KURT WEILL: LIEDER TO LEGEND
AN EXAMINATION OF OFRAH’S LIEDER AND FRAUENTANZ OP. 10

by

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DEDICATION:

FOR GINGER, DAISY AND VIOLET.
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ABSTRACT

Kurt Weill (1900-1950) began his compositional career in Berlin and left his legacy on the American Broadway stage. This study includes an overview of the influences of Lieder composers including Schumann and Strauss on Weill’s first song cycle Ofrah’s Lieder (1916) and the 20th century influences of Schoenberg and Stravinsky on his vocal chamber music cycle Frauentanz (1923). This study examines how the Weill juvenilia employs diatonic melodies, mood painting, and the integration of vocal and piano parts emulating 19th century models. Next, this study presents ways in which Weill’s Frauentanz displays 20th century techniques such as rhythmic texture, non-diatonic melodies, and semi-tonal instability. The Frauentanz vocal line is examined as instrumental in nature, adding textural importance to the interplay of the text with instrumental melodic motives. Kurt Weill’s interest in vocal music and modernism directly influenced his legendary theatrical works. His traditional German musical training, rooted in counterpoint, combined with his melodic and modern ingenuity form the basis of the “Weill Style” of theatre music, for which he earned international recognition.
A. Introduction

Kurt Weill is a composer whose multifaceted songs are sung in a variety of venues from jazz clubs to the Metropolitan Opera. Weill is best known for his German operas, his Broadway shows and his American opera Street Scene.\(^1\) Conductor Leon Botstein wrote that Weill, “sought to write a new kind of music that bridged the concert hall, the cabaret and the street.”\(^2\) September Song, Mack the Knife and Speak Low are just a few of the many Kurt Weill theatrical songs that have become cabaret standards for classical recital singers, amateurs at karaoke night and singers that defy categorization. In Weill’s obituary, Virgil Thomson wrote, “He was probably the most original single workman in the whole musical theater, internationally considered, during the last quarter century.”\(^3\) During his student years, Weill pursued a “pure musical form”\(^4\) and as he found his voice in theatre writing, the “Weill Style” was born. Weill’s Broadway style is not the typical American Broadway style. Weill’s popular style is often dark, with his

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\(^1\) Street Scene includes spoken dialogue in the score. When questioning the authenticity of this work’s operatic genre, Anthony Tomassini gives a clear explanation for the difference between operas and musicals in his New York Times article, “Opera? Musical? Please Respect the Difference,” July 7, 2011. He wrote, “Here is the difference: Both genres seek to combine words and music in dynamic, felicitious and…artistic ways. But in opera, music is the driving force; in musical theater, words come first.” For Weill, the music is the driving force and he refers to this work as both a Broadway Opera and his American Opera.

\(^2\) www.eislermusic.com/music


harmonic language incorporating complex suspensions under his haunting melodies.

Weill was a Broadway contemporary of Richard Rogers and George Gershwin, but Weill’s songs carried over the stark quality of post-war Berlin. Weill wrote for trained voices with a higher tessitura than his contemporary American Broadway composers. Perhaps the strongest characteristic of the “Weill Style” is the way he incorporated jazz idioms as a way to depict classic texts with wit and irony. Stephen Hinton’s book, *Weill’s Music Theatre: Stages of Reform* is an in depth study of Weill’s career as theatre composer. Hinton writes,

> For a theater composer such as Weill, a work is not synonymous with a text. His projects for the musical theater were always, to varying degrees, collaborative ventures….It follows that each work’s identity is dynamic, its status as written text not permanently fixed but mutable.\(^5\)

Weill wrote to Maxwell Anderson the following remarks about their collaboration on *Knickerbocker Holiday*:

> The more I think about our play the more I get enthousiastic\(^{sic}\) about the whole idea…in using music, you can express your philosophy with great bite and irony. I am thinking a lot about the musical style of the play and I have started to work out a style which would give a feeling of the period and yet be very up-to-date music. This combination of old and new gives great opportunity for humor in music, and my idea is that the music in this play should take active part in the humourous\(^{sic}\) as well as in the sentimental parts, because the more we can say in fun the better it is. For instance if we have the fight between the flute and the trumpet, I want our audience to laugh as much about the music itself as they’ll laugh about the situation and the dialogue.\(^6\)

From age 16-23, Weill studied in Berlin with some of the masters of German romanticism. His earliest compositions were influenced by 19\(^{th}\) Century German

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\(^5\) Hinton, xiv.

\(^6\) Hinton, 286. (Weill to Maxwell Anderson, 14 May 1938; copy in WLRC).
composers, such as Schumann and Strauss. Weill’s compositions during his formal student years were influenced by 20th Century composers including Stravinsky and Schoenberg. From age sixteen to twenty-three, there is a big shift in Weill’s compositional style due to his curiosity about modernism, specifically Arnold Schoenberg’s atonal works and the neoclassicism used by Stravinsky and Hindemith. Upon completion of his formal studies in 1923, Weill composed modern music that showcased neoclassicism and included some dissonance.

During the years 1925-27 he makes the shift toward “the Weill style,” also known as his Broadway sound. Robert Russell Bennett, a Broadway arranger credited for bringing the symphony to the theatre, arranged Weill’s theatre suite “Symphonic Nocturne.” Adam Baer wrote in the LA Times that Bennett’s arrangement was, “proof that the most enduring and artful popular music stands firmly on classical foundations.”

This study briefly mentions the evolution of “the Weill style” and primarily examines the early years of Kurt Weill’s career, focusing on the two complete song cycles he wrote for soprano, Ofrah’s Lieder, in 1916 and Frauentanz, in 1923. The “classical foundation,” referred to by Baer serves as the substance of for Weill’s successful Broadway style.

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7 Robert Russell Bennett, who collaborated with Richard Rogers is consistently credited for creating the “Broadway sound” for American musicals. Although the “Broadway sound” is constantly evolving, Robert Russell Bennett made a point of recognizing that importance of an opening eight bar phrase, the diatonic presence in a melody and a supporting orchestration to develop the “exposition” throughout the show. Bill Brohn (Tony award winning orchestrator of Ragtime) said on SHNews online that Robert Russell Bennett, “brought the symphony to the theater and the theater to the symphony.” http://shnsf.com/news/article.asp?key=1552&subkey=456 (accessed 12 Mar, 2012).

B. Life Sketch

Kurt Weill (1900-1950) was born in Dessau, Germany. Kurt was the third of four children born to Albert and Emma Weill. His siblings were Hanns, Nathan and Ruth Weill. Kurt’s father was a Jewish cantor, who encouraged musical study for each of his four children. By the age of fifteen, Albert Weill recognized his son Kurt’s musical abilities and arranged for lessons with Albert Bing, the assistant opera conductor at Dessau’s Hoftheatre. Weill’s lessons with Bing included piano, conducting, score reading and theory. Bing became a second father to the young musician and encouraged his early compositions. Most of Weill’s juvenilia are lost due to the family’s forced exile during World War 1, but in 1983, several of Weill’s surviving manuscripts were made public. Of the newly discovered Weill manuscripts, Jürgen Schebera wrote, “The outstanding work is unquestionably Ofrah’s Lieder, a cycle of five songs with piano accompaniment written in 1916 on Hebrew verses by Juhuda [sic] Halevi.”


In 1918, Weill attended the Hochschule in Berlin, where he was the sole student of composer Engelbert Humperdinck. He studied conducting with Rudolf Krasselt and counterpoint with Friedrich Koch. After one semester, he was unsatisfied with the
curriculum and returned to Dessau to work with Bing at the Hoftheatre. Weill then
applied to study with Arnold Schoenberg, but the devastation of World War I had
financially hurt the Weill family and they could not afford the lessons. His admiration of
Schoenberg’s work continued throughout Weill’s life.

Next, Weill applied for a three-year scholarship to study with Ferruccio Busoni
and in December, 1920, he was accepted. Busoni’s interest in Weill evolved into a
careful mentorship. Busoni allowed Weill to see his own compositions and Weill was a
devoted student and remained a close friend until the end of Busoni’s life. By instilling
technique and confidence, Busoni helped shape Weill from a student to a composer with
the skill to find his own musical voice.

Upon Busoni’s recommendation, Weill secured a ten-year publishing contract
with Universal Editions and he began to make a living as a composer. At this time,
Universal Editions was, “considered the most prestigious publisher of twentieth-century
music.”11 Frauentanz, composed shortly after completing Busoni’s masterclass in 1923,
was among his first published works in 1924. He next began to compose, “short satirical
operas in a sharp modernistic manner…”12 In 1926, he composed Der Protagonist with
writer Georg Kaiser (1926) and soon his collaborations began earning him international
fame. His collaborative works with Bertolt Brecht: Die Dreigroschenoper [The Three

11 Hailey, Christopher. “Creating a Market, Addressing a Market: Kurt Weill and Universal
Editions.” 22.

12 Slonimsky, Nicolas & Kuhn, Laura. Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians Volume 6,
Centennial Edition. (New York, Detroit, San Fran, London Boston, Woodbridge, CT: Schirmer Books,
2001), 3881.
Penny Opera], in 1928, and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* [The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahoganny], in 1930, were immediately successful.

Weill earned money playing for a *Bierkeller* Tavern during his student years and wrote to his brother that he was interested in writing more theatre music. His partnership with the legendary Lotte Lenya inspired his theatrical output. Weill first heard Lenya audition for his show *Zauber nacht* in 1922. The couple met again in 1924 and married in 1926. Lenya, a dancer/singer/actress, created the leading roles in Weill’s early operas. She wrote the following anecdote about Weill’s desire to please her with *Der Protagonist* in 1924,

He asked, “Would you like to hear a little bit of it?” I said, “Oh yes. I would like very much to hear.’ And he said, “Well, my brother [Hans] hated it, but I wonder what your reaction would be.” Strangely enough, as atonal as it was, I loved it. I said, “Well, Mr. Weill, I don’t know why, but I really, really love that music.” And he was so happy that he said, “May I make you some tea?”

Lotte Lenya was a muse for Weill’s theatrical senses and although their open marriage was not conventional, the two remained connected throughout Weill’s life. Weill himself wrote, “My melodies always come to my inner ear in Lenya’s voice.”

Weill’s most notable relationships, with his wife Lotte Lenya and the esteemed playwright Bertolt Brecht, were rocky. The relationship with Brecht is described by many historians as bizarre. The two men were contentious from the start, even though their

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collaborations were hugely successful. Points of dispute included Weill’s feeling that his
music was more important than Brecht’s “ideologically freighted texts,” 15 and Brecht felt
that he deserved credit for dragging Weill out of his classically restricted background.
Brecht developed a method of acting known as *Verfremdungseffekt* [alienation effect],
which was meant to take emotion out of the actor’s delivery. Theodor Adorno wrote,

> His theater of alienation intended to motivate the viewer to think…His didactic
style, however, is intolerant of the ambiguity in which thought originates: It is
authoritarian. This may have been Brecht's response to the ineffectuality of his
didactic plays: As a virtuoso of manipulative technique, he wanted to coerce the
desired effect... 16

Weill’s philosophy of artistic creation was not as radical as Brecht’s and their
working styles were less than compatible, but their biggest rift was caused by money.
Brecht allegedly collected royalties when Weill didn’t, especially after Weill immigrated
to America. After parting ways, the two men talked about reuniting but bickered until the
end of Weill’s life. Weill, along with many others, helped Brecht escape from Germany
during the war. Upon his immigration to the United States, Brecht asked Weill to pay him
a monthly stipend; however, the prospect of this arrangement didn’t meet Weill’s
approval. In 1945 Weill wrote to Erica Neher, “I almost never see Brecht…he is the same
old megalomaniacal egotist and still obsessed with his old stupid theories, without a trace
of character development.” In 1947 Brecht returned to Europe and acquired Weill’s rights
to *The Three Penny Opera*. Lenya wrote to Weill, “It’s like the good old days when he

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University Press, 2000), 70.

(Brecht) tried to keep your name off the program. And this *blasse flammende Arschloch* [pale flaming asshole]¹⁷...it is beyond belief.”¹⁸ The dispute was not settled in Weill’s lifetime, but currently the Kurt Weill foundation holds the rights to *The Threepenny Opera*.

Weill and Lenya divorced shortly after they were forced into exile from Germany, in 1933. The two re-married in 1937, after moving to New York, where Weill and Lenya fully embraced their new life in America and became citizens in 1943. Weill even began pronouncing his name with the American [w] rather than the German [v]. Weill briefly tried composing for films in Hollywood, but found his home and fortune composing Broadway musicals including *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1937), *One Touch of Venus* (1943), *Love Life* (1938) and ultimately, his American opera *Street Scene* (1946). “I decided to develop a type of musical play which leans more and more toward opera,”¹⁹ Kurt Weill declared in 1946. *Street Scene* is a culmination of Weill’s European studies and his theatrical elements. Larry Stempel wrote that Weill had:

> …a conviction that each of his works was something *sui generis*, a unique undertaking which had to ‘create its own style, its own texture, its own relationship between words and music.’ And to emphasize that uniqueness, Weill demonstrated a knack for coining names which corresponded to the ‘sui-generis-ness’ of each of his works… a knack which he apparently did not lose when he immigrated to the United States…Only when it came to *Street Scene* did the sureness of Weill’s sense for names appear to falter; for he christened that work

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¹⁷ ‘Flaming asshole’ was a favorite metaphor of Weill’s, according to Michael H. Kater in *Composers of a Nazis Era*, where he described Weill’s use of the term regarding Brecht, his manager Reinhardt and other contemptible colleagues.

¹⁸ Weill, Kowalke, Symonette, 322.

twice: first as a ‘Broadway musical’ then as a ‘Dramatic musical.’…[Weill] told an interviewer, ‘I would rather term it a dramatic musical.’

Weill died in 1950 of heart failure. His marriage to Lenya was passionate and despite extra-marital affairs and heated arguments, Weill wrote that Lenya always came first, after his music. On his deathbed, Lenya told Weill she, “loved him alone.” Their relationship is the subject of the musical *LoveMusik* by Alfred Uhry and Hal Prince, using selected music of Weill. After Weill’s death, Lenya was depressed and apathetic. It was her friend George Davis who convinced her to establish her own career in order to carry on Weill’s reputation. The two married and Davis encouraged Lenya’s rise to stardom in film, on stage, in concerts and in the recording studios. Later in her life, Lenya wrote that her favorite description of her voice was that it was, “an octave below laryngitis.” Her unique vocal quality and German accent were a part of her persona that by all accounts was mesmerizing to European and American audiences alike.

