hartung, “But For the Grace of God,” *Commonweal* 41 (1 Dec 1944): 176.

CHAPTER 6: MODERNISM THROUGH A LEFTIST LENS: EISLER'S AMERICAN CHAMBER AND PIANO MUSIC

While in the United States Eisler wrote several chamber music works in which he explored new approaches to modernism. Having previously critiqued Schoenberg for conceiving elitist modernist works, Eisler embraced his teacher's techniques, namely atonality and dodecaphony, in his American compositions. Yet he adapted them to his own and new needs and political views. In this chapter I will discuss some of these works which heretofore have received little scholarly attention. First, I will provide background information on the chamber music scene in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s and Eisler's motivation for writing chamber music at that time. Then I will closely examine two works: his dodecaphonic String Quartet (1938) and his atonal Third Piano Sonata (1943).

Compared to his film and vocal works, Eisler's instrumental oeuvre is small. He wrote relatively few orchestral, chamber and piano works, although piano compositions outnumber his other instrumental works, as his principal instrument was the piano. In both Europe and the United States he was first and foremost a composer of vocal and dramatic music. When turning toward politically engaged art in the mid-1920s Eisler focused on vocal, film and incidental music, perhaps because an immediate, political message is more easily conveyed through these genres rather than through instrumental pieces. In Europe he wrote several works for piano, including two piano sonatas, and such compositions for ensemble as the Divertimento for Wind Quintet, op. 4, a Duo for violin and cello, op. 7 and a Sonata Movement for flute oboe and harp, op. 49. While

living in the United States, Eisler composed several chamber and piano works some of which, however, draw on material from his film scores.¹ Eisler spent much of his time in America writing film music and completing his research for his Rockefeller project. The Nonet No. 1 (1939) for flute, clarinet, bassoon, horn, string quartet, and double bass is a highly expressive piece conceived for his Rockefeller study. It is for a scene to John Ford's film *Grapes of Wrath* (1940).² *Vierzehn Arten, den Regen zu beschreiben* [Fourteen Ways to Describe the Rain] is another work that originated from his Rockefeller research. It began as a twelve-tone score for Joris Ivens's film *Regen* (1929) and is arguably Eisler's most well-known chamber piece, using the same scoring as Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* (1912). The third chamber piece that came out of the Rockefeller study is his Septet No. 1 (1940) and was originally written for Joseph

¹ The same is true of Eisler's orchestral works composed in America, most of which also pull from his film work, particularly his first American film score *The 400 Million* (1938, dir. Joris Ivens). From it come the Five Orchestral Pieces, Scherzo with Solo Violin, and Theme and Variations "The Long March." In his Chamber Symphony Eisler uses his music for the documentary *White Flood* (1940), which was part of the Rockefeller project. Finally, there are orchestral pieces based on the *Deutsche Sinfonie* (1935–1957), an antifascist work for solo voice, chorus, and orchestra which Eisler conceived on his 1935 American tour and continued composing throughout his exile: *Allegro for Orchestra* (1935–1939) and *Two Etudes for Orchestra* (1935–1939). Erik Levi, "Hanns Eisler's 'Deutsche Sinfonie,'" in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, ed. David Blake (New York: Harwood, 1995), 183. Jürgen Schebera compares the *Deutsche Sinfonie* to Paul Hindemith's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* (1946) and Paul Dessau's *Deutsches Miserere* (1944–1947) and considers it as a monumental, antifascist statement from a composer in exile. Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern, und Dokumenten* (Mainz: Schott, 1998), 151.

² Mark Swed, "Hanns Eisler, a Marxist For Our Time?" *Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 2010, accessed 30 March 2013, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2010/03/hanns-eisler-a-marxist-for-our-time.html>.

Losey's documentary short *A Child Went Forth* (1940). Eisler's Nonet No. 2 (1941) for flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, percussion, three violins, and double bass is based on John Steinbeck and Herbert Kline's film *The Forgotten Village* (1941). Eisler had also sketched music for Charlie Chaplin's 1928 silent film *The Circus*, when the comedian wished to re-release the picture as a sound film. But when the HUAC investigation interrupted his work, he decided to use the sketches as the source for his Septet No. 2 (1947). This chapter focuses on American chamber pieces that do not originate in Eisler's film music, save the dodecaphonic Violin Sonata, titled "Reisesonate" which Eisler began in 1937 when he was on a train to Prague and finished in 1938 after his ship docked in New York, the Variations for piano, and the Three Fugues for piano (1943).³

I. Chamber Music in the United States

Eisler had good reasons for writing chamber and piano music. In the United States, chamber music thrived in the 1930s and 1940s. American chamber ensembles and solo performers, joined by excellent performers who had to flee Nazi Europe, regularly presented works throughout the country although often in small venues. Many of these performers were interested in a wide variety of styles, including modernism, and were often more adventurous in their repertoire choices than orchestras. American quartets devoted to modern music included the Abas, California, Juilliard, Kroll, and Walden Quartets. Having transferred from Europe to the United States in 1936, the Kolisch

³ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician* (Munich: edition text und kritik, 1976; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 168. Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 155, 301.

Quartet, for instance, premiered Schoenberg's Fourth String Quartet in 1937. The Pro Arte Quartet, comprising exiled musicians, was in residence at the University of Wisconsin and equally dedicated to contemporary works.⁴ Apart from quartets, there were also mixed ensembles, like the New School Chamber Orchestra, the Boston Sinfonietta, and Cleveland's Contemporary Music Group.⁵ Richard Buhlig, Frances Mullen and Leonard Stein, Los Angeles-based pianists, frequently played Schoenberg's piano works. Pianist Edward Steuermann, brother of Salka Viertel, performed Schoenberg and Eisler's keyboard pieces.⁶

Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge was a great benefactor of modernist chamber music and organized chamber concerts on the East and West Coasts. Composers such as Henry Eichheim, Darius Milhaud, Schoenberg, and Ernst Toch dedicated pieces to her.⁷ In the spring of 1939, music critic Peter Yates along with his pianist-wife Frances Mullen initiated a series of chamber music concerts on the roof of their home in Los Angeles. These concerts became known as the "Evenings on the Roof" and featured both

⁴ "About the Pro Arte Quartet," Pro Arte Quartet, accessed 30 March 2013, <http://proartequartet.org/about.html>.

⁵ Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World: The American Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 169.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174–175.

⁷ Isabel Morse Jones, "Concerts Will Do Honor to Mrs. Coolidge," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 October 1942.

modernist and classical chamber pieces.⁸ Eisler's *Divertimento* for wind quintet (1923) was presented at one of these concerts in 1945.⁹

Eisler and Schoenberg were not the only composers exploring modernist chamber music in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. In the early twentieth century, as composers in America were pulling from a variety of inspirational sources, there was no one trajectory in concert music, especially chamber and piano music, that could be called the "American" style. Some composers drew upon indigenous sources for inspiration and fleshed out these ideas into highly original and unique statements. Amy Beach incorporated three Inuit melodies in her dissonant *String Quartet* (1929).¹⁰ On the other hand, in his *Concerto for Organ, Harp, and Strings*, op. 22, no. 3 (1941) and *Serenade for Flute, Harp, and Strings*, op. 35 (1945), Howard Hanson demonstrated his preference for the late Romantic sentiments of Jean Sibelius and Edvard Grieg.¹¹ Many American composers drew on Neoclassicism promoted by French organist and composition teacher Nadia Boulanger who counted among her American pupils Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson. Copland also explored jazz- and blues-inspired approaches in such works as

⁸ Daniel Cariaga, "Yates, Chamber Music Series Cofounder, Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 March 1976.

⁹ Isabel Morse Jones, "'Roof' Event Entertains," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1945.

¹⁰ Adrienne Fried Block, "Beach, Amy Marcy," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 30 March 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02409>.

¹¹ Carson Cooman, Liner notes to *Howard Hanson: Organ Concerto, Fantasy Variations, Nymph and Satyr Ballet Suite*, Philadelphia Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra, 1 CD (Hong Kong: Naxos, 2006), 2–3.

his Two Pieces for piano and violin (1926). Later he adapted the socially meaningful qualities of *Gebrauchsmusik* in works like *The Young Pioneers* (1935), a piano piece for children whose title references the Communist youth group.¹² He even experimented with twelve-tone technique in his Piano Variations (1930) and Piano Quartet (1950).¹³

Musical modernism began to flourish in America in the first two decades of the twentieth century in circles around Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, and Edgard Varèse, a French-born American composer. Varèse and Cowell experimented with percussion and new sound effects in such works as *Intégrales* (1925) and *Ostinato Pianissimo* (1934) respectively. Cowell along with John Becker, Ives, Wallingford Riegger, Carl Ruggles, and Ruth Crawford Seeger, belonged to a loose group of American composers called Ultramodernists, who were eager to explore new ideas in melody, harmony, texture and form and rivaled European musical modernists. Charles Seeger wrote:

The opportunity to contemplate the unconventional in the full panoply of its latent possibilities is actually more real, more present, in America, even more practical. Europe is such a slave to its past that it is almost impossible for it even to imagine the tyranny it suffers under ... Some new handling in respect to pitch has been discovered and worked with, as in Schoenberg's twelve-tone scheme.¹⁴

Spotting an alluring alternative to the Romantic music still prevalent in both Europe and in the United States, some of them appropriated the twelve-tone technique

¹² Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 303–304.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 147, 446.

¹⁴ Charles Seeger, “Carl Ruggles,” in *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium*, ed. Henry Cowell (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1933), 20.

and blended it with their own ideas.¹⁵ Adolph Weiss, who studied with Schoenberg in the 1920s, was probably the first American composer to use dodecaphony. His Twelve Preludes for piano (1927) were the first published dodecaphonic pieces by an American composer.¹⁶ Including a basic introduction to twelve-tone principles, Weiss's Preludes encouraged other Americans to acquire this technique. Riegger followed Weiss with his dodecaphonic Three Canons for woodwinds, Op. 9 (1931) and *Dichotomy* for chamber orchestra, Op. 12 (1932), although he developed his own approach to the twelve-tone technique different from Weiss and Schoenberg.¹⁷

Exiled composers settling in the United States made important contributions to the growing repertoire of modernist chamber music, including atonal and twelve-tone works, when it was largely banned in Nazi Europe and in the Soviet Union. Composers devoted to such approaches included Eisler, Schoenberg, Paul Dessau, Erich Itor Kahn, Ernst Krenek, and Stefan Wolpe. Besides his Fourth String Quartet, Schoenberg, for instance, wrote a dodecaphonic String Trio (1946) and *Phantasy* for violin and piano (1949). Kahn composed the twelve-tone works *Nenia judaeis qui hac aetate perierunt* for cello and piano (1941) and Ciaccona for piano (1943).

Young American composers, including John Cage, Lou Harrison, Dika Newlin, Milton Babbitt and George Perle explored twelve-tone music as well. In the 1940s, the

¹⁵ Joseph N. Straus, *Twelve-Tone Music in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁶ Sabine Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World*, 39–40.

