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TAKING HER AT HER WORK: RECONSIDERING THE LEGACY OF ALMA  
MAHLER

by

Rachel Elizabeth Scott

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Music

The University of Memphis

May 2021

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## ABSTRACT

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Alma Mahler (1879–1964) grew up surrounded by artists in late nineteenth-century Vienna. Despite her musical training, demonstrated passion for music, and publication of several Lieder, Mahler's identity as a composer has remained overshadowed by narratives surrounding her personal life and those of her husbands and lovers, not to mention the artistic work of her husbands and lovers. Increasingly, however, interest in Alma Mahler as a composer has been nurtured through creative engagement with that legacy, and frequently by women authors and artists.

This dissertation explores the existing literature written by and related to Alma Mahler and identifies some approaches for reevaluating her legacy as a composer. Those writing about the life and legacy of Alma Mahler in the twenty-first century typically follow one of two established paths; that of the rational author writing the irrational female subject or that of creative, and frequently feminist, approaches to Mahler's life and work. I propose a third path, one that acknowledges both of the aforementioned approaches, but that focuses on Mahler's work instead of her words. By drawing attention to Mahler works—that is, her songs and the performance thereof—and considering how reception and recording of these songs has shifted over the past several decades, I am poised to assert that Mahler is a composer.

The proliferation of diverging primary source materials surrounding her life and musical activities has prompted some to discount the narrative of Alma Mahler as a legitimate composer. This dissertation acknowledges the varied and often conflicting approaches to and perspectives on the idea of Alma Mahler as a composer and

investigates how her music and its performance have been received in light of, and sometimes despite, her own writings. My work reconciles diverse facets of the composer by exploring her own words, the words of others, and, perhaps most importantly, her musical work in contemporary performance. It is my contention that by investigating Mahler through all of these frames, we can identify and contextualize the hidden but significant musical contributions of a young, female song composer in turn-of-the-century Vienna.

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## INTRODUCTION:

### ALMA MAHLER IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: WORDS VERSUS WORKS

I make you up  
from the lines of a few  
songs you wove:  
*I wander among flowers  
and blossom myself along.*<sup>1</sup>

Alma Mahler (1879–1964) grew up surrounded by artists in late nineteenth century Vienna.<sup>2</sup> Despite her musical training, demonstrated passion for music, and publication of several Lieder, Mahler’s identity as a composer has remained overshadowed by narratives surrounding her personal life and those of her husbands, not to mention the artistic work of her husbands and lovers. Increasingly, however, interest in Alma Mahler as a composer has been nurtured through creative engagement with that legacy, and most frequently by women authors and artists. The above excerpt from Kristina von Held’s “Encountering Alma” captures the generative and identity-forming work of piecing together an understanding of the composer Alma Mahler from fragmentary evidence. Held’s poem is one of numerous examples of how women have

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<sup>1</sup> From Kristina von Held, “Encountering Alma” in “A Whole Canvas Glowing: Poems of Alma Mahler,” (MFA Thesis., University of Akron, 2010); The italicized text is von Held’s translation of the opening of Heinrich Heine’s “Ich wandle unter Blumen” which Mahler published in her 1910 collection of songs.

<sup>2</sup> Although she has been referred to by any combination of the names Alma Maria Schindler Mahler Gropius Werfel, she published her musical work under the names Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler, Alma Maria Mahler, or Alma Mahler-Werfel. The Library of Congress authorized form of her name is Mahler, Alma, 1879-1964, accessed 16 January 2021, <https://lccn.loc.gov/n50002491>. Throughout this dissertation I will refer to her as (Alma) Mahler. There are valid reasons, however, to prefer other forms of her name; as Elizabeth L. Keathley and Marilyn L. McCoy note in their introduction to *Schoenberg’s Correspondence with Alma Mahler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 16: “Our use of ‘Alma’ is not to be taken as trivializing, but rather as a way she identified herself and with which she felt comfortable ... A star in her own firmament, Alma has earned one-name person status.”

found artistic fulfillment and resonance in their work to depict Alma Mahler as an agent of creativity.

Those writing about the life and legacy of Alma Mahler in the twenty-first century typically follow one of two established paths. Sally Macarthur discusses the binaries that can be perpetuated by following the scripts of the “rational male author” writing the “irrational female subject”—the path most frequently followed in scholarship—versus creative feminist approaches to Mahler’s life and work.<sup>3</sup> I propose a third path, one that acknowledges both of the aforementioned approaches to Mahler’s life and works, but that focuses on Mahler’s work instead of her words. By drawing attention to Mahler works—that is, her songs and the performance thereof—and considering how reception and recording of these songs has shifted over the past several decades, I am poised to assert that Mahler is a composer. Previous attempts, largely by the “rational male author,” to delegitimize her work and legacy are increasingly of little interest and import to performers and audiences alike.

This dissertation explores the existing literature written by and related to Alma Mahler and identifies some approaches for reevaluating her legacy as a composer today. The first chapter provides a cultural context for understanding Mahler’s creative work. In “Alma Mahler as Composer: Gender and Creativity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna,” I explore the constraints on women’s musical education in turn-of-the-century Austria and consider their effect on women composers. Educational opportunities were often based on

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<sup>3</sup> Sally Macarthur, “Facts, Fictions and the Alma Mahler Machine: A Schizoanalysis” *Musicology Australia* 41, no. 1 (2019): 61–71. The examples used to explore these binaries, before setting them aside to conduct a Deleuzian analysis of Mahler, are Oliver Hilmes, *Witwe im Wahn: das Leben der Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Munich: Siedler, 2004); translated into English by Donald Arthur as *Malevolent Muse: The Life of Alma Mahler* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2015); Mary Sharratt’s *Ecstasy: A Novel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018).

essentialist ideas about women, their capabilities, and purpose, as well as their class and religion; accordingly, I explore the intersection of gender, religion, and class as it related to musical training. This chapter broadly explores gendered conceptions of creativity and then specifically investigates the interaction between contemporaneous gender norms and the music education, training, and professional opportunities afforded to women in this time and place. These considerations provide an essential context in which to consider Mahler's creative and compositional work.

Chapter Two, "In Her Words: The 'Alma Problem' and Life Writing in Music Historiography," offers a discussion of Mahler's own life writing, especially her diaries and memoirs. These documents are frequently the starting point for literature about her life and are essential to understanding how she chose to present herself and why she has been depicted and understood as she has been. Mahler has been dismissed by several scholars as self-serving and irresponsible with the musical and biographical legacy of a "Great Man of Music." Countless individuals, male and female, have altered and destroyed historical records, defining Alma as the problem instead of questioning the neutrality of any life writing risks perpetuating sexist stereotypes. This chapter will focus on Mahler's own autobiographical writings to explore their shifting rhetoric and investigate how they have informed scholarship on her own music.

Following up on the discussion of Mahler in her own words, Chapter Three turns to the words others have used to describe her. "In His Words: Alma Mahler in the Male Imagination" explores how Alma Mahler has been evoked in print, stage, and sound. Mahler was not merely muse to her husbands and lovers; she continues to inspire and captivate artists working in many disparate media. In this chapter, I will discuss a variety

of textual sources that take Alma Mahler as their topical focus or inspiration. My analysis focuses on four fictional works by authors who identify as men to consider the gendered implications of men fictionalizing Mahler. I will examine the thematic constructs used by these men to reimagine Mahler's life in various fictional genres and discuss their implications for the assessment of Mahler's legacy.

Chapters Four and Five investigate Alma Mahler's work—her musical settings of poetic texts. In Chapter Four, "Taking Her at Her Work: Text Selection and Musical Characteristics of Mahler's Lieder," I examine existing literature on Mahler as a composer of Lieder, discuss her approach to setting poetry, and investigate the musical characteristics of her songs. In Chapter Five, "Shot into the Air Like a Rocket: Exploring Climax in Mahler's Lieder," I present a case study on musical climax in the songs of Alma Mahler and her contemporary and teacher Alexander Zemlinsky. The appropriation of musical climax as an act of subversion has become a common claim in feminist analysis of music. Goal-oriented narratives of tonal classical music imply a linear and teleological development; this focus on the tension and release of climax has been called out by feminist music scholars as overtly masculine and even violent. Some have argued that when women composers approach musical climax differently than their male counterparts, it is based on gender-specific differences, or differences in sexual experience, and is inherently subversive. In this chapter, I argue that differences in Mahler's placement and use of musical climax are not based in gender as much as they are a product of her commitment to expressing the poetic text and composing in a late-tonal style.

Chapter Six, “Take Their Work for It: Establishing Mahler’s Legacy Through Performance,” makes an argument for looking to the performance of Mahler’s song as the key indication of her legacy in the twenty-first century. In this chapter, I investigate metadata surrounding recorded performances of Alma Mahler’s Lieder and leverage social media enabled features to consider the trajectory of these performances over the past several decades. My objective is to shed light not only on the frequency of performances of Mahler’s music, but also on the how perceptions of Mahler’s compositional work have evolved in the past several decades and how the performance of her songs has affected her legacy.

In Chapter Seven, I introduce two songs attributed to Mahler that have not yet been discussed in the literature. The songs differ considerably from her published work and are dated 1925 and 1927—a full decade after what is considered her latest known piece. If hers, these songs disrupt the accepted timeline of Mahler’s compositional activity and also raise questions about how we can reconcile the narratives that emphasize her role and fulfillment as muse with new documents that suggest her continued interest in and engagement with composition.

Throughout the dissertation, I draw connections between the various identities and impressions Mahler cultivated throughout her rich and varied life. Specifically, I investigate how her music and its performance has been received in light of, and sometimes despite, her own writings. The proliferation of diverging primary source materials surrounding her life and musical activities has prompted “rational male authors” to discount the narrative of Alma Mahler as a legitimate composer. This dissertation acknowledges the varied and often conflicting approaches to and perspectives

on the idea of Alma Mahler as a composer. My work reconciles diverse facets of the composer by exploring her own words, the words of others, and, perhaps most importantly, her musical work in contemporary performance. It is my contention that by investigating Mahler through all of these frames, we can identify and contextualize the hidden but significant musical contributions of a young, female song composer in turn-of-the-century Vienna.



## CHAPTER 1

### ALMA MAHLER AS COMPOSER:

#### GENDER AND CREATIVITY IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE VIENNA

Women have been involved in the production of music in various capacities throughout recorded history. Some cultures have been more supportive of women's music making and others have sought to limit how and when women participated. In turn-of-the-century Austria, limitations on the women's musical education, and education more broadly, had a negative impact on their success as composers. In this time and place, educational opportunities were often based on essentialist ideas about women, their capabilities, and their purpose, as well as their class and religion. This chapter will investigate contemporaneous gender norms and the music education, training, and professional opportunities afforded to women in order to consider their influence on the compositional work of Alma Mahler.

Despite women's ongoing engagement with music throughout the nineteenth century, the earnestly held belief that there were no great women composers in the Western art music tradition was pervasive.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon was not limited to art music; during this period, notions about the creative inability of woman were strongly entrenched in most areas of artistic endeavor.<sup>2</sup> Bram Dijkstra documents turn-of-the

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<sup>1</sup> Or even more than that—that women were incapable of composing. Contemporaneous statements on the topic will be provided and discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality; with a New Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

century examples of the perceived intellectual and moral debility of women, noting: “The work of painters, poets, and critics constantly demonstrates how during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century misogyny, the wonders of science, and the theory of evolution had joined to form a holy trinity of saintly masculinity against the regressive entity called woman.”<sup>3</sup> It was in this openly antagonistic environment that Alma Mahler struggled against what she perceived as her weakness, her femininity, to find artistic fulfillment.<sup>4</sup>

Scholarship has demonstrated how Western concert music, especially, perpetuates male hegemony in all aspects of its composition and performance.<sup>5</sup> Women composers in the nineteenth century struggled to have their contributions published, studied, and performed.<sup>6</sup> If we are quick to offer the name of a nineteenth-century woman composer—Fanny Hensel, Josephine Lang, or Clara Schumann, for example—it is due to the work undertaken largely over the past half-century.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the identification of women composers and their compositions, however, this recent scholarship has illuminated aspects of gender as it relates to the lived experience of women composers

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<sup>3</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 182.

<sup>4</sup> Alma Mahler, *Alma Mahler-Werfel: Tagebuch-Suiten 1898–1902*, ed. Antony Beaumont, and Susanne Rode-Breyman (Frankfurt a m Main: S. Fischer, 1997), 172: “Lass mich nicht unterliegen in dem Kampfe [ge]gen meine Schwäche, meine Weibheit.”

<sup>5</sup> John Shepherd writes: “the vast majority of music consumed in the Western world is concerned with articulating, in a variety of different ways, male hegemonic processes. ‘Classical’ music is founded on a notational control of pitch and rhythm which in turn implies an androgynized sense of self as expressed through pure and standardized timbres.” 171. “Music and Male Hegemony” in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 151–72.

<sup>6</sup> Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Aldershot, England: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Much of this work has been done by women, including Marcia Citron, Suzanne Cusick, Ellen Koskoff, Susan McClary, Nancy Reich, Ruth A. Solie, Judith Tick, and others.

and societal norms concerning creativity and musical education and composition. In this chapter, I draw on this research to legitimize a nineteenth-century Austrian woman's contributions to composition by contextualizing the repressive and antagonistic conditions under which she composed.<sup>8</sup>

### **Goodness, Not Greatness: Woman's Nature and Gender Norms**

A useful starting place might be the term "great" in the assertion that there were, allegedly, no great women composers.<sup>9</sup> Great has many possible meanings in a musical context. For example, one might refer to a "great work" or masterpiece, one which has entered the canon and is deemed to be of considerable importance or significance.<sup>10</sup> Great might also suggest the scale of a musical work; a symphony is a great work where a song is considered a small-scale piece.<sup>11</sup> "Great men" was used throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to perpetuate the idea of composer as romantic genius as well as the

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<sup>8</sup> Scholars throughout the humanities have noted a tendency for feminist scholarship to focus on historical restrictions and overlook women's successes. See, for example, Frances Borzello, *A World of Our Own: Women as Artists Since the Renaissance* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2000); Marian Wilson Kimber, "The 'Suppression' of Fanny Mendelssohn: Rethinking Feminist Biography," *Nineteenth Century Music* 26, no. 2 (2002): 113–29. My intention here is to draw attention to cultural and historical restrictions in order to contextualize and celebrate the existing work of Alma Mahler.

<sup>9</sup> Portions of this paper were previously submitted for MUHL 8505, Fall 2019. I am indebted to Dr. Janet Page for her input and feedback.

<sup>10</sup> Please see Marcia Citron's work on gendered elements of canon formation, including: *Gender and Musical Canon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (1990): 102–17.

<sup>11</sup> Especially in the nineteenth-century, A. Peter Brown contends, "the composing of symphonies represented the supreme test; the point of comparison could only be Beethoven...if we are to believe present-day commentators, Beethoven aroused a sublime fear in his symphonically oriented successors, resulting in either imitation or suppression of his models." A. Peter Brown, *The European Symphony From ca. 1800 to ca. 1930: Germany and the Nordic Countries*, *The Symphonic Repertoire*, vol. 3, part A (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 5.

ideology of autonomous or absolute art music.<sup>12</sup> Great men lived public lives; women were mostly relegated to the private sphere, whether that was the home, salon, or convent.<sup>13</sup> Great can also be used as an intensifier; with this usage, one designates an outstanding musical composition as great, according to various personal and social criteria.<sup>14</sup> Nineteenth-century thought held that women were not individuals and were incapable of greatness, or of being exceptional in any way.<sup>15</sup> Compositional greatness is something that has been denied women based on all of these understandings; women of the time were valued for their moral goodness, after all, and not intellectual greatness.<sup>16</sup>

Alma Mahler, like other female Lieder composers of her time, has been called out for an alleged lack of greatness. One biographer recently wrote, “Unlike the men in her life, Alma has not left behind any great artworks that might prompt us to concern ourselves with her—no symphonies, no paintings, no buildings, no poems or

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of “great men” and romantic genius, see Hans Lenneberg, “The Myth of the Unappreciated (Musical) Genius,” *Musical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (1980): 219–31 and Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon is obviously not limited to the study of music and is of broader interest throughout the humanities. See, for instance, Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980): 28–48; Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> John J. Sheinbaum, *Good Music: What It Is and Who Gets to Decide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). Sheinbaum discusses “serious,” “unified,” “deep,” “authentic,” “heroic,” “original,” and “connected” as factors that have shaped what is considered “good” in music.