Lenya started the Kurt Weill foundation in 1962 with a mission to protect and promote Kurt Weill’s music. All foundation proceeds assist in promoting performances and the scholarship of her late husband.


21 Weill, Symonette and Kuwalke, 88.

22 Lenya was nominated for an Academy Award as best supporting actress for her performance of the Contessa in *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, based on the play by Tennessee Williams and co-starring Vivian Leigh and Warren Beatty.

23 Thibaudat, back cover.
CHAPTER 2: MUSICAL TRAINING

A. Abert Bing

In 1915, Kurt Weill’s father arranged a meeting with Albert Bing (1885-1935), who was the assistant opera conductor at the Dessau Hoftheatre. Bing began teaching the young Weill almost every day and their relationship grew to be like father and son. Bing taught Weill piano, score-reading, the fundamentals of composition and conducting. Weill was soon volunteering at the Hoftheatre and in 1916 he composed Ofrah’s Lieder, which he considered the beginning of his compositional career. Bing recognized Weill’s promise as a composer and encouraged him to apply to the Musikhochschule in Berlin. Weill was awarded a scholarship and went to Berlin, but he was unhappy with the curriculum. The next year Weill returned to work with Bing at the Hoftheatre.

Edith Bing, Albert’s wife and writer Carl Sternheim’s sister, discussed politics and contemporary literature with Weill. While World War 1 was devastating Germany, the Bings nurtured Weill’s youthful anti-war ideals. According to Lenya, Weill had learned the trumpet in case he was called to war, in the hope of playing in the service band rather than serving in combat.24 Young Kurt was interested in philosophy and was an avid reader. The musical and scholastic mentorship of the Bings guided Weill to his studies in philosophy and music at the University and Hochschule in Berlin. Weill spent the first three months in Berlin splitting his studies between philosophy (with teachers

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24 Ada Chris Isley. The Early Songs of Kurt Weill: 1913-23. (DMA diss, University of Illinois, 1991), 6. Fortunately, World War 1 ended as Kurt came of age and he did not have to face the draft.
Ernst Cassirer and Max Dessoir) and music, but by September of 1918 Weill became a full time music student at the Hochschule. As Weill came of age under the Bings’ mentorship, his confidence in his own musical skill was solidified and his intellectual curiosity guided his educational endeavors.

B. Berlin Hochschule

At age eighteen, Weill entered the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin where he studied composition with Engelbert Humperdinck, counterpoint with Friedrich Koch and conducting with Rudolph Krasselt. Weill received the Mendelssohn-Bartoldy award for composition in 1919. Discouraged with the program of study, Weill left the Hochschule after only one semester and went back to work for three months in Dessau as Bing’s assistant at the Hoftheatre. Moving on Humperdinck’s recommendation, Weill secured a job as Kapellmeister for a small opera company in Lüdenscheid. Letters to his brother Hans expressed his apathy and his longing for the vibrant cultural scene and modern musical trends prevalent in Berlin. Weill returned to Berlin and wrote to his brother about a “shattering” performance of Beethoven’s Fifth, hearing Mahler’s Resurrection Symphony and watching Richard Strauss conduct Salome. These performances were among the artistic occasions that influenced young Weill’s development.

Englebert Humperdinck (1854-1921), a composer best known for his opera Hansel und Gretel, was the first winner of the Mendelssohn award in 1879 and he was an
assistant to Richard Wagner in Bayreuth, where he composed a few bars for *Parsifal*.25 Humperdinck taught composition first in Boppard, then in Berlin at the *Hochschule* beginning in 1900. Upon being selected as Humperdinck’s sole student, Weill wrote to his brother, “I came to Humperdinck by pure coincidence. I had been confused with another student who had simply asked at one point if he could study with Humperdinck.”26 After only one month, Weill grew dissatisfied with the *Hochschule* curriculum. “The teachers are clearly not modern; Humperdinck’s only modern trait is his daring recklessness in counterpoint.”27 Weill was attracted to the trend of modernism28 in music. His disappointment in the *Hochschule* curriculum was in large part due to the lack of originality. Seeking to understand “modernity,” he wrote to his brother Hanns:

I notice that a “modern” clique has developed around me at the Hochschule, strangely so, because the teachers themselves are definitely not modern….a small circle of students has formed a group in which you have to feel ashamed if you don’t know all the music of Richard Strauss and Reger, and also Korngold.

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28 Musical modernism is not just moving away from traditional western harmonies. In Adam Harper’s book *Infinite Music*, musical modernism is described as, “not a technique, but a direction. Modernism moves away from the strictures of tradition, progressively tearing them away piece by piece and leaving them behind as it travels towards an ultimately infinite potential for musical variety. In doing so it enhances the ways in which we perceive, imagine and live in the world. But there isn’t just one, general and absolute path towards the infinite point of musical modernity…Rather, each path is relative to a different starting point, a different context of convention. Modernism is a multi-directional and multi-dimensional process, and there are as many paths toward musical infinity as there are ways of composing and listening.”
Debussy, Schreker, Bittner and Marx, etc. That is of course very exciting.\(^{29}\)

Weill’s counterpoint teacher at the Hochschule was the German cellist and composer Friedrich E. Koch (1862-1927). In another letter to his brother, Weill wrote, “Koch is a rigid contrapuntalist and as a composer, a hypermodern Much-Noise-About-Nothing-Scribbler.”\(^{30}\) After leaving the school, Weill reflected, “Looking back at the results of my first semester I believe that I got some idea about what composing is, that I benefited a great deal from my instruction in score reading, organ and even piano playing….”\(^{31}\) Although Weill was not satisfied with the Hochschule, his correspondence serves as evidence that he appreciated the fundamental aspects of his education while also, “revealing his precocious and relentless introspection.”\(^{32}\)

Rudolph Krasselt (1879-1954) may have been Weill’s most influential teacher during his studies at the Hochschule. Krasselt was the solo cellist under Gustav Mahler’s baton at the Weiner Philharmonic. He was also the solo cellist with the Berlin Philharmonic and later with the Boston Symphony. He returned to Berlin in 1911 to conduct opera at the Deutsches Opernhaus in Berlin-Charlottenburg and began teaching at the Hochschule in 1913. Weill wrote to his brother, “Krasselt makes increasing demands on the evolving répétiteur [opera rehearsal accompanist/coach]. He wants to arm me with what Bing simply let me learn in Dessau. He is also requiring me to take a

\(^{29}\) Weill, Symonette and Kuwalke, 29.

\(^{30}\) Rathert and Selk, 14.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
further step in my piano technique...” In another letter to his brother in the spring of 1919, Weill commented that because of Krasselt, he almost gave up writing and pursued conducting, but, even at the young age of nineteen, he knew he wanted to compose for the theatre.

C. Ferruccio Busoni

Kurt Weill referred to his teacher, Ferrucio Busoni, (1866-1924) as “the greatest pianist of all time,” Busoni as Pianist describes Busoni as, “one of four or five greatest in the entire history of piano playing.” Busoni was widely considered a genius conductor, pedagogue, lecturer and composer. In Weill’s essay “Ferruccio Busoni: For His Sixtieth Birthday,” he wrote a generous tribute, including the following statement:

Busoni sought the extraordinary; his music had to free itself from the narrow limits of classical forms and from the narrow scope of tonal constraint…In work and deed, as composer and interpreter, he was the prophet of Impressionism as well as of the ensuing complete disengagement until he finally arrived at his ultimate goal in the “new classicism” which he developed—a synthesis of all new achievements with the useful material of earlier generations.

At the end of Busoni’s life, he taught a composition master class at the Preußische Akademie der Künste [Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin]. Pupils accepted into his class were on a full three-year scholarship. Kurt Weill was the last of six students

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33 Ibid.


36 Kowalke, 477.
accepted into Busoni’s master class in 1920. By all accounts, Busoni did not teach
technique, but rather, he embraced artistic thinking and encouraged individual growth.
Busoni’s synthesis of old and new music was the well from which Weill drew his
cravings for modernism and balanced them with the traditions of Romanticism. The class
met twice a week in master class format and Busoni was an open and sharing leader of
discussion. Alexander Ringer writes:

In Ferruccio Busoni, young Weill found an inspired teacher who encouraged and
equipped gifted pupils to assume cheerfully the awesome burdens of history
handed down to them directly by great performer-composers like himself as well
as indirectly through a veritable avalanche of musicological research and
publication.

Weill and Busoni were mutually fond of one another. Weill praised his mentor with
sincere praise in his essay “Busoni und die neue Musik,”

There are some major productive artistic figures whose names survive only in
their works and whose own lives and creative processes disappear entirely behind
their creations. Then there are others who, already within their lifetimes, exert
such an influence through the charisma of their personalities that the memory of
the vividness of their appearance remains as precisely awake as their artistic
legacy itself...It was seldom recognized, but everyone experienced it: Busoni had
become the invisible leader of European musical life; everyone suspected that he
was one before whose righteousness only a true and great art could exist. The
powerful consequence of such a life is not terminated by death; it meshes so
strongly into the events of its time that its traces continue to be preserved in the
most recent generations.

37 The term master class refers to a gathering of students with a teacher to perform a piece, discuss
it and be publicly coached so all participants benefit from the master teacher’s comments.

38 Ringer, Alexander L. “Kleinkust and Küchenlied in the Socio-Musical World of Kurt Weil.”
Ed. Kowalke, A New Orpheus: Essays on Kurt Weill. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press,
1986), 38.

39 Kowalke, 461.
The mutual admiration of teacher and student is described by Kastner:

One afternoon Busoni introduced to me a small, quiet man, maybe twenty years old. Two pupils beamed and flickered behind spectacles. In conversation an uncommonly serious, resolute man of strong character was revealed. In his absence, Busoni spoke of him with exceptional warmth. In fact, he “cultivated” him like a fatherly, loving gardener who bestowed all his love on one flower, one approaching the end, in that he stayed with Busoni in the sad period of misfortune and separation. In addition to Phillip Jarnach, he was allowed to see every page of the evolving *Faust*, and each of Weill’s own works received the benefit of the reciprocal effect. Now that Busoni is gone, Jarnach and Weill remain his most genuine “pupils” in the intellectual or technical sense.40

As both teacher and pupil shared compositions with one another, Weill began to find his style through Busoni’s guidance. A detailed description of the “Weill Style” comes from John C.G. Waterhouse in his article “Weill’s Debt to Busoni.” He writes:

…the popular elements in Weill’s style are little more than a convenient framework within which to express a very individual message…this harmonic idiom rarely has much connection with that of light music, but rather, a strange, disturbing instability, with something mysterious and sinister lurking just beneath the hard surface, which is the main reason for the extraordinary ironical hard ‘edge’ that makes it so perfect a counterpart to Brecht’s words.41

By Waterhouse’s account, “semi-tonal instability” was a technique that Weill learned from Busoni, which appears in nearly every subsequent composition throughout Weill’s career. This compositional device is heard in the mature Busoni, which the master shared with his students. Weill’s use of semi-tonal instability can be readily heard in his tendency to insert major and minor triads in the melody of the first movement of *Frauentanz* (musical example 2.1). Busoni’s *Zigeunerlied* (musical example 2.2) displays

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40 Kowalke, 24.

the master teacher’s compositional chromatic movement to juxtapose tonality and dissonance. Zigeunerlied is in g minor and in measures 2, 3 and 4 the bass line moves in ascending fifths to an Ab and Eb against the upper piano line that collides with a G and D. This dissonance repeats with the vocal line lining up with the tonic G. This balance of repetition and dissonance within the tonic key is an example of the term ‘semi-tonal instability.’ Waterhouse writes that Busoni’s teachings gave Weill his foundation in modernism.

“Always an artist in quest, Busoni saw it as the goal of his creative life to find his ‘own individual sound’...striving to reconcile tradition with innovation, his gifts as a composer and the profundity of his theoretical writings make Busoni one of the most interesting figures in the history of 20th century music.”

Characterizing Busoni’s style as a composer and teacher is a difficult task because he strove for innovation in all musical areas. Hinton wrote of the “most obvious link to Weill,” as being the way Busoni instilled an ideal for “absolute orchestration,” not merely arranging for instrumentation. Busoni taught Weill that to, “invent and feel purely orchestrally,” was to be a, “genuine composer.” Weill’s early interest in Wagner can be seen as a harbinger of his successful studies with Busoni. His lifelong admiration for Schoenberg was solidified by the innovative techniques Busoni instilled in young Weill.


43 Hinton, 61.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 2.1: Measures 12-13 of “Wir haben die winterlange Nacht”

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 2.2: Measures 1-4 of “Zigeunerlied”

44 Weill, Kurt, Frauentanz [Seven Poems from the Middle Ages op. 10] (Universal Music: European American Music Corporation, 1924), 1.

D. Modernism and the influence of Arnold Schoenberg

A major influential composer in Kurt Weill’s early development was Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), whom he referred to as, “the acknowledged apostle of a new music.”⁴⁶ Although their paths only truly crossed through published critiques and reports of lost correspondence, Schoenberg inspired Weill as an up and coming composer. Largely based on Lotte Lenya’s library of Weill’s manuscripts and correspondence, David Drew’s Handbook was the first complete biography and catalogue of Weill’s works. Drew described his own interest in Weill’s music as an outgrowth of the modern movement;

What drew me to Weill’s music…was the unique nature of its compositional and idiomatic tensions. These, it seemed to me …had a unique bearing on the modernist movement in music, and were not seriously discussible except in relation to the consequences of Schoenberg on the one hand and Stravinsky on the other.⁴⁷

Weill was fascinated by the works of Schoenberg, in particular, the Gurre-Lieder (which premiered in 1913). He wrote to his brother Hans, “This Schoenberg has brought me something so new that I was left completely speechless.”⁴⁸ It has been written here that Weill attempted to study with Schoenberg, but he was unable to afford the lessons. Undaunted, Weill studied Schoenberg’s compositions and reviewed them for Der

⁴⁶ Schebera, 20.
⁴⁸ Schebera, 21.
In one review he described Schoenberg’s work as, “an entirely organic outgrowth of the nineteenth century.”

In another article, Weill wrote that Schoenberg was misunderstood because he:

renounced tonality, common chords, symmetrical melody, rhythmic and formal constraints and substituted a wonderful interweaving of long melodies, a free polyphony that is sustained with prodigious skill, rich in inspiration, and unquestionable honesty.

The majority of Arnold Schoenberg’s early compositions are Lieder. There are thirty-two completed songs written before 1900. Schoenberg did not consistently date his works before 1897, but Christian M. Schmidt’s chronology (based on paper type and the compositional style) is considered the most accurate. In Walter Frisch’s book The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg 1893-1908, he stated:

One aspect of Schoenberg’s activity as a song composer that appears quite early on…is a tendency toward concentrated involvement with specific poets for short periods. Moreover, the quality of the poetry seems directly related to the musical results.”