¹⁷ Straus, *Twelve-Tone Music*, 7–10.

latter two developed very sophisticated twelve-tone techniques and theories foreshadowing the rise of integral serialism in the early 1950s. Babbitt was not interested in writing music that clearly presented the row to the listener, rather he preferred “the effect [the row] might have, the way it might assert itself not necessarily explicitly.”¹⁸ For example, when he wrote his *Composition for Four Instruments* (1948), he constructed trichords from the row and its transformations, so that their registral detachment would facilitate coherence:

By setting up the first trichord and isolating it from the rest, I thought that would set up ... the theme for this continuity. The continuity would be very clearly displayed by the delineation in the lower register of a trichord which is obviously the inversion of the first trichord.¹⁹

Dodecaphony became the focus of Perle’s works and writings after the 1940s. He developed an approach which he called twelve-tone tonality, creating analogies to tonal hierarchical ideas. He created twelve-tone sets with symmetrically related subsets and combined those subsets in chord arrays.²⁰ Some American composers saw an alluring democracy in the twelve-tone technique, because, with the removal of tonal hierarchies, all pitches were now allotted equal value in the row.

¹⁸ Milton Babbitt, *Milton Babbitt: Words About Music*, ed. Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰ Feisst, *Schoenberg’s New World*, 243.

II. Eisler's Chamber Music Style

Eisler's chamber music style is informed by his desire to speak clearly and directly to the listener. He almost always sought a form of communication that avoided the lush and "narcotic" sounds of bourgeois music, particularly the large symphonic sound of the Romantics. His early European chamber pieces, including the first two piano sonatas, exhibit his associations with the expressive and dissonant styles of Schoenberg and his students. He used dissonant intervals, phrases of varying and irregular lengths, contrasting sections of soft repose and stentorian violence, ninth-chords, whole-tone chords, quartal harmony, and older forms and techniques including passacaglia and theme and variations.²¹

While Eisler was in European exile, he wanted to address the broadest public more than ever. He increasingly sought to compose unique but approachable works which were in demand.²² Soon, Eisler found himself embroiled in an argument with Marxist philosophers György Lukács and Ernst Bloch concerning the use of modernist musical means such as the twelve-tone technique. Lukács criticized Eisler. He believed that Eisler and other composers grossly distorted reality by drawing on compositional methods that were irrelevant to mass art and ineffective as tools against fascism and capitalism. Bloch seemed to agree with Eisler that "advanced art, especially that of modernist composers,

²¹ David Blake, "The Early Music," in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, ed. David Blake (New York: Harwood, 1995), 24–27.

²² Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician* (Munich: Edition text und kritik, 1976; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 149–150.

could be appropriately applied to the present situation.”²³ Eisler emphasized that “the Popular Front needs progressive artists,” who do not isolate themselves from the masses, for he believed that it was possible, at least in the near future, for “the most progressive social consciousness” to ally with “the most progressive aesthetic consciousness.”²⁴

Eisler responded with subject matter on anti-fascist subjects and directed his creative efforts toward the revival of the cantata form. Eisler’s twelve-tone cantatas are an attempt “to infuse his compositions with a political message on the level of both form and content.” In 1937, the year before he moved to the United States, Eisler wrote nine solo cantatas and the *Lenin Requiem* on Brecht texts to express resistance to fascism and Nazism.²⁵ Dodecaphony, a technique perceived as the invention of a Jew and proscribed by the Nazi regime was a means Eisler used to express anti-fascist resistance.²⁶ Eisler combined modern twelve-tone technique with the Baroque cantata and jazz elements, “transforming these apparently heterogeneous elements into a style of peculiar acidity.”²⁷

Eisler’s use of dodecaphony and other modernist techniques, including references to jazz (particularly in the Third Piano Sonata) can be understood as an act of anti-fascist

²³ Peter Chametzky, Introduction to “‘Avant Garde Art and the Popular Front’ and ‘To Inherit Art,’” by Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler, *Critical Texts* 4, no. 3 (1987): 1–3.

²⁴ Bloch and Eisler, “Avant-Garde Art and the Popular Front,” *Critical Texts*, 6.

²⁵ However, Nazi tyranny did not completely erase dodecaphony from European art culture. Winfried Zillig and Paul von Klenau wrote twelve-tone pieces while living and working in Nazi Europe. See Feisst, *Schoenberg’s New World*, 273, note 142.

²⁶ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 145.

²⁷ Betz, *Political Musician*, 149–150.

defiance. Eisler believed that most creative artists were aware of the social conditions of their environment and that many composers were surprised that unwanted political expressions were suppressed or silenced when fascism and Nazism arose in Europe. Fascist and National socialist governments in Europe forced composers to stick to the tonal language inherited from the past, particularly the admired, and therefore acceptable, styles of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. The modern strains of Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern were condemned, even though, to Eisler, “Schoenberg’s music reflects the complexity and crisis of [the] times.”²⁸ Some *Gebrauchsmusik*, music with a specific function, was also censored under National Socialism, particularly that of Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill and Eisler, who extended the meaning of *Gebrauchsmusik* to include music with a socially urgent message.²⁹ Therefore, Eisler’s continued use of modernist techniques, particularly twelve-tone technique, a style forbidden by Hitler, is in direct and strident defiance of Nazism and other fascist regimes. Eisler would not be held down by any system.

III. String Quartet, op. 75 (1938)

The String Quartet was probably the first chamber work that Eisler composed when he had settled in America. Many composers in the United States, including Samuel Barber, Cowell, Riegger, Schoenberg, William Schuman and Roger Sessions devoted

²⁸ Hanns Eisler, “Contemporary Music and Fascism,” *Gesammelte Werke* [EGW], Serie 3, Bd. 1, *Schriften*, 1924–1948, ed. Stephanie Eisler and Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973), 490.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 489–492.

themselves to this genre. Samuel Barber's String Quartet, with its famous Adagio movement, and Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 4, both composed in 1936, are among the best known examples. Eisler penned his Quartet after completing nine chamber cantatas in the previous year. He probably wrote this Quartet for study and performance within the context of the New School of Social Research in New York where he was teaching. Little is known about the origin of this work. It is Eisler's only complete string quartet. He composed a Scherzo for string trio in 1920 and later started a Scherzo for string quartet that was left unfinished.

Like Schoenberg, Eisler uses twelve-tone technique within the context of a theme and variations form in the first movement of the String Quartet.³⁰ The Quartet is a twelve-tone piece comprised of two restless movements, "Variationen" and "Finale," which use the same tone row and last about fifteen minutes. Each movement is characterized by a polyphonic texture and the audible clarity of the prime form of the row. Like Berg and Schoenberg in his American years, Eisler includes consonant intervals in this work's prime row which contains several minor thirds. The prime row has the following pitch content: F# E \flat A A \flat F G B \flat B E C# D C. The presence of minor thirds yields a smoother melodic content and greater accessibility. Exclusion of transpositions of the row further indicates Eisler's desire to present the series as clearly as possible to the listener. Eisler almost always uses the row in a linear fashion, generally avoiding a simultaneous

³⁰ Tim Howell, "Eisler's Serialism: Concepts and Methods," in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, ed. David Blake (New York: Harwood, 1995), 120.

realization of the row through harmony which can also be seen as a device to achieve more agreeable sonic textures.

Figure 12. Hanns Eisler: String Quartet, 1st movement, mm. 1–14, cello.



The first variation-based movement begins in triple meter, but there is also a section in duple meter. The variations within the first movement are not labeled, but Eisler does delineate ten sections of varying character with notes and tempo markings. In the opening bars, the cello states the row and its retrograde as an antecedent-consequent phrase in a moderate tempo (Figure 12).³¹ Thus as in Schoenberg's early works, the prime row is used as a theme in the first movement and it appears numerous times with varying character in different instruments.³² The rhythmic and intervallic character of the melody, with its initial downward descent, followed by a wide leap upward as well as dotted quarter and eighth notes, aid recognition when the theme or a variation of it appears. The music soon acquires a rushing, mischievous quality with motive repetitions and dotted

³¹ Hanns Eisler, *Streichquartett* (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1961).

³² Ethan Haimo, "The Evolution of the Twelve-Tone Method," in *The Arnold Schoenberg Companion*, ed. Walter Bailey (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1998), 131.

rhythms. Eventually, the energy is exhausted, and at m. 140 the quartet becomes more contemplative with rocking chords lightly punctuated by plummeting pizzicato figures.

With the slow section beginning at bar 141, the rocking chords executed by the entire quartet are vertical realizations of the prime row. The cello then states it in two similarly falling lines (Figure 13).³³ At measure 164, the theme returns only slightly varied in the second violin, while the cello and the viola play variants of the theme using the row's inversion and retrograde-inversion (Figure 14).³⁴ Like Schoenberg, at the end Eisler brings back the original row theme with some octave displacement and in almost exactly the same rhythmic contour. This presentation of the original theme, which functions as a sort of tonic, signals the approach of the end of the movement and points toward sonata form.

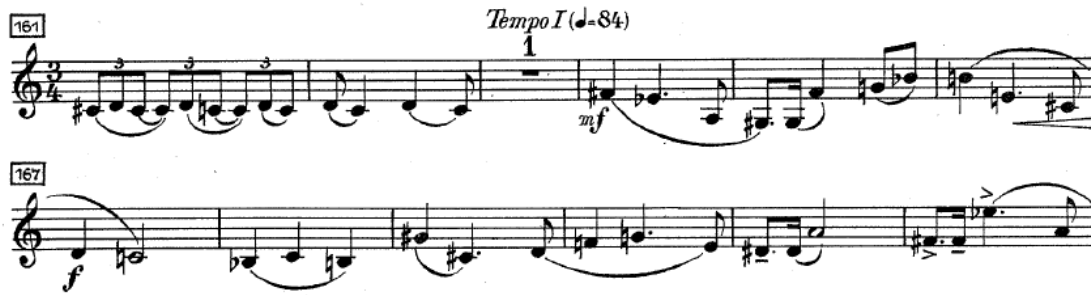
Figure 13. Hanns Eisler: String Quartet, 1st movement, mm. 144–160, cello.



³³ Eisler, *Streichquartett*.

³⁴ Ibid.

Figure 14. Hanns Eisler: String Quartet, 1st movement, mm. 161–172, violin II.



The String Quartet's second movement slightly longer than the first, continues the variation technique with a more urgent stimulus and uses the same row, but with a more dance-like theme. Like the first movement, the "Finale" initially presents the prime row first followed by its retrograde in an antecedent-consequent structure. However, Eisler now provides a spritely, skipping theme of a completely different character (Figure 15).³⁵ Howell notes that the opening bar of the theme references Mozart's "Hoffmeister" Quartet K. 499.³⁶ Eisler's second movement begins with falling pitches and follows an almost identical rhythmic pattern as in Mozart's first movement (Figure 16), a nod to Eisler's Austro-German heritage and also something that the listener unaccustomed to modernist music may recognize.³⁷ This theme is audible numerous times, particularly in the cello at m. 27, in the first violin at m. 37, and again in the cello at m. 87. The row

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Howell, "Eisler's Serialism," 129.

³⁷ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *String Quartet No. 20 in D major*, K. 499, in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts Werke*, Series XIV: *Quartette für Streichinstrumente* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1881), 206.

returns a final time at the end of the Finale, at first appearing in the first violin at bar 208 and then continued in the viola at bar 210. Due to fluctuating character and tempo, the first movement also possesses scherzo and andante qualities, followed by a fast second movement, so the whole piece might be seen as a double function form: a four-movement string quartet compressed into two movements.³⁸

Figure 15. Hanns Eisler: String Quartet, 2nd movement, mm. 1–6, violin II.



Figure 16. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: String Quartet No. 20, 1st mvt., mm. 1–5.



Eisler's String Quartet is a successful fusion of ideas of the past and present. On the one hand, Eisler uses theme and variation form, and on the other hand, dodecaphony.

³⁸ Schoenberg had used double function form in his Chamber Symphony, op. 9 (1907). Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Transformation of Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 160–161.