<sup>15</sup> Max Nordau, for example, wrote in *Paradoxes* (Germany: Laird & Lee, 1885): “woman is as a rule, typical; man, individual. The former has average, the latter exceptional features.” “Therefore, there is incomparably less variation between women than between men. If you know one, you know them all, with but few exceptions.” 48–49.

<sup>16</sup> Or, as Christian Wilhelm Spieker wrote in a widely circulated 1856 (original 1808) conduct book *Emiliens Stunden der Andacht und Nachdenkens. Für die erwachsenen Töchter der gebildeten Stände*: “Woman, on the other hand, should be gentle, quiet, friendly, obedient, withdrawing shyly from life, rather than furiously forcing her way in. She should be the image of morality and joy, peaceful and friendly, rich in poverty, satisfied with little and happy in her limited intelligence” 53–54, translated in Chris Weedon, *Gender, Feminism, & Fiction in Germany, 1840–1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 10.

novels... She may have composed some *pretty little songs* as a young girl, but she has only recently been perceived as a composer.”<sup>17</sup> Before considering the specific context for Mahler’s creativity and compositional work, however, we must first come to terms with assertions made throughout the period that there were no great women composers, and that women were not only different, but also inherently less than their male counterparts.<sup>18</sup> These statements as to the true nature of women and their creative inabilities came from a variety of what were then received as authoritative voices, including theologians, philosophers, and scientists.<sup>19</sup>

Gender norms frequently intersected with and were reinforced by religious belief and practices. In nineteenth-century Austria, beliefs about the nature and purpose of woman were frequently derived from religion, and especially Christianity. The lower status of women relative to men, for example, was argued to be based on biblical scripture. German theologian Heinrich Büttner asserted in 1863, “The first task of a woman according to God’s order is to be a helpmate to her husband. Her duty is to stand by him and help him in every way to realise what he has to do, to be his second in life’s

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis mine. Oliver Hilmes, *Malevolent Muse: The Life of Alma Mahler*, trans. Donald Arthur (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2015), 3. It is telling that Hilmes has been referred to as Alma Mahler’s “most perspicacious biographer” by Seth Monahan, “I Have Tried to Capture You...’: Rethinking the Alma Theme from Mahler’s Sixth Symphony,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 1 (2011): 119–78, at 138. Both men have used what might be considered sexist language to describe Alma Mahler, suggesting diagnoses such as “chronic depression,” 143 and “histrionics,” 144, “raving hysteria,” 154, and so on. See chapter three for a discussion of the sexism in Hilmes.

<sup>18</sup> An excellent and comprehensive discussion of creativity and masculinity/paternity is offered in Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

<sup>19</sup> Although written by individuals in the nineteenth century, these statements generally echoed the beliefs and understanding of their contemporaries. Individuals quoted in the following sections were sufficiently prominent and influential that they would likely have an impact on Mahler’s upbringing, education, and identity.

battles, his consoling angel in life's suffering, in everything his crown and honour."<sup>20</sup>

Women were not to glorify themselves, but rather to serve their husbands, and until they had one of those, their father and his household.

Women composers in turn-of-the-century Austria had different relationships with religion depending on various family and socioeconomic considerations. As ambitious and talented women, however, each was bound to encounter some friction, regardless of her beliefs, between compositional ambition and contemporaneous religious thought about the purpose and role of women. Alma Mahler was not particularly interested or invested in religion as a young woman.<sup>21</sup> This was, of course, an example of privilege.<sup>22</sup> As a Catholic in Vienna, Mahler did not encounter the prejudices non-Catholics, and specifically Jews, did.<sup>23</sup> Mahler's exposure to religious instruction was limited.<sup>24</sup> Even if

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<sup>20</sup> *Woman as God Wants Her* (1863), translated in Weedon, *Gender, Feminism, & Fiction*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> "I had grown up virtually without religion. At home I learned only some primitive prayers that were drilled into us by our Catholic maids." Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love: Memories of a Lifetime* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 24. Mahler describes herself as being spiritual more than religious; her 1898–1902 diaries frequently employ religious language (holiness, purity, sacred, for example) in connection with love and music, not religion. For example, after attending a production of *Tristan und Isolde*, she describes Lilli Lehman and Richard Wagner as "the holy ones," Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, trans. Antony Beaumont (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 32.

<sup>22</sup> Mahler acknowledged this privilege when she recorded statements such as, "The defamatory tactics of the anti-Semitic faction are making him [Dr. Theobald Pollack] ill. God knows, I'm glad I wasn't born a Jew." Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 355. She nonetheless frequently records anti-Semitic statements and thoughts in her diaries. She boasts in her September 29, 1900 entry: "I've become a true anti-Semite." Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 326.

<sup>23</sup> Mahler converted from Catholicism to Protestantism August 25, 1900. Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 317. She claims it was because her less-than-independent sister needed to convert before her marriage and was scared to do it alone: "Und als meine recht unselbständige jüngere Schwester aus Liebe zu ihrem Bräutigam zum Protestantismus übertrete sollte, tat ich es auch ihr zuliebe, da sie eine jämmerliche Angst hatte." Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008), 28.

<sup>24</sup> Her formal education was indeed limited. She, does, however, mention "religious instruction struck me as play acting... I left school without knowing the Ten Commandments. My voracious reading—of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and, above all, Plato—confirmed me in my agnosticism." Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 24.

she was less invested in religion early in her life<sup>25</sup> than many of her peers, she nonetheless felt its constraints.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, such essentialist rhetoric on the nature, purpose, capabilities, and limitations of women was adopted and perpetuated outside of theology, and was used extensively by philosophers, authors, “sexologists,” and other so-called “scientists.” In this section, I share some of the most influential voices from Europe’s cultural centers during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although few of these men were acquaintances of Alma Mahler, their ideas about women were widely held throughout her upbringing and period of compositional training. German Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, for example, wrote in 1851, “The very look of the female form teaches us that woman is neither destined for major intellectual nor physical work. She bears the obligations of living not through action, but through suffering, through the pains of childbirth, care for the child, submission to her husband...”<sup>27</sup> Schopenhauer, like most of his contemporaries, reduced the fate of women to their reproductive capabilities and dismissed the possibility of their intellectual contributions.

French novelist and author Octave Mirbeau, commenting on Remy de Gourmont’s *Lilith*, relates women’s alleged lack of intelligence and creative capacity to

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<sup>25</sup> Her later interest in Catholicism was inspired by her relationship to Father Johannes Hollsteiner, Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 216. She states indicates that she was put off by Gustav Mahler’s interest in Catholic mysticism and indicates that her interest developed much later: “Viel, viel später entdeckte ich für mich zuerst die Kirche und noch viel später Jesus Christus.” Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> An example of a religious constraint might be in her adherence to the “moral code of the time”: “My first marvel of love was wrecked by my so-called ‘breeding’ which made me think I had ‘something of value’ to shield.” Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 12–13.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, “Über die Weiber,” Chapter XXVII *Perergera und Paralipomena*, translated in Weedon, *Gender, Feminism, & Fiction in Germany*, 1.

their anatomy and purpose: “Woman does not have a brain; she is simply a sexual organ. And that is the beauty of it. She has but one role in the universe, but that is a grandiose one: to make love, that is to say, to perpetuate the species...Certain women, very rare exceptions, have been able to give, either in art or in literature, an illusion of creative energy. But those are either abnormal creatures, in revolt against nature, or simply the reflection of males, of whom, through sexual disfunction, they have been able to maintain certain characteristics.”<sup>28</sup> Not only were women thought to be incapable of artistic and intellectual work, those who aspired to do so exemplified sexual disfunction and fought nature.

Austrian Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who was among the most influential psychiatrists in the era before Freud, highlighted women’s alleged natural passivity in his 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis*.<sup>29</sup> He suggested that masochism, a term he coined, was a perversion in men, but natural in women: “In woman, voluntary subjection to the opposite sex is a physiological phenomenon. Owing to her passive role in procreation and long-existent social conditions, ideas of subjection are, in woman, normally connected with the idea of sexual relations. They form, so to speak, the harmonics which determine the tone-quality of feminine feeling.”<sup>30</sup> Krafft-Ebing, too, allowed women but a single purpose and demeanor.

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<sup>28</sup> *Mercure de France* quoted in Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 182.

<sup>29</sup> Mahler mentions von Krafft-Ebing in her *Diaries 1898–1902*, 404, and seems to have been familiar with his work.

<sup>30</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to the Antipathetic Sexual Instinct* (London: Mayflower, 1967), 130.



John Ruskin, an English art critic and influential writer, also alleges an active vs. passive dichotomy in men and women: “The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention ... woman’s ... intellect is not for invention or creation.”<sup>31</sup> British physician Harry Campbell echoed Ruskin by asserting: “In imitativeness and lack of originality [woman] stands conspicuously first; indeed it is essentially in this particular that the masculine intellect shows its superiority over the feminine.”<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche put it quite succinctly in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*: “The happiness of man is: ‘I will.’ The happiness of woman is: ‘He will.’”<sup>33</sup> Prominent and respected men, and frequently women, found consensus in the dubious belief that women had no creative intellectual abilities and should have no desire to create.

Even Alma Mahler’s male contemporaries who were more sympathetic to women identified women’s contributions as different, and of less consequence. Megan Brandow-Faller recalls the writing of Mahler’s contemporary in Vienna, Stefan Zweig, to evoke the perceived “otherness” of women: “The writings of Stefan Zweig also implied that femininity—entailing, as it were, its own set of womanly arts—coexisted uneasily with conceptions of being an artist. With their makeup palettes, brushes, and foundational

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<sup>31</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (London: George Allen, 1883), 91.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Campbell, *Differences in the Nervous Organization of Man and Woman* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1891), 232.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* ([s.l.]: Project Gutenberg, 2003), accessed 12 December 2020, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7205/7205-h/7205-h.htm>. “Das Glück des Mannes heisst: ich will. Das Glück des Weibes heisst: er will.” Frances Nesbitt Opper has argued that through Nietzsche’s use of metaphor and irony he was working to dismantle dualistic thinking and logical hierarchies. Frances Nesbitt Opper, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

clothing, fashionable women like those in the Cabaret Fledermaus were expected to embody the most demanding effects of artistic effort: that is, they had to balance painterly artifice with an effortless naturalism in their daily toilette and manner of dressing.”<sup>34</sup> The feminine arts were not the art to which the young composer Alma Schindler aspired, even if she did engage in them.

Several statements on women’s capacity for creativity focus specifically on music composition. In *Music and Morals* (1872) Reverend Hugh Reginald Haweis wrote: “Music has an unlimited number of notable syrens and lady instrumentalists, but not one original women composer has yet made her appearance. The ladies of the period, even in England, no doubt write drawing-room ballads, and their friends sing them; but the typical English ballad...could hardly be called a musical composition.”<sup>35</sup> In this quote Haweis hints at several aspects of so-called “greatness”: that of small-scale compositions versus symphonic works; a purported lack of originality, which is tied to gendered and romantic ideas of genius; and the difference between composing and performing. Throughout this work he conveys sexist ideas about how women’s alleged limitations preclude musical composition.

In 1880, journalist and music critic George Upton published *Woman in Music*, which included a chapter on “the failure of woman in composition.”<sup>36</sup> He argued that women have had equal advantages, but they have nonetheless failed as composers. He attributes this to women’s supposed inability to control emotions or endure rejection, as

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<sup>34</sup> Megan Brandow-Faller, “Man, Woman, Artist? Rethinking the Muse in Vienna 1900,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2008): 92–120, at 101.

<sup>35</sup> Reverend Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Music and Morals* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 61.

<sup>36</sup> George Upton, *Woman in Music* (Boston: J.R. Osgood and Company, 1880).

well as a purported weakness in science and math: “[Music] is not only an art, but an exact science, and in its highest form, mercilessly logical and unrelentingly mathematical...in this direction woman, except in very rare instances, has never achieved great results.”<sup>37</sup> Such essentialist arguments would be perpetuated for another century, creating an inhospitable environment for the recognition of women’s contributions and damaging their compositional productivity.

In an 1894 article published in *Atlantic Monthly*, arts contributor Edith Brower dismissed social or family responsibilities (such as motherhood and marriage) and lack of education as factors which may serve to prevent women from composing. Instead, she suggested, the very idea of music is masculine and incomprehensible to women: “She can master the exact science of harmony, thoroughbass, counterpoint and all; but, as somebody said of a wonderful German girl who spoke fluently in seven languages, ‘she can’t say anything worth listening to in any one of them.’ And this is because of a certain lack in her emotional nature.”<sup>38</sup> When the article was published in 1894, women were still excluded from conservatory classes in counterpoint and composition; educational barriers remained palpable.<sup>39</sup>

Otto Weininger was a contemporary of Alma Mahler who was an influential thinker in Vienna in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although the work of Weininger was not terribly innovative, the way in which he unified misogyny and anti-

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<sup>37</sup> Upton, *Woman in Music*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Edith Brower, “Is the Musical Idea Masculine?” *Atlantic Monthly* 73, no. 437: 332–9, at 335.

<sup>39</sup> Educational barriers differed, of course, based on the interaction of a variety of geographic, demographic, and social factors. In Vienna, Cecelia Hopkins Porter notes that Frida Kern (1891–1988) was, “the first woman to graduate in composition and conducting from Vienna’s Music Academy (1923–1927).” *Five Lives in Music: Women Performers, Composers, and Impresarios from the Baroque to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

Semitism was well received by Viennese with an interest in racial theories.<sup>40</sup> He argued that women have no intellectual substance and are incapable of artistic production: “The absolute insignificance of women in the history of music may be explained by much deeper reasons, but what it proves in the first place is that Woman is deficient in imagination . . . Music, so to speak, bears no relation to the world of experience.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, Weininger suggested that because music is an abstraction that cannot be seen or touched, women cannot copy as they do in visual arts.<sup>42</sup>

Although far from comprehensive, these examples demonstrate nineteenth-century perspectives related to gender norms and intellectual endeavors, including musical composition. The overwhelming attitude in nineteenth-century literature on the topic was contemptuous of women composing, and contemptuous of women generally. There is evidence that Mahler had internalized these beliefs and questioned her capacity to create something remarkable, despite that being her greatest wish.<sup>43</sup> Establishing the extent and pervasiveness of this hostility is helpful in understanding Alma Mahler’s relatively short compositional period and relatively few surviving works.

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<sup>40</sup> András Gerő, *Neither Woman nor Jew: The Confluence of Prejudices in the Monarchy at the Turn of the Century*, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld and Helen DeKornfeld (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character*, trans. by Ladislaus Löb; ed. Daniel Steuer and Laura Marcus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Dijkstra offers useful context on Weininger’s reception: “The art and attitudes of the 1890s created Weininger. His contemporaries did not consider him mad. . . his contentions were simply one more step on the same road of dualistic extremism trod by the majority of turn-of-the-century intellectuals.” *Idols of Perversity*, 221.