One of Schoenberg’s early poetic choices is his Brettl Lieder [Cabaret songs] (1900-01), which are all taken from Otto Bierbaums’s collection of the same title.

While the earlier songs of Schoenberg were born in the German romantic tradition, his

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49 Der deutsche Rundfunk, (1926), translated by Kim Kowalke.

50 Der deutsche Rundfunk, (1925), translated by David Drew.


52 Ibid.

53 There is one exception to the Schoenberg/Bierbaum Brettl Lieder: Schikaneder wrote the text for the Arcadien aria.
Brettl Lieder are written in a new style unseen in Schoenberg’s previous output. These songs follow the poetic gesture, as Frisch suggested. Schoenberg freely develops a whimsical and sensual musical relation to the texts, composed in the cabaret style for the Überbrettl of Berlin, where he was the musical director for one year. By 1908, Schoenberg abandoned tonality altogether with the fourth movement of his second string quartet and by the 1920’s Schoenberg became known as the creator of the twelve-tone system of composition. At this time in his youth, Weill was seeking to understand modernity and was fascinated with Schoenberg’s works. In 1919, Weill wrote to his brother Hans:

Think of everything in Strauss that is false, trivial, whitewashed, farfetched, and replace it with the ultimate in modernity—in Mahler’s sense—with the deepest conviction of a great personality: then you have Arnold Schoenberg, as I’m getting to know him from his Gurre-Lieder.54

It is said that Schoenberg admired some of Weill’s early works, but of his monumental hit The Three Penny Opera (1928), Schoenberg was recorded as saying, “What has [Weill] achieved? He’s made us a gift once again of three-quarter time.”55 Academic hindsight reminds us that Schoenberg’s Brettl Lieder of 1900-1901 display a playful and sexually suggestive use of melodic material in “three quarter time”. Schoenberg’s Brettl Lieder represent a brief window of melodic music before he focused

54 Kowalke, 30.
his interest in avant-garde modernism. Schoenberg’s student Marc Blitzstein\textsuperscript{56} is credited with the story that Schoenberg had dismissed theatrical musical as a waste of time and was using excerpts of Weill’s *Three Penny Opera* to demonstrate to his Berlin master class what he considered “craftsmanlike trash.”\textsuperscript{57}

Alan Chapman discussed Schoenberg and Weill as being on a “collision course.”\textsuperscript{58} Schoenberg began composing melodic ‘tuneful’ music and between 1907-1909, he reinvented his compositional style with serial music. Schoenberg wrote, “in the end, art and success have to part company.”\textsuperscript{59} As a student, Weill was keenly interested in Schoenberg’s atonal modern music, but changed his own course in 1925 from modern classical music to theatre music. Weill’s “art” met international success, defying Schoenberg’s credo; thus, the collision. Although Weill admired Schoenberg until the end of his life, he wrote, “As for the work of the creators of ‘systems’ and ‘methods’ of composing…[I, myself, am] very much interested in mathematics and puzzles--but not as a musician.”\textsuperscript{60}

Had Weill been able to study with Schoenberg, as he had attempted before his studies with Ferrucio Busoni, their compositional differences might not be so vast.

\textsuperscript{56} Interestingly, even though Blitzstein’s teacher Schoenberg held Weill’s theatre works in disdain, Blitzstein translated and adapted Weill and Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* into English, which was premiered in America after Weill’s death with Leonard Bernstein conducting and starring Lotte Lenya.

\textsuperscript{57} Kowalke, 105-106.


\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

Busoni and Schoenberg debated music for music’s sake and later, Busoni became Weill’s mentor, urging Weill to follow his own path. After one of Busoni’s early dismissals of Schoenberg’s piano works (in 1909), Schoenberg wrote a letter defending his work to Ferruccio Busoni. The letter reads like poetry:

I strive for complete liberation from all forms
From all symbols
Of cohesion and
Of logic.
Thus:
Away with ‘motivic working out’.
Away with harmony as
Cement or bricks of a building.
Harmony is expression
And nothing else.
Then:
Away with Pathos!
Away with protracted ten-ton scores, from erected or constructed Towers, rocks and other massive claptrap.
My music must be
Brief.
Concise! In two notes: not built, but ‘expressed’!!
And the results I wish for:
No stylized and sterile protracted emotion.
People are not like that:
It is impossible for a person to have only one sensation at a time.
One has thousands simultaneously. And these thousands can no More readily be added together than an apple and a pear. They go Their own ways.
And this variegation, this multifariousness, this illogicality which Our senses demonstrate, the illogicality presented by their interactions, set forth by some mounting rush of blood, by some reaction of the senses or the nerves, this I should like to have in my music.
It should be an expression of feeling, as our feelings, which bring us in contact with our subconscious, really are, and no false child of feelings and “conscious logic.”

Schoenberg defended his work time and time again and demanded credit for the invention of serialism when it was attributed to anyone other than himself. Schoenberg was an unabashed elitist and felt that he had no audience; he was striving for complexity that superseded any need for peer approval. Weill said Schoenberg was writing for an audience that would need to be educated to appreciate his work. After his exile from Germany, Schoenberg went to California and taught in universities to make a living. He never composed for Hollywood films. He looked down on commercialism and believed that he, alone, was creating music for the future. In his essay “The Future of Opera,” he wrote,

> It is self-evident that the highest art can never address itself to the many. …the minority that can understand deeper things will never let itself be satisfied wholly and exclusively by what everyone can understand. This minority will always want art to match its power of comprehension.” 62

However, according to his daughter Nuria, Schoenberg composed music that sounded good to him. He viewed serialism as a science that aided, not hindered invention. Nuria Schoenberg Nono, told this story in an interview in Montreal,

Rudolf Kolisch (the leader of the Kolisch Quartet and later in the USA, of the Pro Arte Quartet…) writes that he has analyzed Schoenberg’s Third (or Fourth?) Quartet, tracing all the tone rows and their permutations. He has found several “mistakes” and wants Schoenberg to confirm his findings. My father answers Kolisch, appreciating his diligence, but wondering whether it was worth the effort, since the alleged mistake might have simply sounded better to him. In the letter Schoenberg points out that when he speaks of the twelve-tone method he emphasizes: *composition* with twelve tones, not composition with *twelve tones*. I think one should remember that a composer is a human being who expresses himself in music. Sometimes my father composed tonal music and at other times he preferred to use the method of composition with 12 tones related only to one

another. It was not the method, which expressed the music; it was the composer using that particular method which best enabled him to express a certain musical idea.63

Weill admired the way Schoenberg embodied modernism and this influence is readily heard in Weill’s student compositions. Unlike Schoenberg, who was composing for an idealistic future, Weill composed for the public at large. By age nineteen, Weill knew he wanted to write for the theatre, which led him to his own convictions as a composer. Weill’s credo states:

I'm convinced that many modern composers have a feeling of superiority toward their audiences," said Mr. Weill. "Schoenberg, for example, has said he is writing for a time fifty years after his death. But the great 'classic' composers wrote for their contemporary audiences. They wanted those who heard their music to understand it, and they did. As for myself, I write for today. I don't give a damn about writing for posterity.

And I do not feel that I compromise my integrity as a musician by working for the theater, the radio, the motion pictures or any other medium which can reach the public which wants to listen to music. I have never acknowledged the difference between 'serious' music and 'light' music. There is only good music and bad music.64

After Weill collaborated with Bertolt Brecht and other iconic writers including Ira Gershwin and Langston Hughes, he wrote,

I have learned to make my music speak directly to the audience, to find the most immediate, the most direct way to say what I want to say, and to say it as simply as possible. That’s why I think that, in the theatre at least, melody is such an


64 www.kwf.org.
important element because it speaks directly to the heart—and what good is music if it cannot move people.65

Weill enjoyed winning audience approval and he wrote to his publisher in 1927 about *Mahoganny* as appealing to a, “different and much larger audience and whose appeal will be unusually broad.” 66 His conception of the direction of music in theatre is completely in line with the modernist views of composing without preconceived ideas or following tradition.

The Schoenberg influence on Weill’s development includes the geographical similarities of beginning their musical careers in Berlin, their experiences of a war-torn Germany, both men were exiled, both men immigrated to the United States and both men left enormous legacies for the history books. Albright wrote that Weill’s compositions:

> seem the opposite of a Modernist when compared with Schoenberg…Weill shows himself a modernist of a sophisticated sort by devising a new sort of irony, an irony that does not reject bourgeois values but instead dwells in an interspace between derision and warmth.”67

Irony is traced back to Greek comedies. The ‘understater’ did not say all that he could and the ‘overstater’ bragged about his mighty accomplishments. Greek theatrical practice assigned the understater role to the slave character to conceal his truth from those who held power over him. “But what is socially a position of weakness, is artistically a


position of power: to understate is to overload with meaning.”

The old, ‘less is more’ adage can be identified as the foundation of “The Weill Style.” Weill’s intensive classical training gave him the tools to embed his dark and subtle melodies with irony and wit.

Schoenberg’s compositional achievements and his need for accreditation could be seen metaphorically as a bragging soldier in a Greek play. Weill, naturally, can be characterized as the understating slave, with his Broadway tunes that seem simplistic, yet imply far more meaning to the theatrical experience. Of course the comparison is somewhat superficial—coming so close to studying with Schoenberg as a youth and then again after Busoni’s death, it is of academic interest that the two composers were so vastly different when they both searched for new ways to create sounds with inherent meaning and appeal to their own ideals. The two men might have found more common musical ground had Schoenberg become Weill’s teacher. But history tells us that Weill was changed by Schoenberg’s musical innovations and this brings us one step closer to the legendary style of Kurt Weill.

\[68\] Ibid, 3.

\[69\] Schoenberg assumed the post as composition professor at the Preußische Akademie der Künste when Busoni passed away in 1924.
CHAPTER 3: WEILL’S SONG CYCLE OFRAH’S LIEDER

A. Introduction

Composed when he was only sixteen, Weill’s earliest song cycle, Ofrah’s Lieder was his first composition to receive a public performance. The performers and venue are unknown. Weill wrote to his brother Hans that he was confident about the public performance and considered Ofrah’s Lieder the beginning of his compositional career. It is noteworthy that the score for Ofrah’s Lieder was not discovered until 1983, when Weill’s sister Ruth released the manuscript to the public. Lys Symonette (1914-2005) compiled the songs for publication in July, 1987 in Weill’s manuscript version. Symonette was Weill’s assistant on Broadway and Lenya’s accompanist; later she served as the vice president of the Kurt Weill foundation from 1981 until her death. Broadway producer Hal Prince described Symonette as, “the real thing—full of old world graces to match her brains, talent and loyalty.”

It is fortunate that we have any of Weill’s juvenilia. Of his compositions dated from 1913-23, approximately half are Lieder. Weill scholars have written that he was casual with his manuscripts. Some were lost, some were given away and his sister Ruth told David Drew, author of Kurt Weill: A Handbook, that a whole case of Weill’s early

70 Ofrah’s Lieder was premiered in 1917, but it is not known where or who performed them.

71 Schebera claims the manuscript was in Ruth’s possession, but David Drew writes that the manuscript of Ofrah’s Lieder was in the possession of the family of soprano Elisabeth Feuge, whom Weill accompanied on a recital 3 September 1919. Feuge sang two of Weill’s songs on the program, but there is no record of which titles. Schebera’s book is most recent (1995), but Drew’s reference is worth considering, since it is possible that Feuge sang Ofrah’s Lieder on the 1919 concert and may have kept her manuscript. Weill gave manuscripts of many early works to friends and musicians who performed them.

scores was dropped overboard when their parents sailed to Palestine in 1935. Drew noted, “A handful of songs were given to Lenya and Davis by Weill’s relatives.” The discovery of Ofrah’s Lieder in 1983 is of biographical significance because of Weill’s reference to this work in correspondence with his brother as his initial foray into composition.

The same year as its publication in 1987, Beverly Hoch premiered Ofrah’s Lieder at Merkin Hall with pianist John van Buskirk. The New York Times review stated:

Ofrah’s Lieder, written when Weill was 16, received their premiere Sunday evening. At their best, these pleasant, vaguely Straussian songs suggested the good dramatic sensibility and some of the penchant for dark harmonies that characterized the composer's mature work. Beverly Hoch, soprano, delivered them in an impassioned performance.

At the time Weill composed Ofrah’s Lieder, he was studying piano and composition with Bing. Score reading assignments included opera and Lieder. He had not yet heard Mahler, Stravinsky or Schoenberg. Weill’s later works are fraught with darkly complex structure, but as a youth, Weill explored the romantic tradition of the German composers that came before him. He set the poetry of Halevi with a bold melodic voice and accompaniments that are not as developed as his influential Lieder composers, but uniquely crafted within the genre. On Ofrah’s Lieder, Stephen Blier wrote:

Musically, they tend to evoke the sounds Weill listened to, rather than hinting at the powerful new voice he would find less than a decade later. The sweetness of

73 Drew, 10.

Mendelssohn and Schubert co-exist with the grandeur of Strauss and Wagner in these short songs, combining moments of transparent lyricism with heroic climaxes.\(^{75}\)

Weill’s songs are brief, but lovely and display his natural gift for composition. Weill did not compose at the piano. His was a process of “sonic” imagery for the instruments he wrote for. He said in a 1936 interview,

“When I write music there’s no piano around. Despite the strangeness of the harmonies, they were not really very complex. By composing directly onto the paper, I keep the music simple. With a piano there might be temptations. The problem with most composers is they cannot hear what they write until they play it (and then it is too late).”\(^{76}\)

Weill wrote Ofrah’s Lieder in two drafts. The definitive draft, written in pen and signed by Weill was the manuscript Symonette published in 1987. David Drew writes, “For all their gleanings from Schubert and Schumann, from Loewe and Mendelssohn and Wagner, Ofrah’s Lieder contain the first glimpses of the mature Weill, and the only ones before he had discovered Mahler and modern music.”\(^{77}\) Albright describes Weill’s strong grasp of the nineteenth century Lieder aesthetic as follows: “One of the most remarkable features of Weill’s whole career is the quality of musical irony in his later works, the way in which his ear remapped the stock figures of American popular music as elements of a sophisticated European semantics.” \(^{78}\)

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\(^{76}\) Winnett, Ralph. “Composer of the Hour: An Interview with Kurt Weill,” Brooklyn Daily Eagle, December 20, 1936, 10, 12.

\(^{77}\) Drew, 104.