Perhaps because Eisler chose a simpler approach to the twelve-tone technique, the piece remained lesser known within the canon of serial repertoire, however this practice “may be viewed as something of a strength regarding just how approachable this serial music may be for the listener.”³⁹ The piece was performed at Eisler’s farewell concert at New York City’s Town Hall in 1948. Its modernist qualities did not escape the conservative *New York Times* critic Olin Downes, who despised Schoenberg’s music. He concluded in his review of the Quartet: “Since we are not Schoenbergians and that master’s insignia is all over these pages as regards technique, harmonic structure, and expressive method, we are perhaps limited in appreciation of the work.”⁴⁰ Downes’s verdict may not have aided the reception of this piece, but it has continued to receive occasional performances and has been recorded by the German Vogler Quartet.

III. Third Piano Sonata (1943)

In Los Angeles, in the spring and summer of 1943, Eisler composed his Third Piano Sonata. He had just finished the score to *Hangmen Also Die* and was also working on songs for the *Hollywood Songbook*.⁴¹ Eisler turned to this genre after a hiatus of about two decades, having completed his first two piano sonatas in 1923 and 1926 respectively. Eisler first mentioned this work to Clifford Odets in a letter of April 1943, in which he

³⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁰ Olin Downes, “Eisler Selections Played in Tribute,” *New York Times*, 29 February 1948.

⁴¹ Peter Deeg, Preface to *Dritte Sonate für Klavier*, by Hanns Eisler (New York: C. F. Peters, 2010).

referred to it as “sheer recreation.”⁴² Eisler later told Hans Bunge that he found himself with some free time: “What should I do from 8 in the morning in emigration except compose? Now explain to me, what should I do otherwise with my day?” Christoph Keller pointed out that this statement should not cause one to regard this sonata as a secondary work, rather it is “one of the most important contributions to the genre of the piano sonata in the twentieth century.”⁴³

The origins of one of the movement’s of Eisler’s Third Sonata may be traced to German writer Alfred Döblin’s sixty-fifth birthday.⁴⁴ On this occasion Brecht and his wife invited about two hundred guests for a party at a Montana Avenue theater in Hollywood. At this gathering Döblin’s friends were to sing his praises as he had experienced a financial setback due to unsuccessful work as a Hollywood film writer. Such German writers as Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel and Lion Feuchtwanger offered their congratulations. Peter Lorre and others read extracts from his works.⁴⁵ Brecht had asked Eisler to compose something for the event and thus it seems likely that Eisler submitted a movement from his Third Sonata. The movement took him about three to four days to

⁴² Hanns Eisler to To Clifford Odets, 12 April 1943, *Briefe*, 265.

⁴³ Christoph Keller, Notes in *Dritte Sonate*, no pagination.

⁴⁴ Alfred Döblin was one of the leading German modernist novelists. His masterpiece is *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), set in the dark underworld of Weimar Berlin.

⁴⁵ Lyon, 256.

complete, and Edward Steuermann, a champion of Schoenberg's piano music in Europe and America, performed it.⁴⁶

Eisler later lamented that the celebration on August 14 was a complete disaster. At the end of the performance, Döblin, who had recently converted to Catholicism, announced that he blamed Hitler's success in Germany on his own irreligious sentimentalities. This offended most of the party guests, because they felt that Döblin was casting blame on them as well.⁴⁷ In a conversation with Bunge, Eisler said:

I composed for these fools a piece of music, my poor friend Steuermann, instead of his holiday at the beach, studies it—and I hear that I should seek God! That's too much for me. I didn't make a scene at the performance, but I so loudly and distinctly left the row of seats, where Brecht always said "psst!" to me, and went away with, as one says, "unpleasant feelings." Consequently, it was a deplorable affair.⁴⁸

Brecht was also very embarrassed, but rationalized Döblin's remarks by noting in his journal that Döblin had lost two sons in the war, was in financial straits, and had married a fickle woman.⁴⁹

This sonata in three movements follows the classical model with two fast outer movements surrounding a slow inner movement. Eisler uses Baroque dance forms in two of the movements. Schoenberg, who saw himself as a deserving heir to the German musical tradition, had combined Baroque dance forms, including the gavotte and gigue,

⁴⁶ Hans Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Hanns Eisler im Gespräch* (Munich: Rogner and Bernhard, 1976), 77.

⁴⁷ Lyon, 256.

⁴⁸ Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr*, 78.

⁴⁹ Lyon, 257.

with his new musical language in his Piano Suite, op. 25 (1923) and also motivically alluded to Bach's name. Eisler had also paid homage to Bach with "Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H" for String Trio, op. 46 (1934) and in his politically charged choral pieces *Gegen den Krieg*, op. 51 (1936) and *Lenin-Requiem* (1936–7). To draw on preindustrial dance forms unaffected by capitalist commercial culture may be a socialistically motivated choice. As Schoenberg referenced Baroque music and Bach, Eisler too may have wanted to point to this European musical lineage in his work. Thus, the Third Piano Sonata might be understood as an antifascist statement, reminding of the great German musical tradition developed from Bach and its endangered modernist expressions that had flourished in Europe before the Nazis' rise to power, but were banned in the 1940s. Eisler also alludes to one of his Brecht songs, "Spruch 1939 [Saying 1939]," which contemplates the existence of music in troubled times and further reinforces this sonata's antifascist subtext.

Written with no key signature and marked by expressivity associated with Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, this sonata is largely atonal and includes a section in the third movement, which features a twelve-tone row. Elements of tonality do occur, but never with any implicit functional harmonic outline, always in highly chromatic contexts. Eisler presents his pitch material in homophonic and contrapuntal textures and uses free meter. Eisler also includes jazz syncopation and sonorities, particularly the seventh and ninth chords which he had used frequently in his European fighting songs. The combination of atonality, twelve-tone technique, high chromaticism, and American jazz elements can be seen as a critique of fascist censorship.

The rhapsodic first movement does not introduce, develop, and recapitulate themes in a conventional fashion. Here, constant transition determines structure as theme complexes are followed by intense, developmental passages, where motifs are subject to unusual variation techniques. As Eisler told Bunge, the “friendly wisdom” offered by each of the themes is overturned by periods of high dissonance and intensity, which may reflect Eisler’s frustration with wartime and the challenges of life in exile.⁵⁰

At the outset, an arpeggiated quartal chord leads to the first songlike theme that emphasizes chromatic motion and features several tritones (Figure 17).⁵¹ The quartal chord may be a reference to Schoenberg, who uses such fourth chords prominently in the opening measures of his First Chamber Symphony (1906). After the first statement of this theme, the arpeggiated chord returns in measure 7, now accompanied by a sonority consisting of two superimposed major triads a semitone apart (F major and G-flat major). It is an obstructive sonority that occurs in all three movements and may be seen as an expression of challenge. Another theme beginning at measure 56, emphasizes major and minor thirds in diatonic, diminished, and augmented chords with no tonal implications. At measure 73, Eisler includes rhythms and “pop” chords from American jazz and ragtime as the right hand plays seventh chords in syncopation with a rhythmically complex and highly chromatic bass line (Figure 18).⁵² At the end of the movement, the quartal chord is stated again, followed by three iterations of a dissonant chord whereupon

⁵⁰ Keller, Notes to *Dritte Sonate*, no pagination.

⁵¹ Eisler, *Dritte Sonate für Klavier* (New York: C. F. Peters, 2010), 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.

the first theme returns one more time in the form of a funeral march. As Keller noted, this end bears resemblance to the end of Eisler's Brecht song "Spruch 1939," wherein three dissonant chords also occur. Brecht's poem asks the question, "In the dark times, will there still be singing?"⁵³ The first movement of this sonata may echo the eschatological terror of that statement.

Figure 17. Hanns Eisler: Third Piano Sonata, 1st movement, mm. 1–8.



Figure 18. Hanns Eisler: Third Piano Sonata, 1st movement, mm. 73–75.



⁵³ Keller, Notes to *Dritte Sonate*.

The second movement recalls textures of J. S. Bach's keyboard music, with its juxtaposition of homophony and counterpoint as well as frequent use of parallel thirds in the inner voices. The movement may be understood as a kind of atonal passacaglia with a recurring theme not used as an ostinato in the bass, as one would expect, but spun out, often using free meter. Schoenberg had included a very free passacaglia in "Nacht" from *Pierrot lunaire*. Eisler had previously written a passacaglia for the second movement of his First Piano Sonata, and for his film scores to *Opus III* and *None But the Lonely Heart*. Here, he used the typically static passacaglia form loosely so that he could construct each passage with the appropriate expression that he desired. The highly chromatic 8-bar passacaglia theme (Figure 19), first presented in the right hand, then combined with a countermelody. The theme returns in the bass clef at m. 14.⁵⁴ At bar 39, this theme appears transposed down a half step in the tenor voice step while the right hand plays quick filigrees with widely spaced intervals. At the end of the movement (starting m. 72), the theme appears augmented and in free meter, supported by a chromatically descending bass line.

As in the first movement, there are sections of contrasting expression. The strong and combative sounds of the opening measures are followed by a *piú mosso* section of syncopated chords, which builds to a rushing passage of sixteenth notes and triplets. Also, Eisler again uses repetitions of dissonant chords, increasing in intensity and dissonance with each appearance from bitonal chords (the F major/G-flat major clash) in mm. 45–46

⁵⁴ Eisler, *Dritte Sonate für Klavier*, 6.

to nonachords in mm. 65–66, The nonachords also contain all of the notes of the F major/G-flat major pairing, except for the D flat.

Figure 19. Hanns Eisler: Third Piano Sonata, 2nd movement, mm. 1–4.



The third movement is the longest and it can be analyzed as a two-part form ABA'B' with a short coda. The A sections, which begin with a sharp pentachord built on a G-flat major triad and the pitches F and C, are more urgent and brute while the B sections are more quiet, lyrical and contemplative. The last movement is freely atonal, but features a twelve-tone row in the second B section. Keller refers to the movement as a “last dance, but more aggressive rather than joyful.”⁵⁵ A' differs greatly from A in that, apart from sharing an initial signal motif, the voices are sometimes swapped and the melodic line is mirrored. Such technique is a staple of Bach's gigue, and may have been a possible inspirational source or reference for this movement. B and B' are both contrapuntal in character, but the two sections are rhythmically dissimilar and the row in B' is only loosely derived from the first B section's theme (Figures 20 and 21).⁵⁶ After the initial repetition of an F, the next five pitches in the row share a similar intervallic contour

⁵⁵ Keller, Notes to *Dritte Sonate*.

⁵⁶ Eisler, *Dritte Sonate für Klavier*, 11.

to the theme in the first B section. Finally, as in other movements, the dissonant juxtaposition of F major and G-flat major occurs, first at the beginning of the signal motif, and as the concluding chord of the work.

Figure 20. Hanns Eisler: Third Piano Sonata, 3rd movement, mm. 24–28.



Figure 21. Hanns Eisler: Third Piano Sonata, 3rd movement, mm. 111–113.



The Third Piano Sonata was the last chamber music work that Eisler would ever compose. When he returned to Europe in 1948, eventually settling in East Germany, his artistic focus centered on songs, film music, and incidental music. Pianist Leonard Stein premiered the completed three-movement work on 15 October 1945 at an Evening on the Roof concert in Los Angeles.⁵⁷ Stein often performed this work as well as Eisler's other piano sonatas thereafter. For example he played the Third Piano Sonata in 1988 at Los

⁵⁷ Deeg, Preface to *Dritte Sonate für Klavier*.

