

2020-07-07

# 12 Degrees of Alienation: A Socio-Political Exploration of Hanns Eisler's Use of the Twelve-Tone Method during Exile (1938-1948)

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Heidebrecht, J. L. (2020). 12 Degrees of Alienation: A Socio-Political Exploration of Hanns Eisler's Use of the Twelve-Tone Method during Exile (1938-1948) (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>.

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12 Degrees of Alienation: A Socio-Political Exploration of Hanns Eisler's Use of the Twelve-  
Tone Method during Exile (1938-1948)

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GERMANIC, SLAVIC AND EAST ASIAN STUDIES

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JULY, 2020

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## **Abstract**

Hanns Eisler, one of Arnold Schoenberg's prominent students and a master of his twelve-tone technique, is arguably one of the most important composers of the twentieth century. However, Eisler's contribution to modern music in both Germany and North America has been, until recently, overshadowed by political controversy. It is especially the period of Eisler's American exile (1938-1948) that provides an area of research ripe for investigation with a fresh perspective. This thesis will utilize Eisler's writings about music, politics, and his experience as an exile, in selections from two volumes of collected essays (*Musik und Politik Schriften*), (1924-1962) and *Composing for the Films* (1947). These works incorporate Eisler's theories regarding the relationship between music and the socio-political climate during this time and will be used in order to examine and qualify previously made theses that the twelve-tone method of composition is the musical language of émigrés. I seek to provide a more nuanced understanding that moves away from score analysis alone, synthesizing both of Eisler's creative and political worlds in order to illuminate not only the composer, but also the exile and the unique role that the exile experience has played in the development of twelve-tone music.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, J. L. Heidebrecht.

## **Acknowledgements**

My biggest thanks and gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Martin Wagner. He has been an incredible and patient supervisor who has sat through numerous meetings and emails, helping me sift through the jumbled thoughts of my brain and offering brilliant advice, all of which has led to this thesis. I also extend my gratitude to the supportive and inspiring faculty and my student cohort from the School of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Calgary. I have been blessed with many mentors and friends. I thank my close friends who have encouraged me and kept me going when I wanted to throw in the towel and who made me laugh in spite of everything. Lastly, my love and thanks to my Grandmother Margaret. You have always been there every step of the way and I would not be who I am today without you.

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## Introduction

The life and career of German-Austrian composer Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) can be categorized as one of great turbulence and political fervour. This is not so surprising considering the time of upheaval and great social changes that began in Germany and followed him to the United States of America, and that he found himself in again once returning to post-war Germany, this time in the GDR.<sup>1</sup> The once star pupil of Arnold Schoenberg, Eisler mastered and exemplified the twelve-tone technique, which Schoenberg first began experimenting with in the early 1920s. Schoenberg came to describe twelve-tone music as a “method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another”.<sup>2</sup> The twelve-tone method was a radical departure from the hierarchical structure of traditional harmony that abolished typical major and minor tonality, chord progressions, and cadences, and replaced it with a tone row where all twelve notes of the chromatic scale were represented in an ordered series.<sup>3</sup> While Eisler had a close working relationship with Schoenberg, their relationship was not at all free of conflict and was at times tempestuous. Eisler openly criticized Schoenberg’s bourgeois view of music along with the elitist and isolationist notions that he attached to what Schoenberg saw as the next natural evolution of music (Betz 43-44).<sup>4</sup> These ideological differences eventually led Eisler to break

<sup>1</sup> The following biographical narrative is largely based on information from Albrecht Betz in *Hanns Eisler Political Musician*.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Schoenberg’s 1941 lecture titled “Composing with Twelve-Tones,” which was later published in *Style and Idea* (1975).

<sup>3</sup> See “Composing with Twelve-Tones” in *Style and Idea* (1975), where Schoenberg lays out the practical and theoretical principles of the twelve-tone method and illustrates the concepts with examples from his own works. Important concepts of twelve-tone music that we see reflected in Eisler’s own works include comprehensibility, emancipation of dissonance, the historical necessity of the method, expansion of tonality, and the unifying effect of the method. For more information on Schoenberg and the twelve-tone method see Haimo, *Schoenberg’s Transformation of Musical Language*, (2006).

<sup>4</sup> See Betz, pp. 39-44 for a detailed look at the break between Schoenberg and Eisler.

away from Schoenberg in 1926 when he moved from Vienna to Berlin and became politically involved in the workers' movement through the agitation group *Das Rote Sprachrohr*.

Once Eisler began his involvement with the workers' movement, he moved away from using the twelve-tone method of Schoenberg. At this time, Eisler deemed twelve-tone music as too abstract and unintelligible to the masses. Eisler's political involvement led him to compose protest songs for the workers' movement. As such, Eisler found himself writing largely for amateur performers, and therefore the music had to be predominantly tonal and melodically simple. In 1933 when Eisler's music was deemed *entartete Musik* or degenerate music and banned by the Nazi Party, it became evident to Eisler that he could no longer stay in Germany. It was at this time that his fifteen-year exile began as well as his reengagement with twelve-tone music. Eisler first traveled to other European cities, working in Svendborg (Denmark), Paris, and London before coming to the United States in 1938 on a teaching contract at the New School for Social Research in New York before finally settling in Los Angeles, California in 1942.

It was during this period of exile between 1938 and 1948 that Eisler found himself among the numerous German intellectual and artistic émigrés in America. His colleagues included Brecht, Lang, Adorno, and his teacher Schoenberg. Eisler found employment in the Hollywood film industry as a composer for film scores and soundtracks. Understandably, as an exile and émigré, one of Eisler's initial concerns revolved around securing a stable income, which would evidently at times conflict with his own aesthetic, artistic, and political motivations. However, Eisler was able to negotiate this by subtly inserting some of his own innovations and aesthetic ideals into these scores. He is considered one of the first composers to utilize the twelve-tone method of row composition in a Hollywood film score for *Hangmen Also Die* (1943). It was during this time also that Eisler received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for a project on



Hollywood Film Music. Eisler partnered with philosopher and musicologist Theodor Adorno to complete this project. This project, often a scathing critique on the film music industry, resulted in the published report on the project titled *Composing for the Films* (1947), which was translated into German two years later and published under the title *Komposition für den Film* (1949). This work describes Eisler's theories on the role of film music, and how the 'new music' or contemporary compositional techniques could enhance the film medium. Eisler and Adorno argue that although advancements in film technology continued to rapidly increase, film music remained largely stuck in the past, namely the late romantic period. This period followed in the styles of Wagner, Strauss, Mahler and Brahms. For Eisler and Adorno, this inability to progress had prevented music from being a more autonomous and crucial element in film and therefore remained predictable and served a purely incidental role.

During his American exile, Eisler also partnered with Brecht for stage works and collections of Lieder, such as *Die Hollywood-Elegien* (1942) and *Gedichte im Exil* (1942-43), as well as his own works for chamber ensembles and orchestra, notably *Deutsche Sinfonie*, op. 50 (1935-39) and *Vierzehn Arten, den Regen zu beschreiben*, op. 70 (for the film *Regen*) (1945).<sup>5</sup> These independent works, collaborations, and Hollywood film scores, highlight the great contribution that Eisler made, not only to the German repertory but also to American culture of the time. It is therefore unfortunate that Hanns Eisler's extensive oeuvre has been largely forgotten, uncelebrated, and understudied, especially in North America.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For a complete list of Eisler's works compiled by David Blake see Betz, pp. 276-310.

<sup>6</sup> Notable exceptions include Blake, *Hanns Eisler- A Miscellany*; Culbert, "Introduction. Hanns Eisler (1898-1962): the Politically Engaged Composer," pp. 493-502; Gorbman, "Hanns Eisler in Hollywood," pp. 272-285; Dümling, "Eisler's Music for Resnais' 'Night and Fog' (1955): a Musical Counterpoint to the Cinematic Portrayal of Terror," pp. 575-584; Weber, "Eisler as Hollywood Film Composer, 1942-1948," pp. 561-566. Most of these sources from the mid to late 1990s focus on Eisler's time in Hollywood and his political motivations.

In recent years however, scholarship has become increasingly interested in Eisler's work and theories as America has moved past the long-lasting legacy of the 'second red scare,' which refers to the growing fear of communism between the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>7</sup> This has opened up Eisler's transcultural career to scholars on both sides of the Atlantic highlighting the contributions he made to modern music in both Europe and North America. No longer is Hanns Eisler known only for the infamous label of being one of the first artists to be forced out of the United States being blacklisted from Hollywood by the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) of the United States House of Representatives. Led by Herbert Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation,<sup>8</sup> HUAC was tasked at investigating alleged communist ties and activities of émigrés and to investigate many intellectuals in the creative field, including Eisler's long-time collaborative partner Bertolt Brecht. The extensive 686 page file on Eisler was released online under the Freedom of Information Act in 2000, and highlights Hoover and Nixon's dogged pursuit of Eisler, eventually leading to his deportation in 1948.<sup>9</sup> The interest in Eisler had much to do with a familial scandal that accused Hanns Eisler and his brother Gerhart Eisler of bringing communism to America in a series of published allegations made by the Eisler brothers' sister, Ruth Fischer.<sup>10</sup> However, enough time has now passed, to look more objectively at Eisler's work and political leanings and to appreciate the legacy that he has left for contemporary music in both America and Germany and to both the genres of film music and concert music.

<sup>7</sup> On the study of McCarthyism see Schrecker, pp. 197–208.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Nixon was a notable member of the committee tasked with looking into Eisler.

<sup>9</sup> Eisler's file can be found in the FBI Records Vault under the Freedom of Information/Privacy Act (FOIA) online at [vault.fbi.gov/Hanns%20Eisler](http://vault.fbi.gov/Hanns%20Eisler)

<sup>10</sup> See Betz, pp. 194–207 for a detailed report of the investigation into Eisler, the family scandal, and his extradition from the United States.

It is the period of Eisler's American exile that provides an area of research ripe for investigation with a fresh perspective. While scholars including Sally Bick, Pietro Cavallotti, Andrea and Phillip Bohlman, and most recently Heidi Hart, have begun this process, providing great insight, I aim to synthesize both Eisler's creative and political worlds in order to illuminate not only the composer but also the exile and the unique perspective that the exile experience had on Eisler's contribution to contemporary music. This thesis will explore the degree to which Hanns Eisler's production of twelve-tone music in the 1930s and 1940s was a reaction to or shaped by his experiences of exile and immigration. I seek to provide a more nuanced understanding that moves away from attempts to draw conclusions made from score analysis, which have been largely substantiated by and at times too heavily relying on biographical details.<sup>11</sup> I also seek to move beyond the simple conclusion that twelve-tone music mirrors the experience of exile through its rigorous and limiting form.<sup>12</sup> Utilizing Eisler's writings about music, politics, and his experience as an exile, and incorporating his theories regarding the relationship between music and the socio-political climate during this time, this project will examine and qualify previously made theses that the twelve-tone method of composition is the musical language of émigrés. What will be shown is that while Eisler's return to the twelve-tone

<sup>11</sup>See Scheding, pp. 125-128 as he addresses this issue as it pertains to exile studies and musicology.

<sup>12</sup>Schoenberg's premise for the twelve-tone method is presented in *Style and Idea*, 1975 and is described as, "a method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another," pp. 218. This means that each note of the chromatic scale (every note in conventional western harmonics) was given equal weight and importance. This was a radical departure from the hierarchical structure of traditional harmony, for example chord progressions, cadences, and a tonal centre. In the twelve-tone method, each of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale are arranged in a 'tone row'. This is the order that the notes will appear in a sequence. The tone row is then able to undergo various permeations such as inversion and retrograde in order to provide variation. However through analysis, the entire composition can be reduced to the original tone row.

method did coincide with his exile experience, his treatment and use of the method was second to how the music was being used, highlighting the important relationship between music and society.

## **Literature Review**

In recent years, Hanns Eisler has increasingly become a topic of interest for Germanists and musicologists alike, focusing on his political ideology, thoughts about modern music, his various professional and personal relationships, and the study and analysis of his compositional works. Relatively little attention has been dedicated to the study of the direct effect that Eisler's experience of exile had on his compositional techniques in modern music and how exile shaped his views on music's role in society and politics. One exception that has been instrumental in sparking the idea for this project is Pietro Cavallotti's article "The Twelve-Tone Method as the Musical Language of Émigrés" (2014). This article brings to light an area that begs much further explanation, especially when considering the work of Hanns Eisler. Cavallotti's article concentrates not only on Eisler but also the works of Ernst Krenek and Stefan Wolpe in order to support the thesis that the twelve-tone method and the genre of dodecaphonic music are emblematic of the exile or immigrant experience. Cavallotti makes an important point that although attributed to Schoenberg, dodecaphonic music was not only a German phenomenon, and he uses Italy as an example of how Schoenberg's method became the "language of emancipation, for a whole generation of composers active in the 1930s," using Melipiero and Dallapiccola as examples (220). In fact, it is important to note that the first International Congress of Dodecaphonic Music took place in Milan in 1949. Cavallotti uses the fact that the twelve-tone method was not limited to the German exile experience, to support his argument that

the twelve-tone method became a universal musical language for exiled composers, regardless of the country of origin. However, Cavallotti does focus on Wolpe, Krenek, and Eisler, who were German, for the bulk of the article. Regarding these three composers Cavallotti states that “the experience of Hanns Eisler, Stephan Wolpe, and Ernst Krenek are undoubtedly emblematic, and have a common denominator: exile afforded all these composers either initial contact or a more strict confrontation with the twelve-tone method.” He goes on to tie the fact that their music was given the label of degenerate and was banned for its modernity and association with Schoenberg as the reason that “these musicians came to attribute to the twelve-tone method a significance that involved a clearly political stance” (220). While Cavallotti endeavours to illuminate this thesis through the study of selected works by Eisler, Wolpe, and Krenek, the musical findings are rather dependant on drawing parallels with biographical information. While Cavallotti does note that Eisler abandoned the twelve-tone method during his political activities in Berlin, stating that he, “placed his art in the service of the class struggle” (221), Cavallotti seems to try and isolate Eisler’s return to the method as an anomaly, that was the direct result of the experience of exile and being ‘othered’ in a sense, relating to the aspects of the method that drove him to break away from Schoenberg, particularly how the complex nature of the form isolated it from the average listener. However, from his time in Berlin composing for the worker’s movement to his return to the twelve-tone method and beyond, Eisler continued to tie his work to the class struggle, hence Eisler’s careful attempt to make twelve-tone music as clear as possible to the listener and striving to make contemporary music relevant and intelligible to the masses. Cavallotti’s statements appear to indicate not so much that Eisler’s return to twelve-tone music is solely emblematic of his exile experience, but that it is rather a continuation of his political leanings stemming from the Worker’s Movement in conjunction with the maturation of his craft.

Other sources on Eisler's exile and exile studies more generally that are important for this project include Harmut Krones' *Hanns Eisler: Ein Komponist Ohne Heimat?* (2012), a collection of musicological essays discussing the fraught relationship that Eisler had with notions of *Heimat* or home before, during, and after his official exile. The common theme of Schoenberg's influence throughout Eisler's career is woven throughout the contributions and includes many references to personal accounts, letters, and archival materials. Four essays make up the portion of discussions regarding Eisler's film music in this anthology, and they are the most relevant for this project. The interview with stage director and professor Wolfgang Glück in particular, illuminates Eisler's dedication and commitment to the film music genre as experienced in Glück's personal conversation with Eisler in the 1950s<sup>13</sup>.

In *Music and Displacement: Diasporas, Mobilities, and Dislocations in Europe and Beyond* (2010), editors Florian Scheduling and Erik Levi compile essays by respected scholars in the fields of exile studies and musicology and explore the interaction between music and displacement both practically and theoretically. The book is comprised of three parts, each addressing an aspect of physical and musical displacement such as silence, acculturation, and theories. Chapter eight, "The Splinter in Your Eye: Uncomfortable Legacies and German Exile Studies," written by Florian Scheduling discusses displacement from a Western and Eastern German perspective as well as from an American perspective, discussing Schoenberg and Eisler, among others as examples of musical migration. Scheduling notes that the topic of displaced musicians and composers has received relatively little attention, especially when compared to the research focusing on literary exiles (126). While noting some of the earliest book-length studies of music and exile such as a 1980 study of Ernst Krenek's life and work in exile by Claudia

<sup>13</sup> See Faßhauer, pp. 343-364.

Maurer Zenck and Jürgen Schebera's *Hanns Eisler im USA-Exil* (1976), Scheduling warns that these early studies cannot truly be classified as *Exilforschung* or exile studies for they do not address the implications of the term or provide an analytic response. Scheduling describes that even more recent publications such as Heister, Zenck, and Petersen's *Musik im Exil* (1993) rely too heavily on a biographically centered approach (126). Scheduling prescribes that in order to successfully analyze displacement, its social, cultural, and historical context need to be the primary focus and that studies of exile should be discussed in an interdisciplinary manner (130). This has been significant when considering my own approach and desire to move away from drawing musical conclusions by relying too heavily on biographical material.<sup>14</sup>

Two distinct chapters of Eisler's biography, his time as a Hollywood film composer and his return to Germany in the DDR, have been of particular interest in recent scholarship. Sally Bick has studied the unique dichotomy of these two periods of Eisler's career in depth. Her 2003 article, "Political Ironies: Hanns Eisler in Hollywood and Behind the Iron Curtain," highlights the relationship that Eisler's music played in the vastly different settings of capitalist America and Communist East Germany. Bick focuses on the paradoxical nature of Eisler's self-borrowing in his compositions and how this reveals the contradictions of his personal and political

<sup>14</sup> See Scheduling, pp. 119-134. For musicological analyses of Eisler's *Reisesonate*, *Regen*, and *White Flood* see Bohlman and Scheduling, "Hanns Eisler on the Move: Tracing Mobility in the 'Reisesonate'," pp. 77-98; Heller, "The Reconstruction of Eisler's Film Music," pp. 541-559; Faßhauer, "Hanns Eisler's 'Chamber Symphony op. 69'," pp. 509-521. Regarding exile studies in general Brinkmann and Wolf, *Driven into Paradise*, (1999) follows the impact of exiled musicians, composers, and musicologists from 1933-1944. Especially relevant is Goehr, "Music and Musicians in Exile: The Romantic Legacy of a Double Life," pp. 66-91, which discussed the perplexing situations that many composers, including Eisler, found themselves in such as the need for employment that often resulted in working for Hollywood, while morally opposing the capitalistic mass culture that Hollywood represented. See also Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*, (1983).

experiences (“Political Ironies” 65). Bick also states that, “the paradox exposes music’s functional ability to mediate meaning through cultural encoding” (“Political Ironies” 66). Bick’s insight into this mediation of meaning during Eisler’s Hollywood years is crucial in understanding aspects of Eisler’s personal philosophy in music that will be apparent throughout this thesis and as Eisler’s own writings are consulted. In discussing Eisler’s American exile and employment in Hollywood, Bick notes the conflict of striving for artistic autonomy and the social concern or politicization of music as one of the main struggles of Eisler’s career (“Political Ironies” 66). Bick connects Eisler’s compositions for the workers’ movement as the foundation for his later involvement in the, “practical and critical nature of film,” as he was required to write for non-professional musicians, instigating Eisler to modify his style of composition (“Political Ironies” 67). Upon first coming to the USA, Eisler, like many other émigrés, was preoccupied with securing stable employment and recognized that film work would offer him the opportunity to sustain himself financially while allowing him to pursue his own artistic autonomy as a composer (Bick “Political Ironies” 69). During the earlier part of Eisler’s American exile, his political aspirations complemented the United States’ own sentiments against fascism when the country entered the War in 1941. However, after 1945, and as anti-communist tensions grew, it would become the grounds for his extradition from the United States and his return to Germany. Eisler’s choice to settle in East Germany, according to Bick, “reflected Eisler’s belief that he would be participating in the building of a new kind of socialist society, one that he had optimistically envisioned prior to the war” (“Political Ironies” 78).<sup>15</sup> The contradictions found in Eisler’s work and his philosophy on the social function of music, along with his early association with the Worker’s Movement to his eventual resettlement in East Germany as discussed in

<sup>15</sup> This idea is also supported by Betz, pp. 208-242.



“Political Ironies,” lay important groundwork in the study of Eisler’s period of exile and return to the twelve-tone method. In this sense it becomes feasible that Eisler’s return to his Schoenbergian roots is not so much the direct result of the exile experience as it is a result of continuous growth and artistic experimentation, that allowed Eisler to finally be able to merge his desire to compose for the ‘people’ in an easily intelligible way while maintaining the ideals of modern music, including the renouncement of the outdated and socially irrelevant aesthetics of romanticism.

In the article “A Double Life in Hollywood” (2010), Bick focuses on Eisler’s score for *Hangman Also Die* in order to discuss how Eisler’s ability to negotiate, often covertly, between the expectations of Hollywood and his own artistic ideals and political values represents a state of ‘doubleness’ that many exiles found themselves in (“Double Life” 91). The concept of ‘doubleness’ is found and expanded upon in Lydia Goehr’s article “Music and Musicians in Exile” in *Driven into Paradise* (1999). Eisler, like many exiles during this time struggled with the constant dichotomy between notions of home and notions of estrangement and Bick argues that, “this effect creates layers of tension and contradiction that polarized and problematized the existence of some émigré artists working in Hollywood” (“Double Life” 91). The ‘doubleness’ and the conflicting political environments that Eisler found himself in, are, according to Bick, represented in the score for *Hangman Also Die*. Bick highlights that Eisler’s strategy for the score was to leave a large portion of the film musically silent, reserving music for the politically important moments, while avoiding linking any specific musical themes to dramatic concepts and the crawl specifically employs twelve-tone row composition, becoming one of the first known instances of row composition in a Hollywood production (“Double Life” 93,107,113-114). The use of the twelve-tone method in the crawl is significant for a few reasons. Firstly, by

1943, the style and methods of twelve-tone composition were virtually unknown to the public and barely understood by a limited number of professional American composers, for example, Aaron Copeland. This therefore can be seen as one of the ‘covert’ ways that Eisler implemented his personal ideals into a contract work. Secondly, the twelve-tone method was, as Bick states, “a strategy that allowed Eisler a personal and private way to retain his cultural and musical identity as a modernist political composer” (“Double Life” 118). Lastly, this scene is significant in that it highlights a development in Eisler’s thoughts around the potential functionality of Schoenberg’s method according to Bick, “Eisler recognized the conflict between his training and his aesthetic commitment to Schoenberg’s musical techniques, on the one hand, and his goals as a politically engaged Marxist composer on the other.” Bick goes on to suggest that although Eisler had been highly critical of Schoenberg, he nevertheless understood the potential for twelve-tone music to be socially relevant, hence his return to the method in 1931 (“Double Life” 117). Bick’s article provides a useful insight into Eisler’s motivations in using row composition in the score for *Hangmen Also Die*. This indicates that it was not only the experience of exile that led Eisler to return to Schoenberg in order to reconnect with his identity and musically represent the feelings of isolation, but also a maturation and experimentation of techniques that allowed Eisler to employ Schoenberg’s method in a socially relevant manner.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Other sources consulted regarding Eisler’s years in Hollywood include Bohlman and Bohlman, “(Un)Covering Hanns Eisler’s Hollywood Songbook,” pp. 13-29; Gorbman, “Hanns Eisler in Hollywood,” pp. 272-285; Hart, *Arguing with Beauty* (2018), especially chapter 3: “Hölderlin in Hollywood,” pp. 64-107; Hufner “‘Composing for the Films’ (1947): Adorno, Eisler, and the Sociology of Music,” pp. 535-540; and Weber, “Eisler as a Hollywood Film Composer 1942-1948,” pp. 561-566. Regarding Hollywood film music more generally see Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, (1992), especially pp. 70-90; Stilwell and Powrie, *Composing for the Screen*, 2008; Monod, *Settling Scores*, 2016.