\(^{78}\) Albright, 3.
B. The Poet: Judah Halevi

For *Ofrah’s Lieder*, Weill chose poems by the ancient Jewish scholar Jehuda Halevy (1075-1141). The poetry is romantic and lustful with the use of animal and nature imagery. According to the full-text Jewish Encyclopedia, Halevi was a Hebrew scholar, philosopher and poet who studied in Spain, but died in Palestine.

“No other Jewish poet is so steeped in recollections of the ancient history of Israel when singing of the tokens of God’s love to His chosen people… Next to God, the poet’s people stand nearest to his heart: their sufferings and hopes are his. Like the authors of the Psalms, he gladly sinks his own identity in the wider one of the people of Israel…”

Weill’s choice to set Halevi’s poetry was a natural option for the son of a cantor. During this period of World War 1, Jewish children were directed to be mindful of their ancestry and take pride in their religion. Halevi was an historical philosopher in Jewish studies. In Weill’s search for literary inspiration, he found musical riches in Halevi’s poetry, which had been praised by German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856). Much of Halevi’s philosophical writings were about religion, humanity and the justification of both. The original Hebrew texts are presently not available.

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79 Halevi’s first name is seen as both Judah and Jehudah. Sources by Jewish scholars predominantly use Judah.


81 Schebera, 7.

Franz Rosenzweig is a predominant Jewish scholar who characterizes Halevi’s poetry as “speech-thinking.” Barbara Galli, who translated Rosenzweig’s book into English, wrote about the impossibility of translating Hebrew poetry to English and maintaining scholastic tone. She printed the German translations of Halevi’s poetry and included her “English aids….for those who have no or very little German.” As a Jewish son of a cantor, Kurt Weill’s studies included Hebrew until he turned eighteen, but there is no documentation of whether or not Weill translated the original Halevi Hebrew into German.

C. Texts, Translations & Comparative Musical Observations

I. In meinem Garten

In meinem Garten stehn zwei Rosen und harren dein, mit dir zu kosen.
Als Schlangen lauern meine Locken am Blumenbeete meiner Wangen.

O tue Freund nicht so erschrocken und nahe ihnen ohne Bangen, sie sollen Trauter dich ber, cken in mir die Schönste zu erblicken

In my garden there stand two roses and they wait to caress you. Like snakes, my hair lies in wait On the flower bed of my cheeks. Oh don’t act surprised my friend! and approach without fear, they will enchant you, and you shall behold me as the most beautiful of women.

Translation: Stephen Blier

The first song in Ofrah’s Lieder “In meinem Garten” [In My Garden] bears an immediate resemblance to Schumann’s “Die Lotosblume” [The Lotos Blossom]. In the

spirit of Schumann, Weill created a sophisticated style balancing pure melodic delivery of the vocal line with counter-melodic material in the piano part. Schumann’s innovation in Lieder was his signature atmospheric integration of vocal line and accompaniment. Carol Kimball wrote, “With the songs of Robert Schumann, the piano comes into its own as a full participant with the voice.”84 Weill constructs “In meinem Garten” with careful integration of melodic material between both voice and piano parts. The atmosphere of the rose garden can be interpreted by the delicate juxtaposition of the repeated chords under the melodic text. The moving bass line could be heard as the beguiling snake’s charms as stated in the text.

Weill’s countermelodies in the accompaniment are a clear example of Schumann’s influence. Weill’s compositional technique embodies the style of Schumann’s song. The tempo in Weill’s song is marked Langsam und zart [slow and sweet] and Schumann’s song is Ziemlich langsam [rather slow]. Weill’s accompaniment, like Schumann’s, employs rhythmic blocked chords for the duration of the song, established in mm. 1-3 (musical example 3.1) with two exceptions: a moving melodic bass line in mm. 7-9 and the postlude which sparsely outlines a G minor 7 arpeggio with a sustained F, resolving to a solitary F, the dominant of Bb M. The lingering pitch on F creates a tonal passage to the next song, which begins in e minor (musical example 3.2).

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84 Kimball, 77.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.1: Measures 1-985 of “In meinem Garten”

1. Langsam und zart
   [Lento e deciso]

2. Words by Jehuda Halevi
3. Music by Kurt Weill

In meinem Garten stehen zwei Rosen
In my garden stand two roses

Verre den, und verre den, mit dir zu küssen.
Await you to caress with you

Schlangen lauern meine Lochen, als Schlangen lauern meine
Like snakes, my locks lurk in wait...
“In meinem Garten” alternates between Bb major and G minor. The time signature starts in 6/4, then switches to 4/4 time with an ausdrucksvoll [expressive] marking at m. 12. The time signature and steady rhythmic chords are similar, but the relationship of voice and piano shows the notable influence that Schumann bestowed on Weill. “In meinem Garten” employs just enough chromaticism to enhance the text, but the music does not stray from a “dolce” [sweet], simplistic quality, indicated by the tempo marking. Weill uses a stringendo in m. 20 to move the vocal line to a high A in the climactic penultimate phrase, similar to Schumann’s gesture in Die Lotosblume. The musical elements of mood painting and the integration of melody and counter-melodic material come together to create the characteristics common in the Schumann Lieder. The
young Weill emulated his predecessors with similar style, yet his compositions resist parody and represent his own compositional voice.

The traditional Lieder influence of “Die Lotosblume” on Weill’s first song is exemplified in compositional similarities including: repeated quarter note chords, the 6/4 time signature and the *ritardando* ending of phrases written out with longer note lengths (musical example 3). Like Schumann, Weill integrated the melody with the accompaniment in a diatonic manner where the themes of nature highlight the texts. Weill emphasizes Halevi’s garden imagery text with melodic swells ascending and descending in a “sigh” motive (musical example 3.1, mm. 5-6 and 7-8 for examples of rise and fall of melody to emote a “sigh”).

Schumann set Heinrich Heine’s poem using the Clara Motive to text paint the blossom’s longing in the very first notes, and repeatedly through the song (musical example 3.3). Weill’s “In meinem Garten” uses most of the Clara motive (musical example 3.2 mm. 5-6 ) on the text “*mit dir zu kosen*” [to caress with you]. Weill’s use of the motive resolves the final A in measure 7. There is no evidence to prove Weill intentionally used the motive; but the romance-driven text is nonetheless similar to the declaration of love Schumann created with the Clara motive.

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86 The “Clara Motive” is the pattern of C-B-A-G sharp-A (musically spelling Clara’s name). Robert Schumann used this motive throughout many of his songs that he gave Clara as a wedding present in 1840.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.3: Measures 1-3 “Die Lotosblume”

H. HEINE

Ziemlich langsam.

Die Lotosblume ängstigt

The Lotus flower fears...

Op. 25, No. 7

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87 Schumann, 85 Songs for Voice and Piano, 98.
II. *Nichts ist die Welt mir*

*Nichts ist die Welt mir,*
*ihre Lust nur Tand,*
denk' ich der Seligkeit,
da deine Hand
von Liebesschauern
zitternd mich umwand.

*Da schlürft' ich Wein*
*von deiner Lippen Süsse,*
lustwandelte auf deiner Wangen Wiese.
*Ich litt ja gern den Tod,*
dich zu befrei'n,
bist ja mein Hüter in der Liebe Hain,
der Herzens Glut, sie ist ja dein,
ja einzig dein!

*Von deinen Wangen*
pflück ich Würze süsse,
*dein Aug' war Balsam mir vom Paradiese.*

The world is nothing to me
The world is nothing to me
Its pleasures mere trifles,
When I think of my bliss,
For your hand.
Trembling with shivering love,
Transformed me.

Then I sipped wine
from your sweet lips,
wandered on the meadow of your cheeks.
I suffered Death gladly,
In order to set you free,
You are my guardian in the grove of love,
The glowing fire of my heart is yours,
Yours alone!

From your cheeks
I gather sweet spices,
Your eye is as balsam from heaven to me.

Translation: Stephen Blier

The second song in *Ofrah’s Lieder* is titled “*Nichts ist die Welt mir*” [The World is Nothing to Me]. David Drew wrote that this song, “is so much more accomplished than any of the four songs in the two preceding drafts that it suggests a lapse of weeks or even months before Weill put the cycle into its final form.” 88 The compositional qualities that create this urbane song include a sense of movement in the melodic phrasing as mood painting, the use of rhythm and the semi-tonal resolutions of harmony. Weill’s octaves in the piano part enrich the texture, making it sound more like an operatic orchestral reduction than the traditional voice-piano Lied.

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88 Drew, 103.
The tempo is marked *Immer ein wenig Erregt* [always a bit agitated]. Weill’s song is in 3/4 time with syncopated rhythms catapulted by numerous downbeat rests (musical example 3.4). Measures 7-8 also begin with eighth rests, indicating a quick gasp as the singer declares, “[gasp] for your hand [gasp] showering me with love.” The mood painting is full of unabashed optimism with eighth rests giving the singer a giddy sensation of the “paradise” that is to come at the end of the song.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.4: Measures 1-8 of “Nichts ist die Welt mir”

The compositional resemblance of “Nichts ist die Welt mir” to the early output of Richard Strauss can be demonstrated by comparing its opening phrase with the opening

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89 Weill, 4.
phrases of “Ständchen” (composed 1885-87). Strauss and Weill both used constant movement in the piano and seemingly breathless leaps in the vocal line to blend melody and texture with delicate nuance. Strauss begins his song with the text *Mach auf* [open up] in an ascending leap marked *pianissimo* as the poem begins to describe the secret, hushed rapture of the night (musical example 3.5). Measures 48-50 of Strauss’s song are a masterful example of text painting by using a descending perfect fifth for the text *sitz nieder* [sitting down] (musical example 3.6). According to Chris Isley, whose dissertation surveyed the early Weill songs:

> Other stylistic features of Weill’s *Ofrah’s Lieder* are its expansive vocal range, wide leaps, upward-sweeping lines and emphasis on the upper register of the soprano voice, reminiscent of Richard Strauss, who composed many of his songs with his wife’s (soprano Pauline de Ahna) voice in mind.  

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.5: Measures 1-4 of “Ständchen”\(^{91}\)

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90 Isley, 40.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.6: Measures 48-50\(^{92}\)

Weill establishes an E-minor tonality in “Nichts ist die Welt mir,” but ends the song in E major developing the tone of the song with musical optimism. In mm. 1-8, (musical example 3.4) Weill shows further evidence of the Strauss influence through the use of dynamic changes. In this song, Weill employed mood painting with two measure crescendos and decrescendos alternating every two measures. In “Nichts ist die Welt mir,” the return of the vocal line in m. 21 continues in the mezzo forte dynamic but with a return to the established key of E-minor. Weill uses text painting in this song to create an atmosphere and to create musical momentum. Measures 21-22 set the text “Ich litt’ gern den Tod” [I suffer death gladly] in a descending stepwise phrase, with death ending on the implied tonic (musical example 3.7). Death can be interpreted as a resting point in the song and the figurative and literal climax of the poem. Another example of text painting is found in mm. 40-43 with the third and fourth syllables of the word *paradiese* [paradise] set with an ascending and even group of quarter notes to suggest the rise to

\(^{92}\) Ibid, 65.
heaven (a result of the object of love in the poem) resolving tonally to the optimistic key of E major.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.7: Measures 21-22 of “Nichts ist die Welt mir”

Weill had heard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier* and watched him conduct; the illustrious composer made a strong impression on young Weill. “Ständchen” is one of the best-known Strauss Lieder because of its effervescent nature, especially with dynamic interplay of the pianississimo piano texture under the urgent, yet “whispered” vocal line. Strauss’s urgent textural timbre is seen and heard in mm. 31-32 (musical example 3.8) Weill uses contrary motion (piano octaves descending as the vocal line is ascending) as the singer declares of the heart, “it is yours, yes, only yours!” Measures 31 and 32 of “Nichts ist die Welt mir” both begin with a strong downbeat from the piano against the almost motivic eighth rest in the vocal line. Measure 32 is nearly a repeat of m. 31,

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except for a slight rhythmic variation in the vocal line. The conflicting feel of the contrary motion can be interpreted as the simultaneous rise and fall of emotions.

The music for Ofrah's Lieder is still in manuscript form, which indicates the phrase markings are Weill’s. The phrase markings are in the piano part and follow the poetic gesture of the text—often phrasing over downbeats to elongate texts. Most phrase markings are one, two, or one and a half measures long, but each phrase marking follows a complete thought. The irregular phrase lengths are a telling feature in Weill’s early compositions because the young composer was creating mood with both text, melodic voicing and accompaniment. By using irregular phrase lengths, Weill put his own interpretation into the poetic setting and created an atmosphere of bliss.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.8: Measures 31-32 of “Nichts ist die Welt mir”

III. *Er sah mir liebend in die Augen*

He looked lovingly into my eyes

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\[ \text{Er sah mir liebend in die Augen,} \]
\[ \text{und ich hielt kosennd ihn umfangen,} \]
\[ \text{und in dem Spiegel meiner Augen,} \]
\[ \text{sah er sein eigen Bild gefangen.} \]

He looked lovingly into my eyes, and I captured him in a caress, and in the mirror of my eyes, He saw his own image captured.

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\[ \text{Da küsst' er mir die dunklen Augen} \]
\[ \text{und küsste sie so heif und wild!} \]

Then he kissed my dark eyes He kissed them madly!

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\[ \text{Der Schelm, der Schelm!} \]
\[ \text{Er küsste nicht die Augen} \]
\[ \text{er küsste nur sein eigen Bild.} \]

The rascal! He wasn’t kissing my eyes, he was only kissing his own image.