Angeles's Gallery Theater in Barnsdall Art Park.⁵⁸ Frederic Rzewski, an American pianist and experimental composer of politically engaged music made the first recording of the piece for Finnadar Records in 1976 and noted that this sonata was written in the spirit of what Eisler called "left modernism," a musical response to the politics of the United Front.⁵⁹ He also noted that it was written for "progressive bourgeois audiences."⁶⁰

Commenting on a Rzewski performance, *New York Times* critic John Rockwell called the Third Piano Sonata "ambitiously structured and formalistically conceived" but also "a bit too 'progressive' and dry for its own good."⁶¹ The social implications of the work must have been lost on Rockwell, who seems to have assessed it only from a structural standpoint. The sonata contains many musical elements abhorred by fascist regimes, particularly high chromaticism, jazz elements, and a twelve-tone row. With its highly modernist re-interpretation of musical elements used by Bach, whose works were glorified by the Nazis as the pinnacle of German art but also revered by Jewish musicians who saw themselves as rightful heirs of the German music tradition, the Third Piano Sonata seems to be a critical response to the destruction of culture in Nazi Europe.

⁵⁸ "Stein to Play in Recital Sunday at Barnsdall Park," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 January 1988.

⁵⁹ Frederic Rzewski. Liner notes to *Variations on "No place to go but around"* by Frederic Rzewski; P-JOS.4K-D-(MIX) by Anthony Braxton; Third Sonata by Hanns Eisler, 1 LP (New York: Finnadar, 1976), no pagination.

⁶⁰ Quoted in John Rockwell, "Avant-Garde Piano Recital by Rzewski," *New York Times*, 1 December 1975.

⁶¹ Rockwell, "Avant-Garde Piano Recital."

Just as Eisler instilled portions of his film music with an anti-fascist character, the same sentiment is apparent in some of his American chamber works. The same can be said for the songs he wrote while in American exile, which are the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7: EISLER'S AMERICAN VOCAL MUSIC

Hanns Eisler's devotion to revolutionary music was most voluminously realized in his compositions for voice: songs for voice and piano, for voice and orchestra or small ensemble, choral songs, oratorio, and incidental music. Upon moving to the United States, Eisler continued to compose politically charged vocal music. His best known American vocal works are the collection of circa fifty songs on texts by Brecht and other poets. It became known as the *Hollywood Liederbuch* and will be discussed in this chapter. At around the same time Eisler also composed a set of choral songs for women's or girls' choir titled *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* [Little Woodbury Songbook], which has to date received little scholarly attention and will also be examined below.

I. Songs in America

When Eisler arrived in the United States in the 1930s, song composition flourished. The Brill Building in New York City, the center of America's music publishing industry, had just been erected at 1619 Broadway in 1931.¹ America's composers were writing songs and choral music that ranged from the styles of folk song and Broadway, to those of the nineteenth century, as well as modernist and experimentalist trends. The songs' text topics ranged from the mundane to contemporary criticism. Tin Pan Alley, an area of New York City known as the "capital of popular-song

¹ David A. Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers, and their Times: The Golden Age of American Popular Music From 1886 to 1956* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1988), xxiii.

publishing in the United States,” had been in operation for about forty years and shoveled out popular tunes, parlor songs, minstrel songs, as well as songs pulling from classical repertoire.² Sales of sheet music benefited from the enormous popularity of the phonograph record and the introduction of the “talkies” and film musicals in the 1930s.³

Among the most successful vocal works for theater and film in the 1930s were Nacio Herb Brown and Ralph Freed’s “Singin’ in the Rain” written for MGM’s *Hollywood Revue* (1929) and *Little Nellie Kelly* (1940) and Richard C. Rodgers and Loren M. Hart’s “Blue Moon” for MGM’s 1934 *Manhattan Melodrama*, the duo’s best-selling number up to that time.⁴ During Eisler’s American sojourn, they also wrote such other songs as “The Lady is a Tramp” and “My Funny Valentine” for Broadway’s *Babes in Arms* (1937) and the jazzy “This Can’t Be Love” for *The Boys From Syracuse* (1938).⁵ George and Ira Gershwin’s show tunes, including “They Can’t Take That Away From Me” from the 1937 film musical *Shall We Dance?* and the socio-politically charged numbers from *Porgy and Bess* (1935), were also highly successful upon Eisler’s arrival.⁶

² Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: Norton, 2001), 470–473.

³ Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley*, xxiii.

⁴ “Singin’ in the Rain” was also featured in the enormously popular 1952 musical of the same title. *Ibid.*, 204–205.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 218–225.

⁶ “It Ain’t Necessarily So” from *Porgy and Bess* became a song of resistance against the Nazis in Denmark. Ira Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions: A Selection of Stage & Screen Lyrics Written for Sundry Situations; and Now Arranged in Arbitrary Categories. To Which Have Been Added Many Informative Annotations & Disquisitions On Their Why & Wherefore, Their Whom-For, Their How; And Matters*

Broadway audiences applauded Virgil Thomson's opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934), on a libretto by Gertrude Stein, which featured an all-black cast and a myriad of musical styles from Baroque aria to Negro spiritual.⁷

Many other American composers explored song in various styles. Eisler's friend Elie Siegmeister, whom he had known from the Composer's Collective, wrote the socially critical *The Strange Funeral in Braddock* for baritone and piano (1936), which uses *Sprechstimme*. He drew on American folk song in his choral works *John Henry* (1935) and *Johnny Appleseed* (1940) and his Broadway musical *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* (1944).⁸ Aaron Copland's best known songs include the *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1950) and two sets of *Old American Songs* (1950–1952) which pull from America's rich and stylistically varied reservoir of 1800s folk music: minstrel songs, Negro spirituals and children's rhymes.⁹ Some of these songs, "The Dodger" for instance, are political in nature. It is an arrangement of a satirical piece written during Grover Cleveland's first presidential campaign (1884).¹⁰

Ruth Crawford, Henry Cowell, and John Cage among others wrote vocal music in the 1930s and 1940s and built on Charles Ives's modernist legacy, whose provocative and

Associative (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 47–48, 147–150.

⁷ Olin Downes, "Broadway Greets New Kind of Opera," *New York Times*, 21 February 1934.

⁸ Unsigned Liner Notes, *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* Elie Siegmeister, Original Broadway Cast, 1 LP (New York: Decca, 1963), no pagination.

⁹ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 440.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 467–469.

sometimes socio-critical songs became better known in the 1930s.¹¹ These composers instilled their vocal works with unusual vocal techniques, dissonance, new rhythms, timbre and textures. Crawford, whose music was once performed along with Eisler's at a New York concert, set poems by Carl Sandburg in her *Five Songs* (1929) and *Three Songs* (1930–1932) and also wrote the politically oriented songs “Sacco, Vanzetti” and “Chinaman, Laundryman,” which comprise her *Two Ricercari* (1933).¹² In “Sacco, Vanzetti” based on a text by H. T. Tsiang, Crawford underscores the text's critique of the American government's trial and execution of suspected anarchist Italian immigrants, with many tritones and complex rhythms.¹³ Cowell's *Two Songs on Poems of Catherine Riegger* (1933), the aphoristic *Mother Goose Rhymes* (1937) and his Robert Frost setting *The Pasture* (1944) demonstrate his interest in cluster chords.¹⁴ Cage, a student of Cowell

¹¹ In 1933 and 1935 Cowell published sets of Ives's songs in his *New Music Quarterly* and therefore advanced the dissemination of these works. Examples of Ives's socially conscious songs include “The New River” and “An Election” (both from 1921). Ives's music soon inspired America's modernist composers and performers to write modernist vocal compositions. Cowell also oversaw the first publications of songs by Copland, Charles Seeger, Vivian Fine, Siegmeister, Ernst Bacon, Leo Ornstein, and Otto Luening, among others. Joel Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151–152, 198–199; and Frank R. Rossiter, *Charles Ives and His America* (New York: Liveright, 1975), 235–236.

¹² Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

¹³ Ellie M. Hisama, “In Pursuit of a Proletarian Music: Ruth Crawford's “Sacco, Vanzetti,” in *Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds: Innovation and Tradition in Twentieth-Century American Music*, ed. Ray Allen and Ellie M. Hisama (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 73–77.

¹⁴ Robert Osborne, Liner Notes, *Songs of Henry Cowell*, Mary Ann Hart, Jeanne Golan (New York: Albany, 1997), no pagination.

and Schoenberg, wrote several songs in the 1940s. Involved with music for percussion in the 1940s, his song *Forever and Sunsmell* on a text by e. e. cummings is for voice, Chinese tom-toms and Chinese cymbal. Accompanied by intricate rhythmic patterns, the vocal line initially centers on the notes D and G.¹⁵

In the 1930s and 1940s, composers in exile enriched the American vocal repertoire. Besides Eisler, these included Kurt Weill, Alexander Zemlinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Ernst Krenek, Stefan Wolpe and Paul Dessau. For some of these artists, setting the English language to music, or even speaking it, was difficult, and they either wrote fewer vocal works than in Europe or stuck to their native language. Many of these composers' vocal works have melancholic, religious or political undertones and can be understood as responses to the stringencies of displacement and the Second World War.

Kurt Weill, who settled in New York in 1935, enjoyed a successful career as a composer of American vocal works. Like Eisler, he collaborated with Hoffman R. Hays and the Group Theatre and wrote music for films and the 1939 New York World's Fair. However, unlike Eisler, he wrote a number of Jewish-themed vocal works, including *Two Songs of the New Palestine* (1938) and *Kiddush* (1946) for cantor, chorus, and organ.¹⁶ His anti-war Biblical drama *The Eternal Road* (1937) features a rabbi in a synagogue reading Bible tales to his congregation before they are sent into exile by an angry mob.¹⁷

¹⁵ John Cage, *Forever and Sunsmell* (New York: C. F. Peters, 1960).

¹⁶ David Farneth, "Chronology of Weill's Life and Works," in *A New Orpheus: Essays on Kurt Weill*, ed. Kim. H. Kowalke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986): 353–357.

¹⁷ Guy Stern, "The Road to *The Eternal Road*," in *A New Orpheus*: 269–270.

Weill also wrote, sometimes in collaboration with Ira Gershwin, works for Broadway which included such songs as “Tchaikovsky and Other Russians” for *Lady in the Dark* (1941).¹⁸ Schoenberg’s former teacher Alexander Zemlinsky, who moved to the United States in 1939 composed *Three Songs* (1939) on texts by Irma Stein-Firmer for the publisher Chappell & Company.¹⁹ The subject of the texts, translated from German into English, concerns a loved one who has been left on the other side of the Atlantic. The musical language is rooted in late nineteenth-century music. A resident of Los Angeles since 1934, Schoenberg wrote several vocal works that were religiously motivated and addressed exile life during wartime. *Kol Nidre* (1938), op. 39, his only liturgical work is tonal and uses English and Hebrew text. It caters to “American Jews [who] considered [the Kol nidre] one of the most significant communal rites.”²⁰ In response to the Holocaust, Schoenberg conceived *A Survivor From Warsaw* (1947) for narrator, men’s choir and orchestra featuring the English, German and Hebrew languages and elements alluding to Hollywood film.²¹ Schoenberg also wrote *Three Folksong Settings*, op. 49 (1948), tonal arrangements of German folksongs with texts translated from German into

¹⁸ Weill and Ira Gershwin worked together on the Broadway shows *Lady in the Dark* (1941) and *The Firebrand of Florence* (1945). Kim Kowalke, “Kurt Weill and the Quest for American Opera,” in *Amerikanismus, Americanism, Weill: Die Suche nach kultureller Identität in der Moderne*, ed. Hermann Danuser and Hermann Gottschewski (Schliengen: Argus, 2003), 284.