Perhaps one of the most prominent works on Eisler for the North American readership is Albrecht Betz's *Hanns Eisler, Political Musician* (1982), a translation of the original 1976 German edition, *Hanns Eisler: Musik einer Zeit, die sich eben bildet*. This comprehensive guide to Eisler's artistic career is divided into four crucial periods including his early years in Vienna under the instruction of Schoenberg, his political music for the German workers' movement composed while in Berlin, his fifteen years of exile (five of which were in Europe before settling in America), and his final decade and return to Germany. Betz's holistic view of Eisler's career provides insight into his shifting perspectives on the twelve-tone method as well as the growing inseparability of music and socio-political reality. While Betz describes the 1920s as the most important for Eisler's development, I argue that his American exile (1938-1948) was just as crucial in solidifying and merging Eisler's views on music and society and undoubtedly shaped his decision to re-settle in East Germany and greatly influenced his final decade as seen in his writings. David Culbert's 1998 article, "Hanns Eisler: The Politically Engaged Composer" primarily focuses on Eisler's career during American exile and provides a concise overview not only of the works that Eisler published during this time and the political climate that led to the HUAC investigation, but also his reception and legacy post extradition from the United States, including a discussion on the Eisler Symposium arranged by Albrecht Dümmling among others in California in 1998, with many contributors still leading the research on Eisler today.<sup>17</sup>

When discussing Eisler's philosophies on music and politics, and the role that both play in society, it is important to discuss collaboration. Two of Eisler's colleagues feature most prominently in his collaborations, Bertolt Brecht and Theodor W. Adorno. As the first chapter of

<sup>17</sup> Other biographical sources include Blake. *Hanns Eisler- A Miscellany* (1995) and Krones, *Hanns Eisler- Ein Komponist ohne Heimat?* (2012).

this thesis focuses on *Composing for the Films* (1947), a collaboration between Eisler and Adorno, Sally Bick's article, "The Politics of Collaboration: Composing for the Films and its Publication History" (2010) provides a valuable and nuanced discussion around the issues of authorship. Bick, through her consultation of research and personal letters between Eisler and Adorno, uncovers details about the process of their collaboration, revealing the false pretense that Adorno was primarily responsible for the book's contents. Indeed, when considering Eisler's earlier writings, as will be discussed throughout the thesis, it is evident that Eisler and Adorno were very much aligned even though Adorno removed his name from the first publication for fear of political scandal. Martin Hufner also supports the idea of a more equal collaboration between Eisler and Adorno in his article "Composing for the Films (1947): Adorno, Eisler and the Sociology of Music" (1998). While he does not address the question of authorship as explicitly as Bick, he treats both Eisler and Adorno equally in his discussion of *Composing for the Films* and notes that while Eisler and Adorno fought over authorship and the question of who made the largest contribution, the significance of this question is minor when analyzing the work.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For more on the Eisler and Adorno collaboration see Bick, pp. 7-39 and Stilwell, pp. 432-440. For Eisler's collaboration with Brecht see Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (2008), Gilbert, *Brecht's Striving for Reason*, and Papaeti, pp. 318-332.

## Methodology:

In the discussion and selection of texts, this thesis seeks a direct connection to exile and the twelve-tone method as well as texts that highlight the general relationship between music and socio-political reality. The analysis of the texts selected will focus on Eisler's creative and political worlds during his time of exile in order to illuminate the unique perspective that the exile experience had on Eisler's contribution to contemporary music, both practically and theoretically. The analysis also aims to discern the degree to which Hanns Eisler's return to the twelve-tone method was a reaction to his experiences of exile and immigration. This project does not seek to provide in-depth score analysis but will at times draw on the significant contributions in musicological scholarship as it relates to Eisler's experience of exile and his philosophies on modern music.<sup>19</sup> Primary sources include, *Composing for the Films* (1947), a collaboration between Eisler and Theodor W. Adorno. This publication is a critique of the Hollywood film music industry and provides ideas on how modern composition techniques could be the answer for bringing film music into line with other technological advancements in film. *Composing for the Films* also provides insight into the social and political functions that Eisler sought for the future of film music and modern music more generally. Eisler's collected writings about music and politics in *Hanns Eisler, Gesammelte Werke* (EGW), Volume III/I, *Musik und Politik Schriften* (1924-1947) and EGW, Volume III/II, *Musik und Politik Schriften* (1948-1962), as well as the English translations found in, *Hanns Eisler a Rebel in Music* (1978) edited by Manfred Grabs will provide insight into the composer's own thoughts on the practical and problematic implications of modern music and how these implications changed with the socio-

<sup>19</sup> See Bohlman and Scheduling, pp. 77-98; Bohlman and Bohlman, pp. 13-29; Hart, *Hanns Eisler's Art Songs: Arguing with Beauty* (2018); Spinner, pp. 2-9.

political climate that Eisler found himself in during his exile. The main texts selected for this thesis from Eisler's short essays, letters, and journal entries include, "A Musical Journey through America" ("Musikalische Reise durch America") (1935), where Eisler gives an account of his first impressions of America from his lecture and music tour, focusing on the socio-political situations of working class American people in numerous cities; "Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer" ("Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten") (1935), in which Eisler draws parallels between the crisis in music and the crisis in society and states that for music to remain relevant, composers must become socially and politically engaged; "The Crisis in Music" ("Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik") (1935), where Eisler identifies a lack of functionality beyond entertainment as the current crisis in music, and that functionality and accessibility will be the key to keeping modern music from obscurity; "Fantasia in G-Men" (1947); Eisler's written statement that he prepared for his House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) trial in which he distances himself politically and defends his art, cautioning against censorship and rising fascism. It is an important aspect of Eisler's exile experience and highlights his reasons for ultimately re-settling in East Germany after being extradited from the United States; "Basic Social Questions of Modern Music" ("Gesellschaftliche Grundfragen der modernen Musik") (1948), in which Eisler states that the working class proletariat will be the future public of modern music, overtaking the past monopoly from the bourgeoisie; and "Thoughts on Form and Content" ("Inhalt und Form") (1962), where Eisler discusses compositional form and the content of modern music and emphasizes that forms of use will take precedence over a consistent blueprint for a new compositional style.

While the texts discussed in this thesis represent only a small percentage of Eisler's complete writings, they have been carefully selected to ensure that an accurate representation of Eisler's philosophies on music and society can be made. As this thesis focuses on Eisler's American exile, texts discussing this time were naturally sought out, especially as they related to themes of the future of modern music and how contemporary composition techniques, such as the twelve-tone method, could be intelligible and useful to the masses. It is important to note that Eisler remained, overall, very consistent in his musical and socio-political philosophies, and it was therefore a goal when selecting the texts for this thesis to be able to show subtle evolutions of Eisler's theories and the maturation of his thoughts.

## **Organization of Chapters**

### **Chapter One: Eisler in Hollywood and *Composing for the Films***

This chapter examines Hanns Eisler's engagement with the twelve-tone method through film music.<sup>20</sup> His collaboration on this project with Adorno provides insight into the anti-capitalist sentiments Eisler and Adorno had towards Hollywood and how twelve-tone music could dismantle the 'narcotic' effects that current film music had on the audience response. The analysis of *Composing for Films* looks at how Eisler negotiated his need for financial security with his own artistic and political ideals and investigates what perspectives can be gained through engagement with Eisler's theoretical discussion of the film music industry. Together these aspects show how the anti-capitalist social and political functions that Eisler envisioned for

<sup>20</sup> I begin the thesis with a discussion of *Composing for the Films* (1947), and while this does not follow chronologically, I have selected it for the first chapter as it is one of the most prominent and important works by Eisler, making it a justifiable starting point.

twelve-tone music were incorporated into the epitome of capitalist mass culture that is Hollywood.

## **Chapter Two: Impressions of America and the Crisis in Music**

This chapter discusses the following essays: “A Musical Journey through America” (“Musikalische Reise durch America”) (1935), “Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer” (“Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten”) (1935), and “The Crisis in Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik”) (1935). These three texts speak to Eisler’s first impressions of the United States, before he settled there in 1938, as well as his comments on the social function and future of music. The texts are analyzed through three prominent themes: the critique of capitalism, the critique of new media resulting from capitalism, and how forms of use will shape the future of new music. The analysis provides a better understanding of how Eisler’s initial experience of the United States shaped his future use of the twelve-tone method and how exile may or may not have shifted his views on music’s role in contemporary society.

## **Chapter Three: Eisler’s Second Exile and the Future of Music**

This chapter continues the textual analysis of Eisler’s writings of music and politics highlighting the last year of his exile and deportation as well as a selection of texts that take a retrospective look at twelve-tone music. These texts include: “Fantasia in G-Men” (1947), “Basic Social Questions of Modern Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Grundfragen der modernen Musik”) (1948), and “Thoughts on Form and Content” (“Inhalt und Form”) (1962). The analysis of the selected texts focuses on three major influences that have shaped Eisler’s philosophy of modern music: the influence of America and his exile there, the influence of Marxism that began very early on in



Eisler's career, and the historical European influences both political and musicological. The analysis highlights the evolution in Eisler's philosophy, including focal points that matured from his earlier writings and became more concrete and explicit, such as his position as a socialist composer, the ability of twelve-tone music to represent the working class, and the legitimacy of film music.

## **Chapter One: Eisler in Hollywood and *Composing for the Films***

This chapter focuses on *Composing for the Films* (1947), which came out of a project on film music that Eisler was conducting for the New School of Social Research and was co-authored by Theodor W. Adorno. *Composing for the Films* takes the results of the Film Music Project and makes a theoretical analysis of how modern composition techniques, namely twelve-tone music, could dismantle the outdated clichés and ‘narcotic’ effects of Hollywood film music, thus proving superior. The analysis of the text will show how Eisler negotiated his need for financial security with his own artistic and political ideals as well as investigate what perspectives can be gained through the engagement of Eisler’s theoretical discussion of the film music industry. As it will be shown, *Composing for the Films* is an interesting case study highlighting how previous scholarship has used this work, or conversely, glossed over it to explain Eisler’s work with twelve-tone music in relation to his American exile. My own analysis will show that the question and importance of exile, when studying Eisler’s use of the twelve-tone method, is indistinguishable from the question of capitalism. The superior ability that Eisler believed modern music had in its use for film was as much of a response to American capitalism as it was to exile.

The concept for what would become *Composing for the Films* began when Eisler left New York for Los Angeles in 1942 in order to complete his Film Music Project that was funded through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Eisler sought to test the potentials of the role that modern music could play in the Hollywood film industry and to study how the gap between

the technical advancements in film and the lack of similar advancements in the music being composed for films could be bridged through modern composition techniques, namely twelve-tone music.<sup>21</sup> While the Film Music Project was the basis for *Composing for the Films*, Eisler partnered with the philosopher, music theorist, and fellow exile Theodor W. Adorno in order to complete the publication. At this time Adorno was working on The Princeton Radio Project, which began in 1940 and was also funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. The collaboration ultimately proved difficult for the two highly opinionated and strong-willed men, leading to quarrels surrounding authorship. Though questions of authorship cannot be fully answered and go beyond the scope of this thesis, recent scholarship, namely Sally Bick's article "The Politics of Collaboration" (2010), provides a nuanced investigation into the collaboration between Eisler and Adorno. Bick notes that previous scholarship has at times taken Adorno's claims of writing the majority of the book at face value and states:

The oft cited letter that Adorno wrote to his parents stating that he not only wrote but conceived ninety percent of the book has not been critically evaluated, thus overlooking Eisler's theoretical and practical expertise and his previously published work on the subject ("Politics" 142).

Bick goes on to discuss the bias in previous scholarship and notes that most Adorno scholars, even those who focus on Adorno's writings about music only deal with *Composing for the Films* in passing, if at all.<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, Bick notes that Eisler scholars tend to try and bridge the two

<sup>21</sup> The following narrative regarding the Film Music Project is largely based on Eisler's report on the Film Music Project written in 1942 and republished in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* in 1998, pp. 595-598.

<sup>22</sup> In "The Politics of Collaboration" (2010), Bick states, "Previous discussions of the subject tell us more about the scholars themselves than about the question of authorship. A symptom of this authorial problem is revealed, for example, in the published materials on Adorno and his work. Most Adorno scholars either do not treat *Composing for the Films* or mention the book simply in

authors, though still cannot resolve the question of how much each author contributed to the publication (“Politics” 146).<sup>23</sup> The collaborative issues between Eisler and Adorno led to numerous delays in the publication, and as Bick points out, the majority of these delays were due to Adorno’s desire to ensure that the English translation of their German manuscript maintained his tone and style (“Politics” 147). The ongoing delays and quarrels ultimately led to Adorno’s claim of being responsible for writing the majority of the book, while growing political tensions led to the eventual removal of Adorno’s name from the publication.

While the Film Music Project was intended to be more of a practical experiment rather than a theoretical one, as Eisler notes in the report, and as Hufner elaborates on in “Adorno, Eisler and the Sociology of Music” (1998), one has only to look at the final report to find that the musical and dramaturgical methods that Eisler laid out, play significant roles in *Composing for the Films*, and the theoretical analysis from the project is further expanded upon in the book. It is also important to note that although Adorno was himself a musician and competent composer, schooled in the methods of Schoenberg, he, as Bick notes, had never had experience composing film music (“Politics” 144). Moreover, both Eisler and Adorno shared similar views on the political and social functions of music, and as Hufner details, they point towards the problematic nature of Hollywood film music being created to invoke false emotional experiences in order to distract from the hold of capitalism, and therefore destroy the political and social consciousness of the masses (Hufner 535).

passing. Even Max Paddison, whose work specifically focuses on Adorno’s writings about music, devotes only a few pages to the contents of *Composing for the Films*. The few notable exceptions are Philip Rosen and Thomas Y. Levin, who discuss the book from the perspective of Adorno’s theories about culture, omitting Eisler from the theoretical equation” pp.145-46.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Hufner takes the approach of bridging the two authors in “Adorno, Eisler and the Sociology of Music” (1998) but does not explicitly address the question of authorship outside of stating that it has little relevance when analyzing the work, pp. 536.

Even though Eisler and Adorno collaborated on the manuscript that was completed in 1944, various versions of the book have appeared in both English and German with and without naming Adorno as co-author.<sup>24</sup> In May of 1947 Adorno officially withdrew his name from the book over growing anxiety regarding the US government's probe into Eisler's political affairs. Bick points to a postscript in the 1969 edition of *Composing for the Films* where Adorno states, "I did not seek out to become a martyr in an affair that still had nothing to do with me. In view of the scandal, I withdrew my name from the book" (Adorno, "Postscript" in *Composing for the Films* (1971), cited in Bick, "Politics" 151).<sup>25</sup> *Composing for the Films* did have a brief period of positive reviews but was unfortunately published at the beginning of the Cold War, which unsurprisingly damaged its reception. This timing also helps explain why it has only been in the last few decades that the book has resurfaced in the scholarship.

Eisler was particularly interested in following 'new music', in other words, any music that came after, or in the manner of Strauss,<sup>26</sup> in film making and in his report on the Film Music Project, we can see how he practically engaged in new methods of composition. For example, in the section of the report outlining the musical methods employed in each section of the project, Eisler lays out a study that progressively introduces modern composition techniques, beginning with American nursery tunes, to be used in two methods. The first study featured the use of

<sup>24</sup> For a complete list of published versions of *Composing for the Films* from the manuscript in 1944, to the most recent edition in 2006, see Bick, "Politics," pp. 155.

<sup>25</sup> The full quote is as follows: "I did not seek to become a martyr in an affair that still had nothing to do with me. In view of the scandal, I withdrew my name from the book. At that time, I was determined to return to Europe, but feared I might have difficulties in doing so. Hanns Eisler fully understood". This quote is from Adorno's postscript in *Composing for the Films* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), pp. 167, translated from Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Komposition für den Film* (Munich: Rogner and Bernhard, 1969), cited in Bick, "Politics," pp. 151, 160.

<sup>26</sup> Eisler states: "Since Strauss, all really modern music has been driven into the esoteric" pp. 57.

variation form, a technique where musical material is repeated in an altered form, either through melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic changes. Eisler does not state here that the twelve-tone method will be utilized but does claim that this is the first instance of variation form being introduced to film music. The second treatment of the nursery tunes includes arrangements and modifications that were adapted to “specific situations and actions of the film.” Eisler states that, “here again definite musical forms, such as the canon, the rondo, and smaller lied-forms were used” and that, “although the basic tunes were kept intact, they were transformed by their contrapunctal<sup>27</sup> treatment and harmonization into modern musical language” (“Final Report” 596). This second stage begins the introduction of modern techniques but does not yet include the mention of twelve-tone music either. It is in the subsequent sections of the experiment where Eisler states:

The most advanced musical material (rigid 12-tone technique), applied to large musical forms, such as sonata, scherzo, symphonic etudes, choral variations, inventions. Here, for the first time, the most modern musical elements of sound, harmony, melody, contrapunct, and formal treatment were tried out for films (“Final Report” 596).

Eisler then continues to use the twelve-tone technique but experiments with instrumentation, opting for a small chamber quintet, and also loses traditional forms, developing the music, “entirely out of rhythm and structure of the picture.” The final part was as Eisler describes, “an experiment in ‘improvisatory’, entirely free musical style for moving, pictures, set for large orchestra” (“Final Report” 596). Regarding the dramaturgical methods of the study Eisler highlighted three aspects of the relation between music and picture that would be investigated. The first experiment was, unsurprisingly, intended to have the music illustrate exactly what was

<sup>27</sup> It appears here that Eisler combined the English *counterpoint* and German *Kontrapunkt*. The error is left as it appeared in the original quote.

happening on screen or following the psychological mood of the scene. The second experiment sets the music against the picture and as Eisler stated, “the music should force, as it were, the spectator to look at the picture in the right way, to understand the meaning of the picture.” The final experiment combines both of the first two experiments so that the music may as Eisler hypothesizes, “simultaneously accompany and interpret the scene” (“Final Report” 597) He provides the following example:

The music describes the rhythm of monotonous yet quick rain whereas the harmonization and contrapunct simultaneously express the sadness and melancholy which is engendered by the motion of the rain (“Final Report” 597).<sup>28</sup>

In the brief discussion of theoretical analysis in the report, Eisler notes that the analysis of the following topics would be included in the subsequent publication:

1. The standard of present-day film music and the problems it presents to the responsible modern composer.
2. The prejudices of the ‘commercial’ music in pictures and the bad musical manners deriving from this prejudice.
3. Advanced autonomous music and the problem of its application to the pictures.
4. Musical dramaturgies in moving pictures.
5. The problem of musical form and their relations to the formal structure of the picture.
6. Instrumentation, sound effects and ‘neutralization’
7. Some technical aspects, such as synchronization, mixing, and cutting (“Final Report” 597).

When *Composing for the Films* was published in 1947, certain changes to the proposed sections of the text were made, but much of Eisler’s content from the Film Music Project is incorporated into the book.

<sup>28</sup> Here Eisler is referring to *14 Arten den Regen zu beschreiben* (14 Ways To Describe The Rain), op. 70 (1941), which was set to the 1929 documentary *Rain* by director Joris Ivens.

*Composing for the Films* (1947) is divided into seven chapters as follows:

1. Prejudices and Bad Habits
2. Function and Dramaturgy
3. The New Musical Resources
4. Sociological Aspects
5. Elements of Aesthetics
6. The Composer and the Movie-Making Process
7. Suggestions and Conclusions (“Composing” 1951)<sup>29</sup>

An appendix to *Composing for the Films* includes the *Report of the Film Music Project*, containing Eisler’s concluding remarks on the project and introductory plans for the subsequent publication, as well as the score for *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain* Op. 70. Much of the material that Eisler initially mentions in the report on the project appears in chapters one to three and six of *Composing for the Films*. Chapters four and five on the sociological aspects and aesthetics of film music are notable additions and are understandable when considering how the original practical material from the film music project was expanded into a more theoretical realm in the subsequent publication.

The brief summary of Eisler’s report on the project above is essential in order to understand holistically the theoretical analysis that was made after the study. In Eisler’s own words, *Composing for the Films* is, “an account of theoretical and practical experiences with cinema music” and, “is an outcome of the Film Music Project of the New School of Social Research” (“Composing” v).<sup>30</sup> Eisler credits his several years in Hollywood in being able to expand the book by, “considering the problems of music within the practical setup of the motion-picture industry” (“Composing” v). In *Composing for the Films* Eisler also provides insight into

<sup>29</sup> The chapter layout of the 1951 edition is the same as the 1947 edition.

<sup>30</sup> Introduction to *Composing for the Films* (1951).



the social and political functions that he sought for the future of film music and modern music more generally.

When discussing Eisler's years in Hollywood in the context of his view on the twelve-tone method, there are two aspects to consider. The exile experience necessitated the need to find stable employment and income. As such, many in the performing arts found themselves in Hollywood, working in one way or another in the film industry. Firstly, how did Eisler negotiate this need for security with his own artistic and political ideals? Secondly, what perspectives can be gained through engagement with Eisler's theoretical discussion of the film music industry, namely *Composing for the Films*? Together these aspects concern the perplexing notion of how the anti-capitalist social and political functions that Eisler envisioned for twelve-tone music were incorporated into the epitome of capitalist mass culture that is Hollywood. Analyzing *Composing for the Films* can shed light on what Eisler says about this paradox and whether the use of the twelve-tone method is indicative of the 'outsider' status that Eisler had in Hollywood. As it will be shown, Eisler was able to covertly implement twelve-tone technique, take a political stand against fascism, and meet the commercial demands of Hollywood when composing the music for *Hangmen Also Die* (1943). Also, in part, the twelve-tone method could not help but be indicative of Eisler's 'outsider' status as it was such a new and foreign concept in North America that is was virtually unknown outside of a few highly specialized composers.

Existing scholarship helps to answer this question of Eisler's use of the twelve-tone method and the exile experience in two ways: Firstly, in his 2014 article, "The Twelve-Tone Method as the Musical Language of Émigrés," Pietro Cavallotti ties the structure and rigidity of the twelve-tone form to the exile/immigrant experience: "Schoenberg's method can stand as a metaphor for the immigrant's condition: constriction, rigor, even a certain limitation of means

and material on one hand, combined with a predisposition to embrace new horizons and discover new territory on the other” (221). Cavallotti’s approach points to a direct mirroring of the exile experience in Eisler’s use of the twelve-tone method, using his personal and professional break from Schoenberg and twelve-tone music in 1926 and subsequent return to it during his years of exile as being an artistic response to this experience. Cavallotti also saw Eisler’s return to twelve-tone music being as much of a political statement as it was personal artistic expression. Indeed, looking back to the time just before Eisler’s exile, it is evident that twelve-tone music was already taking on a political stance when it was deemed as degenerate by the National Socialists and Cavallotti sees Schoenberg’s exile as being the catalyst for other composers’ adoption of the twelve-tone method (220).

Conversely Sally Bick’s 2010 article, “A Double Life in Hollywood” points to a state of ‘doubleness’ that many exiles found themselves in as they navigated Hollywood and negotiated their own artistic ideals and political values. Rather than seeing the exile experience mirrored in the twelve-tone form Bick states that, “this conflict [of doubleness] engenders a perceptual dichotomy, that of the artist’s notion of ‘home’, whether psychological or socio-political and of ‘estrangement’. The effect creates layers of tension and contradiction that polarized and problematized the existence of some émigré artists working in Hollywood” (“Double Life” 91). Bick takes the approach of seeing a complex negotiation of the abovementioned aspects of the exile experience and concludes that the twelve-tone method became a way for Eisler to maintain a connection to his cultural and musical identity as a modernist political composer (Double Life” 118). Eisler was among the first to employ twelve-tone techniques in Hollywood. In the article “Hanns Eisler in Hollywood and Behind the Iron Curtain” (2003), Sally Bick discusses how Eisler believed twelve-tone music and other modern techniques, “provided one of the most vivid

means of contemporary expression”. Bick interprets Eisler’s explanation of the new musical resources in *Composing for the Films* as, “a reflection of modern capitalist society, interpreting its [the music’s] strident, harsh, and objective approach as a response to the surrounding chaos and ugliness he perceived within the world around him” (Bick, “Eisler in Hollywood” 73). Indeed, when Eisler discussed Schoenberg<sup>31</sup> in a 1935 essay titled, “On Schoenberg” (“Über Schönberg”) he said,

To the uninitiated listener Schoenberg’s music does not sound beautiful because it mirrors the capitalist world and it is without embellishment and because out of his work the face of capitalism stares directly at us. (Schönbergs Musik ist nicht schön anzuhören für naive Zuhörer, denn er zeigt den Kapitalismus genau wieder, ohne die kapitalistische Welt zu beschönigen, und aus seinen Werken schaut uns wirklich das Gesicht des modernen Kapitalismus entgegen.) (Eisler, “Rebel” 75; “EGW III/I” 272).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The anglicized spelling of ‘Schoenberg’ has been used when writing in English to remain consistent throughout the paper. Eisler uses the German spelling of ‘Schönberg’ in this essay in both the German and English translation.