Translation: Stephen Blier

“*Er sah mir Liebend in die Augen*” [He looked lovingly into my eyes] is the most virtuosic song of the cycle for both pianist and singer because of the unexpectedly large vocal range and the swift movement in octaves in the piano part. The tempo marking is *Leidenschaftlich* [with passion] and the song encompasses an attempted operatic grandeur characteristic of the songs of Strauss and Wagner. Eisley writes,

The third of *Ofrah’s Lieder…* juxtaposes two different vocal styles: declamatory and chromatically spun-out melodies….the upward sweeping arpeggios in the voice and accompaniment are marked *mf* with crescendos. This style underlines the young woman’s impassioned and effusive outburst. \(^95\)

The piano employs grand sweeping gestures to high notes with immediate tonal resolutions. Measures 2-3 and 4-5 exemplify this melodic ascent in both the vocal and piano parts (musical example 3.9). The singer is describing the rogue she is kissing, and the vocal line soars above the staff with a passionate drive. The dramatic pauses after she calls him “*der Schelm*” [the rogue] emphasizes the conflict of the poem and serves as the

\(^{95}\) Eisley, 56.
mood painting and operatic charisma. Weill’s similar treatment of the text and rhythmic drive bears similarities to both Strauss and Wagner in a common flair for drama. As Strauss often did in his early Lieder, Weill sets his song in common meters, but uses rhythmic variations to intensify the dramatic contours of each song. Strauss was a master of detail in his Lieder and Weill attempted to follow a similar form with text and piano relationships in his Lieder. The influence of Strauss can be identified in “Ich Liebe Dich,” with the high tessitura from the first note (musical example 3.10) and the sforzando dramatic upward sweeping gesture of the piano often in octaves (musical example 3.11). This operatic effect is seen and heard in both the Strauss and Weill Lieder. Weill’s repetition of key words and soaring vocal lines musically deliver the passion of the chosen texts. Weill’s song ends with a rallentando leading into a lento phrase; thus, musically accepting the rogue’s disinterest with an almost abrupt dismissal of the momentary passion (musical example 3.12).
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.9: Measures 1-5 of “Er sah mir Liebend in die Augen”

Er sah mir Liebend in die Augen, und ich hielt
He looked me in the eyes of love and I held

kossaend ihn um fangen; und in dem
caressing him to catch

96 Weill, 8.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.10: Measures 1-3 “Ich Liebe dich”

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.11: Measures 7-9

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97 Strauss. Sechs Lieder, 4.

98 ibid.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.12: Measures 18-23 “Er sah mir Liebend in die Augen”

\[ 18 \] Schelm, der Schelm! Er küssst nicht die Augen;
rogue the rogue he does not kiss my eyes

\[ 21 \] nich... lange...
he kissed he only kissed his own image

\[ 23 \] küss-te, er küss-te, er küss-te nur sein eigen Bild.

\[ 99 \] Weill, 9.
IV. Denkst du des kühnen Flugs der Nacht

Denkst du des kühnen Flugs der Nacht,  
da du als Beute heimgebracht  
den Mond mitsamt der Sternlein Pracht?

Sie schmückten nur mein Angesicht,  
umschlossen mich so warm, so dicht,  
ja zu mir eilt des Himmels Heer,  
daß reichen Schmuck es mir bescher.

Wenn ich im Zwielicht dich umschließle  
und saug an deiner Lippen Süsse,  
bist mein, bist mein, dich jubelnd grüß’ ich.  
Bist mein, bist mein, ich lass’ dich nicht,  
rührt einzig mir am Herzen dicht.  
Dich gab mir Gott zur Lust, zur Ehr,  
bist mein, bist mein, bist mein,  
wie lieb ich dich so sehr!

Do you think of the bold flight of Night

Do you think of that bold flight of night,  
when you brought the moon and all the  
spendor of the stars home to me as prey?

They adorned my countenance alone,  
And embraced me so warm, so close  
yes the heavenly host hastens to me,  
to bestow its rich jewel upon me.

If I embrace you in the twilight  
and suck on your sweet lips,  
You are mine, are mine, I greet you with  
joy. You are mine, I’ll never leave you  
You alone rest close upon my hear.  
God gave you to me for my delight,  
For my honor, you are mine –  
How great is my love for you!

Translation: Stephen Blier

Song Four, “Denkst du des kühnen Flugs der Nacht,” [Do you think of the bold flight of night] is in recitative/aria form. The recitative section is Langsam, aber nicht Schleppend [slow, but not dragging] and it is in a common time. The text moves syllabically. The song begins in G minor with vocal sigh motifs over pianistic chromaticism. There is a piano interlude marked von nun an schneller weruend [now a little faster] that divides the recitative and aria sections. The aria section is marked Duftig und Drängend [piu animato] with parallel triplet chords in both hands of the piano under legato vocal phrases (musical example 3.13). This section of the song incorporates melismatic movement to enhance the delivery of impassioned words. The singer repeats words and short phrases in her declaration of love in ascending phrases while the piano
plays a repeated descending line. This ‘push and pull’ in contrary motion hints at the style of Wagner. The song ends with only the voice and without tonal resolution (musical example 3.14). Delayed resolution is another Wagnerian trait, which Weill uses to lead gracefully into the final song in the cycle.

Weill’s youthful attempts to suspend resolutions could easily have been modeled on Wagner’s Wesendonck Lieder. Weill learned poetic grandeur from the master. In particular, there are correlations between Weill’s “Denkst du” and Wagner’s “Im Treibhaus” (the song known as the Tristan study). Weill employs a motive in the descending bass line of measures 14-17 (musical example 3.13), which reappears

\[\text{MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.13: Measures 14-19 of “Denkst du des kühnen Flugs”}^{100}\]

\[\text{Weill, 12.}\]
throughout the song. Wagner was the creator of the leitmotiv, literally taking meaning from the text and imbedding it within the music. Both songs employ texts that reach for heaven while the music chromatically moves down. Again, we see the push and pull of contrary motion to create the musical mood. Wagner’s “Im Treibhaus” is an orchestrated song and in Weill’s fourth movement, he achieves an orchestral texture by using octaves to thicken the sound and enrich the chromatic chordal movement to the climax of the aria section (musical example 3.14).

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.14: Measures 30-32 of “Denkst du des kühnen Flugs”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Weill, 14.
"Im Treibhaus" reads "High-arched crown of leaves, canopies of emerald, children from distant regions, tell me why you grieve?" The pastoral grandeur is similar to Weill's opening recitative "Denskt du des kuhnen Flugs der Nacht" where we read, “Do you think of that fearless flight into the night, when you brought the moon and all the splendor of the stars home to me as prey?” Both composers set the opening phrases predominantly syllabically and allow the lofty descriptive words to be sensitively delivered. Weill sets the ‘recitative’ with harmonic suspensions similar to Wagner’s (musical example 3.15) Both songs musically depict longing with delayed resolutions.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.15: Measures 9-14 of “Im Treibhaus”\textsuperscript{102}

\footnotesize
V. Nur dir fürwahr

Nur dir fürwahr, mein stolzer Aar, ist hingegeben mein ganzes Leben. Ich lechz' nach dir der Männer Zier, bist der Gazelle Lebensquelle.

Die Taube ruft, durch Balsamduft, o komme, raste auf meinem Aste.

Wann naht die Zeit voll Seligkeit, da ich erwarme in deinem Arme?

Translation: Stephen Blier

The final song of the cycle, “Nur dir für wahr”[Only true for you], is reminiscent of German Romanticism with its firm hold on both tonal melody and a harmonic sense of grandeur. The final Ofrah Lied is in Eb Major, which provides an optimistic turn of events after the previous song’s minor tonality. Although there is no motivic unity to bind these songs together as a formal cycle, there are musical transitions between each song that makes tonal sense to the musicians and listeners alike. “In meinem Garten” transitions seamlessly to “Nichts ist die Welt mir” with a solitary F that serves stepwise movement to tonality of the next song: “Nichts ist die welt mir” in e minor. The second song ends with an E Major chord, again transitioning the listener the third song, “Er sah mir liebend in die Augen” which is in the parallel minor (e minor). The vocal line ends
“Er sah mir liebend in die Augen” on a D, which is the beginning pitch of the fourth song, “Denkst du des kühnen Flugs der Nacht,” and serves as the dominant of G minor. “Denkst du” employs some chromatic movement to shift from G minor to Gb Major and ultimately ends in Bb Major. The last note in “Denks dt” is a solitary F, serving as the dominant of Bb Major. This smoothly leads into the singer’s first note on a Bb, the dominant of the final key of Eb Major. These transitions give the group the sound of a unified cycle. Weill grouped them together and titled them Ofrah’s Lieder, so the composer’s intention and sound structure clearly indicates that these songs should be sung as a traditional song cycle.

The tempo of the final song is marked Sehr Leidenschaftlich [appassionato] with a ritardando into lento at m. 40 and a high A on the words deinem Arme [your arms]. The tempo primo at m. 43 accompanies the poetic return to the opening statement, “Nur dir für wahr, mein stolzer Aar, is hingegeben mein ganzes Leben” [Only true for you, my proud eagle, is my whole life devoted]. The song ends with the longest and highest held note of the song cycle: a high Bb (the dominant) on the word ganzes [whole], resolving down the triad to tonic, then the lower dominant on the word Leben [life]. The piano finishes with one final ascending arpeggio to a tonic Eb (musical example 3.16).

Weill’s melody gracefully combines leaps and stepwise movements into a phrase worthy of any of the great Lieder composers before him. This song doesn’t develop tonally beyond the purity of the opening phrase. The Lieder quality of this song allows it to stand alone, perhaps better than any of the other songs in Ofrah’s Lieder. The piano shares the melody when the singer rests and keeps an arpeggiated accompaniment
moving while the voice part delivers the melody, creating a Straussian musical momentum. The compositional devices Weill employed: urgent tempo markings, repeated figures in the piano, long and soaring phrases for the singer, mood painting and a climactic long-held high-note ending, are characteristics used in the Lieder of both Strauss and Wagner.

In the final song of Ofrah’s Lieder, Weill establishes stable tonality with minimal harmonic development. The element of simplicity highlights the melodic delivery of the poetry as the predominant element of the music. The vocal phrases are driven by upbeats and half step ascending intervals (musical examples 3.17). The tempo and dynamic markings: Appassionato and forte, are suited to the texts. Schumann, Strauss and Wagner were masters of diatonic melody in their Lieder. Young Weill’s attention to these details is another harbinger of his career as a songwriter.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3.16: Measures 46-52 of “Nur dir fuhr war”\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{103} Weill, 18.
The songs in Weill’s *Ofrah’s Lieder* are romantic in style and the poetic settings employ musical and textural imagery of nature and passion. The influence of Schumann and Strauss are immediately obvious, most directly seen and heard in the texture of the accompaniments. Schumann’s integration of melody between voice and piano is a technique that Weill emulated in his own early *Lieder*; the musical links which tie the

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104 Weill, 18.
songs together are also part of Schumann’s legacy. Within the smaller scope of Lieder writing, the Strauss and Wagner influence of operatic grandeur comes to fruition in Weill’s first cycle. Emulating the characteristics of songs like “Gefunden” and “Mit deinen blauen Augen” from Strauss’s Op. 56, Weill often writes accompaniments that evoke orchestral sonority and uses dramatic high notes to emphasize the climax of the passionate poetry. Wagner’s Wesendonck Lieder also is a model of lyric and dramatic integration of melody and harmonic suspension and informs the young composer’s text. Nonetheless, while Weill emulated his predecessors, these songs represent his own early compositional voice.

The only two recordings have been sopranos Cynthia Sieden105 and Stephanie Wust.106 The 1917 premier of Ofrah’s Lieder featured a soprano (chosen by Kurt Weill, but unnamed in his letters) and in this author’s opinion, the high tessitura of the songs are written to best show off a soprano voice. The song cycle Ofrah’s Lieder (approximately ten minutes in duration) is currently unknown by many classical musicians and deserves consideration as a legitimate Lieder group for a recital. The published music is in manuscript form, which poses some difficulty in deciphering occasional notes and rhythms, but the editorial markings are presumably Weill’s. Weill emulated the German romantic masters in his melodic style and careful text painting for the poetry of Judah Halevi.


CHAPTER 4: WEILL’S VOCAL CHAMBER MUSIC CYCLE FRAUENTANZ

A. Introduction

Kurt Weill completed his studies with Feruccio Busoni in 1923 and in that year he composed both his String Quartet No. 1, Op. 8 and Frauentanz [Women’s Dance], Op. 10. Both works were published in 1924; Frauentanz was Weill’s most performed work until 1927. Composed while Weill was in the town of Heide, Frauenanz is based on seven medieval poems dealing with the topic of courtly love. Wolfgang Rathert reports in the critical edition that, “Frauentanz is a key work within Weill’s output, in that it signals his final departure from romantic idioms.”

Weill used the term “modern classical art music” when discussing młoda muzyka [young music] and as written here, he was keenly interested in modern musical trends. Weill wrote in a 1929 survey:

I am sending you a few words as a contribution to the survey concerning “Romanticism in Music.” I am of the opinion that the announcement of a new romantic epoch in music, being proclaimed at present in Germany by the defenders of an obsolete artistic taste, is a highly reactionary phenomenon. That which the proclaimers of that theory all romanticism is nothing other than the form of expression of the 19th century, which has not already been completely overcome by musicians of today. It would amount to a complete lack of understanding of the musical development of our epoch if we were to take pains to smooth the path toward a direction that we have already quite consciously given up. …There will arise a modern classical art, which will be in the most complete opposition to romantic art. Modern times abound in great, all-embracing ideas, which are able to find artistic expression solely in classical form. There is no place in them for romantic art.

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107 Rathert, 20.
108 Hinton, 55.
Stylistically, *Frauentanz* exists between the “European” Weill and the “American” Weill. It reaches beyond the romantic idiom expressed in *Ofrah’s Lieder* and does not deliver a hummable tune. Weill composed *Frauentanz* in a unique style that still holds with his training, but embraces modern elements unheard in his previous works. In the CD insert of *Berlin Lit Up*, Drew described the work as:

….exploring the medieval orchard and heathland of *Frauentanz* (whose enchantments are in any event more readily apparent on the present route than they sometimes are in their usual context of post-1918 ‘Neue Musik’)…because what we can hear there are not only the echoes of yesteryear and of distant history, but also, and increasingly, the sounds of today.109

Drew later wrote:

Originally Weill had planned to link the songs with interludes, and these—to judge from the only surviving sketch-may have been intended to heighten the dance-character of the work, perhaps with a view to facilitating choreographic interpretation…One of the best-liked of his early concert works, and one of the first to be heard outside Germany, *Frauentanz* belongs to the modern tradition of song-cycles with small ensemble, and takes its place in the line of succession from Stravinsky… Only in the final song does a distant echo of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* reveal the sources of the Romanticism latent in, or audibly held in check by, the deliberate coolness and erotic playfulness of the earlier numbers.110

To examine *Frauentanz* is to first decide what it is not. Though Weill published them as a group, the work is not a typical song cycle. The movements do not resemble traditional German *Lieder*. There are no key signatures in the work, nor a progression of related keys between movements. The sound of *Frauentanz* is tonal in the sense that certain tones dominate each movement, but in these songs, Weill leaned closer to


110 Ibid.
medieval tonal tradition than western harmonic construction (a clever tribute to the medieval poetry). While there is a tonal sense of stability, the music meanders down different key centers and employs many meter changes. The scoring is for a wind quintet, but Weill wrote for a viola rather than an oboe. The influence of untraditional sounds and instrumental groupings as they appear in Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du Soldat* (1918) and Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) should not be overlooked.