¹⁹ Antony Beaumont, Liner Notes, *Alexander Zemlinsky im Exil: Kammermusik und Lieder* (Wedemark: Thorofon, 1998), 13.

²⁰ Sabine Feisst, *Schoenberg’s New World: The American Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 105–108.

English to be performed by American high school choirs.²² Schoenberg's last three choral works are religious in nature and dodecaphonic and use German and Hebrew texts:

Dreimal tausend Jahre (Thrice a Thousand Years, 1949) with a text about the destruction of the Temple and the desire to return home from exile; *De Profundis* (1950) and the unfinished *Modern Psalm No. 1*.²³ Krenek composed the highly influential sacred dodecaphonic choral work *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* (1941), "a vision of the suffering of a whole people" in response to the war.²⁴ A composer of European *Kampflieder* like Eisler, Dessau wrote several vocal works with Brecht while in the United States, including the monumental *Deutsches Miserere* (1944–1947), an antifascist cantata.²⁵ Wolpe who had come to America in 1938 composed Hebrew "folk songs" and also wrote *Drei Lieder von Bertolt Brecht* (1943) for low voice and piano and *Zwei Lieder aus Gedichten von Berthold Viertel* (1945).²⁶ Initially, he preferred to set either

²² Ibid., 69–70.

²³ Ibid., 108–112.

²⁴ John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 237–238; and Leo Samama, Liner Notes, *Ernst Krenek: Lamentatio Jeremiae Prophetae*, Netherlands Chamber Choir, Uwe Gronostay (Castricum, The Netherlands: Globe, 1992), 4–5.

²⁵ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 282.

²⁶ Jehoash Hirshberg, "A Modernist Composer in an Immigrant Community: The Quest for Status and National Identity," in *On the Music of Stefan Wolpe: Essays and Recollections*, ed. Austin Clarkson, Dimension & Diversity Series No. 6 (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003), 93; and Austin Clarkson, ed., "Appendix B: Chronological Catalogue of Compositions," in *On the Music of Stefan Wolpe: Essays and Recollection* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003), 330.

Hebrew or German texts, but with his *Three Songs for Medium Voice and Piano* (1946), which includes a setting of Walt Whitman's "O Captain, My Captain," Wolpe began exploring the English language more frequently.²⁷

Eisler's American song output reflects the eclecticism of the genre in the United States. Using both German and English texts, Eisler demonstrates a variety of musical styles and techniques. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, Eisler continued to compose *Kampflieder*-style marches, particularly in "Song for Mother Bloor" and "Muscle and Strength" from *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*. Yet other works, the "Love Terzett" from *Pete Roleum* for example, are jazzy or comical in character. He also penned serious songs with socio-critical implications, like the songs from the *Hollywood Songbook*. Yet unlike Schoenberg, Dessau and other exiled composers, he rarely featured specifically Jewish themes in his American vocal oeuvre. Some of his vocal works are tonal, while others border on atonality. He employs an array of vocal textures in the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, for instance imitative counterpoint in "An den Schlaf" and homophony in "On New Year's Day in the Morning." The *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* contains several examples of melismatic text setting. But the *Hollywood Songbook* features by and large syllabic vocal writing.

II. *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*

The *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* was Eisler's first American choral work, although it was preceded by vocal music he had written for *Pete Roleum and His Cousins* and by

²⁷ Clarkson, "Appendix B," 330.

such songs as “Song for Mother Bloor,” “Sweet Liberty Land” for Hoffman R. Hays, *Shakespeare Sonett No. 66* (1939) and Two Sonnets for voice and clarinet (1939) on texts by Brecht. Other earlier Brecht settings include *Über die Dauer des Exils* [About the duration of exile], *Elegie 1939* [Elegy 1939], *Zufluchtsstätte* [Place of refuge], *Spruch 1939* [Saying 1939], and *Über den Selbstmord* [About suicide] (all from 1939).

In the summer of 1941, Hanns and Lou spent three months in Woodbury, Connecticut with Marxist immigrant philosopher Joachim Schumacher and his wife. Schumacher was working as a lecturer in nearby Middlebury at Westover School, an academic institution for girls. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, the Eislers had previously stayed with the Schumachers in the summer of 1938 in Valley Cottage, New York. Eisler spent many days swimming and playing skat and chess.²⁸ In gratitude to the Schumachers, he wrote the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, a collection of twenty short a cappella choral songs for the girls’ choir at Westover.

For the first fifteen songs, Eisler chose *Mother Goose* rhymes as texts. Eisler had used children’s songs earlier in his music for Joseph Losey’s short documentary *A Child Went Forth*. The first fifteen songs and the last one are set in English.²⁹ The remaining four songs are on German texts: “An den Schlaf [To sleep]” from Eduard Mörike and “Für Lou [For Lou],” “Ode an die Langweile [Ode to boredom]” and “Sommer adieu

²⁸ Hanns Eisler to Lou Eisler, 11? August 1941, in *Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe: Briefe 1907–1943*, Ser. IX, Bd. 4, 1, ed. Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010), 179.

²⁹ The only existing recordings, however, are in German.

[Good bye, summer]” by Eisler himself.³⁰ The last song’s text, “On New Year’s Day in the morning,” comes from a variant of the English Christmas carol “I Saw Three Ships.” While the nursery rhymes possess an innocent child-like quality with no real binding elements besides the frequent appearance of animals, the German song texts are more serious and melancholic. The carol concludes the work with a more festive character. Thus, the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* possesses contrasting moods.

Letters Hanns and Lou wrote to his sister Ruth Fischer at that time shed light on why he may have been drawn to some of these texts and why a dark shadow suddenly overtakes the idyllic spirit. He could not be completely at ease, because he was in financial straits, explaining that he had many debts and utility bills that could not be easily settled. He had sent his brother Gerhart some money while he was at Ellis Island waiting on a visa approval. Eisler was further distraught that he could not send money to his son, Georg, who was living in England. Ruth had asked him for monetary aid but he responded “you can still shake it and yet no dime drops out.”³¹ Perhaps the many years away from his son provided Eisler with a nostalgic feeling, which may have inspired him to compose music for *Mother Goose* rhymes. Also, while in Woodbury, he read in the newspaper that Hitler had invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Indeed, in a note at the end of “Für Lou” Eisler inscribed: “Written after a newspaper article, which was not good.”³²

³⁰ “An den Schlaf” was also set by Hugo Wolf and is included in his *Mörike Lieder*.

³¹ Ibid., 173–174.

³² Hanns Eisler, *Woodburry* [sic] *Liederbüchlein für Frauenchor* (Leipzig: Deutscher

Just like Schoenberg's Suite in G for String Orchestra, Theme and Variations for Band, op. 43 and Three Folksong Settings, op. 49, these choral songs are an example of Eisler writing music for young American students, though no evidence has been found indicating that the Westover group ever performed them. As mentioned in the third chapter, Eisler had spoken to the choir of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union in 1938 on the crisis in music, the division of entertainment and serious music that has led "the younger generation, influenced by new conditions, with new habits and new standards [to prefer] sport and films to concerts."³³ In that speech, in order to make music interesting for the performers and the audience, he recommended a repertoire that included not only jazzy works devoid of Hollywood sentiment, but also modern works, classical pieces and "the marvelous madrigals of composers like Orlando di Lasso, [Luca] Marenzio and numerous others of the highest level."³⁴ In his *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, Eisler combines the serious with the playful. As the girls would have known the rhymes, he may have hoped to familiarize them with a modernist musical language while also teaching them various choral styles.

Each song possesses its own unique qualities. The twenty choral songs are generally short. Most are less than two minutes in length—some less than a minute. Most of the numbers are scored for three vocal parts (soprano, mezzo-soprano and alto), but

Verlag für Musik, 1976), 15. Eisler sometimes misspelled the name "Woodbury" and the misspelling is retained in the 1976 edition of this vocal work.

³³ Hanns Eisler, "Labor, Labor Movement and Music," in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 139.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 145–146.

sometimes the parts vary. For example, “Für Lou” and “Sommer adieu” are written for soprano 1, soprano 2, and alto, while “I Had a Little Doggie,” in a blues tempo, calls for mezzo soprano and alto or two altos. Textures vary from the homophonic to the contrapuntal. “The Five Toes,” which features a call and response pattern, divides the girls into two choirs. There are songs in both duple and triple meter, and some contain alternating time signatures. In general, the triadic harmony that appears is not functional. Most of the songs are highly chromatic and many do not have a key signature. Nevertheless, some songs, while containing chromatic moments, are clearly tonal, like “Pussy Cat” and “The Old Woman From France,” both in B-flat major.

[illegible]

Figure 23. Hanns Eisler: *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, “Little Miss Muffet,” mm. 8–16.

The musical score for "Little Miss Muffet" (mm. 8–16) is presented in three staves (Soprano, Alto, Bass). The lyrics are in both German and English. The tempo and dynamics are marked as follows:

- Measures 8–10:** *molto* (Soprano and Alto), *molto* (Bass).
- Measure 11:** *Zeit lassen, sehr schwer* (German), *fff* (Soprano and Alto), *fff* (Bass).
- Measures 12–14:** *poco pesante* (Soprano and Alto), *fff* (Bass).
- Measures 15–16:** *molto rit.* (Soprano and Alto), *sub. pp* (Bass).

The lyrics for the Soprano and Alto parts are:

There came a big Spi -
Kam ei - ne gro - ße Spin -

The lyrics for the Bass part are:

der and sat down be - side her and fright
ne und setz - te sich vor sie hin. Du stürz -
der and sat down be - side her and fright
ne und setz - te sich vor sie hin. Du stürz -

One peculiar facet of this collection is the abundance of word painting, which Eisler generally avoided in his vocal works, although as mentioned earlier Eisler appreciated the pictorial madrigals of Lassus and Marenzio. The inclusion of text painting here is both entertaining and instructional, as it is often difficult to execute, but the effect is always humorous. In “The Sick Kitten,” the girls imitate the sound of an approaching cat. With continuous eighth notes, the mezzo-sopranos and altos approximate the sound of a tinkling bell on a cat’s collar using onomatopoeia while the sopranos “meow” (Figure 22).³⁵ A difficult madrigalism occurs in “Little Miss Muffet” on the word *spider*. The first line of the rhyme is set in quiet homophony. Suddenly the sopranos and mezzo-sopranos burst into fortississimo melismas that musically depict the bouncing descent of

³⁵ Eisler, *Woodbury* [sic] *Liederbüchlein*, 9.

(Figure 23).³⁶

Figure 24. Hanns Eisler: *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, “Hector Protector,” mm. 1–16.

Heroic

Sopran

Mezzo-sopran

Alt

Hec - tor Pro - tec - tor was dressed all in green,
Hek - tor Pro - tek - tor, ge - klei - det in Grün,

Hec - tor Pro - tec - tor was dressed all in green,
Hek - tor Pro - tek - tor, ge - klei - det in Grün,

Hec - tor Pro - tec - tor was sent to the queen. The
Hek - tor Pro - er - achien vor der Kön - ni - gin. Die

Hec - tor Pro - tec - tor was sent to the queen. The
Hek - tor Pro - er - achien vor der Kön - ni - gin. Die

queen did not like him. No more did the King. So
Kön - ni - gin sag - te: Was will denn der Mann. Und

queen did not like him. No more did the King. So
Kön - ni - gin sag - te: Was will denn der Mann. Und

Hec - tor Pro - tec - tor was sent back a - gain.
Hek - tor Pro - tek - tor nach Hau - se ging dann.