<sup>43</sup> “My sole desire: to achieve something in art—in my art, something beautiful, substantial, sacrosanct. That’s my only wish.” Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 355.

## Women and Creativity in Vienna 1900

Turn-of-the-century Vienna, sometimes referred to as Vienna 1900, was a unique and rich context for artistic creation. Carl Schorske's influential work on the subject traces the origins of modernism in Vienna to a retreat from liberalism to the aesthetic and psychological: "Its great intellectual innovators—in music and philosophy, in economics and architecture, and, of course, in psychoanalysis—all broke, more or less deliberately, their ties to the historical outlook central to the nineteenth-century liberal culture in which they had been reared."<sup>44</sup> Arguably, this deliberate break with the past and with the liberal culture might have had a positive impact on the acceptance of women creators. The result, however, was not a more inclusive environment for women.

Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock have noted that women's art has consistently been categorized as "decorative, domestic, and derivative."<sup>45</sup> Although this was certainly true of turn-of-the-century Vienna, women and their work during this period were not only understood in terms of these categories but were also branded in newly demeaning ways. Informed by the philosophy of Weininger and those who espoused his, or similar ideologies, women were perceived as purely sexual and incapable of thought or creative production. In an atmosphere in which women were so openly devalued, it should not be

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<sup>44</sup> Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), xviii. Among others, Steven Beller has questioned Schorske's thesis and highlighted the centrality of Jews in the artistic achievements associated with Vienna 1900: "It is no coincidence that Jews had such a large role in this, because if there was an existential crisis caused by the defeat of liberalism, by nationalism and antisemitism in Habsburg politics, then it was Habsburg Jewry that was at the heart of it." Steven Beller, *The Habsburg Monarchy: 1815-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 216.

<sup>45</sup> Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts," in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 50–81.

surprising their art, too, would be infantilized, sexualized, treated as primitive or intersex, or some combination thereof.

Women in turn-of-the-century Vienna were perceived as being closely linked to children, both intellectually and because of their reproductive capabilities. As one of Weininger's apostles claimed: "The somatologic juvenile attributes of the female correspond to her juvenile character. Psychologically, the normal woman is a child with both its good and bad characteristics."<sup>46</sup> Brandow-Faller notes how this played into the reception of women artists: "Conflated with primitive folk culture and children, women occupied a similar position as gendered other owing to their supposed closeness to nature and marginalization from academic institutions."<sup>47</sup> Despite this marginalization, Brandow-Faller argues, "Female art students in fin-de-siècle Vienna harnessed their perceived naiveté and closeness to children to transcend the trivializing stigma attached to the feminine stereotype in art and design."<sup>48</sup>

In the musical arts, however, an analogous appropriation of naiveté with empowering results is challenging to identify; links between woman and child most frequently served to reinforce the role of woman as music teacher, and frequently to younger children. When the child-like nature of a woman composer is noted, as in this *Neue Freie Presse* review of a performance of Maria Bach's work, it is frequently negative:

This young woman is decidedly gifted. Certainly, she glows and storms.  
But knows not where she is going! Ability and childlikeness coexist. All

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<sup>46</sup> Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Die Gefahren des Frauenrechts und die Notwendigkeit der mannesrechtlichen Herrenmoral* (Graz: Ostara, 1909), quoted and trans. in Gerö, *Neither Woman nor Jew*, 87.

<sup>47</sup> Megan Brandow-Faller, "'An Artist in Every Child—A Child in Every Artist': Artistic Toys and Art for the Child at the Kunstschau 1908," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 20, no. 2 (2013): 195–225, at 196.

<sup>48</sup> Brandow-Faller, "'An Artist in Every Child.'"

said, the music turns into an enchanting jumble! And she does this with talent. How much little Maria imagines herself to be Stravinsky ... ; genius or philistine, holy or devilish, she could become anything—perhaps even a completely useful composer!<sup>49</sup>

Alma Mahler received some backhanded praise for her unschooled compositions while simultaneously being told that they were not naïve.<sup>50</sup>

When women's artistic work was not accused of being childlike, primitive, or dilettantish, it was described in language that evoked sexuality or ambiguous gender identity. Britta McEwen notes that "Vienna's reputation as a city suffused with illicit, venal sex at the turn of the twentieth century has been well established in the *fin-de-siècle* historiography."<sup>51</sup> This heightened interest in sexuality is evident in the reception of arts; for example, some critics "likened the new ceramics to a form of seductive coquetry—teasing viewers with expressive or intellectual content but ultimately collapsing back into the decorative."<sup>52</sup> Brandow-Faller notes that "the artist [Vally Wieselthier] plays on the stereotype of the feminine art of seduction. In transgressively rising above the mere decorative, Salome figures in the clay the idea that ceramic sculpture could render impotent misogynist male critics who preferred that women and their art remain

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<sup>49</sup> Unsigned review in *Neue Freie Presse* 19 February 1930, quoted and translated in Porter, *Five Lives in Music*, 105: "Dieses junge Fra uenwesen ist ausgesprochen begabt. Zwar glüht sie, stürmt und weiss nicht wohin! Können und Kindlichkeit hart nebeneinander. Zum Schluss wird es entzückend wüst! Aber tut sie das mit Talent. Wie klein Mariechen sich den Strawinsky vorstellt. Genie oder Philister, Heilige oder Teufelin, sie kann noch alles werden—vielleicht sogar ein ganz brauchbarer Komponist!"

<sup>50</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 93: "Prof Ludwig came to pass judgement on my songs. He concluded that I was very talented but lacked the necessary qualifications—counterpoint and all other such techniques."

<sup>51</sup> Britta McEwen, "Purity Redefined: Catholic Attitudes Towards Children's Sex Education in Austria, 1920–36," in *Shaping Sexual Knowledge: A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Lutz Sa uerteig and Roger Davidson (New York: Routledge, 2009), 173–87.

<sup>52</sup> Megan Brandow-Faller, "Feminine Vessels: The Ceramic Sculpture of Vally Wieselthier," *Woman's Art Journal* 35, no. 2 (2014): 28–36, at 30.

decorative.”<sup>53</sup> Salonniere Zuckerkandl reproached women artists in an exhibition arranged by the Secession for adopting styles not “differentiated from those of their male colleagues” and not going “to the full length of their convictions.”<sup>54</sup>

The degree to which women composers had the agency and desire to subvert gender norms in Vienna is less clear. Regardless of women composers’ intentions, however, when their music was well-received, it was not uncommon for an audience to question the gender of the artist. On March 14, 1899, Alma Mahler records in her diary: “I played my pieces, and the general opinion was that they didn’t sound as if they’d been written by a woman.”<sup>55</sup> Of course she notes this with pride; as previously stated, she considered her femininity and feminine identity her weaknesses because she had internalized the profound misogyny of her time and place. Leon Botstein notes how conflicting aspects of Alma Mahler’s gender might have been received in Vienna 1900: “According to Weininger’s categories, her enormous musical talent represented the male side of her being. Yet this talent was overwhelmed by her feminine need to express and realize her sexuality. Because she was a superior woman—graced with a sufficient element of maleness to make her capable of experiencing the aesthetic—her erotic allure was immense.”<sup>56</sup> Even as they created their art, Alma Mahler and female contemporaries

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<sup>53</sup> Brandow-Faller, “Feminine Vessels,” 35.

<sup>54</sup> Armelle Weirich, “Viennese Networks of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Salon of Berta Zuckerkandl” in *Women in Art and Literature Networks: Spinning Webs*, ed. Marianne Camus and Valérie Dupont (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 18–28, at 27.

<sup>55</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> Leon Botstein, “Alban Berg and the Memory of Modernism,” in *Alban Berg and His World*, ed. Christopher Hailey, 299–344 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).



frequently had their work and their persons infantilized, sexualized, and treated as primitive or intersex.

### **Gender Norms in the Life of a Composer**

A useful example of how gender norms intersected with a woman's conceptualization of herself as a composer can be found in the life of Clara Schumann (1819–1896). Schumann experienced considerable acclaim as a concert pianist, and even programmed her own music, but she did not identify as a composer. As she recorded in her diary, “A woman must not wish to compose—there never was one able to do it. Am I intended to be the one? It would be arrogant to believe that.”<sup>57</sup> Schumann respected a number of female performers, but even those talented women musicians we now appreciate as composers, Schumann seemed to label as performers.<sup>58</sup> That Schumann struggled to recognize women as composers is interesting, especially in light of her wonderful compositions.<sup>59</sup> Schumann and many of her contemporaries had seemingly internalized essentialist arguments about women's limited capacity for creative work; she and her husband note in their shared marriage diary the primacy of the composer versus the performer.<sup>60</sup> The case of Clara Schumann is also relevant because Alma reported that

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<sup>57</sup> Clara Wieck, *Clara Wieck Tagebucher, RSH 4877-A3*. November 25, 1839, translated in Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 118.

<sup>58</sup> Reich indicates that Schumann first met Pauline Viardot, the accomplished singer and composer in June 1838 and respected her immensely, to the point of being overwhelmed and intimidated by her. Schumann nonetheless wrote in her diary: “she is the most musical singer living today.” June 25, 1838 translated in Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 209.

<sup>59</sup> An exception to this might have presented itself under different circumstances. Schumann wrote this before she met Fanny Hensel (in 1843) and came to respect Hensel's work before her premature death in 1847. Nancy B. Reich, “The Diaries of Fanny Hensel and Clara Schumann: A Study in Contrasts,” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 4, no. 2 (2007): 21–36.

<sup>60</sup> Robert wrote, for example, that it was the responsibility of the performer, “to present the work of art, not himself.” Robert Schumann and Clara Schumann, *The Marriage Diaries of Robert & Clara Schumann*:

Gustav Mahler pointed to the relationship of Clara and Robert Schumann to suggest the ridiculousness of husband and wife competing as composers.<sup>61</sup> Even Otto Weininger weighed in on the Schumanns in *Sex and Character*, pointing to their music to suggest that both husband and wife do not appropriately conform to gender norms.<sup>62</sup>

Alma Mahler had clearly internalized contemporaneous gender norms; she frequently comments on the nature and purpose of woman in her diaries.<sup>63</sup> Her diaries make clear the conflict between wanting to create something impressive and lasting, and the external reminders that she was a silly, trivial girl and should not bother.<sup>64</sup> Her diary entries indicate that she both liked the attention she received when she went out and she understood that this would be held against her.<sup>65</sup> Mahler wanted to be creative, and her creativity was very important to her identity when she was a young woman. She nonetheless articulated essentialist differences related to creativity: “While love, for a

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*From Their Wedding Day Through the Russia Trip*, ed. Gerd Nauhaus (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 10.

<sup>61</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 19.

<sup>62</sup> Weininger suggests that Robert: “would be taken for a woman rather than a man at certain times of his life, and in his music there is also a large albeit not always the same, amount of femininity,” 59.

<sup>63</sup> For example, she wrote that it was the nature of woman to forgive and even pray for the man who betrayed her. *Diaries 1898–1902*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 5: “I want to do something really remarkable. Would like to compose a really *good* opera—something no woman has ever achieved. . . . But it’s impossible—& why? I don’t lack talent, but my attitude is too frivolous for my objectives, for artistic achievement.” Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 222: “What can a dumb woman like me achieve?—Nothing! I lack application. My head is full of other, *silly* ideas.”

<sup>65</sup> For example, her then composition teacher Zemlinsky told her she would need to choose between composing or going out in society and suggested that she preferred the latter. *Tagebuch Suite*, 632: “Entweder Sie komponieren oder Sie gehen in Gesellschaften—eines von beiden. Wählen Sie aber lieber das, was Ihnen näher liegt—gehen Sie in Gesellschaften.”

man, is a tool for creativity, for a woman it's the principal motive. I was never less productive than when I was in love."<sup>66</sup>

When Gustav Mahler asked her to stop composing and live for his music, her resignation to his request highlights the degree to which she understood it to be her fate. Nineteenth-century women, whether composers or not, were expected to let their work and lives be subsumed into those of their husbands. The influential nineteenth-century author Laura Marholm stated the expectation quite clearly: "The life of a woman begins and ends with man. In all cases, the man is the only meaning of her life, for man is the content of woman."<sup>67</sup> This narrative would become central to Mahler's published memoirs: she found fulfillment in her mission to support the work of "Great men" and to remove obstacles from their paths.<sup>68</sup> Although toxic gender norms contributed to Alma Mahler's relatively short compositional career and limited extant output, other factors were also integral. Mahler received a limited education and was unable to pursue professionalism as a composer, both of which limited her ability to compose the larger-scale music she had hoped to.

### **Musical Education in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna**

The education women received in the nineteenth century was typically limited, especially relative to that which their male contemporaries might expect.<sup>69</sup> Music,

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<sup>66</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 444.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Schreiber 1911, 167, translated in Weedon, *Gender, Feminism, & Fiction in Germany*, 115. Mahler herself adopted this language in a letter to Willy Haas shortly after Franz Werfel's death: "Mein Leben ist mit Franzls Tod beendet" (quoted in Haas's foreword to Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 9).

<sup>68</sup> "Ich bin tief erfüllt von meiner Mission, diesem Genie die Steine aus dem Wege zu räumen!" Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 28.

<sup>69</sup> Juliane Jacobi-Dittrich, "Growing Up Female in the Nineteenth Century," in *German Women in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History*, ed. John C. Fout (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), 210.

however, was an area in which instruction for girls was not necessarily precluded; cultivating one's piano playing and singing were related to virtues of culture and deemed appropriate for middle-class and aristocratic girls.<sup>70</sup> Musical training with an intention to become a professional or a composer was not. Fanny Hensel articulated this distinction clearly in a letter to her fiancé shortly before their marriage: "I am composing no more songs, at least not by modern poets I know personally...I now comprehend what I've always heard and what the truth-speaking Jean Paul has also said: Art is not for women, only for girls; on the threshold of my new life I take leave of this child's playmate."<sup>71</sup>

Nineteenth-century gender norms dictated that the primary purpose of a woman's education was to prepare her to be a good wife and mother, to enable her to be the first teacher of her children, and to provide structured socialization. Caroline Milde indicated that "the whole goal of education should be to prepare the young woman and provide her with what she needs for this most important future role [wife and mother] which will bring happiness to everyone."<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, the educational opportunities afforded to women did not encourage ambition or intellectual engagement.

Education in the second half of the nineteenth century increasingly came to be regarded as a potential threat to the very nature of woman, especially as social reformers

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<sup>70</sup> Eva Rieger, *Frau, Musik, & Männerherrschaft: zum Ausschluss der Frau aus der deutschen Musikpädagogik, Musikwissenschaft und Musikausübung* (Kassel: Furore-Verlag, 1981); Halstead, *The Woman Composer*.

<sup>71</sup> Letter Depositum Berlin No. 107 in the Mendelssohn-Archiv of the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Trans. in Marcia J. Citron, "The Lieder of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel" *Musical Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (1983): 570–94, at 571. Hensel's internalization of societal gender norms complicates the narrative of her "suppression" by her father and brother. Wilson Kimber, "The 'Suppression' of Fanny Mendelssohn."