<sup>32</sup> The full quote is as follows: “To the uninitiated listener Schoenberg’s music does not sound beautiful because it mirrors the capitalist world as it is without embellishment and because out of his work the face of capitalism stares directly at us. Due to his genius and complete mastery of technique, this face, revealed so starkly, frightens many. Schoenberg, however, has performed a tremendous historical service. When his music is heard in the concert halls of the bourgeoisie they are no longer charming and agreeable centres for pleasure where one is moved by one’s own beauty but places where one is forced to think about the chaos and ugliness of the world or else turn one’s face away.” (“Schönbergs Musik ist nicht schön anzuhören für naive Zuhörer, denn er zeigt den Kapitalismus genau wieder, ohne die kapitalistische Welt zu beschönigen, und aus seinen Werken schaut uns wirklich das Gesicht des modernen Kapitalismus entgegen. Da er ein Genie und ein vollendeter Techniker ist, schaut es uns sehr klar entgegen, und viele Leute erschrecken, aber er hat das riesige historische Verdienst, daß die Konzertsäle der Bourgeoisie, wenn man seine Musik hört, kein mehr so lieblicher, angenehmer Aufenthaltsort sind, wo man gerührt über die Verworrenheit und Häßlichkeit der Welt nachzudenken, oder sie abzulehnen.”) See Eisler, “Rebel” pp. 75 and “EGW III/I” pp. 272.

This critique of capitalism, a common theme throughout *Composing for the Films* along with Eisler's known Marxist views, solidified his 'outsider' status in Hollywood and the United States in general and while the book was initially and briefly well received the Cold War sent it into obscurity.

Chapter three, "New Musical Resources," of *Composing for the Films*, is particularly useful concerning the twelve-tone method and the exile experience. In it, Eisler discusses the techniques in composition for autonomous music that were developed in the first few decades of the twentieth century- techniques that are indicative of the works of Schoenberg, Bartok, and Stravinsky. Eisler argues that these resources have a superior ability to convey emotion in a complete and accurate manner that had been previously unachievable. In contrast to many ideas surrounding the new music that focused predominantly on the audible dissonances of atonality, Eisler states that,

What is all-important in their [Schoenberg, Bartok, and Stravinsky] music is not the increased number of dissonances, but the dissolution of the conventionalized music idiom. In truly valid new music, everything is the direct result of the concrete requirement of structure, rather than a tonal system or any ready-made pattern ("Composing" 32-33).

What Eisler refers to here is how the new compositional structure frees the music from concrete forms, like the sonata or minuet, both structurally and tonally, allowing the music to conform to any situation. It is this ability that Eisler sees as being essential for music in meeting the requirements of film. Eisler's reason for his prominent focus on the structure and principles of musical construction was that it left no room for clichés and superficial embellishments of current film music, thus making the new music 'objective' ("Composing" 33). Eisler wanted to avoid prefabricated emotionalism and sought for the music to be subordinate to the dramatic task

at hand and believed that traditional musical resources could be used in a meaningful way only if they were alienated or distanced, commenting on the scene rather than telling the audience what to feel. Eisler also believed that traditional resources could not be used to express that which is unfamiliar or unexplored. By contrast, he states that, “the new musical resources can explore fields inaccessible to traditional resources because these latter present themselves as something that has always been known” (“Composing” 37). The Second World War and its aftermath left a cultural world that could not be, for Eisler and many exiles, represented by traditional resources. Themes of fear, horror, ironic detachment and emptiness, as well as more positive themes of triumph, love and tenderness had taken on new meaning, new extremes, especially when expressed on the big screen. Regarding this Eisler states, “the slight dissonances allowed in traditional music are unable to achieve what the cinema requires” (“Composing” 37). The slight dissonances of traditional music were also unable to reflect the socio-political reality that Eisler tried to navigate as an exile in Hollywood.

In the chapter: “New Musical Resources” especially, but also coming up throughout the book, Eisler often references the emancipating and liberating aspects of twelve-tone music. Phrases such as, “emancipation of motive and theme,” “freeing of individual musical events,” “the emancipation of harmony,” the “liberation of Harmony,” and the “conquest of polyphonic freedom” dominate the chapter, and indeed it is not a stretch to connect these to the exile experience, for example, the desire of an exile to be emancipated from their current situation, or freed from persecution. In reviewing the literature, Pietro Cavallotti focuses on the limitations and restrictions of the form and makes the following conclusion:

Thus, rigor and limitation of the material on one hand and exploration of new technical and expressive horizons on the other, are recurrent features in the dodecaphonic

production of composers who underwent similar biographical experiences and were ultimately forced into exile and characterize the reception of Schoenberg's method (232). However, it is evident when looking at Eisler's own words of liberation and emancipation, there appears to be a more hopeful desire that Eisler saw in the potentials of these new musical resources not only for those forced to create a new life for themselves but also in his hopes for the film industry. Sally Bick believes that the potentials that Eisler saw in the new musical resources, namely twelve-tone music, stemmed from Eisler's determination and states that, "twelve-tone music should and could reflect practical life, provide social meaning, become democratized and directed towards a greater social base and mass public" ("Political Ironies" 67). Bick illuminates the complex negotiation of Eisler's artistic and political ideals as well as his sense of home and cultural identity within the conventions of the environment of capitalist Hollywood and touches on the social potential that Eisler saw in new music. Bick however does not speak directly to Eisler's own statements about the emancipatory and liberating aspects of the twelve-tone method. This I believe was an important point for Eisler, connecting his own experience of exile to his methods of composition

Seeing this potential, Eisler highlights how it can be used practically to represent an 'invisible community' and discusses the music that he composed for the closing scene of Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die* (1943) in the second chapter: "Function and Dramaturgy." The score for *Hangmen Also Die* is important not only as one of the first instances of twelve-tone row composition being used in a Hollywood score,<sup>33</sup> but also as Eisler was simultaneously working

<sup>33</sup> Particularly innovative was the music that Eisler composed for the beginning crawl of the film, which dramatically shifted to twelve-tone row composition from the initial introductory music. The next case of twelve-tone music in a Hollywood score was not until 1955 in Leonard Rosenman's score for *Cobweb*. For an in-depth analysis of Eisler's music for the crawl and establishing shots, see Bick, "Double Life" pp. 112-120.

on the score while writing *Composing for the Films*. The film is also emblematic of the brief era of Hollywood films that were produced after 1941 when America entered the war. These films, commercial productions to support the war effort, were a direct critique and response to Germany's role in the Second World War and were particularly meaningful for the exile community in Hollywood, who desired to work on films related to their own stories and experiences.<sup>34</sup> *Hangmen Also Die* is loosely based on events that occurred during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, specifically the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi Reich Protector of German-occupied Prague. In the closing scene, Gestapo Chief Kurt Daluege reads the official report on the shooting of the suspected assassin of Heydrich. The Gestapo is aware that the person in question is not the murderer but a Czech agent who has been framed but nevertheless Daluege signs off on the report. The scene is quiet and subdued but Eisler scores it for orchestra and chorus performing an up-tempo march. About this closing scene Eisler states that, "here again music acts as the representative of the collectivity: not the repressive collectivity drunk with its own power, but the oppressed invisible one, which does not figure in the scene." The oppressed and invisible ones in this scene are Czech hostages who were murdered by the Nazis--those who did not manage to survive the resistance. Eisler continues saying that, "the music expresses this idea paradoxically by its dramatic distance from the scene. It's dramatic function here is the sensuous suggestion of something un-sensuous: illegality." The scene closes with a long shot of the city of Prague, that demonstrates as Eisler states, "the real hero of the picture, the Czech people" ("Composing" 25). While not the entirety of the score for *Hangmen Also Die* was strict twelve-tone row composition, including the abovementioned scene, we see in this example Eisler's contemporary approach to film scoring which features dramatic

<sup>34</sup> See Bick, "Political Ironies" pp. 70.

distancing in order to convey the complexity of the scene. Elsewhere in the film the score utilizes music to emphasize only the most politically important moments and themes of the film. In the article “Political Ironies” (2003), Sally Bick discusses this score and its departure from the conventions typical of Hollywood by avoiding “continuous or lengthy passages of underscoring” and she states that, “instead, music is employed judiciously, with only select moments that primarily underscore strategic political ideas within the film’s image and narrative” (“Political Ironies” 73). Bick determines this to be the key to understanding Eisler’s methods in politicizing the music. It was through these strategies that Eisler was able to impart his theories of the social functions of new music into the film medium, and in the case of *Hangmen also Die*, criticized fascism and gave a voice to the oppressed, all while being able to adhere to the confines of Hollywood, even securing for himself an Academy Award nomination. In *Composing for the Films*, it is evident that Eisler was highly critical of the industry and yet at the same time Hollywood provided the means for him to establish a new life and career for himself, at least until his expulsion from the United States in 1948. While earlier parts of the chapter have shown some of the remedies Eisler sought to improve the industry, and how his experience of being an exile gave him a unique perspective, I will illustrate in the next section how Eisler negotiated his need for stable employment and financial security with his own artistic and political ideals.

Current and recent scholarship addresses the question regarding Eisler’s perplexing situation with various focuses. It is stated that Eisler’s political agenda had to take a back seat during his Hollywood career, with only covert instances that do not seem apparent within the larger framework of his scores (“Political Ironies” 73). It is also claimed that Eisler’s purely commercial projects seem to contradict much of what Eisler criticized in *Composing for the Films* (Gorbman, 283). Still others leave out Eisler’s Hollywood scores entirely. In “The Twelve-



Tone Method as the Musical Language of Émigrés,” Pietro Cavallotti, for instance, fails to mention or discuss Eisler’s time in Hollywood and his composition of film scores. This time was a significant part of Eisler’s exile experience and the works that he composed for film were a large part of his oeuvre. About Eisler’s return to the method during exile Cavallotti states that, “having renounced the overt political stance that characterized his earlier music, Eisler appears to have turned again to the twelve-tone method for a new compositional rationale without forgoing the imperative of a clear, linear communicability” (224). While this statement could be questioned even if considering Eisler’s autonomous concert and chamber music alone, the condition of clear communicability, being in itself a political stance that separated Eisler from the elitist and bourgeois nature that he saw in Schoenberg’s treatment of the form, it is clearly not true for Eisler’s film scores. While the film scores are perhaps not ‘overtly’ political, they were certainly no less (inherently) political. What seems more likely is that the covert nature of Eisler’s implementations of politics into his film scores stemmed from the necessity of finding secure employment and income that forced those who like Eisler, found themselves in Hollywood, to carefully negotiate their own ideals with that of the industry.

This argument appears in Sally Bick’s article “A Double Life in Hollywood” (2010) and using the example of the score for *Hangmen Also Die*, Bick discusses the political and aesthetic ideals that reflected Eisler’s, and in the case of the film, Brecht’s Marxist outlooks and how these were considered unacceptable throughout mainstream Hollywood. Bick endeavours to illuminate how Eisler’s political ideals were covertly implemented into the larger framework of the score. Bick states:

As an émigré and socialist now living in the United States, much of Eisler’s political activism had to be largely subdued. And although Eisler was dedicated to his Marxist

ideals, he nevertheless recognized that his activism had to take on a more indirect and covert form (“Double Life” 70).

For Eisler, this created a personal and creative dilemma. The highly commercialized environment of Hollywood and the large studios that controlled it were for the most part not interested in films that addressed the topic of class struggle and films that were overtly political were often censored in accordance with the Hays Production Code.<sup>35</sup> Regarding Eisler’s predicament Bick notes that, “such concealed gestures provide us with strong symbolic and rhetorical signs that capture the complications inherent in the double life of an exiled artist who had to function between two political and cultural realms” (“Double Life” 92) . While Eisler was able to challenge the norms of Hollywood, he nevertheless at times sharply contradicts himself by falling into the very same methods that he criticized so polemically in *Composing for the Films*.

In “Hanns Eisler in Hollywood” (1995), Claudia Gorbman takes the position that Eisler’s reasoning for moving away from twelve-tone music when he became politically involved in Berlin in 1925 was due to the cultural struggle that was embodied in the workers movement; for Eisler, “music as a cultural product must be involved in cultural struggle” (273). The same reasoning for moving away from the twelve-tone method could also affirm Eisler’s return to it during his period of exile, witnessed in the cultural struggle against fascism and the cultural struggle of being othered. Gorbman highlights one of Eisler’s solutions to the alienating

<sup>35</sup> The motion picture production code was produced in 1930 as a response to the recent technical advancements in sound which created the ability for much more dramatic material to be depicted on stage. The code regulated everything from violence and criminal activity to sexuality and anything deemed obscene related to comedy. See “Motion Picture Production Code; MPPC.” *A/V A to Z: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Media, Entertainment and Other Audiovisual Terms* (2014).

conditions of Hollywood stating that, “for the most part he managed to get hired for film projects which, while never radical, held some sort of political or aesthetic interest” (275). Eisler was also one of the few composers who orchestrated his own scores, allowing him to maintain control over the instrumentation and therefore the sound aesthetic of the score. Regarding the application and principles of montage, Gorbman writes, “drawing a formal analogy between the textual body and the social body, claiming that the text’s illusion of coherence reinforces society’s illusion of its own coherence, Eisler demands a cinema that makes palpable the divergence of sound and image” (279). Gorbman draws on the following quote from Eisler in *Composing for the Films*:

The alienation of the media from each other reflects a society alienated from itself, men whose functions are severed from each other, even within the individual. Therefore, the aesthetic divergence of the media is potentially a legitimate means of expression, not merely a regrettable deficiency that has to be concealed as well as possible (Eisler, “Composing” 74, cited in Gorbman 279).

In addressing the main contradiction in Eisler’s Hollywood career, which Gorbman identifies as “the contradiction between what he considered aesthetically and politically necessary and what was feasible given the limitations of the system” (284), she gives the example of Eisler’s score for *The Spanish Main* (1945), arguably Eisler’s most commercial endeavour. The film, a Technicolor swashbuckling adventure and romance from RKO Radio Pictures, chronicles the exploits of a Dutch sea captain turned pirate who captures a Spanish Contessa arranged to marry the main antagonist, a corrupt governor. The captured Contessa offers to marry the captain if he will spare her escort and he agrees. The two eventually fall in love and set out to defeat the governor along with a slew of pirates. The score appears to contain everything that Eisler abhorred in film and film music and criticizes highly in *Composing for the Films*. Gorbman notes

that the score contains recognizable Eisler tonalities and orchestration but that they are utilized in the most conventional of ways, opening with a shipwreck during a storm that features menacing low minor chords in the brass section, while high violins mimic the tempestuous winds (282). This is an example of what Eisler describes as “musical Mickey Mousing”<sup>36</sup> and as Gorbman states, “the score contains so much musical illustration, in fact, that one begins to wonder if Eisler wasn’t overdoing it just to amuse himself” (283). Indeed, Eisler does suggest that this level of exaggeration can be used as an act of rebellion against a bad picture stating that, “it is true that occasionally skilfully composed music can rebel and disavow the picture that degrades it, either by ruthless opposition or by revealing exaggeration” (“Composing” 117). However, as Eisler and Gorbman point out, these attempts would not be recognized by the viewing public and could be edited out by the industry agencies, should they find the score to be over exaggerated (Eisler, “Composing” 117; Gorbman, 283).

In chapter four: “Sociological Aspects,” in *Composing for the Films*, Eisler discusses the negotiation between artistic ideals and the social character of musicians in an era of mass culture. About film music Eisler states, “motion picture music, however, suffers from a particular handicap: from the very beginning it has been regarded as an auxiliary art not of first rank importance” (Eisler, “Composing” 46). Eisler ties the above problem to the greater social stigma of musical performance being a service for those that can pay, saying that, “the musician, like the

<sup>36</sup> According to Peter Wegele in *Max Steiner: Composing, Casablanca, and the Golden Age of Film Music* (2014), “The term *Mickey Mousing* refers to the exact segmentation of the music analogue to the picture. This method was first seen in *Steamboat Willie* (1928), the first Mickey Mouse movie by Walt Disney” <sup>37</sup>. Hanns Eisler describes this concept in a 1958 essay titled, “On Stupidity in Music” in *Hanns Eisler A Rebel in Music* (1978) and states, “If a dog is mentioned then the orchestra barks, if a bird is mentioned then the orchestra cheeps, if death is mentioned then the gentlemen of the trombones have to exert themselves, if it is love then there are divided high violins in E major, and at the triumph the trusty percussion also joins in. It is unbearable!” pp. 192.

actor, has been regarded as closely akin to the lackey, the jester, or the prostitute” (“Composing” 46). Eisler believed that these negative and consumerist attitudes have in some way shaped the social character of musicians. Indeed, musicians throughout history, including the early days of Hollywood, were already on the fringes of society, and the fact that Eisler, among others, was also exiled from his home country could only compound this feeling of otherness and displacement. Eisler describes this as the “taint of social outcasts”, comparing the musician throughout the chapter to the stereotypical “gypsy”<sup>37</sup> another figure who is marginalized and without a homeland (“Composing” 47). The common experience of feeling as an outcast, according to Eisler, was the historical and contemporary catalyst that caused musicians to have, “the mania to please, even at the price of self-humiliation, manifested in a thousand ways that range from over-elegant dress to zealous pandering to what the audience wants” (“Composing” 48). This desire to please and pandering to the audience is one of the main sociological reasons that Eisler states for the lack of evolution in film music (“Composing” 49). Another reason Eisler provides for this stalemate of progress or musical ingenuity is the ‘musical administration’ aspect of the film industry. This is especially true in the case of Hollywood and Eisler laments that, “since its streamlining, cinema music has become a helpless victim of culture without becoming one whit more cultured than it was before it attained respectability” and that the “subjection [of film music] to administrative control is responsible for the stagnation of motion-picture music” (“Composing” 54). As such, this focus on marketability left no room for experimentation or risks when it came to the composer’s role in creating music for film and essentially resorted film music to advertisement. Eisler uses the figure of the “gypsy” again as an embodiment of the most

<sup>37</sup> Eisler uses the image and name “gypsy” in a stereotypical sense that does not acknowledge the diverse and nuanced culture of the Roma people.

historically sought-after characteristics of musical reproduction or performance: spontaneity, sensuality, and as Eisler states, “an aspect of vagrancy opposed to settled orderliness” (“Composing” 47), all of which are reflected in Eisler’s strikingly stereotypical and uncritical image of the gypsy. Eisler states that “the historical processes that can be perceived in cinema music are only reflections of the decay of middle-class cultural goods into commodities for the amusement market” (“Composing” 49). This decay marks Eisler’s reason for the lack of evolution of film music and that it has changed its social purpose. Eisler points to the economic power behind motion picture music to “mask the monotony of serial productions and to enhance advertising appeal, thus becoming one of the departments of cultural industry” (“Composing” 53). Eisler notes the industry’s failure in securing important European composers such as Schoenberg and Stravinsky to compose for films and blames the numerous concessions that artists were required to make in the industry as the reason for this, stating that “no serious composer writes for film for any other than money reasons” (“Composing” 55). In order to provide evidence for this statement Eisler points to clauses in typical Hollywood contracts of the time including the fact that all materials composed would become the property of the corporation and that the corporation had the right to use, adapt, or change any music that the composer submitted. The corporation also had the right to combine the works of multiple composers, essentially cutting and pasting as they saw fit (“Composing” 56). The chapter, “Sociological Aspects,” is a scathing critique of film music’s current place and subjugation to ‘mass culture’ where the music is devoid of any meaningful substance and the artist is prevented from deviating from the set standard of what is marketable and well received. As a solution to the dire and restrictive nature of the industry, Eisler proposes the following: “the composer working under duress should rather try to impose as much novel music as possible, contrary to the prevailing

practice, in the hope, however feeble, that he will thus help to improve the standards of the whole industry” (“Composing” 56). When considering the score for *Hangmen Also Die* it is apparent that Eisler was trying to accomplish just that. The use of dramatic distancing, the instances of twelve-tone row composition, selective underscoring, and brief tonal segments that were freed from symmetry and repetition, were all ways that Eisler provided contrast and innovation to current practices.<sup>38</sup> However, while the score for *The Spanish Main*, seems to go against everything that Eisler prescribes in *Composing for the Films*, and indeed was a purely commercial venture for Eisler, he was still able to rebel through exaggeration of musical imagery.

Taking into consideration the primary and secondary literature discussed in the previous sections, a few interesting correlations can be made regarding the question of how Eisler negotiated his need for stable employment in a new and unfamiliar country, with his own artistic and political ideals. While Eisler’s creative and intellectual contacts were able to not only get his foot in the door of the industry, but also granted Eisler greater freedom and control over his musical scores for Hollywood films than some composers, he nevertheless had to make significant concessions to fit in with industry standards. These early forays into Hollywood gave Eisler the first-hand experiences that helped formulate his criticisms and his proposed solutions that were implemented into *Composing for the Films*. The scores for the two films that were highlighted, *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Spanish Main* provide concrete examples of the dilemma marking Eisler’s Hollywood career and American exile and the ways in which he was able to either implement his modernist techniques with covert political statements, in the case of

<sup>38</sup> For more detailed examples analyzing segments of Eisler’s score for *Hangmen Also Die* see Bick, “Double Life,” pp. 90–143.

*Hangmen Also Die*, or concede to the extreme as he did in *The Spanish Main*. Should the score for *The Spanish Main* be seen as a failure or as Eisler selling himself out? Is this score evidence that the ideology in *Composing for the Films* was impractical and unfeasible to implement in Hollywood? Hardly, but it does however point to the difficulties that Eisler had trying to reconcile his artistic commitments to Schoenberg and his political commitment to Marxism with the industry responsible for providing his, at the time, limited opportunities for livelihood as an exile. These two scores, which represent the extremes of innovative techniques to scoring and ultimate cliché are both ways in which Eisler was able to comment on his situation and *Composing for the Films* was a way for Eisler to synthesize his thoughts and theories about the industry.

Cavallotti, for one reason or another, leaves out Eisler's Hollywood career, instead focusing on his autonomous works, and thus leaves out an important period of Eisler's career. This is especially true considering that Cavallotti's article is a study of exile. However, it does reflect a somewhat dated approach that overlooks *Composing for the Films*. This bypass is due in part to the Cold War era's condemnation of the book for its overt anti-capitalist sentiments. It could also be argued that Cavallotti leaves out this substantial part of Eisler's career for the fact that the music for film was accessible to the masses, diminishing the elite place that the twelve-tone method has had in contemporary music history. It is important to remember however, that this was the very reason for Eisler's dispute with Schoenberg and initial frustrations with the twelve-tone method, namely that this music appeared to keep the music in the realm of the esoteric.

Gorbman and Bick provide a more nuanced look into addressing this question of how Eisler navigated creating music for commercial films while maintaining his identity as a modern



composer. Both focus on the complexity of the situation that Eisler found himself in. Gorbman and Bick also bring up unique points specifically related to reception and the audience's perception of the social functions that Eisler believed modernist music could have in the film medium. In the article "Hanns Eisler in Hollywood" (1995), Gorbman discusses the film *The Spanish Main* and points to Eisler's own statement about the rebellious nature of exaggeration, while also noting that such exaggeration was not likely to be perceived by the audience (284). In the article "A Double Life in Hollywood" (2010), Bick notes that during the time that Eisler was in Hollywood, Schoenberg's twelve-tone method was virtually unknown, outside of a highly specialized group of composers ("Double Life" 114)<sup>39</sup>. While Gorbman and Bick illuminate these rather curious aspects they do not engage with it further. However, I believe these are important points to consider because they provide further insights into Eisler's experience of exile.