Hec - tor Pro - tec - tor was sent back a - gain.
Hek - tor Pro - tek - tor nach Hau - se ging dann.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

Eisler's endorsement of anti-authoritarianism is evident in the tenth song, "Hector Protector" in E-flat major, one of the few clearly tonal numbers (Figure 24).³⁷ The rhyme may refer to Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York (1411–60), who resented that his rival Henry VI had inherited the throne of England. When the king had a mental breakdown, the Duke of York was given the title Protector of the Realm. After the king's return, Richard was banished to Ireland ("dressed all in green"), but executed after quitting exile and declaring himself king.³⁸ Thus, the rhyme is about a man in exile, something Eisler certainly could relate to. Considering the setting, while the first line of text outlines a major triad and the voices descend the scale in the second line, pitches from outside the key occur in the third line, which contains the words "queen" and "king." Indeed "queen" is harmonized with an F-sharp minor triad, enharmonically spelled. "King" is even more sharply treated with a C diminished triad.

The German songs within the collection are more serious and introspective in character than the nursery rhymes. With "An den Schlaf," a particularly austere song, Eisler returned to a poem by Mörike he had previously set to music in August 1940 in New York. As in his String Quartet and Variations for Piano, for the earlier setting of "An den Schlaf" Eisler had used a twelve-tone row without transpositions.³⁹ The song was probably written in reaction to current events in Europe. Mörike's text praises sleep for

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

³⁸ Albert Jack, *Pop Goes The Weasel: The Secret Meanings of Nursery Rhymes* (London: Penguin, 2009), no pagination.

³⁹ Horst Weber, *I Am Not a Hero, I Am A Composer: Hanns Eisler in Hollywood* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2012), 30–32.

making life sweet, while also relating it to death. Concluding with the line “how dying is so easy,” the poem can be seen as an epitaph to soldiers who lost their lives in battle.

Sleep may have suggested to Eisler respite from his realization that his fellow Germans were dying in a senseless war. As was his custom, for the purposes of text setting, Eisler changed some of the words of the poem, altering its alexandrine verse, but not necessarily its meaning. For example, he replaced the word “willkommen” with “begrüß’,” both mean “to welcome,” and the word “Sterben” with “Tode,” meaning dying and death respectively.

Figure 25. Hugo Wolf: *Mörke-Lieder*, “An den Schlaf,” mm. 1–14.

Sehr ruhig. Hugo Wolf.

GESANG.

PIANO. *pp*

(*leise*)

Schlaf! — süs - ser Schlaf! ob-wohl dem Tod wie du nichts

gleich, auf die-sem La-ger doch will - kommen heiss' — ich dich!

mf *dim.*

Figure 26. Hanns Eisler: *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, “An den Schlaf,” mm. 1–10.

Andante

Sopran *p* Oh sü - fer Schlaf, ob - wohl dem Tod wie Du nichts

Mezzo-sopran *p* Oh sü - fer Schlaf, ob wohl dem Tod wie Du nichts

Alt *pp* Oh sü - fer Schlaf

gleich; auf die - sem La - ger doch be - grüß' ich dich. Denn so dem

gleich; auf die - sem La - ger doch be - grüß' ich dich. Denn so dem Le - ben

—, auf die - sem La - ger doch be - grüß — ich — dich. Denn so dem

His Mörike setting for the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* is in common meter, with one bar of 3/2, and highly chromatic. All twelve notes of the chromatic scale are stated by the sixth bar. However, the song ends on an F-major triad, which may indicate the peace that finally comes with sleep or death. Eisler was certainly familiar with Hugo Wolf's setting for voice and piano from 1888. Wolf's song also features a highly chromatic vocal line while concluding with an E-major triad. A comparison of the two songs suggests that Eisler may have been thinking of Wolf's vocal line (Figure 25)⁴⁰ when composing his piece (Figure 26).⁴¹ The similarities are particularly obvious in the vocal descent on the

⁴⁰ Hugo Wolf, *The Complete Mörike Songs* (New York: Dover, 1982), 91.

⁴¹ Eisler, *Woodbury* [sic] *Liederbüchlein*, 9.

words “auf diesem Lager doch begrüß’/willkommen” and the word “Schlaf.” At the beginning of Eisler’s song, the composer set the voices in pervading imitation, a technique used in Renaissance vocal music, but here using modernist sonorities and no strict imitation. The sopranos enter on C and the mezzo-sopranos enter a tritone lower on G flat in the next bar. The altos follow, beginning a fourth lower on D flat. Despite this chromaticism, there are fleeting tonal chords without harmonic function, like the B-flat major chord in bar 10, followed by a B-minor seventh chord and a pause on a C-minor seventh chord in bar 12.

The *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* is a composition that served dual roles. First, it was meant as instructional music for a girls’ choir, using such familiar elements as nursery rhymes, call and response, and diatonic chords to balance modernist sonorities. Like many of Eisler’s other American works, it can be considered a musical response to life in exile and the tragedy of war. The innocence of childhood seems illusory and is overshadowed by the seriousness of world conflict. The concluding “On New Year’s Day in the Morning,” with its quick eighth notes and dancelike character, suggests hope for a future without violence, although since the song is in D minor, Eisler may indicate that one should not be naïve. The collection, however, is not a cycle, as there are no unifying musical devices and these settings can certainly stand on their own as subsets culled from the compilation or individual concert pieces.

III. *Hollywood Songbook*

While Eisler was on holiday in Woodbury, his friend and collaborator Bertolt Brecht arrived in the United States. When Eisler moved to Los Angeles in April 1942, they renewed their joint artistic efforts. As mentioned earlier, Brecht wrote the script to Fritz Lang's film *Hangmen Also Die* (1942), for which Eisler composed the score. While Eisler maintained a relatively stable income with his film scores, his stipend from the Rockefeller project, and his teaching post at the University of Southern California, Brecht was less fortunate with employment in Hollywood and concentrated on theater for the stage, although he experienced difficulties in getting his plays produced. At this time, Eisler only finished music for two Brecht plays: English-language versions of *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches*, known as *The Private Life of the Master Race* (1943) and *Leben des Galilei*, known as *Galileo* (1946). The former, translated by Eric Bentley, was a flop when it was presented in New York in 1945, although Eisler's music was considered as one of the highlights.⁴² The latter, featuring English actor Charles Laughton, opened in Los Angeles on 30 July 1947 to mixed reviews, but the California premiere attracted celebrities such as Charlie Chaplin, Richard Conte, Van Heflin, Gene Kelly, Anthony Quinn, and Frank Lloyd Wright.⁴³ While in the United States, Eisler also started working on music for the Brecht plays *Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg* [*Schweik in*

⁴² Michael John T. Gilbert, *Bertolt Brecht's Striving for Reason, Even in Music: A Critical Assessment*, Studies in Modern German Literature, vol. 3 (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 162–163.

⁴³ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 196.

the Second World War] and *Die Geschichte der Simone Machard* [*The Visions of Simone Machard*], both not produced until 1957 after Brecht's death.⁴⁴

Perhaps their most celebrated joint effort in America are the songs that Eisler based on Brecht poems and incorporated in the *Hollywood Songbook*, a collection of songs with texts by Brecht and many other writers, composed in Los Angeles. The other text sources of the *Hollywood Songbook* include his own poetry, the writings of French philosopher Blaise Pascal, fellow exile Berthold Viertel, the German and French poets Goethe, Mörike, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Arthur Rimbaud, as well as passages from the Old Testament. The Old Testament verses are used in the short song "Der Mensch" whose first line is taken from the Book of Job and whose second line stems from Exodus. The song is a rare example of Eisler directly drawing from Jewish religious sources.⁴⁵

The *Hollywood Songbook* builds on the tradition of song composition established by such composers as Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf and Mahler. However, the collection also belongs to the tradition of modernist socio-critical songs to which such American composers as Ives and Crawford Seeger made important contributions. The songs address such themes as the situation of emigrant life, examinations of Hollywood society, the Second World War, and nostalgia for the

⁴⁴ Gilbert, *Striving for Reason*, 163–165.

⁴⁵ In the passages that Eisler chose, Job, whose faith was tested by God through great suffering, mentions that man's short life on Earth is constantly full of anguish. The words from Exodus refer to Passover, where one avoids the angel of death by coating the house door with "the blood of a lamb." The song is written in the E Phrygian mode, with allusions to E major/minor tonality. Written in mid-1943, Eisler's choice of texts perhaps reflects thoughts of the war.

Germany of the past, before the rise of fascism.⁴⁶ Albrecht Betz says that unlike his predecessors from the nineteenth century, Eisler did not write for a salon, but rather re-interpreted the Lied as a “concert song to impart social understanding [and] enlightenment.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there was a salon-like culture in Los Angeles. Eisler’s friends Salka Viertel and Alma Mahler-Werfel, for instance, both hosted salons in Hollywood and Eisler, who played some of these songs for his friends, may very well have imagined that these songs would be performed in such intimate venues. He made photocopies of the songs and distributed them among his friends, suggesting performances not only in concerts, but also in private homes.⁴⁸ The concept of the *Hollywood Songbook* seems most directly related to Wolf’s song collections, which were not necessarily meant to be performed as a complete work in concert but rather as a set from which songs for a recital could be chosen.

Historically, scholars have argued the exact number of songs comprising the *Hollywood Songbook*. Erwin Ratz on the occasion of Eisler’s fiftieth birthday in 1948 incorrectly proclaimed that the collection contained nearly 200 songs.⁴⁹ No definitive

⁴⁶ Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern und Dokumenten* (Mainz: Schott, 1998), 181.

⁴⁷ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician* (Munich: edition text und kritik, 1976; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 186–187.

⁴⁸ David S. Steinau, “The Artist in Exile in Wartime Los Angeles: Hanns Eisler’s Expressive Goals in the ‘Hollywood Songbook’” (DMA diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003), 11

⁴⁹ Erwin Ratz, “Hanns Eisler zum 50. Geburtstag,” in *Wer War Eisler?: Auffassungen aus sechs Jahrzehnten*, ed. Manfred Grabs (West Berlin: Verlag das Europäische Buch, 1983), 160.

compilation in Eisler's hand exists, however there is evidence that Eisler had planned a songbook because of markings above song titles.⁵⁰ Thirty-eight of the autograph manuscripts are labeled with the words "Hollywooder Liederbuch" or "Hollywooder Liederbüchlein" ["Little Hollywood Songbook"], later crossed out.⁵¹ Hectographed editions of some of the songs passed among Eisler's friends in the late 1940s.⁵² In the 1950s, Eisler released *Lieder und Kantaten*, which contained 43 songs, but the songs from the *Hollywood Songbook* were assorted by theme and dispersed in three volumes. Manfred Grabs compiled the first edition of *The Hollywood Songbook* in 1976 in volume 16 of the *Gesammelte Werke* from Deutscher Verlag für Musik. The volume also contains works unrelated to the songbook. The first edition with the songs presented as a set did not appear until 2008.⁵³ Now considered the preferable edition, this publication chronologically organizes 47 songs by date of composition (1942–1947) and serves as the basis for this study. Soprano Roswitha Trexler and pianist Josef Christof provided the first complete performance of the *Hollywood Songbook* in 1982.⁵⁴

Most of the songs are short, under two minutes in length. "Der Schatzgräber" ["The Treasure Hunter"] and "An eine Stadt" ["To a City"] are the longest, usually taking

⁵⁰ David S. Steinau, "The Artist in Exile", 8.