<sup>72</sup> *Der deutschen Jungfrau Wesen und Wirken*, 1871; Translated in Weedon, *Gender, Feminism, & Fiction in Germany*, 43.

such as German-language authors Louise Otto, Fanny Lewald, and Hedwig Dohm published and agitated on the topic.<sup>73</sup> Traditionalists worried that by making girls aware of intellectual problems and challenges, education could lead to such dangers as curiosity and ambition. Juliane Jacobi-Dittrich writes about this tension “between the accepted goals of socialization... and their [girls’] intellectual interests.”<sup>74</sup> The threat of education was of most concern to women in wealthy families, who generally enjoyed more opportunities, musical and otherwise, than did their poor and working-class contemporaries. The threat of education was minimized by religion in the lives of the devout, who most often accepted the role of helpmeet and did not aspire to autonomy, curiosity, or intellectual ambitions.<sup>75</sup>

Propriety demanded that the training was limited to that which would make a young woman of means a more suitable wife. Toni Stopler (1890–1988), a near contemporary of Mahler’s and also living in Vienna, indicated that boys and girls received different educations, both formal and casual, in line with personal and professional expectations held for them: “The boys were to become doctors and lawyers and teachers but the girls in their families would take care of belles lettres, music and the arts, of ‘culture.’”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Louise Otto, *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1869) and Fanny Lewald, *Osterbriefe für die Frauen* (1863), reprinted in *Fanny Lewald: politische Schriften für und wider die Frauen* (Frankfurt: Helmer, 1989).

<sup>74</sup> Jacobi-Dittrich, “Growing Up Female in the Nineteenth Century,” 215.

<sup>75</sup> Janet Page highlights an interesting exception by demonstrating how women in eighteenth-century Austrian convents were able to pursue musical and other creative and intellectual pursuits. Janet K. Page, *Convent Music and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Page notes that although it was the social norm for well-born girls in Italy to enter convents if they did not have the chance of marrying, in Vienna that seems not to have always been the case. Page discusses a woman who trained professionally as a pharmacist to highlight the varied intellectual pursuits of women in Austrian convents.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Alison Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin De Siècle Vienna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 12.

Although it was entirely appropriate, and even desirable, for young women from middle-class or wealthy families to study musical performance, it was not appropriate for them to formally study music composition—that was still men’s work.

Eva Rieger explored the exclusion of women from music instruction, musicology as a discipline, and music performance.<sup>77</sup> Participation in all three areas is closely related, of course; opportunities to study music, and with the intention of becoming a professional—whether performer or composer—have very real implications for the quality and content of the education one receives. Even as educational institutions including conservatories opened their doors to women, some allowed women only in a limited subset of classes. It was not uncommon for women in the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries to be omitted from music theory, composition, counterpoint, and orchestration courses, or to attend conservatory without completing their course of study.<sup>78</sup> Mathilde von Kralik (1857–1944), for example, studied counterpoint privately with Anton Bruckner before studying at the Vienna Conservatory, but she did not complete her degree. Kralik nonetheless found compositional opportunities as president of the Vienna Women’s Choral Society, a group for which she also composed.<sup>79</sup>

Women in Vienna began to find enhanced opportunities for formal education towards the end of the nineteenth century. Elisabeth Derow-Turnauer notes that “you have to know the possibilities of education for girls and women to appreciate the

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<sup>77</sup> Rieger, *Frau, Musik, & Männerherrschaft*.

<sup>78</sup> Rieger, *Frau, Musik, & Männerherrschaft*; Nancy Reich, “Women as Musicians: A Question of Class” in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth A Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>79</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Kralik von Mayerswalden [Kralik von Meyrswalden, Kralike, von Kralike], Mathilde,” by Martha Furman Schleifer, dated 15 November 2005.

woman's course of education and later achievements. 'Lehr- und Lernfreiheit' (the academic freedom to teach and learn what one sees fit) was decreed in 1848, but never implemented."<sup>80</sup> Juliane Jacobi indicates that progress moved slowly in Austria: "It was not until 1872 that the first Austrian public school for girls... was founded, and courses preparing for the Matura exam required for university matriculation gained little support from the state even during the first Austrian Republic (1918-1934)."<sup>81</sup> Secondary schools for women in Vienna opened in the Fall of 1892<sup>82</sup> and the first women to attend the University of Vienna matriculated in the philosophical faculty in 1897/98,<sup>83</sup> when Alma Mahler was in her early and late teens, respectively.

Although women participated in the Konservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde as teachers and students of singing and piano at the turn of the century, Robert Lach does not highlight women teachers or students of composition during this period in his 1927 history of musical training institutions in Vienna.<sup>84</sup> Susan Filler asserts: "It is worth noting that she [Alma Mahler] never studied at the Vienna Conservatory, which was responsible for the education of performers, conductors and

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<sup>80</sup> Elisabeth Derow-Turnauer, "Women and the Musical Aesthetics of the Bourgeoisie," in *Vienna: Jews in the City of Music 1870 to 1938*, ed. Leon Botstein and Werner Hanak (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Yeshiva University Museum and Bard College, 2004), 126.

<sup>81</sup> Juliane Jacobi, "Influence of Confession and State: Germany and Austria" in *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* ed. James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman, and Rebecca Rogers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41–57, at 55.

<sup>82</sup> Nike Wagner, "Geist und Geschlecht: Karl Kraus und die Erotik der Wiener Moderne" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1980), 32.

<sup>83</sup> Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin De Siècle Vienna*, 89.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Lach, *Geschichte der Staatsakademie und Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Wien* (Vienna: Ed. Strache Verlag, 1927). Admittedly, Lach may not have been inclined to acknowledge women's presence or contributions in his history.

composers including Gustav Mahler himself.”<sup>85</sup> This was not for lack of effort; Alma Mahler had hoped to study piano with Julius Epstein, but her stepfather intervened.<sup>86</sup> Even if the lessons with Epstein would have been conducted privately, and not via matriculation in the conservatory, they may have led to more educational and professional opportunities for her.

### **Alma Mahler’s Education and Training**

Alma Mahler was raised within an artistic community in Vienna and experienced unique benefits and challenges in her education. Mahler adored her father, landscape artist Emil Jakob Schindler (1842–1892), who died when she was only thirteen years old. Schindler taught Mahler about painting, and Susanne Rode-Breyman has speculated that Mahler might have pursued painting instead of music, had her father lived longer.<sup>87</sup> Mahler’s mother, Anna Sofie Moll, née Bergen (1857–1938), had worked as a singer before Alma’s birth, and offered Mahler her earliest introduction to music.<sup>88</sup> Anna Schindler maintained a household full of artists even after the death of Emil Schindler;

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<sup>85</sup> Susan Filler, *Alma Mahler and her Contemporaries: A Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3. Filler also asserts that Alma Mahler’s was “short changed in her education” and “this may have been among the reasons that she is still treated as a second-class composer,” 3.

<sup>86</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, November 5, 1898, 67. Epstein had been the teacher of Mahler’s piano teacher Adele Radnitzky-Mandlick.

<sup>87</sup> Susanne Rode-Breyman, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Hannover: Niedersächsische Staatstheater Hannover, 1999), 20, “Der Vater hatte sie mit dem Malemetier vertraut gemacht, und es hätte sich, wäre er nicht so früh gestorben, möglicherweise auf diesem Gebiet Almas Begabung entfaltet.”

<sup>88</sup> Rode-Breyman notes that Mahler did not document an appreciation of her mother’s musical gift, which is especially egregious because Anna so frequently sang her daughter’s songs, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 47.



she married Schindler's former student and future co-founder of the Vienna Secessionist movement, Carl Moll (1861–1945).<sup>89</sup>

Beyond the informal education of an artistic household, Mahler had little formal education.<sup>90</sup> She notes with frustration that the limitations on women's education present real and grave implications for their intellectual and professional opportunities. In a lesson with her composition teacher Josef Labor (1842–1924), Mahler bemoans differences in the education of boys and girls and specifically, how boys are “taught to use their brains, but not girls.”<sup>91</sup> Mahler further asserts that “Women's emancipation will never be possible, unless their minds are systematically trained, drilled.”<sup>92</sup> The topic of her flightiness, or lack of seriousness is a frequent theme in Mahler's 1898-1902 diaries, and even though she does not directly espouse other beliefs related to women's emancipation or the equality of women, the difference in educational opportunities and approaches does seem to have hit a nerve. She derisively refers to women who have chosen to focus on their education as “the third sex.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Moll's style evolved from his teacher's naturalistic landscapes to “a sombre, Symbolist-influenced style of landscape painting, to a more colourful Impressionism in his works of the early 1900s.” Peter Vergo, *Art in Vienna 1898–1918* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 25. Oliver Hilmes notes in *Malevolent Muse* that “Some of Alma's family felt the collapse of the ‘Thousand-Year Reich’ as a personal downfall” and reports that Moll, along with his daughter Maria Moll Eberstaller and son-in-law Richard Eberstaller, all documented Nazis, died by suicide as the Red Army approached Vienna in April 12, 1945, 213.

<sup>90</sup> Rode-Breyman implies that Mahler did not attend school formally in *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 27: “...den für Frauen, die wie sie nicht einmal eine Schule besuchten, waren die Bildungsgrenzen seinerzeit sehr eng bezogen.”

<sup>91</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 202.

<sup>92</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 202.

<sup>93</sup> Lilli Conrat, for example, has “learnt the art of learning” and “She's engaged—in love, but not physically—the third sex!” Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 352. For an interesting discussion of what Mahler likely understood and meant by “the third sex,” see Kirsten Leng, “Permutations of the Third Sex: Sexology, Subjectivity, and Antimaternalist Feminism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Signs* 40, no. 1 (2014): 227-54. doi:10.1086/676899.

Mahler nonetheless demonstrated curiosity and motivation to learn in a variety of areas. She played piano and sang, composed music, drew sketches, studied French,<sup>94</sup> and read anything available to her, especially her father's beloved *Faust*. Mahler read voraciously and in reading she found an escape, an opportunity to better understand her situation, and an education.<sup>95</sup> She frequently mentioned titles of the books that she was reading at the time, which topically ranged from all genres of literature to philosophy and criticism. She was often challenged by the texts she read, and frequently commented on processing the ideas presented in a book.<sup>96</sup> She was also inspired by the texts she read: she appreciated good poetry and aimed to write music befitting it.<sup>97</sup> The challenge of musically expressing a meaningful text became a fascination and another mode of learning. Mahler realized that she would need a more robust musical training in order to set texts to her satisfaction.<sup>98</sup>

Mahler, her sister Gretl, and a few of their friends studied piano with Adele Radnitzky-Mandlick.<sup>99</sup> Mandlick had studied piano at the Konservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna and was active afterwards as teacher and

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<sup>94</sup> Her French teacher, Léon Dubrot, is noted in the *Diaries 1898–1902*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> In her diaries she notes reading materials, including important contemporary and local publications such as *Die Fackel* and *Ver Sacrum*, Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 11 and 117.

<sup>96</sup> For example, she admits that she did not yet understand all of the Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 33.

<sup>97</sup> "Composed a little song. I don't know if it's any good—but I like it and it expresses my current mood fairly well. Text by H. Heine, i.e. a solid house at which it's safe to open an account." Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*.

<sup>98</sup> She notes the need to study counterpoint and learn more about form, specifically. Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*. 93 and 101, among others.

<sup>99</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*.

performer.<sup>100</sup> Rode-Breymann suggests that Mandlick likely recommended Labor as Mahler's first composition teacher; Mahler began studying with him in 1895.<sup>101</sup> That Mahler was a stronger pianist than her sister Gretl and nonetheless studied with the same teacher suggests to me that Mahler's musical training was, at least initially, similar to that of girls in her social class. Her parents engaged an appropriate teacher for young ladies, irrespective of her level of talent or desire to compose. When Mahler began studying composition, of course, her musical education became more distinctive among young women in her milieu; she was one of few to pursue composition lessons at this time.

Mahler made only brief comments about her piano lessons, and seldom includes pieces studied or specific feedback from her teacher. This is in contrast to her composition lessons, many of which she describes at considerable length in her diaries. It is also, perhaps, noteworthy that Mahler studied chamber music in her lessons with Mandlick. Mandlick hosted chamber music events featuring her students; Mahler played in a Robert Schumann piano quartet and an Anton Rubinstein piano trio.<sup>102</sup> It was also in one of these chamber music concerts, on February 2, 1900, that Mahler's songs were first performed to a public audience.<sup>103</sup>

Alma Mahler makes a great deal out of her composition lessons in her diaries. Mahler ascribes importance to her teachers' input and anticipates preparing new

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<sup>100</sup> Rode-Breymann, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 41–42. Rode-Breymann indicates that it is unknown exactly when Mahler began studying piano, and with Mandlick.

<sup>101</sup> Rode-Breymann, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 42.

<sup>102</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 240 and 264.

<sup>103</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 240. Mahler recorded that the singer, Fräulein Freystätt, “made a complete mess of one of them, but the others were quite good. They were well received.”

compositions and awaiting a verdict on their quality. Of her last lesson before summer vacation in June 1900, Mahler writes: “Only now do I realize what they [lessons] mean to me. I feel as if I’d lost my backbone.”<sup>104</sup> In her diary, Mahler frequently records the compositions worked on, her teachers’ impressions, and her feelings and thoughts upon reflection. For example, on March 22, 1898 she records the following:

Despite yesterday’s debauchery, I went to Labor – at 10:00 – and didn’t regret it. I played him my most recent song (“Ein Blumenglöckchen”). When I’d finished, he said:  
Quite good really.  
But suddenly remembering that praise was against his principles, he pointed out lots of mistakes. I was happy for just the little bit of praise. It helped soothe yesterday’s wounds.<sup>105</sup>

The diary entries describing composition lessons are, of course, performative. Mahler shapes the events and conversations to her liking, and her entries vary considerably from one lesson to the next. It is clear that Mahler is performing gender-appropriate behaviors when, for example, Labor points out something positive about her work and Mahler is quick to qualify or dismiss it, as though she is aware young ladies should not be boastful or proud.<sup>106</sup> She also repeats throughout the diaries that she does not know if her composition is any good, and that she lacks the seriousness to compose something great. Of course, when she fishes for feedback in her lessons, she will sometimes receive praise, and sometime an agreement with her self-deprecating statement.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 289.

<sup>105</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 15.

<sup>106</sup> She occasionally willfully misconstrues Labor’s praise: “He’s right: I never do anything well intentionally.” Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 72.

<sup>107</sup> For example, when Mahler suggested to Labor that she lacks depth, he reiterates its importance: “Depth is indeed necessary if you want to get anywhere, he said.” Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 22.

Mahler suggests in many ways that composing songs is insufficient or not entirely fulfilling. She regularly attends orchestral concerts and operas and indicates a longing to compose for large forces. She writes after attending a concert of the Vienna Philharmonic that “orchestra music really is the noblest—purest.”<sup>108</sup> Opera seems to be her passion; throughout her diaries she critiques opera performances and music and describes the strong connection she has with the operas of Richard Wagner, especially. She indicates that composing an opera would be the most remarkable thing she could do with her talent.<sup>109</sup> She worked on an operatic scene during the summer of 1901, but likely grew disheartened by her lack of technical ability and experience.<sup>110</sup> She began this work shortly before she became engaged to Gustav Mahler and accepted his demand that she stop composing. Even though she composed a bit and revisited old material later, Alma Mahler’s compositional training ended abruptly and before she had the opportunity to develop as she had desired. Posterity does not regard her as a composer of Great works and that must be attributed, at least in part, to a lack of adequate and commensurate training and opportunity.

### **Creativity and Professionalism**

Among Alma Mahler’s near contemporaries who were active as composers in Austria, Johanna Müller-Hermann (1878–1941), studied composition with Alexander Zemlinsky, Frida Kern (1891–1988) at Vienna’s Music Academy, and Maria Bach

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<sup>108</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 72.

<sup>109</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 5: “Would like to compose a really Good opera – something no woman has ever achieved.”