While Eisler desired to change the film industry and audience perceptions at large, the scores for *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Spanish Main*, though easily passed-by examples, provide a more personal comment from Eisler. Knowing that these measures were likely to be unperceived or worse edited out by industry agencies, show that Eisler was making these inclusions for himself and perhaps the few like-minded exiles in his personal and professional circles. These musical statements were not made to revolutionize Hollywood but were an artistic response to Eisler's own experience. That is not to say that Eisler's overall agenda was as covert as his scores for *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Spanish Main* were. Indeed, regarding the public's eventual acceptance of modernist music through the film medium, Eisler states that "even conservative listeners in the cinema swallow without protest music that in a concert hall would

<sup>39</sup> See Straus, *Twelve-Tone Music in America*, (2009).

arouse their most hostile reactions” (“Composing” 87). While Eisler bemoans that the reason for this is the ‘neutralization’ of musical style in the editing and recording process, it nevertheless exposes the public to soundscapes that they otherwise would not choose to experience, as in purchasing a ticket to hear the music performed by orchestra in a concert hall. This could also perhaps speak to Eisler’s belief in the superiority of the new music’s ability to express the wide range of emotions, ideas, and experiences depicted in film, fitting better in this medium than in its autonomous state in the concert hall.

Although *Composing for the Films* was intended to be a theoretical exploration of the nature of film music and aesthetics, as well as an expansion of the practical recommendations made in Eisler’s Film Music Project, it is evident how looking at this work through the lens of exile experience, sheds light on the complicated situation that Eisler found himself in and how, through his use and theories about the potential of new music in the film medium, he was able to navigate Hollywood and comment on his experience, while retaining his cultural and political identity. *Composing for the Films* shows that the question of the importance of exile was for Eisler indistinguishable from the question of capitalism. From what has been gathered in this chapter, Eisler did see the twelve-tone technique as a response to the situation he was faced with in America; but at least explicitly, this situation was characterized by an experience of US-capitalism and not solely by that of exile

The next two chapters depart from the co-authored *Composing for the Films* and shift focus towards a selection of texts that Eisler wrote alone. Eisler wrote little during 1938-1948 while he was exiled in America. During this time, we know that he was in the process of writing *Composing for the Films* with Adorno while also composing film scores including his work on *Hangmen Also Die*, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, for the second

chapter I have selected three important texts from 1935 that speak to Eisler's first impressions of the United States, before he settled there permanently in 1938, and that also include important comments on the social function and future of music.

## Chapter Two: Impressions of America and the Crisis in Music

This chapter will examine three texts that Eisler wrote in 1935, a year that proved important for the composer both personally and professionally. Early in 1935, Eisler began a three-month lecture and concert tour in the United States<sup>40</sup> and the selected texts were written by Eisler during this tour and subsequent teaching engagement at the New School for Social Research in New York. The tour was on the invitation of Lord Marley's Committee for the Victims of German Fascism. While on this tour, according to Albrecht Betz, "he [Eisler] found music and politics more widely separated than ever. This was despite the fact that the America he visited had been in a crisis and suffered a depression for more than five years, and that the beginnings of political art were in the making" (143). The fact that the United States was showing the beginnings of political art, as it will be shown, is important in solidifying Eisler's views on the social function of music. Eisler's lectures during this tour were generally centered on culture under fascism and the concerts featured a series of political songs, often performed by choirs that were organized by local committees. The frequently performed *Moorsoldatenlied*, or "Peatbog Soldiers' Song," arranged by Eisler, was so impactful during the tour performances that in the years to follow it became a popular song of the American left.<sup>41</sup> Regarding the content of Eisler's tour, Betz writes, "certainly Eisler's political songs were not considered serious music; but the arguments in his lectures, his questions about the social aims of music and the connection between the musical and the capitalist crisis, together with the concerts, evoked a considerable response" (144). This response led to future employment opportunities and also influenced Eisler's desire to settle

<sup>40</sup> The following narrative regarding the background information on Eisler's lecture and concert tour is largely based on Betz, pp. 143-146

<sup>41</sup> Eisler writes about this piece in "Bericht über die Entstehung eines Arbeiterliedes" in EGW III/I, pp. 274-78 and in English translation as "The Birth of a Worker's Song" in Betz, pp. 77-79.

more permanently in the United States during his time in exile. Summing up Eisler's initial visit to America Betz states, "Eisler's first journey to the United States had a two-fold result; for one thing he made a name for himself in America as a composer; for another he received an invitation to return that same autumn to teach as a guest lecturer for a term at The New School of Social Research in Manhattan" (146). Eisler's compositions during this time underwent certain stylistic changes as well as a return to the twelve-tone method and as Betz notes, "from 1936 to 1937 Eisler's work began to show signs of stylistic changes in line with its intended functions. Its thematic content and forms became at the same time narrower and broader" (149). Concerning form, Eisler took a step back in time and focused on the cantata, which seemed to suit Eisler's desire to balance the familiarity of tonal music with the novelty of twelve-tone music and as Betz states, "using twelve-note technique, he [Eisler] by-passed the classics and romantics and went back to Bach, transforming these apparently heterogenous elements into a style of peculiar acidity whose polyphony acquired a patina of great intensity" (150). The clarity of form attributed to Bach, especially Bach cantatas, becomes essential for Eisler as he works with twelve-tone music again and strives to make it intelligible to the masses.

The first text, "A Musical Journey through America" ("Musikalische Reise durch America") (1935), details Eisler's first impressions of the United States during the concert and lecture tour that took him across the country. In the essay, Eisler explores the relationship between music and society and draws parallels between music and capitalism, economic disparity and the problematic nature of the entertainment industry. In the second text, "Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer" ("Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten") (1935), Eisler highlights what he believes to be some of the greatest challenges faced by modern composers, and how these challenges are intrinsically related to the current

socio-economic and political reality. The last text, “The Crisis in Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik”) (1935), is comprised of ten theses that indicate the issues Eisler believes are contributing to a crisis in music and ideas on how to address them using modern music. In this essay, Eisler calls for composers to become aware of the social function of their music and to actively participate in the struggle of the masses.

Concerning the texts selected for this chapter I have found it prudent to acknowledge some interesting challenges. These texts do not speak about twelve-tone music exclusively, and while Eisler had begun working with the form again he was still addressing his reservations on how twelve-tone music could be relevant for the masses. While the selected texts include many observations from Eisler, they do not speak of how Eisler was personally affected from his experience as an exile. Instead, Eisler remains rather emotionally removed and discusses his observations in a larger societal sense. This however makes the texts uniform and highly informative in nature without having to sift through numerous tangents or personal anecdotes. Also, while these texts were written three years before Eisler settled in the United States permanently, at least until being extradited ten years later, they illustrate Eisler’s first impressions of America. Most importantly, the texts deal with Eisler’s response to American capitalism, the Hollywood film industry, and the plight of the working class, and how these situations affected the production of modern music.

The analysis of the following texts will look at how and where music is used, how it is explained by Eisler, and will focus on three important aspects. The first is a critique of capitalism and how capitalism created new media; the second is a critique of these new media resulting from capitalism, namely sound film, radio broadcasting, and the gramophone; while the third aspect deals with Eisler’s concept that forms of use are instrumental if not more important than

technique when regarding the future of new music and its relevance in society. The analysis of these texts will provide a better understanding of how Eisler's initial experience of the United States shaped his future use of the twelve-tone method, how he was able to integrate his Marxist political ideal from a European standpoint into his American experience, and how exile may or may not have shifted his views on music's role in contemporary society.

### **“A Musical Journey Through America” (“Musikalische Reise durch America”) (1935)**

Eisler read “A Musical Journey Through America” (“Musikalische Reise durch America”) at the Strasbourg Broadcasting Station on June seventh 1935 during the first International Workers' Music Olympiad.<sup>42</sup> The original German typescript can be found in volume three of *Hanns Eisler, Gesammelte Werke* (EGW) and appears in English translation in *Hanns Eisler, a Rebel in Music* (1978) edited by Manfred Grabs. In this essay, Eisler describes his first impressions of the United States and how by getting to know another country's social structures, habits and customs, one is able to test their methods of reasoning (“Rebel” 82). Eisler discusses the financial crisis that the Metropolitan Opera was in upon his arrival to New York. He notes that voices from the workers, employees, and intellectuals were demanding that the opera house be taken from the private sector of wealthy patrons and turned into a publicly supported institution. Eisler discusses how the issue became a political debate with the wealthy not wanting to ‘degrade’ what the opera stood for, a pillar for elite and privileged audiences (“Rebel” 86). Eisler goes on to observe that New York concert life was facing similar struggles to the opera. He states,

<sup>42</sup> This information is taken from Manfred Grabs' editorial remarks in the English translation of this essay, pp. 94.

Ordinary folk have to listen to music by radio broadcasts or at popular concerts, if they cannot satisfy their musical needs in one of the countless cinemas. (Der gewöhnliche Sterbliche muß sich die Musik durch Übertragung des Radios oder in populären Konzerten anhören, wenn er nicht sein Musikbedürfnis in einem der unzähligen Kinos befriedigt.) (“Rebel” 86; “EGW III/I” 287).

However, it is important to note that these advancements in radio and film were able to make exposure to music more accessible to the masses, but perhaps Eisler’s dismay stems from his belief that these popular genres are not exposing the masses to the ‘correct’ type of music, namely, modern music. Eisler does criticize that modern music had been cut off from the masses and that it did not reflect the current realities of social and political life and he raises the question of whether this is the fault of the public or of the composer (“Rebel” 87). Eisler believes that in order for modern music to be accessible to the masses it, and composers, need to understand the interests and struggles of the public and he states that,

Modern music should no longer be a mere distraction for the idle wealthy; it must turn to the masses of the people and support their just struggle. (Die moderne Musik darf also keine Zerstreuung mehr von reichen Müßiggängern sein, sondern sie muß sich an die breiten Massen des Volkes wenden und deren gerechten Kampf für Brot und Freiheit, für die Eroberung der politischen Macht unterstützen.) (“Rebel” 87; “EGW III/I” 288).

Eisler found that the New York Composers Collective was one such group that was determined to shift focus to the masses, actively promoting modern music outside of elite specialist circles (“Rebel” 87).

After leaving New York City, Eisler travels to Pittsburgh, an industrial city dominated by the industries of steel and coal. Regarding his impressions of the city, Eisler writes,



I must say, if you want to describe hell on Earth then you only have to describe Pittsburgh. It is a fearful hell of cold, hunger and degradation of man by man. The city of Pittsburgh consists of 5 percent elegant business and residential areas and 95 percent misery. (Ich muß sagen, wenn man die Hölle auf Erden schildern will, dann braucht man nur Pittsburgh zu schildern, dass eine furchtbare Hölle voll Kälte, Hunger und der entsetzlichsten Erniedrigung des Menschen durch den Menschen ist. Die Stadt Pittsburgh besteht zu 5% aus einem eleganten Geschäfts- und Wohnviertel und zu 95% aus Elend) (“Rebel” 88; “EGW III/I” 289).

Eisler attributes this dismal state to the coal and steel industries and that culturally the only entertainment for the working class is the movies, while the Pittsburgh Symphony gives concerts under the direction of famous conductors to the small numbers of the social and economic elite (“Rebel” 88). Eisler does note that he observed the Pittsburgh workers organizing cultural groups along with their first music association and to this he remarks,

They are not only fighting for a better life, but together with the music intellectuals for culture as well. (Die Pittsburgher Arbeiter schaffen sich ihre erste Kulturorganisation, ihre ersten Musikvereine, und kämpfen nicht nur für Brot, sondern auch für Kultur in einem Bündnis mit den Musikintellektuellen.) (“Rebel” 88; “EGW III/I 289).

The next stop for Eisler was Chicago and in his essay he curiously does not speak about musical or cultural life in the city, even though Chicago was musically progressive at this time and remains a cultural hub to this day.<sup>43</sup> Eisler’s Chicago entry focuses on his visit to the stockyards and he writes,

<sup>43</sup> See Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Music in Chicago 1873-1935* (2003).

I have no patience with people who pale when cattle are slaughtered, but who didn't seem to mind when people were slaughtering each other in the last World War, and who now want to start a new war. Yet it is not only in war that people slaughter each other, they do it every day. Every day people die of hunger and disease. Frightful injustices are daily occurrences; exploitation and the arrogance of parasites daily take their toll on the working people. This is when we should have nervous attacks and turn pale. This is when we should get sentimental. And it is also when we should learn to combat the slaughter of man by man. (Ich bin sehr gegen solche Menschen, die zwar bei der Schlachtung des Viehs schwache Nerven haben und blaß werden, die aber recht gut aufgelegt waren, als sich die Menschen in dem großen Kriege schlachteten und die dafür sind, daß ein neuer Krieg gemacht werden soll. Aber nicht nur in dem Kriege schlachteten sich die Menschen, sondern auch im Alltag. Täglich sterben Menschen aus Mangel und aus Krankheiten. Täglich geschieht das furchtbarste Unrecht, täglich tobt die Ausbeutung und die Überheblichkeit von Parasiten gegen das arbeitende Volk. Das sind die Zustände, wo wir schwache Nerven bekommen und wo wir blaß werden können. Hier sollen wir lernen, sentimental zu sein. Aber hier sollen wir auch lernen, gegen dieses Schlachten von Menschen durch den Menschen zu kämpfen.) ("Rebel" 89; "EGW III/I" 289).

This quote is pertinent not only in reaffirming Eisler's stance on social justice, war, and fascism, but also perhaps sheds light on his own feelings of being exiled. Coming from a situation where pre-Holocaust antisemitism was growing and World War Two was underway, it is understandable how the slaughter of an animal for consumption would pale in comparison to the slaughter of people during war and economic disparity.

Denver and Utah were the cities that Eisler next visited and his observations were sparse, however it is apparent that upon his arrival to San Francisco Eisler is taken with the city, commenting on the weather, lush vegetation, and fruit trees. San Francisco is also where the composer Henry Cowell resided and Eisler finds that life there is embodied in Cowell's music ("Rebel" 90). Cowell was head of the group of International Modern Music and was a lecturer in musicology at the university and it is clear from Eisler's writing that he admired Cowell. While Eisler's time in Hollywood was discussed in greater detail in the first chapter, his initial visit during his 1935 tour of America provides some interesting observations that he had made before becoming employed in Hollywood and before working on *Composing for the Films* with Adorno. Eisler notes that Hollywood was having a labour crisis with twenty-two thousand workers who were at the time unemployed. The wage disparity was also observed by Eisler and he discussed how many actors and stage workers were faced with poverty while an A-list star could make up to \$500, 000 dollars in a year ("Rebel" 90). As with much of America, the economic disparity weighed heavily on Eisler, perhaps drawing parallels to the European Workers' Movement that he advocated so fiercely for. While Eisler was impressed with the technological advancements in the production of film music, such as recording equipment and microphones, he criticized the mechanization of film music and how it had become a sort of assembly line production of composers working only on specific genres. It is therefore not surprising that when his journey brought him to Detroit, he was highly critical of Henry Ford's corporation and the state of the automotive industry ("Rebel" 92). Eisler returned to New York from Detroit and writes,

My journey has been indeed interesting and instructive, for I had the opportunity of studying how music related to society in a country new to me. (Meine Reise war

ungeheuer interessant und lehrreich für mich, denn ich hatte die Möglichkeit, den Zusammenhang zwischen der Musik und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben in einem mir neuen Lande zu studieren.) (“Rebel” 92-93; “EGW III/I 293).

During this time Eisler was invited to the First International Workers’ Music Olympiad in Strasbourg as the chairman of the jury. The importance of such an event was clear to Eisler as a modern composer and he states that,

There is a whole new group of people who are fighting not only for their economic rights, but also for a new culture. We music experts must form an alliance with them: they are the workers, the working proletariat. (Es gibt eine ganz neue Schicht von Menschen, die nicht nur für ihre wirtschaftlichen Rechte, sondern auch für eine neue Kultur kämpfen. Wir Musikfachleute müssen ein Bündnis mit diesen Menschen schließen, und diese Menschen sind die Arbeiter, das werktätige Proletariat.) (“Rebel” 93-94; “EGW III/I” 294).

Eisler goes on to say that, “the Workers’ Music Olympias is taking place as a part of the struggle against fascism, against war” (“Die Arbeitermusik Olympiade findet statt unter dem Zeichen des Kampfes gegen den Faschismus, gegen den Krieg”) (“Rebel” 94; “EGW III/I” 294). It was Eisler’s vision that the Olympiad and the alliance that he spoke of would become a new international movement in music.

**“Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer” (“Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten”) (1935)**

Eisler likely wrote “Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer” (“Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten”) in connection with his classes at the New School for Social Research in New York. He lectured on the topic of “The Crisis in Modern Music” and this typescript was intended for publication in a New York periodical. A shortened version in English appeared in the magazine *Daily Worker* in December of 1935 under the title “The Composer in Society”.<sup>44</sup> In this essay, Eisler relates the situation of the modern composer to that of the earlier medical practitioners before the science had advanced; when disease was considered matters of chance or spiritually induced. He focuses on how some of these diseases were thought to be linked to social conditions and that if these conditions improved, the diseases could be eradicated. He goes on to state,

If we modern composers were able to apply some of this objectivity, common sense, and knowledge to our own field, we would be more successful. But that requires a scientific approach instead of the non-committed futile nattering about art. (Wenn wir modernen Komponisten etwas von dieser Objektivität, Vernunft und diesem Wissen auf unser Gebiet anwenden könnten, würden wir besseren Resultaten kommen können. Das erfordert aber an Stelle eines unverbindlichen, niemandem nützenden Kunstgeschwätzes *wissenschaftliche* Betrachtungsweisen.) (“Rebel” 106; “EGW III/ I” 362).

Eisler notes that the listening public have become musically illiterate despite the technical progress in music. Exactly what technical progress Eisler is referring to is unclear, however as he

<sup>44</sup> This information is taken from Manfred Grabs’ editorial remarks in the English translation of this essay, pp. 113.

relates the situation to “anarchy and barbarism,” it is logical to conclude that he refers to technical progress in the composition of modern music. In order to remedy this situation, Eisler believes that a new type of composer, musician, and teacher is needed, placing extra focus on the composer. For Eisler, this new type of composer would challenge the old types of music production with a more scientific approach. Eisler prescribes that the practice of theory be raised to the level of contemporary thought in order to counteract how music has developed socially. He goes on to suggest that a new definition of the ‘modern’ is needed in order to determine what, for the present time, is to be considered ‘progressive’ or ‘regressive’ in music (“Rebel” 107).

Eisler draws parallels between the crisis in music and the crisis in society and believes that they are intrinsically related, stating,

In music it appears concretely in the technique of composing. This in turn, has contributed to the complete isolation of modern music from social life. (In der Musik erscheint sie konkret als eine Krise der Kompositionstechnik. Dieses wieder hat zu einer völligen Isolierung der modernen Musik vom gesellschaftlichen Leben beigetragen.) (“Rebel” 107; “EGW III/I” 363).

The isolated nature of the modern composer was not unlike those of the seventeenth century composer, as Eisler notes, modern composers are very much still reliant on the support of wealthy patrons. The seventeenth-century composers marketed themselves in salons and through the upper echelons of society, thus having no experience or ability to comment on the most pressing issues of the time and Eisler believes that the same conditions exist for the modern composer, even if the venue has changed (“Rebel” 107). Eisler discusses how modern composers, at the time, were of the opinion that ‘absolute music’ or, music without words, could not express anything definite or address the issues of the day, nor was it the purpose of that

music (“Rebel” 108). While Eisler points to Beethoven’s symphonies as being representational of the struggle of the time, this being the struggle of the bourgeoisie against decaying feudalism, he argues that vocal music has always had a superior ability to comment on social struggle, and points to the dominance of vocal music in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as evidence. Indeed, Eisler sees vocal music regaining a prominent place in modern music. Regarding current instrumental music Eisler states,

Instrumental music and the concert (as the organized form of musical life) are not eternal, but historical forms. They arose and developed within capitalist society and they enter a crisis when capitalist society enters a crisis. (Die instrumentale Musik und das Konzert (als Organisationsform des Musiklebens) sind nicht ewige Formen, sondern historische. Sie sind in einer bestimmten gesellschaftlichen Institution entstanden und ausgebildet, in der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft, und sie kommen in eine Krise, wenn die kapitalistische Gesellschaft in eine Krise kommt.) (“Rebel” 108; “EGW III/I” 364).

Comparatively, about current vocal music Eisler says,

We are witnessing a new blossoming and predominance of vocal music following the instrumental era of the nineteenth century. Instrumental music will play an increasingly subordinate and insignificant role in music. (Nach dem Zeitalter der instrumentalen Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts kommen wir in eine neue Blüte und Vorherrschaft der Vokalmusik. Die Instrumentalmusik wird eine immer mehr und mehr untergeordnete und belanglosere Rolle in der Musik spielen.) (“Rebel” 108; “EGW III/I” 364-365).

While there was indeed a resurgence of vocal music as Eisler observed, it could be argued that the Lied flourished in the nineteenth century as it had in no other time as well. As concepts of what is considered beautiful and what is considered ugly are subject to trends and matters of

opinion, Eisler believes that modern music should be more concerned with what is ‘useful’ and what is ‘useless’ when judging the value of music (“Rebel” 109). Eisler credits the growth of technical devices as being a contributor to the crisis in modern music, specifically the radio, gramophone, and sound film. These advancements, according to Eisler, were destroying old forms of musical listening. Eisler notes that classical music requires a listener to be passive and open to the affect that the music desires to induce, thus making it an unacceptable form for busy city life. Eisler gives the example of driving along a busy city street and how it is impractical and impossible to shut off one’s thinking and simply listen to the music. Eisler points to film as being the catalyst for making forms of music, like the sonata, obsolete, as the correlation between picture and sound has made the audience unaccustomed to listening to music in the abstract. At the time, in 1935, Eisler takes an ‘it remains to be seen’ approach as to what the film industry’s influence on modern music will be. Eisler does predict that machines will largely replace the modern labour of musicians, thus completely revolutionizing the technique of composition. While this means for Eisler that the composer can be independent of instruments and musicians that play them, along with their inadequacies of human error, he notes that it could result in mass poverty of musicians should society not be changed by the time these advancements reach their peak (“Rebel” 111).

Eisler concludes the essay with advice to modern composers that they should engage in the question of social attitude and how their music can be most useful. He urges modern composers to take an active role in society and rely less on wealthy patrons, ending a centuries long parasitic relationship (“Rebel” 112). Eisler ends with the following quote:

In these times of mankind’s greatest battles for a new world musicians should not desert the field. Let us join the struggle on the side of truth against falsehood. Then we will best



serve our cause, the cause of modern music. (“In den Zeiten der großen Kämpfe der Menschen gegen die Menschen um eine neue Welt sollten die Musiker nicht länger Deserteure sein. Beteiligen wir uns an diesen Kämpfen an der Seite der Wahrheit gegen die Unwahrheit, dann nützen wir am besten unserer Sache, die uns allen teuer ist, der modernen Musik.”) (“Rebel” 112-113; “EGW III/I” 369).

While it is not explicit, Eisler appears to be implicitly calling for a shift from capitalism to socialism. Looking at his present circumstances, Eisler observes that as automation increases, not only in the music industry, social securities will need to be in place to prevent mass poverty resulting from job loss.

### **“The Crisis in Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik”) (1935)**

Eisler gave the lecture titled “Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik” (“The Crisis in Music”) on December seventh, 1935, at a symposium and concert on the subject of “The Crisis of Music” at Town Hall, New York City.<sup>45</sup> In this essay, Eisler lays out ten theses indicating the issues that he believed contributed to what he believed was a crisis in music, along with ideas on how to address these issues. Eisler begins this essay by saying,

In our social system music is undoubtedly produced as a luxury. When poverty increases to the extent that it has today this luxury takes on a new provocative character. The question of whether music can take on a new social function becomes increasingly urgent. (Unsere Gesellschaftsordnung produziert die Musik zweifellos als Luxus. Steigt das Elend in so riesigem Maße wie eben jetzt, so bekommt der Luxus geradezu den Charakter einer Provokation.) (“Rebel” 114; “EGW III/I 370).

<sup>45</sup> See Grabs’ editorial note, pp. 120.