⁵¹ Oliver Dahin and Peter Deeg, Preface to *Hollywood Songbook* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 2008), no pagination.

⁵² Steinau, "The Artist in Exile," 11.

⁵³ Hanns Eisler, *Hollywood Songbook* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 2008).

⁵⁴ Dahin and Deeg, Preface to *Hollywood Songbook*, no pagination.

over three minutes to perform. Many songs are without meter indication, while others feature constantly changing time signatures. For example, the short and quick “Frühling” [“Spring”] is only 28 measures long but contains thirteen changes in time signature. Only two of the songs, “An den kleinen Radioapparat” [“To A Little Radio”] and “Der Schatzgräber,” have key signatures. Interestingly enough, they are both in D major and end with unison F sharps. Otherwise, atonality subsists in these pieces through extremely dissonant harmonies, diatonic sonorities with no prevailing tonal relationships, as heard in the piano in the first “Anakreontische Fragment,” “Geselligkeit betreffend” [“Concerning conviviality”], or the quick sounding of all twelve notes of the chromatic scale, as in the first three measures of “In den Weiden” [“In the Willows”]. As with his European *Kampflieder*, the text setting is almost always syllabic and declamatory, promoting clarity and in opposition to the melismatic coloratura typical of opera. In preludes, interludes, and postludes, the piano is generally given more independent and freely moving passages. However, when the voice enters, the piano’s prominence is subsumed, usually either with chord accompaniment or imitation of the vocal line and rhythm. David Steinau notes that the piano often features ostinato patterns, as in “Die Flucht” [“The Flight”], which allude to the suspension of time, a doleful characterization of life in exile.⁵⁵ Eisler referred to these songs as diary entries, so the texts and music express the conflicting feelings of an exiled person in a new land and culture: nostalgia

⁵⁵ Steinau, “The Artist in Exile,” 32.

for Germany while denouncing Hitler, hope for success in exile while criticizing some of the host land's values, "a desire to belong with a desire to be left alone," and humor.⁵⁶

Eisler has often been criticized for returning to a bourgeois form of concert music with the *Hollywood Songbook*. Yet like his European cantatas and *Kampflieder*, many songs in this collection can be understood as a re-interpretation of a classical genre as a socio-political statement. Perhaps the most frequently discussed songs from the collection are the *Fünf Elegien* [*Five Elegies*], which due to the chronological organization of the songs, occupy a central position. Originally known as the *Hollywood-Elegien*, these are the only poems that Brecht wrote specifically for the *Hollywood Songbook* in the summer of 1942.⁵⁷ Referring to Goethe's *Roman Elegies*, Eisler told Brecht that America was "the classic place to write elegies [because] you do not go unpunished in Hollywood."⁵⁸ Although the elegy is generally associated with the lament, Fritz Hennenberg says that Brecht and Eisler's elegies "regress to the ancient meaning, as a lyrical expression of a perhaps philosophical or political subject matter."⁵⁹ Eisler set seven of the ten elegies provided by Brecht: the *Fünf Elegien*, *Die letzte Elegie* ["The Last Elegy"], and *Hollywood-Elegie Nr. 7*. The songs concern disillusionment with Los Angeles and Hollywood business ethics. Michael John T. Gilbert calls the elegies "the most

⁵⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁷ Schebera, *Eine Biographie*, 182.

⁵⁸ Hans Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Hanns Eisler im Gespräch* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1976), 43.

⁵⁹ Fritz Hennenberg, "Das Hollywooder Liederbuch – Struktur und Interpretation," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 33, no. 7 (July 1983): 414.

sophisticated pieces Eisler composed after his break with Schoenberg,” while noting motivic similarities to Schoenberg and a Straussian lyrical quality.⁶⁰

Figure 27. Hanns Eisler: *Hollywood Songbook*, “Die Stadt ist nach den Engeln genannt,” mm. 1–11.

The fourth installment of *Fünf Elegien*, “Die Stadt ist nach den Engeln genannt” [“The City is Named After Angels“], is a grotesquely critical description of the exorbitant lifestyles of the Hollywood elite (Figure 27).⁶¹ Brecht describes women who “smell of oil

⁶⁰ Gilbert, *Striving for Reason*, 170–171.

⁶¹ Hanns Eisler, *The Hollywood Songbook* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 2008), 41.

and wear golden pessaries,” while feeding Hollywood writers in their swimming pools. The oil may refer to suntan oil, reflecting their exuberant lifestyle, or to the crude oil from the refineries that polluted California’s air. Pessaries are birth or bladder control devices alluding to these women’s potentially disreputable sexual lives.⁶² Eisler indicates that the song is to be performed “with dark Schmalz.” The waltz-like melody and the syncopated rhythms in the piano point to popular music, while the bass line descends by half steps, depicting a descent into a decadent world. As Stanley Workman observed, the highly chromatic harmonies point to Wagner.⁶³ Indeed, the piano in bars 2 and 3 seems to sound a “Tristan” chord that is not fully realized. Perhaps with this quotation, Eisler was critical of some of the members of the European community in Los Angeles who succumbed to such depraved living. Steinau stated, “His seductive waltz and lush chords create an attractive veneer that barely manages to conceal the decadence beneath, which calls to mind the beauty salon Brecht imagined Hollywood to be.”⁶⁴

One noteworthy and profoundly poetic musical reaction to the war is “Gedenktafel für 4000 Soldaten, die im Krieg gegen Norwegen versenkt wurden” [“Plaque for 4000 Soldiers, Who Were Sunk in the War Against Norway”]. The text comes from Brecht’s *Steffin Collection*, written while in Scandinavian exile and compiled

⁶² Steinau, “The Artist in Exile,” 56.

⁶³ Stanley E. Workman, “Hanns Eisler and His Hollywood Songbook: A Survey of the *Five Elegies (Fünf Elegien)* and the *Hölderlin Fragments (Hölderlin-Fragmente)*” (DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 2010), 29.

⁶⁴ Steinau, “The Artist in Exile,” 57.

by Brecht's collaborator Margaret Steffin in 1941. This collection served as the impetus for Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook*.⁶⁵ "4000 Soldaten," composed in July 1942, memorializes German soldiers, whose war ship was sunk while in passage to Norway. At the outset, the voice intones the B-A-C-H motive, which has appeared numerous times throughout the history of German music composition (Figure 28).⁶⁶

Figure 28. Hanns Eisler: *Hollywood Songbook*, "Gedenktafel für 4000 Soldaten, die im Krieg gegen Norwegen versenkt wurden," mm. 1–6.

Unruhig (♩)

Wir lie - gen al - le - samt im Kat - te - gat. Die

p *simile*

3

Vieh - damp - fer ha - ben uns hin - ab - ge - nom - men. Fi - scher

The motive (B-flat, A, C, B natural in German nomenclature), here transposed up a tritone, was initially used by Bach as a sort of musical signature. Other composers, who wanted to pay homage to Bach with this motive include Franz Liszt in *Fantasy and Fugue on the Theme B-A-C-H* (1855) and Schoenberg in *Variations for Orchestra*, op. 31

⁶⁵ Oliver Dahin and Peter Deeg, Notes to *Hollywood Songbook*, 97.

⁶⁶ Eisler, *Hollywood Songbook*, 22.

(1928). Eisler had previously used this motive in his “Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H” for String Trio, op. 46 (1934). Albrecht Dümmling believes that the motive’s appearance in “4000 Soldaten” does not represent simply the Baroque composer but rather all of German culture: “The tones B-A-C-H remind you that these soldiers were not just perpetrators, but also victims, not only followers of Hitler, but also representatives of a different, better Germany.”⁶⁷ Thus, even though these soldiers represent the Nazism that Eisler so intensely abhorred, he may have also recognized that they were his fellow countrymen ensnared in an inescapable situation that led them to their watery grave. The piano’s dotted-rhythm ostinato pattern chromatically rises, mimicking the rocking of the ocean surface. After the line, “Fishermen, when you catch many fish in your nets, think of us, and let one go,” the piano’s wave crests and suddenly sinks again.

Although many of Eisler’s songs suggest somberness and pessimism, some of them also reflect Eisler’s humorous personality and playfulness. “Vom Sprengen des Gartens” [On the Sprinkling of the Garden] is a case in point. Eisler probably composed it shortly after Brecht had penned the poem in August 1943.⁶⁸ With a sardonically witty text, the voice glibly encourages a lawn sprinkler that not only waters the grass, but also the fruitless plants, the weeds, and the dirt between the flowers. Brecht satirizes America’s cultural tendency toward excess by scoffing at the gardener’s unnecessary overuse of water. Eisler’s use of vocal line and rhythm heightens comedy. For example, repetitive eighth notes marked *kurz* (*sempre staccato*) in the piano mimic the whirling

⁶⁷ Albrecht Dümmling, *Laßt euch nicht verführen: Brecht und die Musik* (Munich: Kindler, 1985), 476–477.

⁶⁸ Dahin and Deeg, Notes to *Hollywood Songbook*, 100.

spritz of the sprinkler, while the voice sings “And do not forget the shrubs, even the ones without berries” in a playful eighth-note arch (Figure 29).⁶⁹

Figure 29. Hanns Eisler: *Hollywood Songbook*, “Vom Sprengen des Gartens,” mm. 15–18.



Brecht was apparently astounded that despite the war Eisler would spend several days composing songs on the subject of Anacreon, who usually addressed commonplace pleasures. Nevertheless, Eisler took as his inspiration Mörike’s translations of Anacreon poems, “which had nothing at all to do with that.”⁷⁰ As usual, Eisler made changes to the text where he saw fit, striking some words and combining some fragments to form the message he desired.⁷¹ In the five “Anakreontische Fragmente,” as well as the six

⁶⁹ Eisler, *Hollywood Songbook*, 77.

⁷⁰ Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr*, 66.

⁷¹ Steinau, “The Artist in Exile,” 72.

“Hölderlin-Fragmente,” Eisler confronts the contradictions of his own exile existence. As in “4000 Soldaten,” he critically observes the deplorable actions of his fatherland, while at the same time feeling nostalgia for Germany’s former beauty.⁷² The songs are typified by the use of much dissonance. In the fourth song, “In der Frühe,” [“In the Morning”], written in April 1943, the artist wakes up, drinks a cup of wine, and reaches for his instrument. He is struck by the thought, “My poor homeland, when will I see you again?” The poem is a yearning to return home. Steinau mentions that in the *Hollywood Songbook*, Eisler usually accompanies nostalgic thoughts of home with the more popular sonority of a major-major seventh chord. Eisler’s use, however, is not banal, but rather genuinely affectionate.⁷³ Eisler takes a chord heard frequently in pop tunes and uses it with serious meaning in art song. “In der Frühe” opens with alternating augmented and major-major seventh chords, and such sonorities can be found throughout the short song, particularly on the falling words “My poor homeland” in bar 22 and in the closing measures (Figure 30).⁷⁴

⁷² Betz, *Political Musician*, 191–192.

⁷³ Steinau, “The Artist in Exile,” 14.

⁷⁴ Eisler, *Hollywood Songbook*, 57.

Figure 30. Hanns Eisler: *Hollywood Songbook*, “In der Frühe,” mm. 19–31.

Figure 30 shows a musical score for the piece "In der Frühe" by Hanns Eisler, measures 19–31. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in German. The piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with various time signature changes (2/4, 3/4, 4/4) and dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *ffz* (fortissimo zando). The voice part includes a triplet in measure 20 and a final phrase in measure 31 marked *molto decresc.*

je - tzo greif ich. Mein arm hei.mat.lich Land, wann wer.de ich dich wie.der.sehn.Mein

arm hei.mat.lich Land.

ffz *ff* *molto decresc.*

Figure 31. Hanns Eisler: *Hollywood Songbook*, “Nightmare,” mm. 4–13.