<sup>110</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 410–1. She writes: “My work is a complete failure” in response to Zemlinsky’s corrections and a letter offering guidelines on operatic form and structure.

(1896–1978) with Joseph Marx.<sup>111</sup> These women faced extraordinary challenges to have their creative works and intellectual endeavors taken seriously. Women who wished to have their work performed and published in turn-of-the-century Vienna often struggled to do so, performed to private audiences, and published anonymously or under an assumed name. Maria Bach, for example, had her works performed at her family’s “Sunday musicales” and by her sister, cellist Henriette Bach. Her work was also published and performed publicly, but not without “gender-specific slurs” from reviewers.<sup>112</sup> Women who had internalized contemporary ideas about their inferiority as artistic creators or did not want to risk such critical attention may not have sought out publication and public performance of their music.

Propriety dictated where women composers could see their work performed. Many scholars have noted the importance of women’s music-making in salons, as this was an acceptable venue for women composers to perform or have acquaintances perform their work.<sup>113</sup> The centrality of salons to art and culture in fin-de-siècle Vienna is well documented, but the exceptional role women played as salonnières is worth highlighting. Salons were often run by wealthy Jewish women, though some were of more modest means and some were converted.<sup>114</sup> Two of the primary salons in Vienna 1900 were those of Berta Zuckerkandl (1864–45) and Eugenie Schwarzwald (1872–

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<sup>111</sup> Porter, *Five Lives in Music*.

<sup>112</sup> Porter, *Five Lives in Music*, 122.

<sup>113</sup> For example, Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*; Halstead, *The Woman Composer*.

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Emily D. Bilski, and Emily Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New York: Jewish Museum under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2005); Rebecca Cypess and Nancy Sinkoff, *Sara Levy's World: Gender, Judaism, and the Bach Tradition in Enlightenment Berlin* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

1940), two Jewish women who approached the salon quite differently. Zuckerkandl saw “the salon as one of the birthplaces of the Enlightenment and women as mediators of this new Weltanschauung, not because of any newly acquired academic or philosophical training, but rather because they were free of such formal education.”<sup>115</sup> As an educator, Dr. Schwarzwald was eager to dissolve “associations of informality and dilettantism that still clung to the term salon.”<sup>116</sup> Salons provided some women in Vienna, including Alma Mahler, an opportunity for literary, philosophical, musical, and social exchange. For all their potential benefits, however, salons were still private and tied to the domestic sphere. Although salons provided women composers with a venue, they did not provide a public audience or professional ensembles to showcase their compositional work.

Alma Mahler frequently performed her songs in private homes and salon settings. The diaries document the frequency of these occurrences and indicate Mahler’s pleasure in hearing her music performed well. On January 30, 1899, Mahler records “Mama sang my songs, and everyone like them very much, particularly Olbrich—he kept saying, ‘Wonderful, wonderful,’ and asked me to work hard at my composition. Klimt asked me: ‘Where do you find the poems? They all have a bearing on our situation.’”<sup>117</sup> At a housewarming party for Dr. Friedrich Victor Spitzer (1854–1922), Alma was invited to

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<sup>115</sup> Deborah Holmes, “‘Genia’ Schwarzwald and Her Viennese ‘Salon’” in *Contemporary Austrian Studies 21: Austrian Lives*, ed. Günter Bischof (New Orleans: University of New Orleans Press, 2018), 200–21, at 209.

<sup>116</sup> Holmes, “‘Genia’ Schwarzwald and Her Viennese ‘Salon’”

<sup>117</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 90.

play her songs and her mother sang “Gleich und gleich,” “Ich wandle unter Blumen,” and three other Lieder.<sup>118</sup>

Mahler occasionally complains about performing in front of audiences, whether in private or public contexts, and notes when she is not in the mood to perform. For example, on February 24, 1900, she records “I was pestered into playing the piano. I did play—but entirely without flair. I began with a piece of my own.”<sup>119</sup> This serves as a reminder that she also frequently played the music of other composers, and salons gave her the opportunity to perform music of her choosing, unlike the performances she gave in Frau Radnitzky’s pupils concert.<sup>120</sup>

On March 16, 1900, at the home of Pierre Charles van der Stappen, Mahler chose to play piano arrangements of the prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*.<sup>121</sup> Zuckerkandl used the opportunity to comment: “She’s good-looking—that’s bad enough. She’s a brilliant pianist—that’s infuriating. And on top of it she composes—it makes you sick.”<sup>122</sup> This comment highlights the degree to which Mahler’s talent for composition was known among the Viennese artistic elite of the time. It also suggests, perhaps, that Mahler’s musical skills were received, like her beauty, as ornamental. By the time Mahler

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<sup>118</sup> Nov 29, 1899, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 209. Rode-Breyman notes that it was a common occurrence for Mahler to perform her Lieder in private settings such as this and that they were well and seriously received, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 47: “Almas Lieder kamen in der Privatspäre also häufig und keinesfalls beiläufig zur Aufführung.”

<sup>119</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 252.

<sup>120</sup> Mahler complained both about being asked to perform a particular piece she did not like (“Fantasiestück” by Heinrich Rietsch) and public performance in general: “I wouldn’t dream of it—just imagine: bowing and scraping before the public...” *Diaries 1898–1902*, 373.

<sup>121</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 262.

<sup>122</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 262.



hosted her own salon, she was no longer studying composition.<sup>123</sup> Her activities as salon hostess are aligned with her work of muse and patroness of the arts.<sup>124</sup>

Marcia Citron discusses the relationship between gender and publication, one of the most visible aspects of musical professionalism.<sup>125</sup> This may seem a simple question of economics: if a score is considered likely to be purchased sufficiently to yield a profit for the publisher, it will be published; otherwise, it will not. But Citron demonstrates that it is more complex; women's institutional exclusion from employment, their relative lack of access to musical performance groups (such as a conductor might have to a symphony), and difficulties in networking within a male-dominated musical establishment made securing publication for their compositions incredibly challenging.<sup>126</sup> Without successfully publishing her work, and under her own name, a woman lacks affirmation as a professional composer and her work cannot easily be performed or studied. These issues certainly contribute to the challenge of studying and valuing Alma Mahler's work.

Because of her artistic connections, Alma Mahler had an easier path to publication than did some of her female peers. Despite her statement that she was “not

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<sup>123</sup> Heike Herrberg and Heidi Wagner, *Wiener Melange: Frauen zwischen Salon und Kaffeehaus* (Berlin: Ebersbach, 2002).

<sup>124</sup> “Alma Mahler's home and Eugenie Schwarzwald's salon also were meeting grounds for artists, including composer Arnold Schoenberg, architect Adolf Loos, and writer Egon Friedell, while Adele Bloch-Bauer hosted figures such as politician Karl Renner and writer Stefan Zweig at her Schillerplatz Palais.” Kathleen Hulley, “Sonorous Bodies: Representations of Female Sexuality in fin-de-siècle Austro-German Opera, from the Wiener Moderne toward the Weimar Republic” (PhD diss., Stony Brook University, 2015).

<sup>125</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*.

<sup>126</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*.

the least bit interested in publishing my songs,”<sup>127</sup> her stepfather began to make arrangements for the publication of three of her songs in 1899. Carl Moll presented her with a printed copy of three songs, which she referred to as brush-proofs.<sup>128</sup> A letter from Koloman Moser—one of the preeminent graphic artists of the era—is inserted into the diary which indicates that he was contracted to design the title page for the private publication of the three songs.<sup>129</sup> Her first experience with publication turned somewhat awkward as Mahler shared the proofs with Zemlinsky and he indicated that “These three songs are simply bristling with mistakes.”<sup>130</sup> Mahler indicates that she wished she knew from the outset it had been Carl’s intention to publish the songs so that they could have been written more carefully and shown to Zemlinsky in advance.<sup>131</sup> When Zemlinsky agreed to give Mahler composition lessons, he required that she not publish any songs for some time.<sup>132</sup>

The story of Alma Mahler’s first real publication is frequently told: when Gustav Mahler found out about her affair with Walter Gropius, who would become her second husband, Gustav helped her prepare five of her previously composed songs and had them

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<sup>127</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 88.

<sup>128</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 296. The three songs are likely “Einsamer Gang,” “Kennst du Meine Nächte,” and “Leise weht ein erstes Blühn.”

<sup>129</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 298. Peter Vergo writes that “Moser was at this period [the turn-of-the-century] known primarily as a draughtsman, although he too later devoted himself to a large extent to applied art and design, before turning entirely to painting.” *Art in Vienna 1898–1918*, 25. Moser was a member of the Secession and a co-founder of Wiener Werkstätte.

<sup>130</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 312.

<sup>131</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 312.

<sup>132</sup> *Diaries 1898–1902*, 344: “One thing, though – if you want to be my pupil, you mustn’t contemplate publishing anything for some time yet.”

published with Universal, the firm where he published his music.<sup>133</sup> Shortly after their 1910 publication, all five songs enjoyed public performances.<sup>134</sup> Thea Drill-Orridge, accompanied by Zemlinsky, sang all five songs on December 11, 1910 in Vienna and Frances Alda Gatti-Casazza sang “Laue Sommernacht” on March 3, 1911 in New York.<sup>135</sup> Mahler later published another four songs with Universal and five songs with Josef Weinberger.<sup>136</sup> Posthumously, her Lieder have been published by Hildegard Publishing Company, G. K. Hall / Gale Group, Indiana University Press, and *Wagner Journal*.<sup>137</sup>

For a variety of reasons, Alma Mahler had little professional experience as a musician or composer.<sup>138</sup> This was decidedly to the detriment of her artistic growth and capabilities. Nancy Reich investigated class among nineteenth-century women musicians, some of whom were also composers. She discusses the “cult of domesticity” and stigma associated with women who worked outside of the home, but who persisted out of the

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<sup>133</sup> Many authors have speculated on the extent of Gustav Mahler’s involvement in revisions to her songs and some have minimized Alma’s contribution to her own songs or their publication and subsequent performance. Oliver Hilmes, for example, wrote: “As if motivated by a guilty conscience, he [Gustav] suddenly took an interest in some of her youthful compositions and even suggested some joint rewriting. Still in that same year he had her five songs printed and given world premieres in Vienna and New York.” Hilmes, *Malevolent Muse*, 69.

<sup>134</sup> Alma Mahler, *Fünf Lieder* (Wien: Universal-Edition, 1910).

<sup>135</sup> Rode-Breyman, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 144–5.

<sup>136</sup> Alma Mahler, *Vier Lieder* (Wien: Universal-Edition, 1915); Alma Mahler, *Fünf Gesänge* (Leipzig: Josef Weinberger, 1924).

<sup>137</sup> Susan Filler, *Alma Mahler and her Contemporaries*; *Wagner Journal* had not published “Einsamer Gang” at the time of Filler’s *Alma Mahler and her Contemporaries*.

<sup>138</sup> Mahler did have limited experience teaching piano lessons to young women, including Gretl Hellman. Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 196 and 199.

necessity of earning money.<sup>139</sup> Not only was there a stigma around working, but women's opportunities were also severely circumscribed. Professional celibacy requirements were still enforced throughout Austria at the turn of the century; in many vocations, women were required to quit their careers when they married.<sup>140</sup>

Reich notes that without being scrutinized by reviewers or competing for the money and attention of audience, women of means whose work was performed privately did not have the same opportunity for artistic growth as their professional peers.<sup>141</sup> Thus Alma Mahler, who received a musical education, albeit a limited one, saw her talents in composition go unpolished by the processes by which professional musicians and composers honed their craft. As Ethel Smyth put it: "I have always maintained that until we are in the rough and tumble of musical life as men are, there cannot possibly be many women composers worth talking about. Competition, environment, and the sort of chance you get all around, are to talent what sunshine and the less poetical activities of the gardener are to a flower."<sup>142</sup>

Scholarship on canon formation highlights the challenges Mahler and her contemporaries faced in music professionalism and publishing.<sup>143</sup> Citron examines complex relationships to and among education, professionalism, publication, femininity,

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<sup>139</sup> Reich, "Women as Musicians: A Question of Class," 132.

<sup>140</sup> James C. Albisetti, "Female Education in German-speaking Austria, Germany and Switzerland, 1866–1914" in *Austrian Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. David F. Good, Margarete Grandner, and Mary Jo Maynes (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), 42.

<sup>141</sup> Reich, "Women as Musicians: A Question of Class."

<sup>142</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1921), 241.

<sup>143</sup> Marcia Citron deals substantively with gender and creativity, gender and professionalism, music as a gendered discourse, and gender as it relates to the creation and reinforcement of a music canon, most comprehensively in *Gender and Musical Canon*.

and canon formation and analyzes content of existing anthologies to find that women are scarcely represented.<sup>144</sup> Following up on Citron's excellent work, Jill Halstead interviewed contemporary women composers to investigate the gendered politics of music, including canon formation.<sup>145</sup> Halstead investigates how psychology, education, social history, and the gendered politics of music have all played into women's compositional work. She is accordingly able to address several of the ongoing historiographical debates surrounding gender and creativity, gender and professionalism, and gender and politics in classical music. She reports that the difficulty of contemporary women composers to find mentors and role models actively discourages women's engagement in composition.<sup>146</sup>

The difficulty nineteenth-century women encountered in finding role models and a network of professional women colleagues is sometimes attributed to the stereotype that women would marry and then carry and raise children and cease all musical work.<sup>147</sup> This did not prove true in the life of Alma Mahler. Mahler, like several of her peers, published music after getting married and becoming a mother. There were nonetheless strong expectations that one's family would be the first, if not exclusive, work of women. The lack of networks of professional composers were due to several other considerations including the lack of women in professional music teaching, publishing, conducting, and related roles. The difficulty in identifying role models made composition, at least as a

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<sup>144</sup> "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," 114.

<sup>145</sup> Halstead, *The Woman Composer*.

<sup>146</sup> Halstead, *The Woman Composer*.

<sup>147</sup> Linda Shaver-Gleason and Marian Wilson Kimber have challenged this stereotype using the career of Clara Schumann, for example. Accessed 13 December 2020, <https://notanothermusichistoryclique.blogspot.com/2016/08/did-clara-schumann-sacrifice-her-career.html>.

profession, feel out of reach for many women. This was one of the many concerns that Alma Mahler expressed in her diaries.<sup>148</sup> Contemporary gender norms were so powerful that imagining an identity as a composer meant fighting against what one's peers understood to be one's roles, purpose, and fate. As a woman at the turn of the century, working to assume the identity of composer was downright subversive. For a variety of reasons, Alma Mahler decided against that path.

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Rigid gender norms, lack of education, and limited professional opportunities constrained the advancement of women composers in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Women composers simply did not have equitable support or opportunities to learn their craft and refine their talent. Contemporaneous gender norms reinforced that women had no creative or intellectual capacity and that attempts to compose would be unseemly and unwelcome. Religion reinforced repressive gender norms. Class worked against women at every level; wealthy women were forbidden professionalism and publication and working-class women obtained meager, if any education, and might be exploited for their talents. Women struggled to find mentors or role models who made composing, or identifying as a composer, seem like a viable option. Alma Mahler faced significant psychological and material obstacles to receiving an equitable education. These obstacles in turn had implications for her opportunities to gain confidence, experience, and professionalism as a composer. Mahler's few existing Lieder are all the more significant for the obstacles she encountered.

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<sup>148</sup> Mahler points to Cécile Chaminade for evidence that women are incapable of creative work. After attending a performance of Chaminade's Piano Concerto, opus 40, Mahler wrote: "She is a disgrace to her sex... Now I know that a woman can never achieve something, never, never, never." Mahler, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 195.