Eisler quotes the Chinese philosopher Me-Ti to highlight the urgent need for music to be socially relevant to the masses and provide contrast with one radical possibility. For Me-Ti, according to Eisler, this is the call for the complete abolishment of music because of the divide it places on society.<sup>46</sup> Eisler indicates that Me-Ti connected hunger, poverty, and social disadvantage to the use of music and that if these disadvantages were to be eradicated, the practice of music should be forbidden (“Rebel” 114). Eisler then departs from Me-Ti with his theses that seek to find a way that music can join rather than divide society, thus averting the current crisis. In the first thesis Eisler states,

The present-day crisis in music is but a part of the great economic crisis which is shaking the whole world, and which has caused serious functional disturbances in every sphere of cultural life. The crisis in music can only be overcome to the extent that music itself takes part in solving the world-wide social issues. (Die gegenwärtige Krise in der Musik ist nur ein Teil der großen ökonomischen Krise, welche die ganze Welt erschüttert und in allen Gebieten des kulturellen Lebens schwere Funktionsstörungen verursacht hat. Die Krise der Musik kann nur insoweit überwunden werden, als sich die Musik an der Liquidierung der großen gesellschaftlichen Weltkrise beteiligt.) (“Rebel” 115; “EGW III/I” 370-71).

As it has been and will continue to be observed, for Eisler there is simply no way that music can function outside of social issues. If music cannot intellectually engage with current reality and contemporary thought, it cannot be relevant for contemporary society and will therefore only be able to function in a historical sense. Carrying on this vein of thought, Eisler next states his belief

<sup>46</sup> About this statement Manfred Grabs notes, “The quotation from the tract, *The Damnation of Music* by Me-Ti was often, even freely, quoted by Eisler and relying on his memory with incorrect date. The Chinese philosopher (497-381 B.C.) spoke in the interests of the working people against the division of society into nobles and lower orders, which Confucian teachings defended.” pp. 120.

that composers must become aware of the social functions for which their music is being used. It is here that Eisler draws parallels between music and narcotics, meaning the ability that music has to numb the masses from the current economic, social, and political issues, regardless of the composer's intent ("Rebel" 115). This is especially true for Eisler when considering film and popular music. In the third and eighth theses, Eisler describes how the social function of music, can work against the composer's intent, particularly when it comes to historical works and notes that musicians using the music of composers such as Orlando di Lasso, Bach, or Beethoven for social functions, contradict the original intentions of the music. As an example, Eisler discusses how Beethoven's *Eroica* was used in propaganda by Hitler's Germany, serving a new social function and therefore serving an aim different from what Beethoven had intended. To remedy this, Eisler believes that the historical character of music must be preserved and conveyed through commentaries and musical explanation during the performance to prevent what Eisler describes as "socially harmful uses" ("Rebel" 116, 119). In the fourth thesis Eisler asks,

In changing the function of music why does society today direct it toward music that intoxicates and drugs the senses? ("Warum erfolgt diese Umfunktionierung der Musik durch die Gesellschaft heute gerade in der Richtung auf Erzeugung von Rausch- und Betäubungszuständen aller Art?") ("Rebel" 116; "EGW III/I" 372).

Eisler's answer for this is that life under capitalism has increased the desire for escapism and intoxication of the senses through commercial art. Eisler continues this thought in the fifth thesis and calls for a radical change in social order, namely a change in the dominance of capitalism and believes that this is only possible if modern composers engage in the social and economic struggles that have caused the intoxicating effects of current music ("Rebel" 116). By participating in this struggle, Eisler notes in the sixth thesis, that a, "total change in the function

of music” is needed in order to replace the old functions with new *social* functions. To do this, Eisler states that music must therefore, “endeavour to clarify the consciousness of the most advanced class, the working class, and must attempt to influence the practical actions of the audience” (“Rebel” 116). In the seventh thesis, Eisler outlines what must change in the functions of music and how this will impact the composer. The chart, featured later in the chapter on “forms of use,” shows the comparisons between the old functions and new functions and highlights a shift in the predominance of instrumental music to the predominance of vocal music, as well as the shifting focus in songs from the soloist performing subjective-emotional works, to workers’ choruses singing songs of struggle. Eisler also sees the role of the composer changing from a personality with individual style to a specialist able to master several styles of composing depending on the social function of the music they are called to or desire to compose. In the final two theses, Eisler’s final points highlight the necessity of radical change in order to raise the standards of musical listening and continue the development of new methods of composition. He cautions against “artificially lowering standards” as it has a “narcotic effect” on the listeners (Eisler, “Rebel” 119). Finally, in the last thesis Eisler states,

The decisive criterion of the “social function” must be added to the criteria of “invention”, “technical skill”, and “feeling.” Progress means not only the introduction of new technical methods, but the introduction of new technical methods serving new social functions. (Für die Beurteilung eines Musikstückes muß zu den Kriterien “Erfindung, technisches Können, Empfindung” als neues entscheidendes Kriterium die Frage nach gesellschaftlichem Zweck treten. Fortschritt ist nicht nur die Einführung neuer technischer Methoden, sondern die Einführung neuer technischer Methoden zu neuen gesellschaftlichen Zwecken.) (“Rebel” 119; “EGW III/I” 375).

This final thesis highlights the importance that Eisler places on the social function of music, equating its importance with invention and technical skill.

### **Capitalist Critique**

Looking at these three texts as a capitalist critique helps illuminate not only Eisler's thoughts on the social function of new music but also show how Eisler's exile experience, and everything he observed through that lens, was interconnected with his experience of American capitalism.

While Eisler brought his Marxist views and political leanings with him from Europe, we see that his time in exile and in America specifically, solidified their importance in music and the future role that music would play in socio-political life. Indeed, it was not until Eisler's exile that he began looking at the twelve-tone method again with renewed interest and the belief that it could be useful when commenting on the struggles of the masses.

In "A Musical Journey through America" ("Musikalische Reise durch Amerika"), Eisler draws a parallel between economic disparity and cultural life. The greater the economic disparity the less the masses engage in or have the means to engage in culture. To illustrate this, Eisler notes, "the music life is restricted to an even smaller circle of the wealthy than in New York" ("das Musikleben dieser Stadt ist noch mehr als in New York auf eine kleine Schicht von reichen Leuten beschränkt") ("Rebel" 88; "EGW III/I" 289). While the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra does attract famous conductors to their series of concerts annually, cultural life for the masses is, as Eisler describes, "meager to the extreme" ("Rebel" 88). He goes on to note that Pittsburgh does not have a permanent theatre and no popular concerts and that the only affordable entertainment available are films. There are instances where Eisler discusses the topic of capitalism directly. However, Eisler also makes this critique through his Marxist statements,

particularly those that concern the ‘usefulness’ of music, and how this, above all other factors, is the most important for the progression of music and maintaining its social relevance. Eisler regards America as being at the centre of the crisis of class struggle, due to the country’s past economic growth and dominance between 1918 and 1927. Eisler states that, “since music is man-made, it is subordinated to the general laws of mankind and consequently of human society” (“da Musik von Menschen gemacht wird, so folgt sie auch den allgemeinen Gesetzen der Menschen und damit der menschlichen Gesellschaft”) (“Rebel” 83; “EGW III/I” 284). For Eisler, this means that any social or economic crisis will impact the creation of music. In the world of capitalism, Eisler sees a need for a new type of ‘hero’ whom he describes as, “one who does not advance at the detriment of the majority of society, but who rises with his class by fighting for the interests of his class” (“die sich nicht zum Schaden der Mehrheit der Gesellschaft durchsetzen, sondern mit ihrer Klasse emporkommen, indem sie für die Interessen ihrer Klasse kämpfen”) (“Rebel” 84; “EGW III/I” 285).

When Eisler first laid eyes on the New York City skyline he mused not on the majesty of the lights and skyscrapers, but on the twenty million American people in need of public assistance. He also ponders upon the working conditions of the elevator operators, who in 1935 were crucial to the functional success of those great structures that marked the famous skyline. Eisler criticizes the capitalist nature of the Metropolitan Opera and New York concert life more generally and how this has made cultural life inaccessible for much of the population, therefore keeping it sequestered for the wealthy elite (“Rebel” 85). Eisler describes Pittsburgh as “Hell on Earth,” with economic disparity, rampant inequality, and extreme poverty, all caused by the coal and steel industries and the conditions that the workers were forced to endure (“Rebel” 88). Eisler ties capitalism to religion and notes when visiting Utah that the Mormons had become

modern day businessmen (“Rebel” 89). When Eisler travels to Los Angeles and tours the film industry he highlights his concern of how capitalism impacts the film medium:

Although films could be an excellent means of entertainment and education in modern society, in the hands of private industry they are solely for profit and a means of lulling the masses. (Denn obwohl der Film ein großartiges Unterhaltungs- und Erziehungsmittel für die moderne Gesellschaft sein könnte, so ist er doch in Händen einer Privatindustrie, die ausschließlich Filme herstellt, um Profit zu machen, ein Verblödungs- und Verdummungsmittel für die breiten Massen.) (“Rebel” 91; “EGW III/I” 292).

Eisler discusses the Ford Motor Company in Detroit and how it was once seen as “capitalism’s greatest achievement” and that Ford had “found a way to save capitalism” as his workers were so well off that they did not have to fight for their rights or for political power. However, in 1935, this was not the case. While Ford still employed seventy thousand workers, they only worked an average of four to five months out of the year (“Rebel” 92). From his observations it is evident that Eisler loathed what the Ford Company stood for and sought to illuminate the horrid and inhumane conditions of the workers. Indeed, Manfred Grabs notes that during the broadcast of Eisler’s report of his American tour from Strasbourg, transmission was cut off when Eisler began to describe the working conditions of the company.<sup>47</sup>

In “Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer” (“Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten”), Eisler ties the decaying relevance of the symphony to capitalism. The economic crisis that Eisler found America in 1935 exposed the failings of capitalism. Where in the early 1800s, the symphony represented the highest form of musical expression, by 1933 there were no more significant achievements for the form, leaving it without purpose, thus

<sup>47</sup> See Grabs’ editorial note, pp. 94.

becoming archaic. In “The Crisis in Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik”), Eisler ties the crisis in music to economic and social crises and when addressing capitalism directly Eisler states,

The present crisis has only increased the desire for such pacifiers and intoxicants which has arisen out of the peculiar circumstances of life under capitalism. If the masses want art to be intoxicating, or at least accept it, it is because they are seeking substitutes for activities and experiences of which they are deprived through their position in society. (Die Krise hat jene Sucht nach Betäubungs- und Erregungszuständen, welche durch die eigentümlichen Lebensverhältnisse im Kapitalismus erzeugt wird, nur gesteigert. Wenn die Massen auch von der Kunst Rauschgiftwirkungen verlangen oder sie wenigstens akzeptieren, so geschieht das, weil sie auf diese Weise psychische Äquivalente für Betätigungen und Erlebnisse suchen, die ihre soziale Lage ihnen vorenthält.) (“Rebel” 116; “EGW III/I” 372).

The participation in the struggle and initiating radical change are the only ways that Eisler believes music can combat this crisis and maintain relevance in the modern world.

For Eisler, it was apparent that his observations of American capitalism solidified his thoughts about the social function of music. Specifically, Eisler tied the economic environment to the accessibility of cultural life. Eisler notes that the greater the economic disparity was, the less the masses were able to engage in cultural life, which due to its function as a commodity or luxury in capitalist society, was only accessible to those that could pay for it. The only means for the masses to engage in music and culture was through films and radio, which again, due to the commodification, was aimed at easy gratification. This, according to Eisler, dulled the audience’s senses and prevented intellectual engagement.



## New Media Critique

The state of music in a capitalist society leads to new forms of media along with advancements in film and sound technology. Technological advancements are however not limited to the world of music. Indeed, the new methods of composition and the production of music are a result of advancing technology in other fields such as transport and factory work and as these processes are streamlined, so too are the methods in music. While Eisler notes in “A Musical Journey Through America” (“Musikalische Reise durch Amerika”), that American concert life is reserved for the wealthy, he points out that the majority of the masses must listen to music by radio broadcast, popular concerts, and the cinema (“Rebel” 86). While these media have the potential to be educational and enriching, it has instead become the venue for cheap and popular mass culture. This further isolates the modern composer from the public and dulls the public’s ability to engage with art and culture intellectually. Eisler goes on to discuss how ill attended new music concerts are, concluding that it is isolated from the masses because it plays no part in the realities of social life. Eisler does not however discuss how new media could play a role in disseminating new music to the masses. Eisler states that,

Modern music which we all love and for which we are prepared to fight must finally come out of its isolation and conquer the ear of the masses, the workers, employees, and intellectuals. (Die moderne Musik, die wir allen lieben und für die wir kämpfen, muß endlich aus ihrer Isolierung heraus und muß sich das Ohr der breiten Massen, der Arbeiter, Angestellten und Intellektuellen, erobern.) (“Rebel” 87; “EGW III/I” 288).

Eisler goes on to say that this can only be achieved if music considers the interests of the people and takes part in their struggles (“Rebel” 87). While this is undoubtedly true, Eisler seems to place no onus on the creators of new music to utilize the media that the masses largely

experience art and culture. Regarding Hollywood film studios, namely the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, Eisler writes, “I have worked in many film studios in Paris and in London— but we have nothing in Europe to compare with the perfect organization and technical equipment” (“Ich habe in vielen Filmstudios gearbeitet— in Paris, in London—, aber so etwas an musterhafter Organisation und technischen Fortschritten haben wir in Europa nicht”) (“Rebel” 90; “EGW III/I” 291). Eisler was of course primarily interested in the music studios of the film companies and marvelled at the advancements in microphone technology among other innovations (“Rebel” 91). However, Eisler was not impressed by the level of industrialization that came along with the advancements in technology. Eisler states that, “despite the growth of the means of production in music, such as radio, sound film, and records, the standards in music are deteriorating” (“trotz der Entwicklung der musikalischen Produktionsmittel, wie Radio, Tonfilm, Schallplatten, sinkt das musikalische Niveau immer tiefer”) (Eisler, “Rebel” 93; “EGW III/I” 294).

In “Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer” (“Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten”), Eisler believes that the new type of composer will have to learn that the crisis in music is the result of the growth in technical devices and goes on to say that “the concert compared to the sound film is just as old-fashioned as the mail coach compared to the airplane” (“das Konzert ist dem Tonfilm gegenüber ebenso veraltet wie die Postkutsche gegenüber dem Aeroplan”) (“Rebel” 110; “EGW III/I” 366). Eisler notes that sound film and radio are destroying old forms of music listening, he describes that many of the formal musical devices, such as the principle of recapitulation, the development section, and the sonata form as a whole seem antiquated when listened to through radio or film (“Rebel” 111). Eisler’s main point is that sound film, in particular, is making the listening public unaccustomed to listening to music in the abstract, as they are now so used to having pictures to accompany the sounds they

are hearing (“Rebel” 111). Eisler also believes that sound film will irrevocably change the state of instrumental music and how it is produced, noting that experiments had already been underway to produce music synthetically on film soundtracks. Because of this, Eisler writes, “the manual labour of the musician is thus replaced by the machine; this will lead to a complete revolutionizing of the techniques of composing” (“die körperliche Handarbeit des Musikers wird also durch die Maschine ersetzt, und das wird zu einer völligen Revolutionierung der Kompositionstechnik führen”) (“Rebel” 111; “EGW III/I” 367). Eisler notes that this will also make the composer independent of instruments and musicians, along with their inadequacies of human error, making the conductor and the instrumentalist obsolete (“Rebel” 111). While obviously useful to the composer, the downside and danger that Eisler points out is the resulting mass poverty of musicians, which will ultimately leave physical music performance only as a vocational activity, rather than a profession (“Rebel” 112).

In “The Crisis in Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik”), Eisler notes that film music needs to transition from being predominantly illustrative or mood painting towards functioning more as musical commentary (“Rebel” 117). Eisler’s essay one year later in 1936 titled “From My Practical Work: On the Use of Music in Sound Film” (“Aus meiner Praxis”) (“Rebel” 121-25; “EGW III/I” 383-86), provides a little more illumination on how exactly Eisler desired film music to provide musical commentary rather than simply illustrating the scene. His experiences in film before coming to America as well as his observations of Hollywood film music led him to make the following conclusions:

The naïve illustrative method is chiefly suitable for humorous or grotesque films. Walt Disney developed this method in the Silly Symphonies to the highest degree. In serious feature films this method is bound to fail in most cases; it reduces music to a secondary

ineffective appendage. A new way of using vocal and instrumental music is above all to set the music against the action in the film. That means that the music is not employed to 'illustrate' the film, but to explain it and comment on it. (Die naive illustrierende Methode ist hauptsächlich geeignet für humoristische oder groteske Filme. Walt Disney hat diese Methode in den 'Silly Symphonies' bis zur höchsten Meisterschaft entwickelt. Diese Methode muß bei dem ernstesten Spielfilm meistens versagen und die Musik zu einem nebensächlichen, unwirksamen Beiwerk degradieren. Eine neue Anwendung der vokalen und instrumentalen Musik im Film bestünde vor allem darin, die Musik gegen die Vorgänge im Bilde zu setzen. Das bedeutet, daß die Musik das Bild nicht untermalt, sondern erklärt, kommentiert.) ("Rebel" 124; "EGW III/I" 386).

Eisler goes on to say that this new method will also be required in comedy film and opera designated for film and advises that the composer should work closely with the director and producer of the film to ensure that the music has the right function for the plot of the film ("Rebel" 124). Indeed, in "The Crisis of Music", though Eisler does not explicitly state that he sees a possible inclusion of opera, operetta, and theatre into film, he treats opera and theatre similarly to film in their new functions. That is, to provide social criticism through independent musical commentary ("Rebel" 117). While it is clear that Eisler saw the use of workers' choruses and other forms of mass singing as ways for music to unite society, by building community in person through live music rehearsals and performances, the shifting towards a prominence of vocal music can also be tied to new media. As Eisler previously discussed in "Some Remarks", when he described the impracticality of listening to classical music over a car radio due to the passivity of listening required, it too can be seen as impractical with the technology available at the time. One needs only to listen to early symphonic recordings from this era to understand that

recording technology could not capture the scope and nuance of a large symphony orchestra. The radio and gramophone were far better suited to vocal music and instrumental music created for smaller ensembles. Even Eisler's film scores, such as the previously discussed score for *Hangmen Also Die*, favoured a smaller ensemble.

Eisler saw the potential that new media had in being able to educate and intellectually engage the masses, but it was not being used in such a manner due to the focus on profit. While Eisler was impressed with the technological advancements in film and sound creation that he observed in Hollywood, he criticized the means of production that was all too familiar to the assembly lines of the Ford Motor Company. Eisler urged the modern composer to be aware of how technology had changed music listening. Because audiences were now so often used to associating music with the images in film, Eisler believed that music listening was no longer a passive activity. It is therefore the task of the modern composer to actively engage the listener by using music to provide social criticism rather than being simply illustrative in nature. For Eisler, new music will have to completely change its forms of use in order to keep up with changes in the production of music.

### **New Forms of Use**

As new forms of media change the production and consumption of music, so too must the forms of use change and as Eisler will show, how music is used will take precedence over and become more important than technique alone.

In "A Musical Journey Through America" ("Musikalische Reise durch Amerika") Eisler does not speak directly to modern forms of composition and the potential social uses for such forms, but rather discusses modern music in a more general sense. However, Eisler does

emphasize how important it is for modern composers to not be isolated from the masses. He describes how modern composers are cut off from reality due to their isolation and that their works do not reflect the current social struggles of the masses and are therefore only interesting or useful to experts in modern music. In order for modern music to come out of isolation, Eisler believes that music must consider the interests of the people and take part in their struggles. Regarding the above sentiment, Eisler notes that it was not a new idea from a European perspective, but that the concept was newly taking hold in America (“Rebel” 87). However, Eisler notes that modern American composers did have to struggle not only against antiquated forms of use but also against ‘kitschy’ popular music in the jazz scene and in film music. According to Eisler, as they struggle against these forms, they do so in a way that isolates their ‘modern’ concert music from society (“Rebel” 88).

About the struggle of the Ford Motor Company Workers, Eisler suggests that writers and composers be sent there to witness the harsh and inhumane conditions of the workers and to compose works commenting on their observations (“Rebel” 92). Eisler notes, “today music and society can no longer be regarded as naively as the artists regarded it thirty years and as mediocre imitators regard it even today” (“Heute läßt sich Musik und Gesellschaft nicht mehr in dieser naiven Weise betrachten, wie es die Künstler vor 30 Jahren getan haben und wie es auch heute noch mittelmäßige Epigonen tun”) (“Rebel” 83; “EGW III/I” 283). For Eisler, this means that music cannot exist outside or separate from social life and the class struggle. These statements reflect the important social role that Eisler saw for those in the arts, and especially composers of new music. As society had experienced great change with the First World War, and with the Second World War causing yet more societal upheaval, music could no longer function as a thing of beauty to be admired by the wealthy classes. For Eisler, the modern

composer also had to move away from an individualistic inspiration or purpose for their music and move to using their music for a greater societal purpose.

In “Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer” (“Einiges über die Lage des modernen Komponisten”), Eisler illustrates how the social function of music is the key to the progress of music and without a meaningful purpose, outside of mere entertainment, any innovations in technique, such as the twelve-tone method, will be useless outside of the realm of the esoteric. Regarding this Eisler states,

The crisis in music has been caused by the general crisis in society. In music it appears concretely in the techniques of composing. This, in turn, has contributed to the complete isolation of modern music from social life. (Die Krise der Musik ist durch die allgemeine Krise der Gesellschaft verursacht. In der Musik erscheint sie konkret als eine Krise der Kompositionstechnik. Dieses wieder hat zu einer völligen Isolierung der modernen Musik vom gesellschaftlichen Leben beigetragen.) (“Rebel” 107; “EGW III/I” 363).

Eisler believes that while progress has been made in the areas of industry, medicine, the sciences, and to an extent, in socio-political life, the theory and practice of music is still very much antiquated. To solve this Eisler prescribes that a new definition of ‘modern’ is required in order to determine what is progressive or regressive in contemporary music (“Rebel” 107). Eisler discusses a major downside of modern music, and that is the fact that there is no ‘obligatory’ style. Instead, it is determined only by the composers’ own taste and individual methods. To illustrate this, Eisler describes the conventions of the early classical period, such as cadences and musical elements that were common to either the development or recapitulation across composers and notes the difficulty of distinguishing early Beethoven, Haydn, or Mozart works due to their similarities (“Rebel” 109). For Eisler, this general consensus of style, form, and

convention, allowed composers to have their own individuality within a more or less obligatory style representative and reflective of the societal uses of the music.

While Schoenberg did establish the twelve-tone method, it was by no means an obligatory style utilized by all modern composers, and while indeed the old forms of music were ill equipped for the new social functions required of modern composers, floundering without any consistency in form, was for Eisler, just as problematic. Regarding aesthetics, Eisler states, “today there are no aesthetic standards in music, for the difference between beautiful and ugly has become a matter of personal taste and experience. A modern type of composer must take note of that. The terms ‘beautiful’ or ‘not beautiful’ which played such an important role fifty years ago are out of date.” He goes on to say; “they no longer say anything about value and therefore must be replaced by the new ‘useful’ or ‘useless’” (“Rebel” 109). While Eisler does indicate that the current state of the world, including war, capitalism, socio-economic disparity has brought about the change in priority from beauty to usefulness, this change can also be seen as a result of Eisler’s desired demographic. Because of Eisler’s focus on the working class, the aesthetics of beauty that first defined the opulence of feudalism and then the success of the bourgeoisie was rendered unimportant in the face of working-class struggle.

Eisler is not satisfied only with the idea of whether music is useful or not, he desires to take it a step further and asks, “useful for whom?” For Eisler, more so than ever, the social function of music, the targeted audience, and forms of use, are paramount to all other artistic and aesthetic ideals. The main difficulties that Eisler isolates in evolving a new musical practice are described as follows:

Certain social situations have produced certain musical forms, that is, they produce a certain musical diction. If the material productive forces of society develop at a quicker



speed than the music, then music will lag behind and a contradiction will arise between it and society. (Bestimmte gesellschaftliche Situationen haben bestimmte Musikformen, das heißt eine bestimmte musikalische Sprache produziert. Entwickeln sich die materiellen Produktivkräfte einer Gesellschaft in einem schnelleren Tempo als die Musik, dann bleibt die Musik zurück, und es entsteht ein Widerspruch zwischen ihr und der Gesellschaft.) (“Rebel” 112; “EGW III/I” 368).