Figure 31 shows a musical score for the piece "Nightmare" by Hanns Eisler, measures 4–13. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in English. The piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with various time signature changes (2/4, 3/4, 4/4) and dynamic markings such as *fp* (fortissimo piano) and *ff* (fortissimo). The voice part includes a triplet in measure 5 and a final phrase in measure 11 marked *poco pesante*.

The rat - men accused me of not lik-ingstend, of

not lik-ing gar - bage, of not lik-ing their squeals, of not lik - ing

to eat dirt.

fp *ff* *poco pesante*

Several years after World War II and in the midst of the Cold War, Eisler became homeless again and left for Europe, following the HUAC investigation and humiliation in the American media that, for many years, had negatively affected his reputation in America. Eisler expressed his disgust with this ordeal in the text to his unfinished “Alien Cantata” (1948), where he poignantly exclaimed “they called me an alien” and “a lover of my brother.”⁷⁵ Eisler had provided a similar sentiment in the song “Nightmare” from the *Hollywood Songbook*, the only number in the collection with a text by the composer and one of the few songs with an English text (Figure 31).⁷⁶ The song, probably composed in 1947, was originally titled “The Hearing (a nightmare).” The title refers to the September 1947 HUAC interrogation in Washington D.C. and suggests that Eisler had no desire to leave the United States, did not want to be an outsider or viewed as an alien. The vocal line remains within the upper register of the voice, reflecting anxiety and vexation, until it sinks to a D sharp on the words “finally they condemned me.” The piano plays ostinato eighth notes on dyad clusters, perhaps mocking the incessant and similarly worded questions that Eisler had to bare during the interrogation. No music survives for the text of “Alien Cantata,” but it may have featured a similar style.

Eisler’s engagement with his American environment and the events of his time is movingly reflected in his American vocal music. Written for an American girls’ choir, *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* explores childhood themes colored by wartime experience. In

⁷⁵ Hanns Eisler, “The Alien Cantata,” *Masses & Mainstream* 1, no. 2 (April 1948): 26–27.

⁷⁶ Eisler, *Hollywood Songbook*, 88.

the *Hollywood Songbook*, the most frequently studied and performed of his American works, Eisler powerfully documents a wide array of his sentiments and ponderings on the war and life in Los Angeles. It is unfortunate that after a very productive ten-year period in America Eisler, suddenly and against his will, had to leave his chosen home, his friends and colleagues.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

During his American sojourns in 1935 and 1936 and from 1938–1948, undaunted by his ongoing visa struggles, hassle from reactionary government officials and misrepresentation in the conservative press, Hanns Eisler made many important contributions to American culture and involved himself in American society. He composed significant scores for such films as *Hangmen Also Die* and *None But the Lonely Heart* which received Academy Award nominations and he co-authored with Theodor Adorno a path-breaking treatise on film composition *Composing for the Films*. Eisler conceived outstanding chamber music, including a String Quartet and the Third Piano Sonata as well as numerous vocal works, among them the *Hollywood Songbook*, a superb collection of nearly fifty songs. His music was played in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden and New York's Town Hall and has been performed and recorded by such American performers as Mordecai Bauman, Eric Bentley, Charlie Haden, Frederic Rzewski, Leonard Stein, Edward Steuermann, the New York Choral Artists, and the Eos Orchestra during his lifetime and after his death.¹ Furthermore he himself gave performances of his own music in small and large venues across the United States. As a professor Eisler inspired fledgling American music students at the New School for Social Research and the University of Southern California. Although always critical of his environments, Eisler acculturated to America with great ease. He had many American friends and colleagues. He moved in leftist circles, interacting with such

¹ Paul Griffiths, "Yesterday's Warnings, Still Timely," *New York Times*, 3 March 1998; and Paul Griffiths, "His Music Can Leap and Fall, Tickle an Appall," *New York Times*, 15 April 2001.

renowned figures as Ella Reeve Bloor, Charlie Chaplin, Harold Clurman, Theodor Dreiser, Hoffman R. Hays, Elia Kazan, Joseph Losey, Tom Mooney, Clifford Odets, and John Steinbeck. As an associate of the Composers' Collective, he worked closely with Marc Blitzstein, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford, Earl Robinson, Charles Seeger, Elie Siegmeister, and others.

Eisler's achievements earned him respect and admiration among his American audiences, colleagues, friends, and students. Thus it is unfortunate that this fruitful period in his career was cut short by the investigations of the House of Un-American Activities Committee which succeeded in portraying and stigmatizing him as the "Karl Marx of Music."² Though genuinely interested in his environment and social philanthropy, Eisler increasingly came to realize that he was an unwanted person: an Alien. "They called me an Alien," he exclaimed shortly before his departure in 1948. Reflecting his sadness and frustration he felt for being ejected from a country he grew to love, this statement found its way in his unfinished autobiographical "Alien Cantata" (1948).³ Displaced again, Eisler settled in East Germany where he lived until his death in 1962.

Although forced out of the United States and long neglected in American musicology, Eisler, his music, ideas and odyssey have nevertheless continued to inspire such diverse American musicians as Blitzstein, Woody Guthrie, Robinson, Frederick Rzewski and Christian Wolff. In his lyrics for the song "Eisler On the Go," written after

² William S. White, "Eisler Plea Made by Mrs. Roosevelt to Sumner Welles," *New York Times*, 25 September 1947.

³ The text to "The Alien Cantata" is available in Appendix A. Eisler mourned being called an alien and a friend to his brother. Hanns Eisler, "The Alien Cantata," *Masses & Mainstream* 1, no. 2 (April 1948): 26–27.

Eisler's "voluntary deportation" and set to music by British song writer Billy Bragg and the American rock band Wilco in the 1990s, Guthrie lamented: "Eisler on the go, Eisler on the move, Brother is on the vinegar truck and I don't know what I'll do."⁴ Wolff, a composer of experimental and politically engaged music, paid tribute to Eisler in his 1983 *Eisler Ensemble Pieces* and in his 2002 orchestral work *Peace March 8*, in which he uses an excerpt from Eisler's *Song for Peace*.⁵

Eisler's songs and music for film and stage have recently received some attention by American scholars, but it is hoped that this recognition will escalate. It is time for a renewal of interest in Eisler's entire oeuvre and a recognition and re-evaluation of his unique contributions to American culture.

⁴ Woody Guthrie, "Eisler On the Go," WoodyGuthrie.org, accessed 7 April 2013, http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Eisler_on_the_go.htm.

⁵ Stephen Chase and Philip Thomas, eds., *Changing the System: The Music of Christian Wolff* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 120.

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APPENDIX A

HANNS EISLER: “THE ALIEN CANTATA”

1.

Early morning, and a gray fall day.
Birds were singing idiotic tunes,
and I could no longer deny
that a new day had arrived.
In my old green bathrobe I went to the garden.
Between flower and weed a newspaper lay
tossed there as in disgust
upon the damp earth.

2.

Slowly I bent to see
what the mighty ones of this country
were concerned with today.
When I saw,
on the front page,
my own face looking back at me,
I knew
that this day they were concerned with me.

3.

After that morning
elderly business men
much concerned with the spiritual purity of this country,
started to question me.
Dismissed,
I looked into their faces
and saw
that they did not like my answers
and had no love for me.

4.

They accused me of being for the poor ones:
(I come from the poor.)
They accused me of hating oppression:
(I am myself oppressed.)
They accused me of hating their wars:
(I fought in their wars and saw destruction.)
And with disgust they pointed their fingers at me
and accused me of loving my brother.
And they called me an alien,
not desired by them,
an undesirable alien,
and they arrested me.

5.

Ever since that early day

I have had no rest;

Ever since that early morning,

when in my old green bathrobe,

I slowly bent down to lift a newspaper from the damp earth

and saw my face looking back at me.¹

¹ Hanns Eisler, "The Alien Cantata," *Masses & Mainstream* 1, no. 2 (April 1948): 26–27.

APPENDIX B
CONTENTS OF THE HOLLYWOOD SONGBOOK

1. Der Sohn (The Son)
 - I. Wenn sie nachts lag und dachte [When she lay at night and thought]
 - II. Mein junger Sohn fragt mich [My young son asks me]
2. In den Weiden [In the Willows]
3. An den kleinen Radioapparat [To a Little Radio]
4. Frühling [Spring]
5. Speisekammer 1942 [Larder 1942]
6. Auf der Flucht [On the Escape]
7. Über den Selbstmord [On Suicide]
8. Die Flucht [The Flight]
9. Gedenktafel für 4000 Soldaten, die im Krieg gegen Norwegen versenkt wurden
[Plaque Commemorating 4000 Soldiers Who Were Sunk in the War Against Norway]
10. Epitaph auf einen in der Flanderschlacht Gefallenen [Epitaph For One Who Fell in the Battle in Flanders]
11. Spruch [Proverb]
12. Panzerschlacht [Tank Battle]
13. Ostersonntag [Easter Sunday]
14. Der Kirschdieb [The Cherry Thief]
15. Hotelzimmer 1942 [Hotel Room 1942]
16. Die Maske des Bösen [The Mask of Evil]
17. Zwei Lieder nach Worten von Pascal [Two Songs on Words by Pascal]
 - I. Despite these miseries
 - II. The only thing
18. Winterspruch [Winter Proverb]
19. Fünf Elegien [Five Elegies]
 - I. Unter den grünen Pfefferbäumen [Under the Green Pepper Trees]
 - II. Die Stadt ist nach den Engeln genannt [The City is Named After Angels]
 - III. Jeden Morgen, mein Brot zu verdienen [Every Morning In Order to Earn My Bread]
 - IV. Diese Stadt hat mich belehrt [The City Has Taught Me]
 - V. In den Hügeln wird Gold gefunden [In the Hills Gold is Found]
20. Die letzte Elegie [The Last Elegy]
21. L'automne californien (Kalifornischer Herbst) [California Autumn]
22. Anakreontische Fragmente [Anacreon Fragments]
 - I. Geselligkeit betreffend [Regarding Companionship]
 - II. Dir auch wurde Sehnsucht nach der Heimat tödlich [For You Also, Longing For Your Homeland Became Deadly]
 - III. Die Unwürde des Alterns [The Indignity of Aging]

- IV. Später Triumph [Later Triumph]
- V. In der Frühe [In Early Morning]
- 23. Erinnerung an Eichendorff und Schumann [Recollection of Eichendorff and Schumann]
- 24. Hölderlin-Fragmente [Hölderlin Fragments]
 - I. An die Hoffnung [To Hope]
 - II. Andenken [Memories]
 - III. Elegie 1943 [Elegy 1943]
 - IV. Die Heimat [Home]
 - V. An eine Stadt [To a City]
 - VI. Erinnerung [Recollection]
- 25. Der Mensch [Mankind]
- 26. Vom Sprengen des Gartens [By the Spring in the Gardens]
- 27. Die Heimkehr [The Return Home]
- 28. Die Landschaft des Exils [The Landscape of Exile]
- 29. Rimbaud-Gedicht [Rimbaud Poem]
- 30. Der Schatzgräber [The Treasure Hunter]
- 31. Nightmare
- 32. Hollywood-Elegie Nr. 7²

² Hanns Eisler, *Hollywood Songbook* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 2008).