## CHAPTER 2

### IN HER OWN WORDS:

#### THE ALMA PROBLEM AND LIFE WRITING IN MUSIC HISTORIOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

Alma Mahler has been dismissed by several scholars as self-serving and irresponsible with the musical and biographical legacy of a Great Man of Music.<sup>2</sup> The so-called “Alma Problem” asserts that her alleged misrepresentations of Gustav Mahler have had an undue impact on his legacy and the scholarship on his life and music.<sup>3</sup> This problem ignores the fact that countless individuals, irrespective of gender, have altered and destroyed historical record without bearing the same degree of responsibility for their actions.<sup>4</sup> If we define Alma as the problem instead of questioning the neutrality of any life writing, we risk perpetuating sexist notions of who can be trusted and who can be definitive.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will focus on Alma Mahler’s autobiographical writings to

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this paper were submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an independent study with Dr. Janet Page. I am grateful to Dr. Page for her input and feedback.

<sup>2</sup> The reliability of Alma Mahler’s correspondence, memoirs, and published recollections has been subjected to considerable scrutiny. See, for example, Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Mahler*, volume 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973) for the assertion of “distortions and errors” in her “often unreliable” books in de La Grange’s discussion of sources in the introduction, xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Youmans notes the influence on Gustav Mahler scholarship, including his own, of the so-called “Alma problem,” which he describes as “the notorious tendentiousness and indeed flat-out falsifications in her memoirs and ‘editing’ of Mahler’s correspondence.” Charles Youmans, *Mahler and Strauss: In Dialogue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 214.

<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship has explored the impact of male interlopers on “Great Men of Music,” for example Daniel Brenner’s *Anton Schindler und sein Einfluss auf die Beethoven-Biographik* (Bonn: Verlag Beethoven-Haus, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Sidonie Smith writes, “Yet patriarchal notions of woman’s inherent nature and consequent social role have denied or severely proscribed her access to the public space; and male distrust and consequent repression of female speech have either condemned her to public silence or profoundly contaminated her relationship to the pen as an instrument of power” *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 7.

explore their shifting rhetoric and investigate how they have informed scholarship on her own music.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson reiterate that life narratives do not present historical record, but rather are rhetorical and performative acts.<sup>6</sup> Smith and Watson suggest that if we approach life writing as “an intersubjective process that occurs within a dialogic exchange between writer and reader/viewer rather than as a story to be proved or falsified, the emphasis of reading shifts from assessing and verifying knowledge to observing processes of communication exchange and understanding.”<sup>7</sup> Much work has been done throughout the humanities to shift the perceived value of life writings from documents of historical record to documents detailing the rich, complex, and often conflicting words of human authors.<sup>8</sup>

This approach is, however, less common in musicology,<sup>9</sup> where biographical writings have largely been received as historical fact, except when the author is perceived as dishonest or unauthoritative, a perception that is frequently gendered.<sup>10</sup> Leon Botstein

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<sup>6</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 16–17.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28–48; James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, *Feminism & Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Leppert and Susan McClary wrote in 1987: “For the most part, the discourse of musical scholarship clings stubbornly to a reliance on positivism in historical research and formalism in theory and criticism, with primary attention still focused exclusively on the canon” in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), xii. Musicologists have done significant work since to question previously held assumptions about the autonomy of music, but positivism is deeply entrenched.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the “women as liar” trope, see Marilyn Yarbrough and Crystal Bennett, “Cassandra and the Sistahs: The Peculiar Treatment of African American Women in the Myth of Women as Liars,” *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 3, no 2 (1999): 625–58.



compares the caution with which Alma Mahler's writings on Gustav Mahler are, he argues, rightly received, to the perceived authenticity of those of Natalie Bauer-Lechner, whose reliability he came to question in light of a new document.<sup>11</sup> I argue for an analysis of Alma Mahler's writings that goes beyond true/false or objective/biased binaries to consider her audience, coherence, evidence, experience, authorship and the historical moment, agency, identity, and temporality as she describes her compositional work.<sup>12</sup> By comparing Mahler's autobiographical writings along these diverse points of inquiry, we can better understand the value she ascribed to music and composition at various points in her life.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Leon Botstein, "Second Thoughts: The Genre of Biography and Natalie Bauer-Lechner as Witness," *Musical Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2014): 1–11; Morten Solvik and Stephen E. Hefling, "Natalie Bauer-Lechner on Mahler and Women: A Newly Discovered Document," *Musical Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2014): 12–65.

<sup>12</sup> Smith and Watson present these, among other strategies for reading life narratives in *Reading Autobiography*, 235–51.

<sup>13</sup> The comparison will focus on Mahler's published diaries and memoirs. Her diaries were first published in German as *Alma Mahler-Werfel: Tagebuch-Suiten 1898–1902*, ed. Antony Beaumont and Susanne Rode-Breyman (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997) and later in English as *Diaries 1898–1902*, trans. Antony Beaumont (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). Her published memoirs include Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958) and Alma Mahler, *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1960).

## Autobiographical and Life Writing Sources

Alma Mahler corresponded broadly,<sup>14</sup> kept diaries at various points in her life,<sup>15</sup> and also contributed to autobiographical memoirs published in various editions and translated into multiple languages.<sup>16</sup> Given that these were written across a long life

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<sup>14</sup> Manuscript correspondence between Alma Mahler and Franz Werfel is housed in the Mahler-Werfel Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania: [http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD\\_upenn\\_rbml\\_MsColl575](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD_upenn_rbml_MsColl575). Some of Mahler's correspondence has been published, for example: "*Immer wieder werden mich thätige Geister verlocken*": *Alma Mahler-Werfels Briefe an Alban Berg und seine Frau*, ed. Martina Steiger (Vienna: Seifert Verlag, 2008); *Schoenberg's Correspondence with Alma Mahler*, trans. by Elizabeth L. Keathley, and Marilyn L. McCoy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); *Liebste Freundin und Alma: Briefwechsel mit Alma Mahler-Werfel: nebst einigen Briefen an Franz Werfel, ergänzt durch zwei Aufsätze Friedrich Torbergs im Anhang und ein Vorwort von David Axmann* (München: Langen Müller, 1987); Helga Scholz-Michelitsch, "Eine Korrespondenz über eine Korrespondenz: Anna Bahr-Mildenburg und Alma Mahler zur Edition von Briefen Gustav Mahlers," *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 43 (1994): 365–74.

<sup>15</sup> Manuscript diaries are housed in the Mahler-Werfel Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania: [http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD\\_upenn\\_rbml\\_MsColl575](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD_upenn_rbml_MsColl575). The Finding Aid for the collection lists the following diaries, or diary excerpts:

A. 1. Handwritten Diaries of Alma Mahler, 1898–1902 (Tagebuch-Suiten). 4 boxes. The organization of the diaries into "suites," numbered four through 25, stems from Alma herself. The diaries are written in composition notebooks, each of which constitutes a "suite." (Suites one through three are not extant.) Correspondence to Alma Mahler that she inserted between the pages of her diary (letters, postcards, poems) have in most instances been filed with correspondence (Series I), according to the name of the correspondent; however, it has been noted where something has been removed, and all of the inserted material, including correspondence, appears at the appropriate point in the diary in the accompanying acid-free photocopies. Inserted materials other than correspondence (e.g. programs, blank postcards) have been left with the corresponding diary suite. Some of the inserted items are to be found in the oversized box.

A. 2. Handwritten Transcription of Diaries of Alma Mahler, 1902-1905, 1911. 3 folders. Alma Mahler's handwritten manuscript dated 1924, bearing the title "Tagebuch Alma Mahler," representing a transcription of diary entries, which she had apparently collected on loose sheets in the years 1902 to 1905, and 1911 (a notation on the title page indicates: "Von fliegenden Zetteln abgeschrieben im August 1924"); the original diary entries are not extant.

A. 3. Handwritten Diary of Alma Mahler, 1961. 2 folders. Several handwritten pages accompanied by a title page ("Tagebuch 1961") in Alma Mahler's hand."

<sup>16</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love* and Alma Mahler, *Mein Leben*. Both have been translated and published in various editions. Manuscripts related to the Mahler's memoirs are housed in the Mahler-Werfel Collection at the University of Pennsylvania, Penn Libraries: [http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD\\_upenn\\_rbml\\_MsColl575](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD_upenn_rbml_MsColl575). The Finding Aid for the collection lists the following content related to the memoirs:

"B. Typescript Precursors related to Alma Mahler's Memoir *Mein Leben*. 4 boxes. Two bound typescripts entitled, respectively, "Tagebuch der Alma Maria" (1902–1944), and "Der Schimmernde Weg (The Sparkling Way)." The latter appears to be a revised and expanded version of the former; both are based on a diary form; both are presumed to be the 'precursors' to Alma's published memoirs, which were written by, or in consultation with, ghost writers."

(1879–1964), for diverse audiences, and with seemingly different goals, it is no surprise that the content may lack coherence and the writings diverge in their description of her compositional activities. It is worth noting that although her published diaries and memoirs attest to her love of and engagement with music as a composer, both have also been used to question her identity as composer.

Although she frequently and fervently documents the importance of her study, analysis, composition, and various other forms of musical participation in her diaries, this narrative has been diminished by memoirs written decades later and popular-press biographies based primarily on these memoirs.<sup>17</sup> Her published memoirs, *And the Bridge is Love* and *Mein Leben*, emphasize her personal relationships and her role as a muse to great men, which she recognized to be her legacy by the time of their writing.<sup>18</sup> This shift in Mahler's identity, from aspiring composer to muse, meant that she minimized the importance of her compositional work in her memoirs by providing only minimal coverage. The memoirs remain the prominent narrative in the literature; by my current count, the English- and German-language memoirs have been cited almost four times as often as the diaries in both German and English versions.<sup>19</sup> The discrepancy in how these sources are used and cited by scholars depends on the aims of the scholars' research

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<sup>17</sup> Published biographies about Alma Mahler are considered in the third chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958); Alma Mahler, *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1960).

<sup>19</sup> Citation counts from Google Scholar collected January 2, 2021. The memoirs have been cited over two hundred times (230), while the 1898–1902 diaries, both the German version and English translation, have been cited fifty-nine times.

agendas. Perceived discrepancies in Alma Mahler's life writings have opened the door for her work and standing as a composer to be dismissed or entirely ignored.<sup>20</sup>

Two bound typescripts in the Mahler-Werfel papers at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania suggest that Mahler had been working on her memoirs more than ten years before the final versions were published in 1958 and 1960. The *Tagebuch der Alma Maria* (1902–1944) and *Der Schimmernde Weg* both present her autobiography in a chronological, diary format. Mahler shared *Der Schimmernde Weg* with Paul von Zsolnay in 1947, who suggested extensive rewrites before the publication.<sup>21</sup> Mahler first worked with Paul Frischauer, who proposed *Great Men's Wife* and *Wife of the Great* as working titles, but he ultimately found Mahler too difficult to work with.<sup>22</sup> Eventually Mahler found a willing ghostwriter in fellow émigré Ernst Basch, who had worked extensively as an author and translator under the pen name E. B. Ashton and whose wife, Hertha Pauli, was a friend.<sup>23</sup> Frischauer and Ashton both indicate the need to make considerable revisions to her typescript manuscripts and the other materials she shared; the necessary changes involved not only the organization of the materials, but also the content itself, which was

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<sup>20</sup> Jörg Rothkamm, for example, quoted self-conscious statements Mahler made in her diaries to suggest that if she did not take her work seriously neither should we. "Wer komponierte die unter Alma Mahlers Namen veröffentlichten Lieder? Unbekannte Briefe der Komponistin zur Revision ihrer Werke im Jahre 1910," *Die Musikforschung* 53, no. 4 (2000): 432–45.

<sup>21</sup> Paul von Zsolnay to Alma Mahler Werfel, August 11, 1947; box 22, folder 1405, Mahler-Werfel Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Frischauer to Alma Mahler Werfel, December 15, 1947; box 5, folder 338, Mahler-Werfel Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>23</sup> Letters between Herta Pauli and Alma Mahler are available in box 14, folder 973, Mahler-Werfel Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

frequently inflammatory and included some factual inaccuracies.<sup>24</sup> Their revised memoir, under the authorship of “Mahler-Werfel in collaboration with E. B. Ashton,” was published in 1958 as *And the Bridge is Love*. The title alludes to a Thornton Wilder quotation that she uses to close the book.<sup>25</sup> The selection of this English-language title highlights the importance of Mahler’s relationship to her late husbands.<sup>26</sup>

Willy Haas prepared the more comprehensive—376 pages compared to 308 pages—German memoir, which was published in 1960 as *Mein Leben*.<sup>27</sup> Ashton had been contracted to prepare the German translation, but Mahler blamed Ashton for some of the problems with the reception of *And the Bridge is Love* and opted to pursue a new partner for the German-language memoirs.<sup>28</sup> *Mein Leben* takes a different approach to autobiography, even though Mahler relied heavily on both ghost writers for both of her memoirs. *And the Bridge is Love* is divided into chapters of narrative that are only infrequently interrupted by diary excerpts or letters.<sup>29</sup> *Mein Leben*, on the other hand, incorporates letters, Werfel’s lectures, reviews of his work, and other documents, especially in the period 1913–1945. Much of *Mein Leben* is comprised of diarylike

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<sup>24</sup> Mahler’s rampant and unapologetic anti-Semitism was frequently to blame. Mahler-Werfel Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>25</sup> “There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.” Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2015), 180.

<sup>26</sup> Mahler may also have used this allusion to his work to highlight her closeness to Wilder, of which she boasts on pages 306–7. Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*.

<sup>27</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*.

<sup>28</sup> Telegrams and correspondence between Mahler and Willy Haas regarding this project are available in Mahler-Werfel Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>29</sup> An exception to this is the inclusion of an excerpt from Franz Werfel’s diary (July 29–August 26, 1918) in both *And the Bridge is Love* and *Mein Leben*.

entries or excerpts from letters, lectures, and other documents that are woven together to form a more cohesive narrative. Despite having been criticized by Henry-Louis de La Grange, among others, for strategic editing and a depiction of Gustav Mahler that has been perceived as less than flattering,<sup>30</sup> *And the Bridge is Love* and *Mein Leben* remain the most frequently cited source among Alma Mahler's life writings, far outpacing her 1898–1902 diaries.

The 1997 publication of Mahler's early diaries, from January 1898 to January 1902, carried with it the opportunity for scholars to refocus on her compositional activities; the period under consideration is that in which she was most active compositionally.<sup>31</sup> In her memoirs and diaries, Mahler relates different and sometimes conflicting images of her compositional work. This chapter will interrogate these sources to contextualize Mahler's own statements on music and composition.

### **Audience**

*"...what kind of reader or ideal audience does the text ask you to be?"*<sup>32</sup>

There are several differences between the memoirs and diaries, and some of these may be attributed to their respective formats. The memoirs were written with the express purpose of being published and disseminated to a wide audience.<sup>33</sup> The diaries served to record private thoughts, although there is evidence of Mahler editing and deleting entries.<sup>34</sup> Her diaries were prepared for publication posthumously, and although she

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<sup>30</sup> Henry-Louis de La Grange, "Mahler: A New Image," *Saturday Review*, March 29, 1969, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*. The English-language translation of her diaries followed in 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 236.

<sup>33</sup> Both memoirs were dedicated to Gusti and Gustav Arlt.

<sup>34</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 755.

reviewed them in the 1960s, there is no evidence that she sought to publish these as she obviously did her various memoirs.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, reading the 1898–1902 diaries in the mindset of a contemporary allows the audience to appreciate the degree to which the creative act was progressive and a struggle for young women in this time and place.