Eisler believes that in order for music not to decay, composers must determine what social attitude is most useful. He goes on to say that an alliance must be formed between progressive intellectuals, scholars, doctors, engineers, artists, and the working class (“Rebel” 113).

In “The Crisis in Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Umfunktionierung der Musik”) in the sixth thesis Eisler states,

Participation in this struggle, the greatest that mankind has yet been engaged in, means nothing less than a total change in the functions of music, that is to say, we must strive to replace the old functions by new social functions. Instead of trying to bring about a state of psychic stupefaction or chaotic excitement in the listener, music must endeavour to clarify the consciousness of the most advanced class, the working class, and must attempt to influence the political actions of the audience. (Die Beteiligung an diesem Kampf, dem größten, den die Menschheit je geführt hat, bedeutet nicht weniger als eine totale Umfunktionierung der Musik, also die Bekämpfung der alten und die Erkämpfung neuer gesellschaftlicher Funktionen. Statt auszugehen auf psychische Betäubung des Zuhörers, auf die Erzeugung anarchischer Erregungszustände, muß die Musik an der Aufhellung des Bewußtseins der fortgeschrittensten Klasse der Arbeiterklasse, arbeiten und

versuchen, das praktische Verhalten der Zuhörer zu beeinflussen.) (“Rebel” 116; “EGW III/I” 372).

Here, Eisler states explicitly that music can be used to advance a political agenda and signifies the working class as the most important demographic for modern music to reach when considering the social function of music. In the next thesis, Eisler sets the following comparison chart and practical outline of what the change in the social function of music will mean for the modern composer.

<b>Old function</b>	<b>New function</b>
<i>Predominance of instrumental music</i>	<i>Predominance of vocal music</i>
The small musical forms for one or more instruments: Sketches, character pieces, children’s pieces reflecting the mood of the composer, perhaps also including formal innovations, etudes for development, and exhibition of technical skill.	The small musical forms for one or more instruments: As opportunities for testing material and as training in logical-musical thinking.
The larger musical forms: Sonata, quartet, orchestral suite, and symphony: As expression of philosophy or of religious aspirations. Also, as exposition of ‘pure’ forms. Spontaneous development of musical material (concerto-fashion and <i>spielfreudig</i> ) Place: concert hall.	The larger musical forms: Sonata, quartet, orchestral suite, and symphony: As testing material for types of <i>Lehrstuecke</i> (didactic pieces), film music etc. Also, as <i>Gebrauchsmusik</i> for political meetings, further, for the destruction of conventional musical concepts. Place: concert hall
<i>In Film:</i> As illustration, mood-painting.	<i>In Film:</i> As musical commentary.
<i>Songs:</i> Performed by a specialist in the concert hall to passive listeners. Subjective-emotional.	<i>Mass songs, songs of struggle:</i> Sung by the masses themselves on the streets, in workshops, or at meetings. Activating.
<i>Ballads:</i> Sentimental or heroic content. Mostly dealing with heroes.	<i>Ballads:</i> Containing social criticism often interspersed with ironic quotations of conventional music.
<i>Choral songs:</i> As a mechanical transposition of the expression of an individual into a collective body, e.g. a solo song sung by a chorus of	<i>Choral songs:</i> Workers’ choir undertakes the teaching of mass song and fighting songs to the audience.

one hundred people, “ <i>I cannot explain my sadness...</i> ”	
<i>Polyphonic choral pieces:</i> (See choral song)	<i>Polyphonic choral pieces:</i> Makes possible the learning and presentation of theoretical sayings. Create models for didactic pieces.
<i>Oratorio:</i> Presenting religious material from the old or new testament, or material from classical narrative works. Large musical form, sometimes, however, only a collection of lyrical pieces.	<i>Didactic Pieces:</i> Make use of ballads, instrumental interludes and polyphonic choral pieces, also of independent theatrical productions.
<i>Opera, operetta:</i> Using the same musical form as in the oratorio but weakened by the necessity to achieve theatrical effects.	<i>Opera, operetta:</i> Social criticism, depicting the social mores, destruction of conventional operatic effects.
<i>Theatre music:</i> Atmosphere and illusion producing. Not independent.	<i>Theatre music:</i> Independent element as musical commentary.
<i>The composer:</i> As a personality. Individual style.	<i>The composer:</i> As a specialist, mastering several styles of composing.
<i>The interpreter:</i> Has the character of one who merely delivers.	<i>The interpreter:</i> Has the character of a consumer.

Source: Eisler “Rebel” 117-119.

<b>Für den bisherigen Zweck</b>	<b>Für den neuen Zweck</b>
<i>Vorherrschaft der Instrumentalmusik</i>	<i>Vorherrschaft der Vokalmusik</i>
die Kleinen musikalischen Formen für ein oder mehrere Instrumente: Skizzen, Charakterstücke, Kinderstücke als Spiegelungen privater Stimmungen des Komponisten, eventuell mit formalen Neuerungen. Etüden als Ausbildung und Ausstellung technischer Fertigkeiten.	die Kleinen musikalischen Formen für ein oder mehrere Instrumente: als Gelegenheit für Materialprüfung und zum Training musikalische-logischen Denkens.
die großen musikalischen Formen: Sonate, Quartett, Orchestersuite, Sinfonie:  als Ausdruck einer Weltanschauung oder religiösen Ringens, auch als Darstellung “reiner” Formen. Selbstentwicklung des musikalischen Materials (konzertant und spielfreudig).  Ort: Konzertsaal	die großen musikalischen Formen: (Sonate, Quartett, Orchestersuite, Sinfonie:) als Materialprüfung für Typen von Lehrstückmusik, Filmmusik etc. Außerdem als Gebrauchsmusik für politische Versammlungen, ferner zur Zerstörung konventioneller musikalischer Vorstellungen.  Ort: Konzertsaal

<i>Im Film:</i> als Illustration, Stimmungsmalerei.	<i>Im Film:</i> als musikalischer Kommentar.
<i>Lied:</i> im Konzertsaal von einem Spezialisten passiven Zuhörern vorgeführt, subjektiv- gefühlsbetont.	<i>Massenlied, Kampflied:</i> auf den Straßen, am Arbeitsplatz oder auf Versammlungen von den Massen selbst gesungen, aktivierend.
<i>Ballade:</i> sentimentalen oder heroischen Inhalts meistens mit Helden.	<i>Ballade:</i> gesellschaftskritisch, oft mit ironischen Zitaten konventioneller Musik.
<i>Chorlied:</i> als mechanische Übertragung des Ausdrucks eines Individuums im Kollektiv, z.B. von hundert Leuten gesungen: "Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten, daß ich so traurig bin."	<i>Chorlied:</i> Arbeiterchor übernimmt Einstudierung von Massen- und Kampfliedern bei seinem Publikum.
<i>Polyphones Chorstück:</i> siehe oben	<i>Polyphones Chorstück:</i> ermöglicht die Erlernung und die Darstellung theoretischer Sätze, schafft Modelle für das Lehrstück.
<i>Oratorium:</i> als Basis religiöser Stoffe aus der Bibel oder aus klassischen erzählenden Werken. Große musikalische Form, mitunter aber auch nur eine Zusammenstellung lyrischer Stücke.	<i>Lehrstück:</i> verwendet neben polyphonen Chorstücken, Balladen, Instrumentalzwischenspielen auch selbständige theatralische Darstellungen.
<i>Oper, Operette:</i> Zusammenfassung derselben musikalischen Formen wie im Oratorium, aber beschädigt durch die Notwendigkeit, theatralische Wirkungen zu erzielen.	<i>Oper, Operette:</i> Gesellschaftskritik, Sittenschilderung mit Zerstörung der konventionellen Opernwirkungen.
<i>Theatermusik:</i> atmosphärisch und illusionsfördernd ohne Selbständigkeit.	<i>Theatermusik:</i> Selbständiges Element als musikalischer Kommentar.
<i>Der Komponist:</i> als Persönlichkeit Stil.	<i>Der Komponist:</i> als Spezialist mehrere Schreibweisen beherrschend.
<i>Der Interpret:</i> hat reinen Lieferantencharakter.	<i>Der Interpret:</i> hat Konsumentencharakter.

Source: Eisler, "EGW III/I" 372-374.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> The tables have been slightly reformatted to increase legibility.

Looking at Eisler's chart, we see a few important patterns emerge in his vision for the new functions of music. When utilizing old forms, such as the sonata and quartet, Eisler finds that their primary value is in the opportunities for experimentation and testing as well as for the training in 'logical musical thinking'. Regarding large forms, Eisler believes they will be particularly useful for testing material for didactic pieces and music for political purposes. With the predominance of vocal music, Eisler sees a shift from the performance domain of the professional to that of the amateur, for example, workers choruses and songs for political gatherings. Eisler believes the functions of the song genre are better suited to be sung by the masses and that thematic materials revolve around songs of struggle and protest. Ballads would also perform the role of social criticism rather than the typical themes of heroics. Where choral music is concerned, Eisler sees a shift from the individual to the collective. He also sees polyphonic choral pieces to be used primarily as a means of learning theoretical sayings. Eisler appears to find no use for the form of the oratorio and indeed removes religious material all together from the new forms of music. It is interesting to ask what led to this exclusion. Was it Eisler's individual belief and preferences that dictated the removal of religious forms or his observations of growing secularism in society? If so, this would contradict Eisler's points about moving away from individualistic practices to those that cater to the collective. Or, perhaps it is more likely that Eisler, without saying so directly, leaves religious forms as they are, considering them in the vein of historical forms that have no contemporary social or political purpose, while still having a functional role in the church. Eisler, in my research for this thesis, does not speak much of religion, his own faith, or the role that he sees faith playing in contemporary society. For a man who thinks so deeply and intellectually about the inequalities of humanity during a time of war, it would not be surprising to find an outright atheistic tone emerge in his writing, however,

Eisler simply omits this without comment. Regarding film, theatre, and opera music, Eisler sees the biggest aesthetic and functional change to be a shift from illustrating mood and ambience to providing musical commentary. Once more themes of social criticism take precedence and are dominant to previously conventional themes.

Regarding new forms of use, Eisler illustrates how the social function of music is the key to the continued relevance of music in society. Eisler ties the economic and social crisis to the current crisis in music and notes that old forms of music no longer have the capacity to comment on current societal issues in a meaningful way. For Eisler, modern composers need to focus on the usefulness of their music and decide to who whom the music will be useful for, emphasizing a shift from the individual to the collective.

## **Conclusion**

The three texts discussed in this chapter show how formative the year 1935 was for Eisler's exile. Touring the United States gave Eisler a varied look at life in America, seeing both opulent wealth and dismal poverty, the economic disparity being greater than he ever experienced in Europe. The burgeoning political art movement and the like-minded individuals he encountered at the New School for Social Research, was inspiring for Eisler and he saw an opportunity to contribute, bringing his experience from the German workers' movement. The analysis of the texts showed that Eisler's return to twelve-tone music was not only a result of exile, but also of capitalism, new media, and forms of use. The texts provided a better understanding of how Eisler developed these three aspects within the context of his exile, shaping his use of the twelve-tone method by focusing primarily on the social uses for such music.

It is clear from his writing that Eisler observed an important parallel between economic disparity and cultural life and that the working class, the most economically under-privileged, really only had the opportunity to experience art and culture through film and radio. Eisler saw the potential for film and film music to be not only entertainment but also educational, but under capitalism the sole concern is profit and is therefore used only to provide the masses with a means of escapism, thus keeping them from criticizing their current social situation. Eisler also tied the decaying relevance of traditional classical music, and in particular, the symphony, to the failings of capitalism. The symphony was no longer relevant because, first, the social use of the form was to represent the struggle of the bourgeoisie against feudalism and second, because the social use was no longer viable, the symphony saw no current developments or advancements, therefore making it an historic form.

Eisler observed that the growth of technological advancements in film and radio were destroying old forms of music listening. In particular the advancements in film were making the public unaccustomed to listening to music in the abstract as they now had become so used to having pictures on screen to accompany the music that they were hearing. Eisler also believed that the technological advancements in sound film would forever change instrumental music and how it was produced, noting the experiments that were already underway in the realm of synthetic music production. While instrumental music shifted to the realm of film and potentially to being produced in an entirely synthetic way, Eisler saw vocal music as having a resurgence in dominance not seen since sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The shifting towards the predominance of vocal music is not only tied to the social uses of modern music but can also be tied to new media as the technological advancements of the time for recording music were incapable of capturing the scope and nuance of symphonic music.

For Eisler, the survival of modern music required a complete change in the function of music, and this becomes more important for him than any specific form or compositional technique. Though Eisler clearly sees a place for modern music, namely twelve-tone music, he illustrates that without clear and definite social uses, it will remain esoteric and useful or interesting to only small circles of specialists. Eisler indicates that if the social function of music is clear and the music engages the listener intellectually, commenting on the current struggles of the working class, who were Eisler's most important demographic, and if the music clarified rather than induced emotions, then even the most modern musical techniques would be intelligible to the masses and therefore relevant. According to Eisler the modern composer needs also to shift the focus of composition from the individual to the collective. In turn, exposure and education of modern music also needs to be readily accessible. The shift from the individual to the collective aligns with Eisler's Marxist and socialist background, which solidified steadily throughout his career and as it will be shown, influenced his decision to re-settle in East Germany following his expulsion from the United States.



### Chapter Three: Eisler's Second Exile and the Future of Music

This chapter looks at three additional texts from Eisler that span from his House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigation and expulsion from the United States in 1948, to his final public appearance in 1962 in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). These texts offer several interesting points of discussion as Eisler takes a retrospective look at his time in the United States and the impact that his stay had on his thoughts about the future of modern music and music's place in society. The first text, "Fantasia in G-Men" (1947) is a written statement that Eisler had prepared for his trial with the HUAC, which ultimately led to his extradition from the United States. The short statement, as it will be shown, solidifies the positions that Eisler has taken in his previous writings and highlights the importance of *Composing for the Films*, not only as a stand-alone critique of the Hollywood film industry, but also as an important documentation of Eisler's musical, political, and social philosophies. Secondly, I will explore "Basic Social Questions of Modern Music" ("Gesellschaftlich Grundfragen der modernen Musik") (1948), an essay that came out of Eisler's lecture from the Second International Congress of Composers and Music Critics in Prague. As the title suggests, Eisler discusses the links between social conditions and music, particularly the role of music in society. What Eisler brings to the lecture is a uniquely American perspective and focus, with discussions of his experience with capitalism, film, and censorship. This essay makes apparent, the profound impact that Eisler's exile had on his work, and the struggle of creating a modern 'standard' of compositional practice, due to these conditions, and uses a criticism of the techniques of Schoenberg and Stravinsky to highlight the problematic nature of modern music. The last text, "Thoughts on Form and Content" ("Inhalt und Form") (1962), is from Eisler's last public engagement before his death, delivered at the Composers and Musicologists Union of the GDR.

In this talk, Eisler discusses the importance of understanding Marx and Hegel for modern composers when considering musical form and content and how to take music out of the realm of the ephemeral and shape it into a useful tool for society. This, as will be shown, is, as Eisler believes, the only way that music can stay relevant and survive in a changing world. It is apparent that when considering the tumultuous environments that Eisler found himself in throughout his entire career, the notion of relevancy and usefulness to not the 'I' but the 'we' in music, was a grounding force for Eisler, and it is understandable that music for simply art or entertainment was so distasteful to one who had lived through two wars and seen the worst capabilities of humanity. It is interesting to note that in this final talk, Eisler explicitly refers to himself as a socialist composer ("Rebel" 216; "EGW III/I" 577). While all of Eisler's previous writings discussed in the thesis have led to this conclusion, it is the first time that he has taken a firm stand linking politics to music in such an explicit and personal manner.

The analysis of the selected texts will focus on three major influences that have shaped Eisler's philosophy of modern music: the influence of America and his exile there, the influence of Marxism that began very early on in Eisler's career, and the historical European influences both political and musicological. One challenging aspect of the analysis is that Eisler stayed, overall, remarkably consistent in his philosophy of modern music and clearly maintained his political views throughout his career. Nevertheless, there are subtle though no less interesting variations and developments to observe. The variations explored in this chapter will highlight the evolution in Eisler's philosophy and while there was no radical shift, I will indicate focal points for Eisler that matured from his earlier writings and became more concrete and explicit such as how exile shaped his position as a socialist composer, the ability of twelve-tone music to represent the working class, and the legitimacy of film music.

### **“Fantasia in G-Men” (1947)**

The statement that Eisler titled “Fantasia in G-Men”, appeared in German translation in *Tagebuch*, Vienna on November 14, 1947, a month after the original that Eisler had prepared in advance of the hearing, following an investigation from the HUAC.<sup>49</sup> While Eisler’s use of *G-Men* undoubtedly refers to the ‘government men’ or federal investigators who brought Eisler to task, it seems plausible that Eisler was also referring to the 1935 Warner Brothers film, *G Men*, one of the highest grossing films of that year and undoubtedly known to Eisler. This reference would align the government officials with criminal gangsters, which would indeed complement Eisler’s sentiments when he drew parallels between HUAC and the fascist regimes he escaped and fought against when he wrote, “This is the sort of thing Hitler and Mussolini tried. They were not successful, and neither will be the House Committee on Un-American Activities” (“EGW III/I” 523). To me, the use of *fantasia* in the title can also be read as a way for Eisler to express his belief that the case against him was baseless. Formally, the *fantasia* is characterized by its lack of concrete structure and is known as being more of musical idea, frequently dominated by improvisation rather than a formal genre. This is how Eisler saw the investigation and the facts that were imaginatively improvised to expose the fantastical threat of communism. Eisler’s interrogation and hearings took place in Washington D.C. from September 24-26, 1947. His written statement was put on file, but Eisler, like Brecht, who had prepared a similar statement, was not permitted to read it at his hearing. Eisler’s appeal was ultimately turned down, leading to his extradition from the United States in 1948.

In the statement, Eisler remarked that if the committee was interested in his artistic beliefs and principles, they should read *Composing for the Films* (“EGW III/I” 522). This

<sup>49</sup> See Grabs’ editorial note, pp. 153.

indicates that for Eisler, the work was more important than a mere publication resulting from a much-needed employment opportunity. Indeed Eisler was already something of a pioneer in film music, with ten years prior experience composing for Weimar cinema and theatre before coming to Hollywood.<sup>50</sup> As such, many of the theories, particularly those on the critique of capitalism and on the social function of music, found in *Composing for the Films* appeared early on in Eisler's career in what is arguably one of his most important essays during the Weimar era, "The Builders of a New Musical Culture" ("Die Erbauer einer neuen Musikkultur") (1931).<sup>51</sup>

In "The Builders of a New Musical Culture" ("Die Erbauer einer neuen Musikkultur"), Eisler discusses musical practices and consumption under capitalism. This essay can be seen as a precursor for the distinctly American brand of capitalism that Eisler would encounter during his exile. In this essay, Eisler was already highlighting the commodification of music aimed towards easy gratification or entertainment of the masses in order to detract from perilous economic conditions ("Rebel" 38). Eisler also discusses the need for a new social function in music stating,

Which class, due to its economic situation, has an urgent interest in a new function of music? A new music cannot arise through material revolution, but only through social changes in which a new class takes power, and in which art also has a new social function. (Welche Klasse hat durch ihre ökonomische Situation ein dringendes Interesse nach einer neuen Funktion der Musik? Technische Methoden der Musik können nicht entstehen durch Materialrevolution, sondern können nur entstehen durch eine gesellschaftliche Veränderung, in der eine neue Klasse zur Macht gelangt, in der die Kunst auch einen neuen gesellschaftlichen Zweck hat.) ("Rebel" 51; "EGW III/I" 156).

<sup>50</sup> See Betz, Chapter two, "The great syntheses- *Die Massnahme- Kuhle Wampe- Die Mutter*, pp. 93-119.

<sup>51</sup> See, "EGW III/I," pp. 140-63 and in translation in "Rebel," pp. 32-58.

When taking “The Builders of A New Musical Culture” into consideration, we see that *Composing for the Films* continues and expands on the abovementioned criticisms and political motivations, highlighting their importance to Eisler.

While Eisler states in “Fantasia in G-Men”, that he never engaged in political activities and that he was never a member of any political party during his time in America (“EGW III/I” 523), his émigré status along with his associations, familial or otherwise, when mixed with the growing anti-communist sentiments of the United States, proved to be catastrophic for Eisler’s life in America. As Albrecht Betz discusses in *Hanns Eisler Political Musician* (1982), the death of Roosevelt and the end of the war, which caused a radical shift in economic foreign policy, combined to usher in America’s shift from anti-fascism to anti-communism. The growing communist paranoia led to a scandal for Eisler that began in the fall of 1946 with a press campaign against Eisler’s brother Gerhart Eisler. Since the 1930s, Gerhart Eisler had worked in America as an agent of Comintern, the international communist group founded by Vladimir Lenin and disbanded in 1943 (Betz, 196). Following Comintern, Gerhart Eisler worked primarily as a journalist in New York. It was during this time that the Eislers’ sister, Ruth Fischer, seeking revenge from her own political scandals, namely her expulsion from the German Communist Party in 1926, published a series of articles in the Hearst Press, insinuating that Gerhart and Hanns Eisler brought communism to Hollywood (Betz, 197). It was with these publications that began the public and government interest in the Eisler family. According to Albrecht Betz, “the case of the Eisler brothers suited the committee [HUAC] ideally because it allowed the connection between the cinema and politics to be made to seem plausible without the necessity for cumbersome manoeuvring” (198). Eisler’s belief that the reason for his persecution was his brother is made apparent when he states, “I am accused of being the brother of Gerhart Eisler,

whom I love and admire and who I defend and will defend. Does the committee believe that brotherly love is un-American?" ("EGW III/I" 523). This unfortunate connection and family scandal, however, would initiate further investigations that would turn more directly towards Eisler.

It was at the end of April 1947 that Richard Nixon, then a member of the HUAC, declared that the committee suspected communist propaganda in American films and established a sub-committee tasked with the investigation of Hollywood and specifically to investigate Hanns Eisler (Betz, 199). Betz quotes Richard Nixon from an article in the *Los Angeles Examiner* where he stated that, "the case of Hanns Eisler is perhaps the most important ever to have come before the committee" (199). This scandal and ensuing investigation were significant for Eisler as it became his second major conflict with governmental censorship and persecution and this experience would impact Eisler's decision to settle in East Germany following his extradition order. In his discussion of Eisler's final decade Betz states, "Eisler elected unequivocally for the German Democratic Republic (GDR), despite all the foreseeable and unforeseeable difficulties a pupil of Schoenberg would experience there. For once it seemed to him that it offered a guarantee that the stamping out of fascism was to be taken seriously" (210). Indeed, when considering Eisler's last months in the United States and his treatment during the trial, it seems there could be no other place for Eisler but East Germany and while this reasoning proved to be unfortunately utopian, it aligned perfectly with Eisler's desire for a new socialist musical culture. Perhaps more importantly than Eisler's personal and familial scandal was the fact that Eisler believed the committee sought to intimidate other artists in America, saying,

The committee hopes to create a drive against every liberal, progressive, and socially conscious artist in this country, and to subject their works to an un-constitutional and

hysterical political censorship. It is horrible to think what will become of American art if this committee is to judge what art is American and what is un-American (“EGW III/I” 523).

For Eisler, the dangers of censorship were very real, for he had already experienced the devastating outcome in Germany personally as well as through the many German artists and intellectuals he found himself amongst in exile. Indeed, Eisler’s warnings of censorship came long before the committee’s investigation. In his statement, Eisler discusses his American concert and lecture tour from 1935 and states, “the subject of my lectures was the destruction of musical culture under Adolf Hitler” (“EGW III/I” 521). At the time, this would appeal to the growing anti-fascist sentiment that was present during the lead up to America’s involvement in the Second World War as seen in films like *Hangmen Also Die* (1943). During Eisler’s lecture tour, that was presented under the larger topic of ‘lectures on the social history of music’, Eisler laid out his recommended approach to musical analysis which is summarized by Betz as follows:

1. Examination of the general economic and political conditions of a period; 2. Investigating musical development from the point of view of the development of materials and; 3. Analyzing the results: how do economic and political conditions affect music? (167).