The genre of *Frauentanz* can be described as modern vocal chamber music. *Frauentanz* is a ten-minute chamber cycle consisting of seven movements, for soprano and five instruments. Two movements employ the entire ensemble and five movements are smaller combinations of instruments.\(^{111}\) Having expressed interest in writing theatre music, Weill may have composed *Frauentanz* as a study for setting poetry in a blended style of modern ideas. Rathert writes:

*Frauentanz* foregoes the tonal and motivic unity and structural connections of the romantic song cycle. At the same time, the individual songs cannot be classified according to type (such as ballad, Lied, etc.).…Weill realized for the first time the “elevated simplicity” that would later become the technical and aesthetic foundation of his style.\(^{112}\)

Weill’s respect for Schoenberg and interest in cabaret music can be identified in the songs of *Frauentanz* through stylistic form and instrumentation, although the sound of Cabaret—as we know it—is seemingly buried in the ensemble structure. Influences of

\(^{111}\) The soprano sings in each movement of *Frauentanz*. The ensemble for each movement is scored as follows: Movements 1 and 4 are for full ensemble, movement 2 is for clarinet, French horn and bassoon, movement 3 is for flute, clarinet, viola and bassoon, movement 5 is for viola, movement 6 is for flute, clarinet, horn and bassoon and movement 7 is for flute and clarinet.

\(^{112}\) Rathert, 21.
Stravinsky and Hindemith are also prevalent in the work. Vocal dramatic effects and rhythmic accompaniment derived from Busoni’s *Goethe Lieder* [Goethe Songs] (1918) are inherent in the sounds of *Frauentanz*, as is the quest for ‘absolute music’\footnote{Dahlaus describes Busoni’s theory in *The Idea of Absolute Music* as the dissolution of form. Free music was ‘absolute music’ defined specifically by its architectonic form. Arnold Schoenberg described a similar process of music making as “musical prose” within his dissolution of tonal music and embrace of dissonance. Adorno describes Schoenberg as “the quintessential exponent in modern music.”} or freedom of form. As a composer, Weill had only been without a teacher for a few months. He was keenly aware of the modern sounds around him; he had Busoni’s tutelage on his mind and Jarnach’s counterpoint fresh in his memory. In an interview in 1937, Weill said, “Art should be contemporary in theme and in appeal. Its roots should be embedded in modern subjects, it must be the expression of the ‘modern’ spirit.”\footnote{Ewen, David. “Musical Modernist.” Cue vol. 5, no. 13, (23 January, 1937), 6-7.}

Phillip Jarnach conducted Weill’s *Frauentanz* at the International Society for Contemporary Music in Berlin in 1924, and he wrote, “Weill circumnavigates the shoals of Schönbergian interval copying where so many others flounder. He creates his own melodic arcs and imbues the contents of the poems with music.”\footnote{Schebera, 49.} For the next three years, *Frauentanz* was the most frequently performed work of Kurt Weill. The vocal line does not necessarily “sing itself” like so many gems of German *Lieder*, such as the songs in Schubert’s *Winterreise* or Schumann’s *Liederkreis*. Rather, the vocal part is instrumental in nature—syllabically set to add texture to the work as a whole, but generally isolated in its own tonal ambiguity. With this quest for simplicity in short and modern movements, Weill has delivered something new. In Kim Kowalke’s *Kurt Weill:*
A New Orpheus, a letter from Weill to his parents explains:

I must master a type of expression that is still new to me. To my satisfaction, I’ve confirmed what I already discovered in Der Neue Orpheus: that gradually I’m forging ahead toward “myself,” that my music is becoming much more confident, much freeer, lighter—and simpler.”

After Frauentanz’s publication in 1924, Weill met George Kaiser and began working on his first opera, Der Protagonist. At this point in his career, Weill met the actress Lotte Lenye, who encouraged his theatrical inclination. The rest of his career was successfully devoted to theatre music. When Der Protagonist premiered, it was an instant success. Conductor Maurice Abravanel describes Weill’s opera in his review, “The music does not illustrate the action: it is the action.” Weill’s first published opera, although written with a mix of styles, was described as atonal. Weill himself argued the point saying, “Atonal is nothing but a word; you don’t put a key [signature] ahead of your notes, that’s all. The only important thing is that you have something to say.” This could have been said about Frauentanz, which was composed without key signatures and lacked tonal cohesiveness. There is little coincidence that the two works were composed in quick succession.

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116 Der Neue Orpheus, published in 1925 is a work for soprano, violin and orchestra in the modern style similar to Frauentanz, but in larger form.


118 Abravanel studied with Weill from 1925-27 and was the renowned conductor of Balanchine Paris Ballet, Metropolitan Opera and the Utah Symphony.

119 Kowalke, 43.

Weill first heard Stravinsky’s *L’histoire du Soldat* in Frankfurt, where he wrote that it made people, “Sit up.”¹²¹ Looking back on the experience, Weill wrote, “Standing on the boundary between play, pantomime, and opera, this piece still displays such a strong predominance of operatic elements that it perhaps can be the foundation for a certain course of new opera.”¹²² Weill’s work *Frauentanz* is a miniature of Stravinsky’s “miniature” theatre piece which demonstrates his immediate fascination with this “course of new opera.” Weill’s use of harmonic language employs elements of Stravinsky’s style, and while Weill’s forms are composed on a smaller scale, his movements each create an aesthetic blend of modernism and neoclassicism. His texts are set musically, not strictly rhythmically or in a *Sprechstimme* style. He chose to integrate the text into the ensemble in a way that narration does not. Thus, it is this author’s observation that Weill’s interest in the modern music around him was not driving his choices, merely influencing his ear.

B. Poets of Frauentanz

Three of the poems in *Frauentanz* are by known poets. The other four poems are in a similar Middle High German poetic style, but their authorship is unknown. Weill set a poem by Dietmar von Aiste (1139-1171) for his first movement of *Frauentanz*. Dietmar von Aiste was an Austrian poet and a traveling *Minnesinger* who is best known for authoring a portion of Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. The poem “Wir haben die

¹²¹ Schebera, 47.

¹²² Ibid.
winterlange Nacht” is classified as a Wechsel [a monologue by a knight or lady]. This Wechsel is in two stanzas, a common form of the Minnesang. Weill’s setting is a modern German translation of the original poetry from the Middle High German.

The third song in Frauentanz is a setting of a poem by Der von Kürenberg (mid twelfth century). Similar to Dietmar von Aister, Der von Kürenberg was a Minnesinger and a noble knight in the Danube region, who is associated with poetry of the Nibelungenstrophe [Germanic long-line] genre. His poems often tell little stories. This particular poem is so brief that it serves as a metaphoric proposition for eternal ecstasy. Love within the bounds of marriage is a common theme in the Nibelungenstrophe. Weill set this particular poem for soprano; therefore, he intended to personify a female perspective. It can be assumed that a proper lady would “drink” from the waters of ecstasy only if the proposition served as a proposal of marriage.

The last known poet in Frauentanz is Herzog Johan von Brabant (1251 or 1252-1294). He was a poet of Minnelieder and died during a medieval tournament. His poem is set in the fifth movement of Frauentanz and is the tale of a maiden who said, “No.” Weill’s settings of the medieval poetry create an instrumental effect in that there is a musical sense of equality between the vocal part and the instrumental parts. Weill’s variety of meters is a primary compositional component of the work. The sense of the

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124 Exact birth and death dates for Der von Kürenberg are unknown.


title “Women’s Dance” is reflected in the declamatory style of the poetry with echoes, 
ostinato and obbligatos from other instruments.

“A precedent for the metrical variability of Frauentanz may be found in Stravinsky,” Rathart writes.127 The scoring and prosody of Stravinsky’s Pribaoutki, a song cycle for voice and eight instruments composed in 1914, bear a striking resemblance to Weill’s Frauentanz. Both works integrate a vocal line into the rhythmic predominance over the ensemble and both employ dissonance within the conversational interaction of the ensemble. The translator of Pribaoutki, Stanley Applebaum, writes,

To set these traditional texts, Stravinsky used a generally diatonic vocal line that was in a folk vein, but original with him. In many places he employed the technique, which was to become typical of his vocal works, of creating a tension between the normal word stress and the musical beat. The eight solo instruments illustrate and comment on the texts in musical lines that are more heterophonic than polyphonic; they add harmonic spice, leaving many discords unresolved.128

Why did Weill choose to set these 12th century poems? Jürgen Selk wrote in the Universal Edition:

What motivated Weill to set medieval ‘Minnelieder’ [songs of courtly love] is unknown, but one can speculate that discussions in Busoni’s master class might have revolved around similar topics. The sources of the texts have not yet been ascertained; at the present time only three printed collections, published in the 1920s, are known. They contain three of the seven poems, but only one of them coincides exactly with the text in Frauentanz…129

127 Rathart, p 21.


Kim Kowalke identified the poets of three of the songs in *Kurt Weill in Europe*, but the others remain anonymous. Kowalke writes that Weill respects the integrity of the poetry in *Frauentanz* by setting the text without repetition. He goes on to describe the setting as:

Clear declamation and straightforward presentation for the poems preclude extensive polyphony…this lack of textual repetition and its accompanying ensemble …represents Weill’s return to ‘absolute music.’ This clarity, balance and limited means of expression indicate how enthusiastically Weill had embraced Busoni’s call for a new classicism.\(^{130}\)

Weill’s declamatory settings and rhythmic structures were experimental in writing for singers in the early twentieth century. While Stravinsky’s neoclassicism was paving the way, the sound was still very new. Weill stated that the *Frauentanz* soprano should have a light tone and refrain from much expression.\(^{131}\) This direction indicates the singer should sing simply what is on the page, reflecting the spirit of the new classicism Busoni promoted.

C. Texts, Translations and Stylistic Developments & Musical Influences in *Frauentanz*

I. *Wir haben die winterlange*

*Wir haben die winterlange Nacht*  
*Mit Freuden wohl empfangen*  
*Ich und ein Ritter wohlbedacht,*  
*Sein Wille ist ergangen.*

*We have a long winter night*  
*With joy well received*  
*I and a knight well thought of*  
*His will is given.*

*Wie wir es beide uns gedacht,*  
*So hat ers an ein End gebracht,*  
*Mit mancher Freude und Liebe viel,*  
*Er ist wie ihn mein Herze will.*

*As we both thought*  
*Thus, first brought to an end*  
*With much joy and love*  
*He is what my heart wants.*

\(^{130}\) Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe*, 248.  
\(^{131}\) Drew, 150.
In the first movement of *Frauentanz*, Weill establishes his departure from romanticism with neoclassical techniques. The neoclassic movement in music was employed by Stravinsky and Hindemith and emphasized counterpoint to renew the more classical melodic ideas that German romanticism had left behind. Metronomic rhythmic devices become the predominant feature in neoclassical works with the melody emerging from the rhythmic texture. In mm.1-4 of ‘Wir haben die winterlange Nacht’ (musical example 4.1), the bassoon, horn and clarinet establish a steady rhythmic pulse while the flute begins the minuet-like melody. As the song progresses, the vocal line enters on m. 12, emphasizing the dance like movement described in the tempo marking. The flute and viola play duets of the vocal melodic material with one another during this brief introductory movement. Each instrumental part is connected to the sense of the whole movement with vertical rhythmic texture. Although the movement is not typically tonal, the vertical structure allows homophonic cadences to unifying the parts.
The influence of Stravinsky’s *L’histoire du Soldat* [History of the Soldier] (premiered in 1918) is evident in Weill’s similar instrumentation, rhythmic device and melodic interplay. Stravinsky’s embrace of the modernist aesthetic is present in *L’histoire* in the minimalistic quality of a few instruments creating the marching call while the designated narrator speaks in rhythm over the chamber ensemble of seven players. Weill set his poetry in *Frauentanz* to be sung, not chanted, but the neoclassic influence of

\[132\] Kurt Weill, 1.
Stravinsky is evident in Weill’s declamatory manner of text setting with a small ensemble. The two works sound similar in their combinations of instruments, use of dance forms and their constant changes of time signature. With *L’histoire du Soldat*, Stravinsky establishes the “march” rhythm in m. 4 with the strings and percussion. From the first measure (musical example 4.2), the cornet and trombone play a miniature duet that recurs throughout the march. Stravinsky’s prosody relies on meter, heterophonic instrumental punctuation, and a speech like imitation of the other parts. Weill displays compositional similarities by surrounding his text with instrumental imitation of the vocal line and accentuation of beats.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.2: Measures 1-6 of *L’Histoire du Soldat*133

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II. Wo zwei Herzenliebe

Wo zwei Herzenliebe
An einem Tanze gan,
Sie lassent ihr Äugelin schliessen,
Sie sehen einander an.
Sie lassent ihr Äugelin schliessen,
Recht als ihn nit darum sei,
Sie gedenken in ihren Sinnen,
Ach, läg ich dir nahe bei.

Where two hearts love
At a dance of hearts
Let her close her eyes
They look at each other
Let her close their eyes.
They intend their senses
In silent yearning do they think
Oh, I could lie down near you.

Weill’s appetite for modern music was likely fed by Stravinsky and Hindemith. There are striking similarities in Weill’s Frauentanz to Stravinsky’s 1914 Swiss songs, Pribautki [Ditties]. Both sets are comprised of short movements scored for singer and a chamber ensemble. Both also employ rhythmic variety with changing meters and syllabic text settings that serve as another layer of texture, rather than a soloist with accompaniment. Stravinsky’s third movement “The Colonel” employs folk-like qualities in some moments and throws away tonality in others. Similar to Weill’s second movement of Frauentanz, both works use stark, accented delivery of text.

Though Pribautki consists of nonsense ditties that contrast with the medieval vows of love in Frauentanz, Weill nonetheless emulates Stravinsky’s musical sense of prosody. Weill’s text integrates the voice into the texture of the ensemble in rhythmic patterns. Rathert writes that in Frauentanz, “Weill finds the ‘elevated simplicity’ that would later become the technical and aesthetic foundation of his style.”134 An example of Weill’s text setting can be viewed in mm. 9-12 where voice and clarinet play a duet over the horn and bassoon’s constant rhythmic ostinato (musical example 4.3).

134 Rathert, 21.
Stravinsky demonstrates a similar juxtaposition of text and rhythm within the genre of modern vocal chamber ensembles in “The Colonel.” In mm. 6-8 (musical example 4.4) the flute plays a duet with the singer on almost the same pitches, but with a slight rhythmic elongation. The clarinet plays the decorative melodic flourish in m. 8 and the strings play steady rhythmic ostinati throughout the song. Stravinsky’s neoclassic texture serves as a model for Weill’s stylistic innovations.