There is a performative element to diary writing, especially, perhaps, among adolescents.<sup>36</sup> Catherine Delafield evokes Judith Butler to discuss the performative nature of keeping a diary:

Butler adds that a ‘performative act’ is the ‘coincidence of signifying and enacting.’ The diary is performative for the nineteenth century because it is an element in gender signification within the ‘regulatory frame’ of femininity. The diary is stylized in its repetition and the non-fictional model discussed identifies codes which allow women to access life-writing through their daily record.<sup>37</sup>

Her diaries provided an opportunity for Mahler to enact her femininity. Mahler’s self-conscious statements about her compositional work in the diaries read as a performance of gender- and period-appropriate self-deprecation. The diaries provide evidence that Mahler’s correspondence could also be performative. For example, Mahler details a letter written in reply to a friend’s, but intended for the friend’s father to read.<sup>38</sup> Mahler understood from an early age that the actual audience may differ from the intended

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<sup>35</sup> Notes in the manuscript diaries indicate that she reviewed and made some corrections, for example: “Checked in early January 1963. A.M.-W.,” 77; “Corrected in January 1962. A.M.-W.,” 260. Mahler, *Diaries 1898–1902*.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Crowther, “Writing as Performance: Young Girls’ Diaries,” in *Making Meaning of Narratives*, ed. Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1999), 197–220.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine Delafield, *Women’s Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 2-3; Judith Butler, “Burning Acts: Injurious Speech,” in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwich, eds. *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 197–227.

<sup>38</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 152: “Today I wrote in reply—a letter which I intend her father to read ... It will, I hope, make its effect.”

audience, and that one could take advantage of such situations. This likely has implications for the interpretation and understanding of her diaries.

The memoirs have a more easily identified audience. The ideal audience views Mahler as a celebrity: not a great woman of music, but rather a muse to several great men and patron of the arts.<sup>39</sup> Mahler was not wrong to assume that her published memoirs would be of interest to broad audiences. The publication of numerous popular press biographies and creation of films, plays, and various other forms of media based largely on her memoirs confirm that her story has captivated large audiences. The audience for the memoirs and mass-market biographies may be less interested in Mahler's work and identity as a composer. At the surface, it seems as though the diaries are for those interested in knowing about her engagement with music composition and the memoirs are written for those more interested in her highly sexualized biography and her role of wife and lover to several great men.<sup>40</sup> Some readers who began with the memoirs may seek out the diaries for richer information about her life, for more detailed information about her work as a composer, or for the sake of comparing them.

In her memoirs, Mahler asks her audience to admire her and to side with her. She frequently offers explanations or justifications that come across as defensive. She does, admittedly, say unflattering things about many people in her life, including Gustav Mahler. Women were frequently dismissed as liars or gossips when they dared speak

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<sup>39</sup> Or, as Herrberg and Wagner suggest, *Mein Leben* depicts Mahler as the most admired woman of the century: "1960 erscheint ihre Autobiografie *Mein Leben*, in der sie sich als die meistbewunderte Frau des Jahrhunderts schildert." Heike Herrberg and Heidi Wagner, *Wiener Melange: Frauen zwischen Salon und Kaffeehaus* (Berlin: Ebersbach, 2002), 49.

<sup>40</sup> Albrecht Joseph recalled the initial reception of *Mein Leben*: "The German version was considered so hot, that it was sold under the counter like pornography." Albrecht Joseph, "Werfel, Alma, Kokoschka, the Actor George," 10, in box 8, folder 554, Mahler-Werfel papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.



publicly, or when their words are not received with favor. Because Alma Mahler exercised some control of Gustav Mahler's estate and had exclusive access to various manuscripts and documents, however, she could not easily be written off or ignored. Her demands to be heard and her desire for sympathetic reception in the memoirs has opened the door to considerable scorn and even the coining of the "Alma Problem." Alma Mahler shows her humanity in these thinly veiled attempts to win over an audience and to seek out some arguably deserved sympathy for the sacrifices she made.

### Coherence

*"Does the narrator explicitly assert the coherence of his or her story?...Consider digressions, omissions, contradictions, gaps, and silences about certain things."*<sup>41</sup>

Mahler does not assert the coherence of her story across, or even within sources; the diaries are entirely episodic and the memoirs do not claim to be comprehensive and coherent, though her ghost writers did attempt to assert some continuity. Although the memoirs provide a single narrative of her life, they are nonetheless rife with omissions and contradictions. There are nonetheless continuities across the memoirs and diaries: for example, Mahler documents her love of music and composition in both.

Composition seems to have fulfilled various needs in Mahler's life. In both *And the Bridge is Love* and *Mein Leben*, Mahler articulated how she was driven to compose as an act of self-expression. Mahler used composition to express, and perhaps to cope with, her varied and intense emotional states.<sup>42</sup> Composition was not only a means by which to give form to her suffering, but also a way to escape severe emotional suffering: "The

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<sup>41</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 240.

<sup>42</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 13: "I began to compose again, to seek some creative outlet for my grief."

more I suffered with this (lost) love, the more I sank in my music—thus my misfortune became the source of great bliss.”<sup>43</sup> The need for self-expression was apparent throughout the diaries, too, and yet several themes not mentioned in *Mein Leben* become clear after reading the diaries. The coverage of Mahler’s compositional engagement is much more extensive in the diaries, and the level of detail provided on the role of composition in her life is richer, if also less coherent.

In *Mein Leben*, she states that she began to compose at the age of nine<sup>44</sup> and composed regularly until she became engaged to Gustav Mahler, at which time he demanded that she give up her music and live for his.<sup>45</sup> The memoir captures her passion for music, especially for Wagner’s operas: “I tore through musical literature and screamed through Wagner scores until my beautiful mezzo voice was destroyed. I lived in a wonderment of music.”<sup>46</sup> Her love of music was exemplified in various activities, including composition, collaboration, performance, concert attendance, and discussion of repertoire and performances. It was most obvious, however, in her compositional work. Mahler claims that music and composition were everything to her: “I composed from one day to another several sonata movements, lived only for my work, and suddenly withdrew myself from all social settings.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 28: “Je mehr ich an dieser Liebe litt, desto mehr versank ich in meiner eignen Musik, und so wurde mein Unglück zur Quelle meiner größten Seligkeiten.”

<sup>44</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 17: “. . . hier began ich mit neun Jahren zu komponieren und aufzunotieren.”

<sup>45</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 31: “Gustav Mahler forderte brieflich sofortiges Aufgeben meiner Musik, ich müsse nur der seinen leben.”

<sup>46</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 20: “[ch]raste durch die Musikliteratur und schrie alle Wagner-Parteien herunter bis mein schöner Mezzosoprano zum Teufel war. Ich lebte in einem Musikwunder.”

<sup>47</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 28: “Ich komponierte von einem Tag zum anderen vielseitige Sonatensätze, lebte nur meiner Arbeit und hatte mich plötzlich von allem gesellschaftlichen Treiben zurückgezogen.”

Mahler found fulfillment in composition; statements throughout her diaries, however, contradict the suggestion that she was withdrawn from society. Her social calendar was quite full. Her composition teacher Alexander Zemlinsky was clear: “Either compose or go out in society—one or the other. But choose the one you prefer—go socialize.”<sup>48</sup> After this harsh pronouncement, she did precisely that—she opted to keep her evening social plans and not stay late for her lesson.<sup>49</sup> This highlights what might have proven a fundamental setback for Mahler’s compositional career: she enjoyed going out, being seen, and being complimented on her tremendous beauty. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with such pursuits, both she and her teachers knew that they would distract Mahler from her work and, perhaps more importantly, prevent others from taking her composition seriously.<sup>50</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, the degree of determination that a woman needed to demonstrate in order to gain respect as a composer would rule out such perceived trivialities.<sup>51</sup> This disparity between Mahler’s

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<sup>48</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch Suite*, 632: “Entweder Sie komponieren oder Sie gehen in Gesellschaften—eines von beiden. Wählen Sie aber lieber das, was Ihnen näher liegt—gehen Sie in Gesellschaften.”

<sup>49</sup> Or so she reports in her diary: Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch Suite*, 632.

<sup>50</sup> Rode-Breyman suggests that although Mahler fought for her compositional creativity and freedom, but others sought only the beautiful, young woman with whom one could amuse oneself and speak intelligently about art. Susanne Rode-Breyman, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Hannover: Niedersächsische Staatstheater, 1999), 23–24. “Sie [Schindler] kämpfte um ihre kompositorische Kreativität und um ihre Freiheit, aber die andern suchten nur die fescche, schöne, junge Frau in ihr, mit der man sich auf allen Gesellschaften gut amüsieren und auch geistvoll über Kunst Dinge plaudern konnte.”

<sup>51</sup> The case of composer Dame Ethel Smyth, a very serious woman by most accounts, is relevant. She was a near contemporary of Mahler’s who studied composition in Germany, but in contrast to Mahler, she did not raise children, and instead dedicated her life to composition and women’s suffrage. In an anonymous, 1912 article in *Musical Times*, her seriousness and the masculinity of music were discussed: “The entire absence of the qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions. Throughout it was virile, masterly in construction and workmanship, and particularly remarkable for the excellence and rich colouring of the orchestration” (81). “Dr. Ethel Smyth,” *The Musical Times* 53, no. 828 (1912): 81–83. doi:10.2307/907581. In-depth analysis of contemporaneous gendering of women’s composing and compositions is provided in Eugene Gates, “Damned if You Do and Damned if You Don’t: Sexual Aesthetics and the Music of Dame Ethel Smyth,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 31, no. 1 (1997): 63–71.

creative and social roles created a situation in which both she and those around her did not know how to regard her creative output. The diaries, which showed Mahler's daily activities and conflicts as they happened, make this discrepancy clear to readers. The memoirs, which were written at considerable distance from the actual events, gloss over such discrepancies to present to the world the narrative as Mahler shaped it, which had relegated her compositional activities to a short, if foundational, period of her adolescence.

### Evidence

*“What kinds of evidence does the narrator incorporate into her text to persuade the reader of the narrative’s claims to truth? ... What’s at stake historically (in the larger society) in having this text accepted as a ‘truthful’ account of a life?”*<sup>52</sup>

Although Alma Mahler incorporates a variety of evidence in her life writing, she does not necessarily make claims to be telling the truth. In her diaries, in fact, she readily admits to lying: “With my back to the wall, I didn’t know what to say, so I told him all kinds of fibs. After all, I had no choice.”<sup>53</sup> The admission suggests a guileless approach to recording daily events and conversations as they happened by a person not overly concerned about what readers might think of her credibility.<sup>54</sup> Rather than formal sources of evidence one might expect from an authoritative biography, for example, the diaries offer evidence in the form of the frequency and intensity of Mahler’s statements.

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<sup>52</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 242.

<sup>53</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 100.

<sup>54</sup> She also records a “fairy-tale,” but does readers the credit of labeling it as such. Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 199.

The importance of music in Alma Mahler's early life is evident in the frequency, intensity, and specificity of her diary entries on the topics of music composition, performance, and criticism. Mahler records the dates of piano and composition lessons, as well as concerts attended (and frequently their programs), some of which can be verified, if that is the goal. Much of what Mahler records in her diaries—private conversations, impressions of a composition, a teacher's verbal assessment of her work—is, of course, more challenging, if not impossible, to verify. This information, regardless of its "truth" remains valuable in understanding how Mahler perceived her world and how she chose to convey it to readers. Mahler does occasionally include notated music as evidence of her engagement in musical composition or analysis, but she most often depicts the music of other composers.<sup>55</sup>

In *And the Bridge is Love*, Mahler's evidence reads as imprecise. Although she does occasionally refer to letters, diary entries, and other dated documents, she seldom veers from the narrative to include such evidence in the text. Readers must trust the author and editors to have verified it. *Mein Leben*, however, incorporates a good deal of evidence. Almost three hundred pages present diary-like entries (1913–1945) and incorporate letters, lectures delivered by Franz Werfel, and other evidence of where she was and what she was doing. That *Mein Leben* takes a different approach to the inclusion of evidence may well have been in response to accusations that *And the Bridge is Love* departed too drastically from reality. Perhaps Mahler, working with her ghostwriter Willy

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<sup>55</sup> For example, Mahler annotates an entry detailing a concert featuring a serenade by Josef Suk and she notated a passage from the last movement. *Mahler-Werfel: Diaries 1898–1902*, 277.

Haas, understood that first-hand information was what audiences fascinated by her life craved and would offer readers more perceived authenticity.

### **Experience**

*“Do the different interpretations of an experience in narratives written at different times by the same person signal stages of, or changes in, the overall pattern and beliefs of the autobiographical story?”<sup>56</sup>*

Alma Mahler’s diaries are presented episodically as she experienced the life events described. Although diary entries can be performative, and there is significant evidence here that Mahler was indeed performing, there is no evidence that Mahler systematically changed the 1898–1902 entries later in life to make them better align with her other life writing. Although she presented these experiences with high degrees of drama and excitement, she was also, for the most part, writing these at the time of the events described and without the benefit of hindsight. Mahler nonetheless notes the ways in which experience might shift the autobiographical story: “I didn’t want to write anything, because you easily write too much, and years later, when your outlook has changed completely, you’re surprised, angry, no longer understand yourself.”<sup>57</sup> Mahler seems to appreciate, even as a young woman, that she will be changed by her experiences.

The memoirs are presented as a cohesive—if not entirely coherent—whole, and were edited for grammar, content, and organization. Although Maher was not the single, or even primary author for her memoirs, she did have the final say on their content.

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<sup>56</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 242.

<sup>57</sup> Mahler, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 342.

Accordingly, she was able to shape the experiences and stories to her liking and had control over how she, the protagonist, would appear to readers. This allowed her, the only person with actual knowledge of all experiences, to gloss over the negative, emphasize the positive, and be the woman she wanted others to believe she was. Mahler exercised more control of the experiences conveyed in her memoirs; that does not mean, however, that others were not involved in the process, or that she could maintain control of how readers interpreted these experiences.

The diaries and memoirs present different interpretations of Mahler's experience as a composer. The diaries are the source written at the period in her life when she was most engaged in music composition and provide considerable detail on her experience and activities related to composing. As Mahler recorded in her diaries: "The only thing that gives me joy is composing."<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, audiences will interpret, through the frequency and intensity of her diary entries, the importance, and even centrality, of this work to her life. The memoirs do mention music composition, but not with the same frequency or urgency as do the diaries. Through this relative omission, Mahler signals considerable changes to her autobiographical story; her lived experience as aspiring composer is whitewashed by the triumphant story of an ascending muse.

In her diaries, Mahler describes a scene in which she walks by the magnificent house of an old woman who is playing the piano inside.<sup>59</sup> Mahler was quite taken by the grand woman's sad smile and wondered what the woman still desired from life. Mahler

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<sup>58</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 372.

<sup>59</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 155–6.

connected the scene to her own experience of musical improvisation, during which she would simultaneously reflect on the past and make wishes for the future. She wrote:

How lovely it would be if an old person were to compose the story of their life: the innocence of childhood, first love, passion, the joy of mother- or fatherhood, stories of children, softly echoing their own youth, the approach of old age, purification of the spirit, calm, sublime content—the whole interwoven with the fight for existence, which towards the close would slowly fade. It would be lovely, even lovelier and psychologically more interesting than an honestly kept diary.<sup>60</sup>

That a life would be best composed in music was the statement of an aspiring composer. Mahler's interpretation of her life experiences in the memoirs reveal considerable changes not only in her autobiographical story, but also in how it would best be conveyed.