Here we see that once more the connection between politics, economics, and music is a consistent theme for Eisler that predated *Composing for the Films* but was solidified and made even more apparent in the book.

One of the main differences between “Fantasia in G-Men” and Eisler’s other texts is the fact that he denies any political motivations for his music during his time in America. While this is true in the formal sense, for example, that Eisler was never a member of any political party or

organization at this time, *Composing for the Films*, along with the nature of Eisler's lectures, were inherently political and rooted in Marxism. This apparent contradiction can be read two ways. It is not surprising that Eisler wanted to distance himself from any concrete political leanings for the purpose of the hearing. Instead Eisler focused primarily on his musical works, pointing to the pure subjectivity of art, especially when observations about the 'un-American' nature of his works in question were dependent on musical amateurs. This is evident in the following excerpt:

In the last five years I have lived in Hollywood where I have written the music for eight motion pictures, including *None But the Lonely Heart*, *Hangmen Also Die*, *Spanish Main*, *Woman on the Beach*, and *So Well Remembered*. I also was for a short time a professor at the University of Southern California.

During all this time I have also written numerous symphonic works for orchestra, chamber music, and vocal music. My last performed compositions include a woodwind quintet, sonata No. 3 for piano, variations for piano, sonata for viola and piano, cantatas for alto, two clarinets, viola and cello, symphonia brevis for orchestra etc. Many of my compositions have been recorded.

These, gentlemen, are my activities in the United States and I must suppose that these are what the Committee considers 'un-American'. Apparently, you are not connoisseurs of music ("EGW III/I" 522-523).

Eisler's political distance could also be read from an exile perspective. While *Composing for the Films* was unarguably a political text, Eisler maintains a philosophical tone. In his statement he avoids claiming to be a socialist composer, though indicates this in a round-about way with language such as 'left-leaning', 'socially conscious', 'progressive', and 'liberal', and indeed this



language is prevalent in *Composing for the Films* as well, outside of discussions of Marxism directly. Eisler's choice of words indicates the careful tightrope walk of one without a home, neither a citizen nor visitor, but somewhere in between — an exile. Eisler experienced this precarious situation in Germany as National Socialism began to take power and in the United States as a refugee under suspicion. It was not until Eisler settled in East Germany and perhaps with hope for a new future that he called himself a socialist composer as will be seen in the discussion of the last text in this chapter.

While “Fantasia in G-Men” is a relatively short statement, I believe it is an important aspect of Eisler's exile experience, or rather the experience of becoming an exile and being persecuted for his beliefs for a second time. Eisler's statement highlighted the importance of *Composing for the Films* for him, indicating a culmination of thoughts and ideas that began early on in his career as was seen in “The Builders of a New Music Culture”. This text also presented an interesting contradiction of political distancing that had not been seen in his previous, nor subsequent writings. Being read two ways, it was first shown that this distancing was purely a self-preservation technique that Eisler used to take focus away from his political leanings and to focus on the absurdity of the trial, especially when considering something as subjective as music. Secondly it was evident, when considering Eisler's previous writings along with this text, that the language he chose was perhaps purposefully vague though no less left-leaning, as the exiled composer sought to navigate the complexities of being both a stranger in his homeland and a stranger abroad. The HUAC trial was also shown to have influenced Eisler's decision to settle in East Germany upon his extradition from the United States, in the hopes that there his desire to establish a socialist musical culture could be achieved. Lastly, the analysis of this text has shown that the scandal leading up to the HUAC investigations and subsequent trial only intensified

Eisler's desire for a cultural shift to see the rise of the working class and with it a shift in the role that music played in society.

**“Basic Social Questions of Modern Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Grundfragen der modernen Musik”) (1948)**

“Basic Social Questions of Modern Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Grundfragen der modernen Musik”) is an essay from a lecture that Eisler delivered at the Second International Congress of Composers and Music Critics in Prague in May of 1948. A stencilled copy of the English translation was found among Eisler's posthumous papers.<sup>52</sup> In the text, Eisler explicitly states that his observations are from his American experiences (“Rebel” 155), and therefore revolve around American music, once more highlighting the importance and influence that America and exile had on Eisler's theories about modern music. Eisler criticizes America's capitalist culture industry and how it seemingly caters to the public's so-called ‘needs.’ Eisler states:

It [the culture industry] has left its mark on the whole of musical life- in concerts the symphonies already sound like film music, and the serious composers are bought off by Hollywood, or write musicals. (Sie [die Kulturindustrie] hat ihren Stempel dem ganzen Musikleben aufgedrückt: In den Konzerten klingen die Symphonien bereits wie Filmmusiken, und die Konzertkomponisten werden von Hollywood gekauft oder schreiben Musicals.) (“Rebel” 156; “EGW III/II” 14).

Eisler also writes that the culture industry has led to “boring uniformity,” where profitability takes precedence over all else (Eisler, “Rebel” 156). For Eisler, music in the Hollywood film industry embodied the dangers of focusing on profitability above all else and he felt that it

<sup>52</sup> See Grabs' editorial note, pp. 167.

represented a futile situation for the musician, further separating them from current social conditions (“Rebel” 155). He goes on to say that the Hollywood film industry is somewhat of a paradox in the sense that while it has the monopoly on the capitalist culture industry, it is also bringing a level of “overheated eccentricity” onto the market (“Rebel” 156). I believe that for Eisler, this eccentricity is represented in a façade of the Avant garde or quasi modernist techniques that he witnessed being used in Hollywood simply to indicate newness. Eisler writes that, “of all the arts, music is the most distant from the world of practical things and so it is most prone to be used as a sort of narcotic.” (“Musik ist am entferntesten von allen Künsten von der Welt der praktischen Dinge. Und so leiht sie sich am leichtesten zu Vernebelung, zum Rauschmittel her.”) (“Rebel” 157; “EGW III/II” 14). This means that for Eisler, music has a greater pull on the audience when combating the “emptiness and monotony of everyday life.” Eisler ties the effect of the ‘monopoly culture-industry’ to his belief that the art of listening has not kept up to the development of technology and industry over the last one hundred and fifty years. This is because when compared to vision at least, listening is passive. Eisler states that, “taking in something merely by ear, compared with vision, still shows signs of pre-individualist, pre-capitalist community.” By this, Eisler is referring to historical concert traditions that predate the rise of the bourgeoisie and the commoditization of music for personal use and enjoyment. Eisler also indicates that the rise of bourgeois music went hand-in-hand with the rise of secularism and uses polyphony or polyphonic style in music as a relic of the past to reinforce the pre-individualist nature and passivity of listening to music, describing it as the “cult of religious community” and the “community of the church” (“Rebel” 157).

Eisler notes the difficulty in placing when bourgeois music began to develop into a concrete timeline and states, “the development of music does not go parallel with socio-

economic developments” (“Denn die Entwicklung der Musik ist ungleichzeitig von dem allgemein Ökonomisch-Sozialen”) (“Rebel” 157; “EGW III/II” 15). This statement appears to conflict with Eisler’s previous discussions on the development of bourgeois music. For example, in “The Builders of a New Musical Culture” (“Die Erbauer einer neuen Musikkultur”) (1931), Eisler states that bourgeois musical development must be placed, “at the middle of the eighteenth century with the Mannheim school” (“Rebel” 46). Eisler also ties musical practice and consumption to the growth of capitalism over the past decade and states,

The sharp contradiction between work and leisure peculiar to the capitalist mode of production divides all intellectual activities into those serving work and those serving leisure. Leisure, however, is a system for reproducing labour power[...] This is the socio-economic basis for the peculiar form of musical practice in capitalism. (Der der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise eigene scharfe Gegensatz zwischen Arbeit und Erholung trennt alle geistigen Betätigungen in solche, welche der Arbeit, und solche, welche der Erholung dienen. Die Erholung aber ist ein System zur Reproduktion der Arbeitskraft [...] Das sind die gesellschaftlichen, ökonomischen Grundlagen für die eigentümliche Form der Musikausübung im Kapitalismus.) (“Rebel” 39; “EGW III/I” 143).

However, in “Basic Social Questions of Modern Music,” Eisler does admit that even when the development of music does seem to parallel social developments, it is much more nuanced and complex. Eisler describes the connection between social and musical developments as being a multiple-mediated relation rather than a mechanically direct one (“Rebel” 157). It is perhaps this aspect that Eisler has not made as explicit previously, and when compared to “The Builders of a New Musical Culture” shows how Eisler’s ideas have matured. Eisler believes that the

development of bourgeois music is most concretely seen as an ‘emancipation’ from a ‘religious cult function’ and moving towards a ‘cultivating’ and ‘civilizing function.’ He goes on to illustrate that this is musically displayed in the growth of ‘homophonic style’ and represents the emergence of the individual from the community. Eisler concludes his discussion of the social basis of bourgeois music by saying that although bourgeois society freed musicians from the conditions of the feudal period, it also placed them into the challenges of an open market and free competition. Because of this, musicians were dependent on patrons, publishers, and the concert agencies. Eisler also notes how artists such as Schubert, Baudelaire, and Hugo Wolf all succumbed to poverty (“Rebel” 158).

Eisler moves on from the bourgeois musical past to address the social basis of musical styles in the current era. Here he limits his discussion to Schoenberg and Stravinsky, two composers who Eisler deemed to have had the greatest influence on modern composers and whose music represents late bourgeois style. Concerning Schoenberg, Eisler spends a great deal of his discussion with criticisms that do not immediately appear to make a clear connection to the social basis of Schoenberg’s music and seem to be more of a critique of Schoenberg’s choice of texts for his vocal works. For example, regarding Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, op. 21, Eisler states,

The provincial demoniacal style of Gireaud together with exaggerated declamation, which Schoenberg marked through the rhythm is embarrassing and diverts from the music. I often suggested to Schoenberg that he leave out the text, thus preserving the wonderful music as character pieces, but he would never hear of it. (Die alberne Provinzdämonik Gireauds wirkt durch die übertriebene, sich einfühlende Vortragsart der Sprechstimme, die Schönberg rhythmisch fixiert hat und verlangt, peinlich und lenkt von

der Musik ab. Ich habe Schönberg öfters vorgeschlagen, den Text wegzulassen, um die großartige Musik als “Charakterstücke” zu retten. Er war mit diesem Vorschlag nicht einverstanden.) (“Rebel” 161; “EGW III/II” 17).

However, Eisler does go on to state that a characteristic feature of Schoenberg’s music is fear and writes,

He [Schoenberg] is the lyric composer of the gas chambers of Auschwitz, of Dachau Concentration Camp, of the complete despair of the man in the streets under the hand of fascism. That is his humanity.” (Er ist der Lyriker der Gaskammern von Auschwitz, der Konzentrationslager von Dachau, der ohnmächtigen Verzweiflung des kleinen Mannes unter dem Stiefel des Faschismus. Das ist seine Humanität.) (“Rebel” 161; “EGW III/II” 17-18).

When considering this rather unique quote a few questions emerge. Does this imply that for Eisler, Schoenberg’s relevancy is limited to these specific instances in time and the social conditions that he found himself in? Does Eisler believe that Schoenberg’s music represents more than struggle? It is interesting to note that Eisler focuses on Schoenberg’s humanity rather than legacy. From this it is appropriate and important to ask, if it is Schoenberg’s humanity that sets him apart, should not the twelve-tone method be able to transcend time, rather than the inevitability of it becoming a dated form? If Schoenberg’s music along with his twelve-tone form do in fact transcend time and are not limited to Schoenberg’s personal struggle, it perhaps makes sense as to why Eisler returned to twelve-tone music during his exile. The last question that arises from Eisler’s quote is regarding Schoenberg’s late works. Does Schoenberg escape despair and the Holocaust or is his music forever marked by it? Eisler does not answer this question explicitly but does so by implication when he concludes that, “Schoenberg’s school is closed and

new pupils will fail” (“die Schönbergschule wird geschlossen, und die neuen Jahrgänge fallen durch”) (“Rebel” 161; “EGW III/II” 18). Clearly, as far as this translates to Schoenberg’s contemporaries, Eisler believes that Schoenberg can be impersonated rather easily, though only on a surface level and in order for music to progress, the current time requires something new (“Rebel” 161). Essentially for Eisler, Schoenberg is already dated and the twelve-tone method simply on its own is already an historic form.

Eisler highlights the compositions of Schoenberg’s middle period as his best, noting that it is not the prevalence of dissonances that characterizes them. Instead he states that, “it is much more the disintegration of traditional diction, asymmetry, composing without musical themes, rapid contrasts and the variety of musical configurations” (“es ist vielmehr die Auflösung der traditionellen Sprache: das Asymmetrische, das Athematische, die raschen Kontraste und die Buntheit der musikalischen Gestalten”) that mark Schoenberg’s work during this period (“Rebel” 161; “EGW III/II” 18). Eisler admits that these works are the least well known and least influential even amongst modern composers. It appears that once Schoenberg’s method is removed from his own compositions and particularly those of the abovementioned middle period, problems begin for Eisler. Eisler takes issue with the ideology of Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method and writes, “it has encouraged petty-bourgeois features among some composers, such as mysticism regarding numbers, astrology, and anthroposophy” (“Ideologische hat es kleinbürgerliche Züge wie Zahlenmystik, Astrologie, Anthroposophie in manchen Komponisten entwickelt”), and lists the works of the composers Anton von Webern and Alban Berg as examples of this (“Rebel” 162; “EGW III/II” 18). Eisler notes that the paradoxical nature of the twelve-tone system can lead to potential problems. The form can be both exceedingly simple, when restricting the form to its mathematics, and difficult, when considering the nuance of

themes within the form, especially regarding the social message (“Rebel” 162). Discussing Schoenberg’s use of the sonata form in his twelve-tone pieces, Eisler notes that due to the loss of tonality in twelve-tone music, the structural elements of the form must be more pronounced and developed (“Rebel” 163). For example, the development section in a traditional Sonata, will go through a series of modulations creating instability, before returning to the home key in a recapitulation section. In the twelve-tone system this instability and sense of transition can only be illustrated through changes in thematic and rhythmic material. These contradictions between material and form also prevent a concrete exposition, tonally speaking, therefore the sonata form is no longer concrete in the twelve-tone system but is instead abstract.

Eisler next discusses Stravinsky’s neo-classicism period, deeming it to have the widest influence for composers following in Stravinsky’s path. Eisler describes neo-classicism as impassive, cold, and mechanical, utilizing quotations from pre-Beethoven techniques and that it has an overall lack of motivation. Eisler’s biggest criticisms of Stravinsky’s neo-classicism are that it plays into the notions of ‘big bourgeois’ and ‘good society’ not the earlier incarnation of ‘revolutionary’ bourgeoisie who fought against feudalism (“Rebel” 164). Also, neo-Catholicism focuses more on the aesthetic or the ‘cult in religion’ and Eisler states, “it [neo-Catholicism] has something mondaine, elegant, and falsely modern about it” and goes on to highlight that it is due to their ceremonial sounds, cult like qualities, and capitalistic natures (Eisler calls this an, “affinity to Wall Street”). For Eisler these qualities are best represented in Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* (1930) and *Oedipus Rex* (1927), and they are therefore the most important neo-classical works. Eisler points to *Spielfreudigkeit* as the German equivalent of neo-classicism as it avoids expression, has a preference for running configuration, and simulates the skill of the old masters. However, Eisler also states, “it is obvious that the art of ‘not expressing oneself’ in



neo-classicism is merely one particular form of ‘expressing oneself’” (“Rebel” 165). Eisler draws on the parallels between Schoenberg and Stravinsky by saying that both, “seek in vain for firm ties.” Eisler continues to draw parallels between Schoenberg and Stravinsky relating Schoenberg’s twelve-tone system to Stravinsky’s style imitation. For example, the manipulation of tone rows in Schoenberg’s system and the formulaic and rather easily imitated aspects of the form, at least on a surface level, are similar to the imitation of classical and baroque forms in neoclassicism. For Eisler this resulted into diluted copies of both forms. Eisler also ties the metaphysical aspects and mysticism of numbers in Schoenberg’s method to the formalism and ceremonial in Stravinsky’s neo-classicism, making evident that these two compositional forms only differ in nuance (“Rebel” 166). For Eisler this implies that not only were the two greatest modern compositional methods closer related than what initially appeared but also that both forms are potentially doomed if they cannot be freed from the focus on surface level aesthetics with nothing of substance to support them.

Again, Eisler discusses emancipation and this time it is not from tonality or form, but rather from the “religious cult character” and suggests a movement towards the “cultivating, civilizing character” in a final phase of emancipation. Eisler concludes by stating that, “after all the excesses and experiments, it appears today to be the job of music of the time to lead music back to a higher form of society, to lead it back from the private to the universal, perhaps at first in a somewhat more modest way” (“Rebel” 166). Eisler makes no indication of whether Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method or Stravinsky’s neo-classicism are suitable for the establishment of a compositional standard for modern music or if one method is better than the other and it is perhaps in what is not said that an answer can be provided. Though it is apparent that Eisler worked fairly consistently with Schoenberg’s system, especially during his American

exile, the fact that he does not present one form over the other regarding the future of music, perhaps indicates that something entirely new is needed.

In this discussion on “The Basic Social Questions of Modern Music” it has been shown that both Eisler’s contemporary experience in America and his education rooted in historical European musical traditions gave him a unique perspective on how music functions in society. As Eisler provided a critique on American capitalism and explored this in connection to the development of Bourgeois music, it was evident that his ideas were more nuanced than in his earlier essay, “The Builders of a New Musical Culture,” by indicating that the connection between musical development and socio-economic context is more complex than simply one mirroring the other. Eisler’s discussion about Schoenberg brought to light many interesting questions and highlighted the problematic nature of separating the composer from the method that he created. In this text Eisler does not make any specific suggestions regarding what a concrete compositional standard for modern music would be, but as we have seen in previous texts and as will be seen in the last text examined, forms of use, that is, for what purpose the music will be created for, will prove to be more important than the method of composition, and that this is perhaps where the future of music is to be found for Eisler.

### **“Thoughts on Form and Content” (“Inhalt und Form”) (1962)**

“Thoughts on Form and Content” (“Inhalt und Form”) (1962) was written for a talk that Eisler gave on March 9, 1962 at the Composers and Musicologists Union of the GDR in Berlin, which was Eisler’s last public appearance before his death later that same year.<sup>53</sup> The essay is comprised of excerpts from the talk published in *Musik und Gesellschaft*, a GDR music magazine in circulation between 1951 and 1990 in East Berlin from Henschelverlag, and was edited by Eisler. “Thoughts on Form and Content” is clearly not as structured or prepared as the earlier pieces discussed. Clues for why this may be can be found in Eisler’s final decade that Albrecht Betz details in *Hanns Eisler Political Musician* (1982).<sup>54</sup> The decade begins with Eisler’s non-voluntary return to Europe from the United States, continues with the never completed opera *Johann Faustus* and the death of Bertolt Brecht in August 1956, and concludes with the completion of the elegiac song cycle *Ernste Gesänge* for baritone and string orchestra in 1962. About this decade and the impact, it had on Eisler’s career, Betz writes,

His fame grew, but still without concrete results. Still only a small proportion of his works were printed, and even those by no means found favour with performers, who thought the technical demands too high and the name of Hanns Eisler too political (232).

Regarding Eisler’s composition of the songs for *Ernste Gesänge*, Betz states,

The period during which the songs were composed, 1961-62, gave no grounds for writing optimistic songs. The tensions within Germany resulting from the nation’s partition reached a climax with the building of the Wall and the announcement of a state of

<sup>53</sup> See Grabs’ editorial note, pp. 216.

<sup>54</sup> See Betz, pp. 208-241.

emergency. As in 1930, but in a completely different way, the workers' movement in Germany was also divided (234).

Betz goes on to say that it was towards the future that Eisler looked in order to find hope.

The self-emancipation of the peoples of the Third World was gathering momentum. The first manned spaceflight, the beginning of a new industrial revolution, automation and cybernetics, and their future effects on art were major preoccupations of his [Eisler's] final months (234).

Taking the above statements into consideration, it is not so surprising that Eisler's thoughts were not as organized as was previously the case. The philosophical nature of the essay with its focus on the future is also explained by the preoccupations Eisler had with the rapidly changing world around him. The lack of structure in "Thoughts on Form and Content" is observed in the rather abrupt shifts in subject matter and in a certain lack of explanation or clarification given by Eisler. For example, Eisler begins with a discussion of the limitations of theory for the composer in the following quote:

We must be clear about the uses and limitations of theory for the composer. If a composer is not master of his craft, then the best theories will not help him. I have been teaching for nearly forty years now, yet if I were not able, pencil in hand, to show a pupil how to do it better, then I would be talking generalities and that would not suffice. (Wir müssen uns über den Nutzen und die Grenzen der Theorie für den Komponisten klar sein. Wenn ein Komponist sein Metier nicht beherrscht, nützen ihm die schönsten Theorien nicht. Ich unterrichte fast vierzig Jahre, Aber,<sup>55</sup> wenn ich nicht imstande wäre, mit dem Bleistift in der Hand einem Schüler zu zeigen, wie man es besser macht, so könnte ich nur

<sup>55</sup> The capitalization after the comma follows the original.

allgemeine Redensarten geben, und das wäre zu wenig.) (“Rebel” 212; “EGW III/II” 572).

Initially, the reader would likely draw the conclusion that here Eisler is discussing compositional theory, however, his next sentence makes this harder to discern. Eisler states, “when we theorize, we, as Marxists, are clear about the limitations of theory” (“Wenn wir theoretisieren, sind wir uns als Marxisten klar über Nutzen und Grenzen der Theorie”) (Eisler, “Rebel” 212; “EGW III/II” 572). My interpretation is that because music and politics have, throughout Eisler’s career, become intrinsically bound together, he is speaking about both musical and political theory, What Eisler appears to be inferring is that if a composer is unable to produce physically what he is teaching or studying theoretically, it matters not the quality or soundness of the theory, they will not be able to master it, and therefore, especially when in a teaching position, the students will not master it either. This introductory statement is also interesting in that Eisler explicitly aligns himself politically as a Marxist. This is the first occurrence of such a statement in Eisler’s works analyzed for this thesis, and it appears to coincide with his settlement in East Germany after his extradition from the United States. It was during this time that Eisler became explicit in his political leanings and identity as a Marxist and a socialist composer.

While Eisler introduces the essay with the limitations of theory, he urges composers to be familiar with Hegel’s theories on aesthetics, especially those concerning music. Eisler focuses on Hegel’s distinction between objectivity and subjectivity in music and uses the subjective expression in the interpretation of text in Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis* in D major, op. 123 and Bach’s *Mass in B Minor*, BWV 232, as an example. About this Eisler writes:

Beethoven inserts belligerent music in his *Dona nobis pacem*. So it becomes clear that it is not only a question of individual reconciliation with God, but of real war and peace on

earth. The wonderful *Dona nobis pacem* in the B minor Mass by Bach is more of a reconciliation, of an atonement. Beethoven is more lucid here, one could almost say more realistic than Bach. (Beethoven schaltet in seinem “Dona nobis pacem” eine kriegerische Musik ein. So wird deutlich, daß es sich hier nicht um eine Aussöhnung des einzelnen mit Gott, sondern um den realen Krieg und Frieden auf Erden handelt. Das herrliche “Dona nobis pacem” in der h-Moll-Messe von Bach ist mehr eine Aussöhnung, eine Versöhnung. Beethoven ist hier deutlicher, man könnte fast sagen, realistischer als Bach.) (“Rebel” 212; “EGW III/II” 572-573).

Eisler does not explain these two pieces further or give any more consideration as to how subjectivity in music and the interpretation of text set to music impacts modern music but he does discuss later, the predilection for composers to psychologise and how music will not be able to evolve if this tendency is not avoided (“Rebel” 215). In the above quote it appears that because Beethoven, according to Eisler, grapples intellectually with God and the earthly conditions of war and peace, his music does less to psychologise or emotionally transport the listener than Bach’s work does in this case.