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135 Weill, 4.
III. Ach wär mein Lieb ein Brünnlein kalt

Oh were my love a little cold brook

Ach wär mein Lieb ein Brünnlein kalt
Oh, were my love a little cold brook
Und spräng aus einem Stein,
And sprang from a stone,
Und wär ich dann der grüne Wald,
And then I’d be the green forest,
So tränk ichs in mich ein,
So just take a drink from me,
Und wollt es nimmer lassen,
And want it to never leave.
Wollts ganz und gar umfassen,
Wanted wholly to include,
So gestern und heut und alle Zeit
So yesterday and today and for all time
Bis in die ewige Seligkeit.
Until the eternal bliss.

Weill’s third movement of *Frauentanz* is a short piece with a *molto agitato* marking that can be heard as a frenzy of sound. In mm. 1-3 Weill begins the piece with a sound and texture that prevails until the end of the movement (musical example 4.5). The voice, flute and clarinet are in constant movement with nary a rest to be seen. The singer

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is comparing love to a bubbling fountain. The flute and clarinet’s constant sixteenth-note triplets can be interpreted as a water motive, which is a common 19th century text painting technique. The viola and bassoon play a pizzicato ostinato that reinforces a metric delivery of the vocal line.

There are no key signatures in *Frauentanz*, and rhythm drives the work. Weill employs a full range of dynamic markings in *Frauentanz*; the constant shifts from *piano* to *forte* are further demonstrations that Weill was mindful of the text and used instrumental markings to aid the delivery of the poetry. Busoni transcribed this movement for voice and piano, which was his last completed work before his death on July 27, 1924. For a performance with piano transcription, Busoni’s movement is the most successful. The other movements are available with piano reductions, but do not convey the mood and texture of Weill’s original.

“Ach wär mein Lieb ein Brünnlein kalt” [Oh were my love a cool fountain] is a composition displaying many traits of Weill’s teacher. Busoni’s “Lied des Mephistopheles,” [Song of Mephistopheles] composed in 1918 and published in 1919 can be identified as a clear model for Weill’s third movement of *Frauentanz*. In “Lied des Mephistopheles,” Busoni masterfully employs moving octaves in the bass line to create an orchestral texture. Busoni sets the text syllabically and uses rhythm to deliver each and every word with precision (musical example 4.5). The constant chromatic movement in both accompaniment and vocal line does not rest until the end of the story and therefore, the end of the song. Richard Green, editor of the Anthology of Goethe Songs, writes about “Lied des Mephistopheles,” that the chromaticism, “is either largely melodic or
Weill was an ardent follower of his teacher Busoni and regarded these Goethe Lieder as a model for Lieder composition. Weill’s text setting for Frauentanz uses a declamatory style with precise rhythms and large intervallic leaps (musical example 4.6) to emphasize the poetry in the spirit of the mature Busoni Lieder.

**MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.5: Measures 1-8 Busoni of “Lied des Mephistopheles”**


138 Busoni assigned his master class to set the Goethe text “Die Bekehrte” and he set his own version. Busoni let Weill see his later compositions, including his Goethe Lieder. www.kwf.org.

Along with Stravinsky’s influence, Weill’s life-long interest in Schoenberg’s music is heard throughout *Frauentanz* in its experimental structure and sound. The influence of Schoenberg’s “Einfältiges Lied” [Silly Song] from Schoenberg’s *Brettl Lieder* [Cabaret Songs] is present in Weill’s third movement. While Weill was setting text to emulate a fountain, Schoenberg’s music creates the sensation of a strong wind (musical example 24.7). Both composers use constant moving sixteenth-note triplets to paint their respective poetic elements. This 19th century technique is reminiscent of romanticism, but Weill has stated that, “Modern times abound in great, all-embracing ideas, which are able to find artistic expression solely in classical form. There is no place in them for romantic art.”

Busoni instilled an appreciation for history and taught, “Everything that is to happen has

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140 Weill, 6.

141 Hinton, 55.
already and for all time happened.”142 Thus, Weill sought new ways of creating his own style, but was not immune to the musical legacy left by his predecessors.

The Brettl Lieder text is by Hugo Salus (1866-1929), who was a doctor, philosopher and “the most respected Bohemian poet writing in German at the time.”143 Weill was enthralled with modernism and theatre during his student years, in which Salus played an influential role. Text painting was a romantic Lieder technique that both Schoenberg and Weill employed when it suited their creative gesture. Weill’s “Ach wär mein Lieb ein Brünnlein kalt” has romantic roots in its harmonic movement, but the dissonant sounds and textures created by the full ensemble represent the character of modernism, not romanticism. Identifying the core musical elements of Frauentanz proves difficult to label specifically because Weill disregarded such boundaries. One example of his rejection of any one particular style is the end of the third movement, where the ensemble plays a stringendo and the Weill sets the word “seligkeit” [bliss] with the only melisma in Frauentanz. In a 1940 interview, Weill discussed his ideas as practical by saying:

If music is really human, it doesn’t make much difference how it is conveyed. And as long as it is able to reach its audience emotionally, its creator should not worry about its possible sentimentality or banality. In that connection, I remember a remark of old Busoni’s. “Don’t be afraid of banality,” he told me. “After all, there are only twelve tones in the scale!”144

142 Hinton, 60-61.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.7: Measures 13-15 of “Einfältiges Lied”

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IV. Dieser Stern im Dunkeln

Dieser Stern im Dunkeln
Sieh, verbirgt er sich,
Schöne Frau, so tue,
Wenn du siehest mich.
So lass du deine Augen gehn
An einen andern Mann,
So weiss doch niemals jemand,
Was unter uns zwein ist getan.

This star in the dark
Look, he hides himself
Beautiful woman, so do,
If you love me, seest.
So let you wander your eyes
To another man
As pure, no one can know
What we did together.

The fourth movement of Weill’s *Frauentanz* continues Weill’s experimental tonal structure. Non-traditional scales are present in the first measures (musical example 4.8).

The instrumental arpeggios exemplify a tonal sense of F major while the voice part enters on a G and continues on a seemingly isolated g minor melody. Weill has keenly set the text that describes a star hiding in darkness, but employs pitches in the instrumentation that will soon be used in the vocal line. The stark pizzicati are somewhat isolated from the vocal part, but create a rhythmically steady beat to underline the text, which is pleading to keep the tryst a secret. The instruments all keep a tenuous, yet steady beat.

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until the end of the movement while the viola plays a countermelody that serves as an echo to the vocal part.

“Dieser Stern im Dunkel, sieh” is marked *Tranquillo e molto piano* [quiet and very slowly]. The vocal part is marked *semplice* [simple] and the viola echoes are each marked *molto espressivo* [very expressive]. These guidelines give the ensemble no room to stray from the intended simplicity of the movement. The dynamics vary from *piano* to *pianissimo*, keeping the atmosphere quiet and serene from the beginning to end.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.8: Measure 1-5 of “Dieser Stern im Dunkel”

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In the *Frauentanz* critical edition, Weill’s fifth movement is compared to Hindemith’s *Des Todes Tod*,\(^{147}\) [The Death of Death] which was premiered by Noas Pisling-Boas in March of 1922. Pisling-Boas also sang *Frauentanz* under Jarnach’s baton only two years later. “Eines Maienmorgens schön” [A beautiful May Morning] is a duet between viola and soprano. Weill’s text is about a maiden who said, “No” to the amorous advances of her admirer. The refrain of *harbalorifa* can be identified as a “la-di-dah” dismissal of a young maiden and is the only melodic motive that the singer repeats in any

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\(^{147}\) Rathert, 20.
of the movements of *Frauentanz*. Hindemith’s final song of his impressionist cycle of the same title, *Des Todes Tod*, is also scored for voice and viola (musical example 4.9).

Albrecht’s description of the work paints a clear explanation for Rathert’s comparison of the Hindemith work to Weill’s:

*Des Todes Tod* ("The death of Death") is more darkly rhetorical yet still sparer: the voice is accompanied by two violas and cello, in the third and last song (rather close to Vaughan Williams in its gravity as well as its melodic accent) by a solo viola only. As in the other cycle there is an economy of expression as well, a use of the simplest possible means to increase the emotional burden of the material; the slightly posturing pessimism of the texts is quite transcended by Hindemith’s sombre eloquence.149

Just as Albrecht described *Des Todes Tod* as “spare,” the harmonic and rhythmic textures of *Frauentanz* can be identified as such. Weill’s instrumentation of a more light-hearted text is scaled down to a minimum of sound with only one instrument and the voice. In this movement, viola and voice are partners, with both imitation and the call-and-response form emphasizing the folk characteristics of the melody. Weill’s interest in Busoni’s teachings, Schoenberg’s new harmonic language and the modernist movement are evident in this sparsely scored movement, yet the folk quality and melodic interplay add an important, intimate element to the work titled “Women’s Dance.”

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148 Hindemith taught at the Berlin *Musikhochschule* in 1927, nine years after Weill’s attendance. Like Weill, Hindemith also immigrated to the United States and became a citizen. In the U.S., Hindemith continued composing and was a successful teacher at Yale and Tanglewood.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.9: Measures 1-14 “Des Todes Tod”\textsuperscript{150}

The influence of Schoenberg’s \textit{Pierrot Lunaire}, which premiered in 1922, only a year before Weill composed \textit{Frauentanz}, cannot be discounted. Weill’s fascination with modernism and Schoenberg’s innovative works factor into his choice of texts for \textit{Frauentanz}. By looking to the past and using medieval texts, Weill juxtaposes old words with new musical sounds. \textit{Frauentanz} captures its own poetic nuance without \textit{Sprechstimme} [speech-singing], but the text in “Eines Maienmorgens” (musical example 4.10) moves in similar rhythmic and melodic directions heard in \textit{Pierrot Lunaire}, and his use of \textit{harbalorifa} as a whimsical maiden chant is similar to the \textit{Sprechstimme} technique used by Humperdinck in 1987, and later developed by Schoenberg (musical example 4.11). On the subject of the Schoenberg influence, Kastner wrote the following review:

\begin{quote}
The cycle \textit{Frauentanz}….wonderfully interpreted by Lotte Loenard, made Kurt Weill’s name famous at the Salzburg International Chamber Music Festival, 1924.
\end{quote}

Here with the most reduced musical means, the most extremely fluid expression is found in the most compressed form. With particular power Weill avoided any opulence of harmony, the reef of Schoenbergian interval-reproduction, on which so much runs aground. Weill has coined his own melodic arch and impregnated the poetic content with his music.\footnote{Kowalke, 30.}

\footnote{Weill, 10.}

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.10: Measures 1-23 of “Eines Maienmorgens”\footnote{Weill, 10.}
VI. Ich will Trauern lassen stehn

Ich will Trauern lassen stehn,
Auf die Heide solln wir gehn,
Vielliebe Gespielen mein,
Da sehen wir der Blumen Schein.
Ich sage dich, ich sage dir,
Süssse Minne werde mein,
Mache mir ein Kränzlein,
Das soll tragen ein stolzer Mann,
Der wohl Frauen dienen kann.
Ich sage dich, ich sage dir,
Mein Geselle komm mit mir.

I will let mourning stay behind
On the meadow we should go
Much love my playmates
As we see the flowers glimmer.
I tell you, I tell you,
My companion, come with me.
Sweet love, will do my
Make for me a garland of flowers
That should take a proud man
I tell you, I tell you,
My companion come with me.

In the sixth movement of *Frauentanz*, Weill continues his modernist approach with constant meter changes in order for the text to drive the rhythm. This is a characteristic of both Stravinsky and Schoenberg in their vocal and small ensemble works. The tempo marking of “Ich will Trauern” [I will mourn] is *Allegretto Giocoso* [moderately fast and joking] and the meter changes from 4/4 to 3/4 to 2/4 in one, two, or three measure groups. Weill’s use of rhythmic variety is text driven, and sounds similar to Stravinsky’s *L’histoire du Soldat*. The minor intervals create a sadder sensation than the *giocoso* marking, so the singer must not dwell on the minor sonority (the text is saying that mourning is over and it is time to play lovers’ games in the meadow) and keep the direction of the phrases moving forward. Weill wrote, “The *Lieder* must be sung without any sentimentality, with a slender, light, and yet expressive voice.”\(^{154}\) Weill’s advice is essential to the musical crux of this suggestive song as it beckons, “Come love, with me, oh do.” The bassoon imitates the vocal line one measure after the singer introduces the melody, in a canon-like fashion. A musical conversation between lovers is created between the soprano and bassoon in mm. 2-9 (musical example 4.12).

\(^{154}\) Drew, 150.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.12: Measures 1-9 of “Ich will Trauern lassen stehn”\textsuperscript{155}

The dotted rhythm of the horn creates an immutable marching sensation that disregards changing meters. The \textit{grazioso} interlude featuring flute and clarinet in mm. 16-19 employs contrary motion and a pastoral quality in its use of major and minor urgent sixteenth note patterns (musical example 4.13). The text references to flowers and the meadow create a scene for young love to blossom. The rhythmic horn motive can be interpreted as time marching on, encouraging the listener to take advantage of the moment and respond to a lover’s call.

\textsuperscript{155} Weill, 12.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.13: Measures 16-19

VII. Ich schlaf, ich wach

Ich schlaf, ich wach, I sleep, I wake,
Ich geh, ich steh, I walk, I stand—
Ich kann dein nit vergessen. I cannot remember your power.
Mich deucht, dass ich It seems to me that,
Dich allzeit see, You always see.
Du hast mein Herz besessen. You owned my heart
Wie hübsch sein dein Gebärden. How wondrous to be yours,
Für dir hab ich nun gar kein Ruh For you, now I have no peace
Auf dieser Welt und Erden. In this world and earth.

Weill wrote that he “greatly revered” the works of Mahler. The final song in Frauentanz pays homage to Mahler’s “Das Lied von der Erde,” [The song of the earth] which was composed in 1908-09 and premiered in 1911. Mahler based the large-scale work for orchestra, tenor and alto (or baritone). The texts were originally taken from the

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156 Ibid.
157 Schebera, 224.
Chinese Tang Dynasty poetry. Mahler utilized a number of Chinese motives within each movement to develop an exotic and Asian sound. Mahler’s oboe plays a melody with a descending pattern in mm. 3-11 (musical example 4.14). This descending motive is strikingly similar to Weill’s vocal motive in “Ich schlaf” [I sleep] mm. 13-16 (musical example 4.15). Weill’s flute and clarinet parts set up the poetic delivery with the basic melodic material slowly ‘sighing’ in their descending melodic direction.