Eisler continues with his discussion of Hegel and his belief that in a society that is freed socially, economically, and intellectually, art will die away, and philosophy will take its place. He states, “a mankind finally freed and at the highest stage of material and cultural development— the production of art might be more inclined to die away than to increase” (“in einer endlich befreiten Menschheit auf höchster Stufe ihrer materiellen und kulturellen Ausbildung—könnte die Produktion der Kunst eher absterben als zunehmen”) (“Rebel” 213; “EGW III/II” 573). Eisler also believes that this will also mean a new consciousness for humanity and this elevated state of being will no longer require the semblance of beauty. At this

point in his talk, Eisler does not give any indication of what this means for the future of music or if there is even a future to be had and instead makes another abrupt shift to Marx.

Eisler begins briefly with his opinion on the use of the terms *Volk* and *Volkstümlichkeit* in music stating,

The terms *Volk* and *Volkstümlichkeit* are thoroughly respectable with us, but since I discovered class society through Marx, my advice would be to treat these terms in music rather more carefully. I believe much licence is taken here. (*Volk und Volkstümlichkeit* sind bei uns durchaus ehrenwerte Begriffe, obwohl ich seit Entdeckung der Klassengesellschaft durch Karl Marx raten würde, in der Musik mit dem Begriff des Volkes und der Volkstümlichkeit etwas vorsichtiger umzugehen. Ich glaube, hier wird noch gesündigt.) (“Rebel” 213; “EGW III/II” 577).

Eisler ties this in with Schiller’s essay on the poet Bürger and how in the essay, Schiller makes the conclusion that the purpose of classical art was to bridge the gap between the educated elite and the common people. Eisler notes that Schiller’s error was his belief that this bridge could happen from the top down and indicates that in the current period, social changes have broken the monopoly that the upper class had on education and have thus made the bridging of this gap possible. Regarding the concepts of ‘people’ and ‘popularity’, Eisler believes that re-establishment is needed. He indicates that society can only be changed once the class rule is obliterated. Eisler also notes that it is important to realize that popularity is not fixed but developing (“Rebel” 213). Eisler also believes that popularity is dependent on the ability of the masses to understand both the works of the classics as well as modern works and this focus on boosting the intellectual capabilities of the general public is essential to the survival of music during this period of great social change.

The next section of the talk is significantly more cohesive and Eisler's ideas are clearer. He makes a significant point regarding the development of music stating that it, "proceeds in a peculiar contradiction-in progress and recession simultaneously" ("Rebel" 214). He goes on to illustrate that as some elements in music are developed, others recede by using several examples from Western European music history. Eisler begins with a comparison between Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach<sup>56</sup> and his father Johann Sebastian Bach. Eisler notes that when compared with the works of J. S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach's piano sonatas are 'primitive', especially in formal continuity, structure, and harmony. However, Eisler notes that even so, the piano sonatas contain progressive elements, specifically, a new kind of "emotional music-making", with contrasting ideas and subjects. The new emotional music-making that Eisler refers to here is what came to be known as *empfindsamer Stil* or sensitive style, that was championed by C.P.E. Bach.

*Empfindsamer Stil* featured a wide emotional range with unpredictable shifts as well as an improvisatory and freer formed nature in structural design. This style contrasted the *Baroque Affektenlehre* or the 'doctrine of affections' that previously dominated music and dictated that a composition or an entire movement would have a consistent affect.<sup>57</sup> The innovations of C.P.E. Bach that Eisler discusses would influence and become common over the next several generations. Eisler also uses schools of thought and training to illustrate the contradictory advancement and recession of musical development. He compares the new expressiveness of the Mannheim Symphonic School with the previous baroque era's suites. The Mannheim style was far more simplistic than the baroque style, which can be seen as a recession, while the contrast of themes, types of modulations, and instrumentation were the innovations that created a new type

<sup>56</sup> See Burkholder, et al., pp. 518-520

<sup>57</sup> See Hartz and Brown, "Empfindsamkeit," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2005).



of expression. Eisler observes that the change from the complicated structures of baroque music to the simplicity in style of the classical period are hallmarks of the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, but also notes that it is in the later works of Beethoven where a shift back towards complexity is made once more and that this shift is still felt in music today (“Rebel” 214).

Next, Eisler discusses how historically, new content was achieved through a change in musical devices, but that this is no longer the case in the early twentieth century. Eisler uses the love-death scene from the final act of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (1857-59), the final aria in Richard Strauss’ *Salome* (1903-1905), and Schoenberg’s *Die Erwartung* (1909) to illustrate this and states:

In all three of these great arias, despite the change in the use of musical material, there has been no further change in the function of music. The composers keep to ‘psychologising’ and illustrating. One could go still further and now produce such pieces by means of twelve-tone music, serially, electronically. The function would remain the same, a psychologising, soporific music. This is where our discernment starts and that of the petty-bourgeois composers stops. It can’t go on like this. (In allen drei dieser großen Arien hat sich trotz Materialveränderung die Funktion der Musik nicht mehr verändert. Es bleibt beim Psychologisieren, bei der Illustration. Man könnte es noch weitertreiben. Man könnte solche Stücke jetzt durch Zwölftonmusik, seriell, elektronisch herstellen. Die Funktion würde gleichbleiben: eine psychologisierende Rauschmusik. Hier fängt unsere Vernunft an und die des spießbürgerlichen Komponisten hört auf. So geht es nicht weiter.) (“Rebel” 215; “EGW III/II” 577).

For Eisler, it is clear that the purpose and function of music must change if it is ever to break out of the realm of psychologising, otherwise no amount of innovation in technology or

compositional technique will prevent this. Eisler also believes that in order to break away from psychologising, the emotions of the listeners must be clarified rather than confused and that the unavoidable aspects of music's ability to affect the emotions must be used consciously and not left to chance or inspiration. The ability for music to affect the emotions and the penchant for psychologizing was a major factor in the reasons why Eisler and Adorno believed that film music needed a new approach and provided the impetus for *Composing for the Films* (1947). Eisler also ties the danger of psychologising and the ability for music to confound the emotions to examples from what he calls the 'prehistory' of music as detailed in the bible and the myths and legends of antiquity ("Rebel" 215). In observing tales such as the trumpets of Jericho, from the Abrahamic traditions, Orpheus, and Odysseus, from Greek mythology, as well as the German folk tale of the Loreley, Eisler notes the destructive powers of music when under the guise of beauty. From these myths, Eisler concludes the following:

One thing is clear to us today, the more primitive the society, the stronger was the power of music and of art in general. The more man masters nature, the more progressive his consciousness becomes, the less influence has art on human consciousness. Thus art changes its function. (Aber etwas ist uns heute klar: Je primitiver die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, desto stärker die Macht der Musik, der Kunst schlechthin. Je mehr die Menschen lernen, die Natur zu beherrschen, je fortschrittlicher ihr Bewußtsein wird, desto geringer wird der Einfluß der Kunst auf das menschliche Bewußtsein. So ändert die Kunst ihre Funktion.) ("Rebel" 216; "EGW III/II" 574).

One might gain a fatalistic outlook if music is indeed on an inevitable trajectory of decreasing influence and relevancy. Eisler, however, sees this as an opportunity for music to take on a new function, a function that is directly useful to society, particularly a socialist society. Eisler's

prescription for contemporary music once again focuses on moving away from what he deems as ‘intoxicating devices,’ but rather a shift towards the clarification of emotions. Moving towards the intellectualization of music and highlighting the social function of the music again shows that Eisler is urging modern composers to realize that forms of use will be paramount to ensuring the continued relevance of their music. Eisler concludes the essay with the following statement:

Out of the mythical and ritual, art becomes pleasure and is refunctioned to enrich our lives. But for socialist composers that is no excuse to avoid or underestimate the tasks facing music today in a socialist society. We shall only succeed if we make use of all the wisdom of both the old and the new. Don’t treat it lightly. (Vom Mythos und Ritual wird sie zum Genuß, zur Lebensbereicherung umfunktioniert. Das soll für uns sozialistische Komponisten aber keine Ausrede sein, um den heute gestellten Aufgaben der Musik in einer sozialistischen Gesellschaft auszuweichen oder sie zu unterschätzen. Aber wir werden nur etwas leisten, wenn wir mit der ganzen Weisheit des Alten und des Neuen Verfahren können. Machen wir es uns nicht zu leicht.) (“Rebel” 216; “EGW III/II” 574).

In this quote, Eisler concretely aligns himself politically as a socialist composer. This identity throughout the majority of Eisler’s life was in conflict with his surroundings, especially during his American exile, but was for the first time acceptable during Eisler’s final years in the GDR. While East Germany did not end up being the socialist utopia that Eisler strove for and longed for, it is clear that at the time of this talk, he was still hopeful for this future. Though at times convoluted, in “Thoughts on Form and Content” we find certain consistencies that have become emblematic of Eisler’s philosophy of music in society, such as the belief that new content cannot be achieved through a change in musical devices alone, discussed in “The Crisis in Music” (1935) and “Basic Social Questions of Modern Music” (1948) , and that composers need to be

cautious of the ability of music to effect human emotions by creating a ‘narcotic effect’ which was discussed prominently in *Composing for the Films* (1947) and “Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer” (1935). We know from earlier writings that Eisler tied these narcotic effects of music to a distraction from the economic disparity of capitalism. However, in “Thoughts on Form and Content”, Eisler still warns of these effects and the tendency for composers to psychologise, though now from a socialist perspective. With less of a focus on capitalism, Eisler encourages the intellectual development of composers from the studying of Marx and Hegel, especially the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity in music, and takes a more holistic approach regarding historical musical influences by acknowledging the simultaneous advancements and recessions of musical development.

## **Conclusion**

The three texts discussed in this chapter, “Fantasia in G-Men”, “The Basic Social Questions of Modern Music” (“Gesellschaftliche Grundfragen der modernen Musik”), and “Thoughts on Form and Content” (“Inhalt und Form”) provide an interesting look back at Eisler’s exile in the United States. They illustrate the political tensions that followed him throughout his career and help to clarify and solidify Eisler’s philosophy on the role that music plays in society. Firstly, as it was discussed in “Fantasia in G-Men,” the influence of being investigated and persecuted for a second time, along with the subsequent extradition order, highlighted Eisler’s decision to settle in East Germany with the prospect of helping to establish a socialist musical culture. In “The Basic Social Questions of Modern Music,” we observed how Eisler’s American experience both musically within Hollywood and economically with capitalism, along with his foundation in classical European musical traditions, gave him a unique perspective on how music functions in

society, namely that music cannot function separately from society and that music is bound by the political and economic environment of the society. Lastly, in “Thoughts on Form and Content”, we find Eisler freely stating his political ideology and confirming his identity as a socialist composer. In this essay, Eisler moves away from his critique of capitalism, which dominated much of his earlier writings, and instead attempts to shed light on how music can evolve and maintain relevancy under socialism. When comparing the above texts to Eisler’s important early essay, “The Builders of a New Music Culture” (1931), the culmination of the thoughts and ideas that would become *Composing for the Films* were observed, highlighting the importance of the work for Eisler. It was also shown how Eisler’s thoughts on the development of bourgeois music became more nuanced as he regarded the connection between musical development and socio-economic context. While Eisler does not prescribe a new standard for contemporary compositional standards or find these foundations in one particular school of thought, namely Schoenberg’s twelve-tone system or Stravinsky’s neoclassicism, he does put great emphasis on forms of use. Eisler makes the conclusion that in moving away from the surface level abilities of music to stir human emotions and its place in the realm of beauty, music will be able to have real intellectual and practical use for society, becoming intrinsically connected to socio-economic and political reality. In this way music will not only comment on current situations but may in fact help to shape a new reality.

## Final Thoughts

More than just a product of his time, Hanns Eisler was revolutionary musician, philosopher, and polemicist. He was never satisfied with the status quo and sought to use music to the betterment of society. He was undeniably shaped by the state of constant struggle and conflict that followed him throughout his life and career. Eisler could not have ended up the profound composer remembered today without Schoenberg, and it can be argued that without Eisler, Schoenberg's legacy would not be what it has become. The ideological differences that led Eisler to break with Schoenberg in the early 1930s are the same ideologies that brought Eisler back to the twelve-tone method during his period of exile. It was during this time that Eisler realized the potential for the method to represent and comment on the struggle of the working class. Focusing, as this thesis has done, on Eisler's American exile between 1938-1948 has illuminated not only Eisler's return to the twelve-tone method but also how Eisler was able to modify the technique to be intelligible and useful to the masses. One of the most important ways that Eisler was able to do this was to place great emphasis on forms of use. By focusing on the purpose of the music, Eisler was able to work with twelve-tone music in a less formal and abstract way, while creating a unique and contemporary sound. Hollywood was hugely influential for Eisler and gave him the opportunity to explore in-depth the connection between music and society, while providing a case study for the critique of American capitalism. Hollywood also created conflict for Eisler when at times the needs of employment and a stable income overshadowed his own aesthetic and political ideals. However, while focusing on film music in Hollywood, Eisler was able to incorporate his philosophy on new music and its role in society during the film music project and the writing of *Composing for the Films* (1947).

Two important aspects of Eisler's years in Hollywood were discussed in the first chapter. As with many other artists and intellectuals in exile, Eisler was concerned with finding stable employment and a reliable source of income, and inevitably as the case often was, found himself in Hollywood. It was during this time that Eisler had to negotiate his own personal artistic and political ideals with the demands of Hollywood. The second important aspect dealt with how the exile experience was represented in film music and was discussed primarily through the analysis of *Composing for the Films*. In order to analyze these two important aspects, it was necessary to discuss how Eisler was able to negotiate his need for security with his own artistic and political ideals, and how Eisler's philosophy on music and its role in society was influenced by his engagement with the film music industry. The sections from *Composing for the Films* that were most relevant to the discussion were Chapter Three, "New Musical Resources" and Chapter Four, "Sociological Aspects". These two chapters illuminated not only the aspects of contemporary music that Eisler found most suitable for film music, such as short forms and chamber music instrumentation, but also what Eisler prioritized for the future of new music more generally. According to Eisler this priority was the direct result of the requirements of structure, rather than a tonal system or any ready-made pattern. Also important was Eisler's referencing of the emancipating and liberating aspects of twelve-tone music, allowing for a fairly logical connection to exile to be made, such as the desire of an exile to be emancipated from their current situation, or freed from persecution. These chapters also highlighted Eisler's critique of capitalism and the mass culture industry that was represented no better than it was in Hollywood and the mechanized nature of the production of film music, and how his early forays into the industry gave him the first-hand experience that helped formulate these criticisms, as well as his proposed solutions. The analysis of *Composing for the Films* made evident the fact, that, when

examined through the lens of the exile experience, Eisler found himself in a complicated and foreign situation that influenced his theories about the potentials of new music in films and allowed him to navigate and comment on his experience, while retaining his cultural and political identity. It was also determined that for Eisler, the question of the influence of exile on music could not exist outside of the question of capitalism. Eisler did see twelve-tone music as a response to the situation he was faced with in the United States, not only as an exile but also as a way to comment on American capitalism through the versatile medium of film music.

A better understanding of how Eisler's initial experience in the United States shaped his future use of the twelve-tone method was explored in the second chapter as well as how Eisler was able to integrate his Marxist political ideals into his American experience. These two perspectives highlighted Eisler's view on how music functioned in contemporary society. The textual analysis looked at three important aspects when considering Eisler's perspectives on music and society. The first, centred on Eisler's critique of capitalism which led to the creation of new media. The second focused on Eisler's critique of these new media, namely in sound film, radio broadcasting, and the gramophone. The final aspect dealt with Eisler's concept that the forms of use were instrumental and arguably more important than compositional technique when regarding the future and relevancy of new music in society. As it was shown, the texts selected for the second chapter did not address twelve-tone music exclusively, but it nevertheless became apparent that Eisler was still coming to terms with his concerns about how twelve-tone music could be relevant for the masses, the most prominent being the working class. It was evident that Eisler believed that in order for modern music to be accessible, composers needed to understand the struggles of the working class. Eisler found this reflected in the aim of the New York Composers Collective who actively promoted modern music outside of elite specialist



circles. For Eisler, the parallels between the crisis in music and the crisis in society were intrinsically bound. The crisis in music was primarily shown in the disconnect from contemporary social struggles and the crisis in society were struggles such as economic disparity, growing fascism, and capitalist mass culture. Eisler warned that while the composer remained physically and emotionally isolated from society, by way of pandering to and relying upon the patronage of wealthy sponsors, so too would their music remain isolated from the masses. As such, the relevance of new music would be lost. It is perhaps unsurprising that Eisler therefore believed that instrumental music would become subordinate and increasingly insignificant to modern music. Eisler predicted a return to the dominance of vocal music seen in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, Eisler believed that this dominance of vocal music in the twentieth century would be predominantly secular, unlike the religiosity of earlier eras. One of the main reasons that Eisler gave for this shift back towards vocal music was his belief that instrumental music and concert life were rooted in capitalism and therefore could not be sustained when capitalist society entered a crisis. Eisler also believed that the practice of music theory had to be raised to the level of contemporary thought in order to counteract how he felt music had devolved socially, particularly in the realm of music listening. Eisler linked the advancement of technology such as the radio, sound film, and gramophone as contributors in the destruction of old forms of musical listening such as the concert setting. He also believed that the prevalence and popularity of film, and, by proxy, film music were the reasons that forms like the sonata would become obsolete. The ever-growing link between picture and sound had according to Eisler, made audiences unaccustomed to listening in an abstract way.

Examining the texts for the third chapter, which spanned from Eisler's HUAC hearing to his last public appearance in 1962 in the GDR, provided a retrospective look at Eisler's time in

the United States and how this period of time impacted his thoughts on modern music and society. The analysis of these texts focused on three major influences that were seen to have shaped Eisler's philosophy of modern music and included the influence of America and his exile there, the influence of Marxism that began very early on in Eisler's career, and the historical European influences both political and musicological. While there never was a radical shift in Eisler's philosophy, there was an apparent evolution and maturation, and these last three writings became more concrete and explicit especially regarding his position as a socialist composer, the ability of twelve-tone music to represent the masses, and the legitimacy of film music. The scandal surrounding not only Hanns Eisler, but his brother Gerhart Eisler as well, owing to a series of articles published by his sister Ruth Fischer, as well as growing Cold War tensions and anti-communist sentiment, became Eisler's second major conflict with governmental censorship and persecution. This experience influenced Eisler's decision to settle in East Germany following the extradition order from the U.S. government. In particular, "Basic Social Questions of Modern Music", reflected the importance of Eisler's American exile and the impact that this time had on Eisler's theories about modern music. Eisler's discussion of the development of Bourgeois music highlighted a maturation in his philosophy when comparing it to one of his most important early essays titled, "The Builders of a New Musical Culture" (1931). The biggest evolution is seen in how Eisler negotiated the development of music against socio-economic developments. While in his earlier works, Eisler seemed to draw a fairly concise parallel between these developments by the time he is writing "Basic Social Questions of Modern Music", he is more cautious, indicating that although the development of music does seem to parallel social growth, it is much more nuanced and complex. This is significant when considering Eisler's thoughts on the social uses of modern music. Eisler utilizes examples from both Schoenberg and

Stravinsky in his discussion of modern music and society as these were the two composers that he believed had the greatest influence on modern composers with their genres of twelve-tone and neoclassical music respectively. Eisler was critical of both Schoenberg and Stravinsky, and while it is apparent that he worked more closely with Schoenberg's system, he does not present one form over the other as a consistent blueprint for the future of music, indicating that by 1948 both were already historical forms for Eisler and that something entirely new was needed. Eisler's last public appearance and talk, "Thoughts on Form and Content" (1962) solidified the fact that for Eisler, throughout his life and career, music and politics were intrinsically linked. Moreover, this text is significant in that it is the first instance in the works analyzed for this thesis that Eisler explicitly aligns himself politically as a Marxist and musically as a socialist composer. Looking ahead to the future of music Eisler makes it clear that the purpose and function of music has to change in order for it to break away from a long history of psychologizing. The danger of psychologizing was in the ability for music to confound or manipulate human emotion and this was seen by Eisler as a social and intellectual regression. Eisler saw the manipulation of emotions as regressive because he believed that the more progressive society became, the less influence music would have on human consciousness. This was not to say that music would become obsolete but rather that it must take on a new function, one that is directly useful to society and particularly for Eisler, a socialist society.

By synthesizing both of Eisler's creative and political worlds, this thesis has been able to shed light not only on Hanns Eisler the composer but also the intellectual exile and the unique perspective that this experience had on Eisler's contribution to contemporary music in both Germany and the United States. Through the analysis of Eisler's texts and the research completed, it is unequivocally too simple of a conclusion to make, as has been argued (Cavallotti

219-232), that the twelve-tone music mirrored the exile experience due to its rigorous form and limited material. However, Eisler's return to the twelve-tone method during his time of exile cannot simply be overlooked as coincidental. More accurately, it is necessary to look at Eisler's body of work both musically, theoretically, and philosophically and when viewed in this holistic manner it becomes apparent that Eisler's initial break with Schoenberg in the early 1930s in order to support the German Workers Movement allowed his political ideals to solidify while addressing what was musically necessary to be relevant to the masses: a clarity of purpose and style, predominantly vocal in nature, and easily intelligible and learnable by amateur performers. As the fascism of National Socialism rose and the Second World War waged on, leaving much devastation and displacement, Eisler found himself in exile and returning to the twelve-tone method. Eisler's ability to cut Schoenberg's method down to its most basic elements to incorporate his previously determined ideals of usefulness, meant that he was successfully able to abolish Schoenberg's bourgeois elitism. This was for Eisler, one of his biggest conflicts with the form. Eisler's experience in Hollywood and in particular with American capitalism and the socio-economic disparity that he witnessed, further connected Eisler's political and musical ideals. For Eisler, so well-studied in western European music history, he was able to draw parallels between musical developments and social environment, believing that the crisis he perceived in both areas effected the other and that it required significant shifts not only to preserve the relevance of music but for the betterment of society overall. From these observations, Eisler determined that there was no way that music could continue to be socially meaningful by adhering to historical forms that were out of touch with the current social, political, and economic reality. Not only was the current state of music lacking social meaning, Eisler also believed that it posed a danger to the masses, particularly where popular music and

the entertainment industry were concerned. Using Hollywood as a case study, Eisler warned of the narcotic effects of music when film studios continued to rely on tropes carried over from the romantic era in order to manipulate audience emotions, causing a pre-calculated desired effect, rather than engaging the audience intellectually and providing commentary at a distance. This distance for Eisler was achievable through contemporary methods such as twelve-tone music that freed the composer from the confines and predictability of conventional tonality.

Eisler did not go as far as indicating that the twelve-tone method was the future of contemporary music. In fact, he already found Schoenberg's system to be historical and insufficient as a standard model of composition by the late forties. Eisler's biggest contribution to contemporary music theory was his insistence that forms of use took precedence over compositional method, which indicates that the contemporary post-war society that Eisler found himself in had progressed beyond prescriptive methods of composition. Twelve-tone music in the abstract, freed from the conventions of harmony and tonality, was thus free to become a useful tool for the bettering of society.

While it is evident today that Eisler was not able to completely revolutionize the function of music in society (one only needs to attend the latest Hollywood blockbuster to continue to hear nearly every musical device that Eisler criticized in *Composing for the Films*, including the prevalent use of leitmotif, musical illustration, and large orchestral forms), his work is no less significant or relevant. This thesis has made an important contribution as a case study of the larger question of the role of music in society. Through the study of Hanns Eisler, one of the most politically engaged composers of the twentieth century, it becomes apparent that music is intrinsically linked to the social, economic, and political environment of the time. For Hanns Eisler, his use of the twelve-tone method directly correlated to the social function of music,

especially in response to American capitalism and European fascism. This in turn, created a new form of twelve-tone music that separated itself from Schoenberg and the musical elitism that Eisler loathed, focusing instead on clarity and intelligibility, and showing that it could indeed be used as the voice of the people. As our culture remains arguably in the same crisis of capitalism that Eisler witnessed, if not even more pronounced, and fascism begins to rise again academics and musicians alike would do well to continue to study Hanns Eisler. Perhaps it will be discovered that he was simply ahead of his time.

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