The final movement of Weill’s work is the slowest movement of the work, marked tranquillo dolente [Quietly painful]. Weill’s does not employ the dance idiom to complete a work titled “Women’s Dance.” Instead he chooses to set the poem that says I sleep, using a carefully crafted conversation between flute and clarinet, each playing alternating versions of the descending motive, to finish the work with the sense of intimate interaction depicted in the text. The progression of sound builds from a solo flute introduction, mm. 1-4, followed by the addition of the clarinet with similar melodic material, in contrary motion to the flute. The singer enters in m. 13 with the sighing motive heard in the previous measures, but with different rhythms and delayed resolutions (musical example 4.15). This gradual blossoming of musical texture is heard in a similarly static, yet melodic form that Mahler used for “Der Einsame im Herbst” [The Lonely Autumn] The influence of the large-scale symphonic master is heard in a stripped-down and “practical” musical form, which Weill uses to conclude Frauentanz.
MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.14: Measures 1-5 of “Der Einsame im Herbst”\textsuperscript{158}

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4.15: Measures 1-16 of “Ich schlaf, ich wach”\textsuperscript{159}

With \textit{Frauentanz}, Weill leaves his romantic heritage for the brave new world of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Prosody is showcased in an instrumental way, building a cohesive interaction between the soprano and the instrumentalists, rhythmic elements dominate, and his use of chamber ensemble rather than piano follows the path paved by Stravinsky’s theatrical \textit{L’Histoire du Soldat} and Schoenberg’s tonally experimental \textit{Pierrot Lunaire}. The \textit{Frauentanz} vocal line is often isolated tonally from the ostinato patterns of the lower instruments, yet if treated as part of the ensemble, melodic elements emerge within the chamber group.

\textsuperscript{159} Weill, 14.
Weill’s direction to avoid sentimentality, also a departure from the culture of romanticism, accentuates the need to perform this music and text without unnecessary histrionics or superficial emphases. *Frauentanz* (approximately ten minutes long) is a relatively unknown work amongst singers and chamber musicians alike and warrants consideration for performance that boasts novelty and notoriety. Similar to the way he contributed new musical momentum to 19th century *Lieder* tradition in *Ofrah’s Lieder*, Weill’s venture towards 20th century modernism in *Frauentanz* sets his own stylistic compositional tone.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Weill studied counterpoint with Phillip Jarnach (a fellow Busoni pupil) and Jarnach wrote to Busoni, “Weill showed me his Frauentanz, which delights me. In places it is truly a masterpiece.” Busoni replied,

He has any amount of “ideas”—as you say—but they are concealed or implied, so that only “the likes of us” can discover and admire them…this youngster’s productivity is surprising…His wealth is great, his selectivity at present inactive. One envies and would like to help. But he will come to the right thing of his own accord. The eternal question: Is he still developing or has he already reached his peak?”

Busoni and Jarnach’s confidence is validated with the ensuing success of Frauentanz as Weill’s most performed work from 1924-27, but Busoni’s question foreshadows Weill’s entire career. Was he still developing? Most certainly. Weill’s Frauentanz marked the end of his studies and his departure from romanticism. He referred to own works as modern classical art, but would soon embark into music theatre, his gateway to international success; yet in 1923, he was still experimenting. As Busoni wondered, Weill’s “peak” was not reached until his Broadway years. Foster Hirsch writes of the “two Weills” to describe the shift in style from his European training to his American years:

Of course there are differences between the European and the American branches of Weill’s career…But long before he hit the Broadway big time, Weill had

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161 Schebera, 49. (Letter from Busoni to Jarnach, October 3,1923).

162 Rathert, 20.
already established a commitment to change. Self-renewal, creative rerouting, marked shifts in style and idiom were an engrained part of his signature in Germany as they continued to be in America….But faced with the portfolio of a composer for whom no two shows are exactly alike, why have to choose? Why not, instead, savor Weill’s craftsmanship his irony, his wit, his succulent, insinuating melodies, the deft and often surprising ways in which his music interacts with dialogue and dramatic context…In America, as in Germany, he delighted in confounding rigid categories as he set up a dialogue between elitist and popular musical forms.163

Two years before Weill’s Frauentanz, Webern premiered his Sechs Lieder Op. 14. A student of Schoenberg, Webern had been experimenting with twelve-tone composition. In observing Weill’s prosody, it is of academic interest to see where Weill’s contemporary composers were heading with Lieder. Webern’s experiments were using patterns in poetry as percussive and instrumental effect. Weill was integrating his vocal lines into the ensemble, but with careful text-painting and according to Albright, an “Aggressive matter-of-factness.”164 Susan Bradshaw describes Webern’s work:

“With these songs, Webern begins to explore the uncharted waters which lie between the –by now—secure territory of free chromatic harmonic (atonality) and the still distant world of ordered chromaticism (12-tone composition). Here, the word-setting is entirely abstract, with the voice part forming an additional instrumental strand in the complex overall texture of crossing and re-crossing lines.165

Weill’s interest in modernism did not succumb to the atonal sounds employed by the Second Viennese School. Weill listened to these new works with admiration but clung to his ideals and innovations championed by Busoni. In The Life of Webern,

163 Hirsch, 7-8.

164 Albright, 273-284.

165 Susan Bradshaw, Pierre Boulez Webern Complete Works, CD insert, 2.
Kathryn Bailey writes “Incidentally the name of Kurt Weill is mentioned. And Webern suddenly explodes….He puts to me a very direct question: ‘What do you find of our great Middle-European tradition in such a composer?”166 Weill’s credo lends one to believe that he composed without regrets. The lack of support from fellow German modernists might have disappointed Weill, but did not hinder his pursuit of musical creation.

From Weill’s first composition (that he considered the beginning of his career): *Ofrah’s Lieder*, to his first publication after completing his studies: *Frauentanz*, we see and hear major stylistic development. Weill began composing in the Romantic tradition but as his studies progressed, he found inspiration in modernism and the theatre. Upon completion of his formal training, he composed *Frauentanz* and within a year, he published his first successful opera *Der Protagonist*. At age 25, he became a theatre composer and it is there that he made his legacy. Stephen Hinton commented on David Drew’s observations in *Weill’s Musical Theatre* by writing:

> Based on judgements….that define Weill’s second-period style in terms of an organic evolution out of mainstream German traditions but also with specific reference to Schoenberg’s more “revolutionary” achievements…and for seeing his subsequent development not only as an aberration but as something “unique in the history of significant composition”…. “it is a psychological and indeed historical phenomenon for which there is no parallel in music. It means that in Weill we have not one, but two composers. The first and important one and should be evaluated without reference to the second.”167

*Frauentanz* was Weill’s experimental stepping stone from traditional tonal classical music to the rest of his career in theatre music, standing almost completely alone in Weill’s genres of composition as modern vocal chamber music. In 1924, the year

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166 Bailey, 194.
167 Hinton, 467.
Frauentanz was published, he met George Kaiser and began collaborating on the opera Der Protagonist in 1924, the year Frauentanz was published. Weill’s ensuing compositions have made theatre history.

The overall difference between Ofrah’s Lieder and Frauentanz is a movement from lush displays of melody to a more contemporary style of text setting, minimalist texture and a pervasive sense of rhythm. Weill’s youthful style matures into a voice of modern distinction through musical and pedagogical influence. Weill was impressed with Schoenberg’s deconstruction of music theory and excited by Stravinsky’s modern theatrical music. Weill’s early Lieder and Chamber music demonstrate the pronouncement that, as Jarnach stated is, “in places a masterpiece.”

The similarities of Ofrah’s Lieder to the songs of Schumann and Strauss are readily apparent by comparing the structure of each composer’s accompaniments and relationships of text and melody. In contrast, Weill crafted Frauentanz as a modern showcase of rhythmic textures. Kowalke refers to these songs as lighter fare, showcasing the ‘Weill style.’ This author does not find musical evidence to support that claim. The durchkomponiert [through-composed] style does not give the singer a chance to repeat any melodic material; therefore, Hinton’s assessment that the ‘two periods of Weill are unique in sound and style’ finds resonance with this author’s observations about Weill’s deliberate change from a student of German traditions to an innovator of stage music. David Drew’s 1980 entry in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians labels
Weill as, “perhaps the only [notable artist] to have done away with his old creative self in order to make way for a new one.” 168

Weill’s place in history as an exiled German should be taken into account when accessing his embrace of popular theatre music in America. *Frauentanz* is representative of the end of Weill’s German studies and the influential attributes he embraced from Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Hinton described these attributes as:

Stravinsky’s neoclassicism tended toward mannerism. Schoenberg, in contrast, relied on formal and structural devices, which, except for the names, were often hidden beneath the musical surface….are Stravinsky and Schoenberg two sides of a common trend in the 1920s or are they antipodes? The answer lies partly but also critically in the implications of distinction… “classicism” and “classicality,” respectively.169

After examining Weill’s early stylistic development, maintaining the given theory of “the two Weills,”170 there are two questions that beg to be answered. What is the ‘Weill style?’ and when did Weill change? Lenya described the theory with genuine sincerity, “There is no American Weill, there is no German Weill. There is no difference between them. There is only Weill.”171

On page twenty-four of this document, John C.G. Waterhouse is quoted describing the ‘Weill Style’ in the context of the Brecht collaborations mentioning the

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169 Hinton, 54.

170 Weill lived a life that is described by Kater and others as “the Two Weills” (European Weill and American Weill) but all who write about Weill discuss his irony, his wit and his congeniality.

171 Hirsch, 3.
“instability…and mysterious ironical hard edge” of Weill’s theatre music. Weill’s Broadway success is unique because of this hard edge that Waterhouse describes. Weill’s Broadway contemporaries included the legendary Gershwins, Rodgers, Hart and Hammerstein, all known for their clever and entertaining musicals,\textsuperscript{172} not the “strange, disturbing instability,” which clings to Weill’s theatre music. The ‘Weill Style’ is a culmination of Weill’s attention to detail born of his training and the way he incorporates the American jazz idiom with blues big-band Hollywood style orchestral arrangements which support clever melodies delivering satirical, witty and often risqué lyrics.\textsuperscript{173} Although \textit{Happy End} only ran for four weeks, Weill wrote to Universal Editions that his song orchestrations for “Bilboa Song” and “Surabaya-Johnny” were “the best thing I have done of this kind.”\textsuperscript{174}

In 1938, Weill premiered his first American hit \textit{Knickerbocker Holiday}, featuring “September Song,” which remains a classic. In March 1943, historians claim the Rodgers & Hammerstein show \textit{OKLAHOMA!} solidified the genre of the American musical play.\textsuperscript{175} In October of the same year, Weill’s \textit{One Touch of Venus} premiered (with

\textsuperscript{172} Weill attended a rehearsal of George and Ira Gershwin’s \textit{Porgy & Bess}, which premiered in 1935, soon after immigrating to America. Rodgers & Hart wrote \textit{Babes In Arms} in 1937, which featured the hit song “My Funny Valentine.” Rodgers & Hammerstein’s landmark collaboration \textit{Oklahoma} premiered in 1943.

\textsuperscript{173} Theatre music examples of Weill’s use of blues and dark wit are heard in the settings of Brecht’s texts “Alabama Song” from \textit{Mahagonny} and “Bilbao Song” from \textit{Happy End}. Weill’s Hollywood style orchestrations are represented by his setting of Ira Gershwin’s text for “My Ship” from \textit{Lady in the Dark} and the Ogden Nash lyrics for “That’s Him” from \textit{One Touch of Venus}.

\textsuperscript{174} Hinton, 119.

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{OKLAHOMA!}, the first Rodgers & Hammerstein musical, was also the first of a new genre, the musical play, representing a unique fusion of Rodgers’ musical comedy and Hammerstein’s operetta. A
choreographer Agnes De Mille, who made her name with the ballet sequence in *OKLAHOMA!*). Weill’s Broadway writing found popularity because it was uniquely singable, hauntingly memorable and each show was a unique creation of musical entertainment. Of his song “Foolish Heart,” Foster Hirsch writes, “the German composer takes on and holds his own against not Mahler or Hindemith but Richard Rodgers, the master of the Broadway waltz. Knowing they had a good thing going, Weill and De Mille prolonged the number with a dance.”\(^\text{176}\) Mark Grant wrote, “*Venus*, is perhaps, the first show where the composer became the ‘muscle’—ouflanking the director and guiding not only the creative team, but ultimately the show itself.”\(^\text{177}\)

One example of the ‘Weill Style’ is “I’m a Stranger Here, Myself” from *One Touch of Venus*. In this song, Weill integrates a simple melody with the blues idiom by using minor thirds and placing the stressed syllables in syncopated rhythmic ostinatos (musical example 5.1). The example shown repeats melodically throughout the song with slight variations, including some *parlando*, as the singer’s fury rises to the climax of the song with the text demanding to know what is more important than love: “For heaven’s sake what *is* it?”

\(^\text{176}\) Hirsch, 225.

One of Weill’s final works was his American Opera, *Street Scene*, in 1946. This was a project he had wanted to fulfill for years, culminating his classical training with his belief that music can be the “muscle” that drives the action in a show. *Street Scene* combines Weill’s early European style with moments of Italian operatic quality, Wagnerian orchestral sounds and even arias with distinct jazz idioms. He referred to this project as both a “Broadway Opera” and a “Musical Drama.” *Street Scene* is perhaps Weill’s biggest legacy for the classical singing world and it is a rich study of the man who strove for new ways to incorporate music with drama. From his juvenilia, to his latest works, Weill continued to create works that were “current” at their premieres, but their outstanding compositional quality has established them as classics with the audiences of today.

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From his early operas in Berlin to his Broadway hits, Weill wrote successfully for singers wherever he went. As a composer, it is said that he always had a hand in the libretti he was setting to music. How else could the words and music unite so seamlessly? Weill worked tirelessly, writing music for his true love (Lotte Lenya) and for his public. From his juvenilia to his Broadway scores, Kurt Weill left a treasure chest of music for his audiences and the performers who bring this music to life.

It is the hope of this author to promote interest in Weill’s early song cycles. Kurt Weill left his mark with hit Broadway shows, but before these legendary shows appeared, Kurt Weill came of age in a war-torn Berlin. He studied music with classical masters. His early songs are the stepping-stones to a career that is regarded with increasing respect, scholarly inquiry and carefully researched performances as time goes on. Today, Kurt Weill is regarded as a legend by music-lovers world-wide. His early Lieder offer a look into his past, which laid the foundation for his future. This author believes that soprano recitalists will find “winners” in Weill’s lesser-known works: Ofrah’s Lieder and Frauentanz.


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