### **Authorship and the Historical Moment**

*"We might ask what cultural meanings a narrative acquired when it was written or published ... Why might it have been important to narrate to oneself a personal story, or to make it public?"<sup>61</sup>*

Mahler was immersed in the culturally rich atmosphere of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Keeping a diary was common practice for young ladies in her milieu.<sup>62</sup> Diaries and journals were a means by which women could write their own stories, but also confine their stories to a domestic setting.<sup>63</sup> Publishing memoirs, however, was not typical of women; Mahler's decision to publish her memoirs marks her as an exception to the rule,

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<sup>60</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*.

<sup>61</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 237.

<sup>62</sup> Alison Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 5. Rose indicates that diaries, along with letters, speeches, and other sources chronicle Jewish women's lives in this time and place.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 42.



one of few women who would “cross the line between private and public utterance, unmasking their desire for the empowering self-interpretation of autobiography as they unmasked in their life the desire for publicity.”<sup>64</sup> As a young composer who kept a diary, Mahler was participating in a normalized and socially acceptable cultural activity. As an older woman co-writing her memoirs, however, she was doing something that has been interpreted as attention seeking.<sup>65</sup> Only in more recent scholarship have authors appropriated as powerful and significant Alma Mahler’s chosen role of muse to “great men.”<sup>66</sup>

That diary-keeping was common in turn-of-the-century Vienna is reflected in some of the conversations that Mahler records in her diaries. She indicates in her April 7, 1899 entry, for example that she discussed keeping a diary with Karlweis.<sup>67</sup> They agreed on the importance of reckoning with oneself on a regular basis and also that one never entirely tells the truth with oneself, even in a diary.<sup>68</sup> She reflects on this noting: “In these pages I have often lied and glossed over many of my faults. Forgive me, I’m only

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<sup>64</sup> Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography*, 44.

<sup>65</sup> Oliver Hilmes has written about Mahler’s love of attention and acclaim in unflattering, and perhaps also sexist terms: “While Alma, in view of tributes like this, was able to transform herself into a true ‘grande dame,’ even in this role she is still the classic hysterical woman she was from turn-of-the-century Vienna right into the 1950s, equally capable of dispensing with noblesse because of some trivial matter.” Oliver Hilmes, *Malevolent Muse: The Life of Alma Mahler* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2015), 252. It may also have been interpreted as an attempt to monetize her connections to Great men.

<sup>66</sup> Megan Brandow-Faller, “Man, Woman, Artist? Rethinking the Muse in Vienna 1900,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2008): 92–120.

<sup>67</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 115.

<sup>68</sup> Franz Werfel seems to agree with diary keeping as a means of self-reckoning that is not entirely successful when he writes: “Diary! My effort to combat the lies that pursue me, my struggle against corruption even though new instances should arise beyond those I know of!” quoted in Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 102.

human...”<sup>69</sup> Despite the lack of truth-telling, Mahler nonetheless ascribes great importance to her diaries and confers them with a sacred role.<sup>70</sup> Although keeping a diary was common practice among her contemporaries, writing in her diary seemed to be an important creative, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual outlet for Mahler.

Mahler’s diaries reveal many ways in which she was in the thick of her historical moment. As an example, reading modern poetry and setting the texts to music was a common activity among amateur and professional composers of the time.<sup>71</sup> Mahler responded creatively to these texts and allowed her Lieder to be played for friends and guests, just as her male counterparts were doing.<sup>72</sup> Despite such similarities, however, Mahler was intent on separating her work as a woman apart from the work of men. To her detriment, Mahler bought into contemporary thoughts on the limits of women’s creative capacity.<sup>73</sup> Namely, she considered femininity her weakness: “Let me not be defeated in the battle against my weakness, against my femininity.”<sup>74</sup> Otto Weininger’s *Geschlecht*

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<sup>69</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 115.

<sup>70</sup> “I’m writing my last, dear memories into this sacred book.” Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 198.

<sup>71</sup> Rode-Breyman, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 79.

<sup>72</sup> An example of this activity is Mahler’s settings of texts by Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), which parallels that of her contemporaries, including Zemlinsky, Hans Pfitzner, Max Reger, Arnold Schoenberg, Richard Strauss, Karol Szymanowski, and Anton Weber. Hartmut Krones, *Alexander Zemlinsky: Ästhetik, Stil und Umfeld*, Wiener Schriften zur Stilkunde und Aufführungspraxis, Sonderband 1. (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), 146: “Zemlinskys Dehmel-Arbeiten stammen aus den Jahren 1896–1907, als Dehmel ein in die breite Öffentlichkeit wirkender zeitgenössischer Dichter war und sich auch Komponisten zahlreich mit ihm auseinandergesetzt haben; zu nennen wären etwa Alma Mahler, Hans Pfitzner, Max Reger, Arnold Schoenberg, Richard Strauss, Karol Szymanowski, Anton Webern u.a.”

<sup>73</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, several of Mahler’s contemporaries wrote about the alleged limits of female composers. George Upton, *Woman in Music* (Boston: J.R. Osgood and Co., 1880); Edith Brower, “Is the Musical Idea Masculine?” *Atlantic Monthly* 73, no. 437 (March 1894): 332–9; Rev. Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Music and Morals* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872).

<sup>74</sup> *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 172: “Lass mich nicht unterliegen in dem Kampfe [ge]gen meine Schwäche, meine Weibheit.”

*und Charakter*, which defines genius as masculine and passivity as feminine, was a particularly influential and pervasive statement of dominant thought in early twentieth-century Vienna.<sup>75</sup> Mahler points to Cécile Chaminade for evidence that women are incapable of creative work. After attending a performance of Chaminade's Piano Concerto, opus 40, Mahler wrote: "She is a disgrace to her sex ... Now I know that a woman can never achieve something, never, never, never."<sup>76</sup> She does not explain her outrage beyond suggesting that the orchestration was unconventional or overwhelming.<sup>77</sup>

Mahler expresses self-consciousness and doubt about her compositional work. After working on a piece, she frequently notes in her diaries statements indicating this uncertainty—for example, "whether or not it's any good, I don't know"<sup>78</sup>—and makes a point to record her teacher's approval or disapproval as soon as possible afterwards. Her use of the diminutive to describe her work also suggests self-consciousness. Mahler did not compose Lieder, instead she worked on "ein Liedl" or "kleines Lied." She concludes on several occasions that she lacks the perseverance and sense of purpose, and not the gift, necessary for large-scale compositions: "I want to do something remarkable. I want to compose a really good opera ... I don't lack the talent; I lack the required seriousness."<sup>79</sup> She attributes a perceived lack of progress to her frivolity and inability to

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<sup>75</sup> Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character*, translated from German by Ladislaus Löb; edited by Daniel Steuer and Laura Marcus; with an introduction by Daniel Steuer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>76</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 195: "Sie [Chaminade] ist eine Schande des weiblichen Geschlechts ... Nun weiss ich, ein Weib kann nichts erreichen, nie, nie, nie."

<sup>77</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 195: "Sie aber mit Pfeifen, Triangeln, ja mit einem wahren Monstreorchester, und was steckt dahinter?"

<sup>78</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, for example, page 172: "Obs gut ist weiss ich nicht."

<sup>79</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 11: "Ich möchte eine große That thun. Möchte eine wirklich gute Oper komponieren. . . Mir fehlte die Begabung nicht, mir – fehlte nur der Ernste der immer nothwendig ist."

focus: “I’ve made no technical progress, I’m so flighty/mindless. I consistently make the same stupid mistakes and I can certainly understand his [Labor] losing interest in me. I hate myself because I am so incredibly superficial.”<sup>80</sup> Despite the fact that these statements are consistent with expectations of gender-normative self-consciousness, they have nonetheless been repeated by contemporary scholars and critics to undermine her reputation as a composer.

By the time she got around to the memoirs, the world, and Alma Mahler’s place in it, were very different. Mahler enjoyed a not insignificant amount of celebrity, perhaps due to the popularity of Franz Werfel’s works, which were widely translated and read. Werfel’s work may also have influenced Mahler’s life writing. *In Der Stern der Ungeborenen*, Werfel’s last novel, he “revealed his last thoughts on every subject close to his heart,” which effectively blurred the lines between fiction and life writing.<sup>81</sup> Compared to the rather restrictive opportunities for women in the public sphere under which Mahler grew up in late nineteenth-century, Catholic Vienna, the late nineteenthies in California provided women with new opportunities for public recognition. The celebrity of her husbands, changing social norms for women, and Mahler’s desire to be central to her own life story empowered her and increased the agency she experienced from the writing of the diaries to the writing of the memoirs.

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<sup>80</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 436: “Im übrigen mache ich technisch keine Fortschritte, ich kann halt nicht denken. Mache immer dieselben Fehler, dieselben Dummheiten, und ich begreife es sehr gut, dass er [Labor] die Lust an mir verliert. Ich hasse mich, weil ich so gar sehr oberflächlich bin.”

<sup>81</sup> Adolf Klarmann, the Werfel scholar who was integral to establishing the Werfel-Mahler papers at University of Pennsylvania, indicated that Werfel’s fiction incorporated autobiographical elements. Adolf D. Klarmann, “Franz Werfel’s Eschatology and Cosmogony,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1946): 385–410, at 385.

## Agency

*“People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural strictures about self-presentation in public. Given constraints, how do people change the narratives or write back to the cultural stories that have scripted them as particular kinds of subjects?”*<sup>82</sup>

Alma Mahler’s 1898–1902 diaries present the story of a young composer endeavoring to gain skills and experience and aspiring to achieve artistic fulfillment. This particular cultural script was not available to young women in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Because diaries were private, however, and not meant for public consumption, cultural strictures related to one’s self-presentation did not necessarily apply.<sup>83</sup> The diaries nonetheless frequently present Mahler’s feelings of gender-related inadequacy, incompetence, and lack of seriousness. This suggests that Mahler was well acquainted with the cultural scripts available to her and typically presented herself according to gender-normative expectations. Mahler did, however, occasionally deviate from these rules and expectations. Although she knew the diary was meant to be private and typically endeavored to keep others from reading it, she did show her diary to Zemlinsky on one occasion.<sup>84</sup> Regardless of whether this was an attempt to assert agency, to inspire intimacy, or something else entirely, Mahler regretted the course of action.

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<sup>82</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 235.

<sup>83</sup> There are numerous exceptions to this. One thinks, for example, of Clara Schumann’s childhood diary that was written in part by her father and was not an opportunity for self-expression as much as it was a didactic tool. Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>84</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 376.

Alma Mahler describes compositional work as fulfilling and as a necessary means of self-expression in *Mein Leben*. When she received the infamous composition ban letter from Gustav Mahler, her relationship to the act of composition might have been more complicated than was described in *Mein Leben*; she indicates that when she met Gustav Mahler her studies came to an abrupt end, giving way to a difficult and defining role.<sup>85</sup> It is true that Mahler's responsibilities were likely to shift dramatically after marriage. Further, professional celibacy requirements were still enforced in Austria at this time; in many vocations, women were required to quit their careers if and when they married.<sup>86</sup> Such policies created an environment in which all women, regardless of whether or not they would have children, were expected to focus on motherhood over any other profession or employment.

In *Mein Leben*, Alma Mahler summarizes the letter from Gustav without revealing her feelings: "Mahler demanded in his letter that I immediately give up my music, I must live for his alone. He believes, for example that the marriage of Robert and Clara Schumann was ridiculous."<sup>87</sup> This quotation has provoked a huge reaction from modern commentators, most notably Marcia Citron: "What may rank as the most

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<sup>85</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 30: "Doch ich lernte Gustav Mahler kennen und meine Lehrjahre namen ein abruptes End, um einer anderen schweren und bestimmenden Aufgabe zu weichen."

<sup>86</sup> James C. Albisetti, "Female Education in German-Speaking Austria, Germany and Switzerland, 1866–1914," in *Austrian Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. David F. Good, Margarete Grandner, and Mary Jo Maynes (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), 42.

<sup>87</sup> Mahler, *Mein Leben*, 31: "Mahler forderte brieflich sofortiges Aufgeben meiner Musik, ich müsse nur der seinen leben. Er meinte, die Ehe zwischen Robert und Klara Schumann zum Beispiel sei eine Lächerlichkeit gewesen." Gustav's December 19, 1901 letter in which he asked her to accept his music as her own does not mention the Schumanns but did suggest the ridiculousness of "ein componierendes Ehepaar" and "Rivalitätsverhältnis." Gustav Mahler, Henry-Louis de La Grange, Knud Martner, and Günther Weiss, *Ein Glück ohne Ruh': die Briefe Gustav Mahlers an Alma: erste Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), 104–11.

egregious piece of discouragement comes from no other than Gustav Mahler. With a fragile ego and a heightened sensitivity to potential competition, Mahler forbade his fiancé Alma Schindler to compose. He must have realized she was a creative force to be reckoned with.”<sup>88</sup> It is unlikely that Gustav Mahler would be threatened by her as a “creative force” when she had not yet shown or played him any of her music.<sup>89</sup> It seems more likely that Mahler willingly accepted what she understood to be her fate; this was not the first time that Alma had heard that her (or more generally, women) composing was absurd, and it was certainly not the first time that she had come up against a limit to her agency. She was unlikely surprised by Gustav’s words, as they echoed a sentiment held by many of their contemporaries.

In her diaries Mahler wrote from a position of limited agency and subjugation; in her memoirs, however, Mahler shaped the narrative and claimed hers as a story of a triumphant muse. In the epilogue to *And the Bridge is Love*, Mahler asserts: “My life was beautiful. God gave me to know the works of genius in our time before they left the hands of their creators. And if for a while I was able to hold the stirrups of these horsemen of light, my being has been justified and blessed.”<sup>90</sup> Mahler’s role of helpmeet to “horsemen of light” was culturally available to women of her time and place, and it likely afforded her more prestige and power than she would have achieved as a composer. Mahler did make the choice to give up composing, but one wonders if,

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<sup>88</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 61.

<sup>89</sup> Mahler, *Mein Leben*, 31: “Übrigens: ich hatte Gustav Mahler niemals eine Note meiner Musik gezeigt.” In any case, I had never shown Gustav Mahler one note of my music. Gustav also suggests that he does not yet know her songs in his December 19, 1901 letter to Alma: “Ich rede hier, wie gesagt, noch nicht von Deinen Compositionen, die ich ja noch nicht kenne...” *Ein Glück ohne Ruh*, 109.

<sup>90</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 308.

knowing how her “beautiful” life would unfold, she would have chosen the role of muse over that of composer.

### Identity

*“What models of identity were culturally available to the narrator at her particular historical moment?”<sup>91</sup>*

Mahler’s identity, as articulated in her diaries, is that of an aspiring composer. She indicates that composition facilitated her self-actualization: “Nothing can compare with my joy when I take a song I’ve just finished and play it through. I play it over and over, and in the sound I can hear my own image.”<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, the social identity of composer was not culturally available to Mahler or her female contemporaries because of their gender. Although she was surrounded by artists and her work was well received, she was also actively discouraged from pursuing music professionally.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, shifts in her identity, from that of aspiring composer, to wife and lover of great men, and finally to empowered muse and patron of the arts, are tied to permissible and desirable roles for women throughout her life.

Throughout her diaries, Mahler is very clear that an interest in music is a priority for all relationships: “One who is indifferent to music, is of no interest to me.”<sup>94</sup> She understands, however, that she cannot expect her music, or her burgeoning identity of

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<sup>91</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 244.

<sup>92</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 89.

<sup>93</sup> She records one such encounter and indicates the perceived sacrifice entailed: “Frau Conrat tried to persuade me not to become a musician—it wasn’t worth it. How does she know? Who gives her the right to deprive me of the pleasure I take in my work?” Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 298.

<sup>94</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 184: “Ein Mensch dem die Musik gleichgültig ist, der ist mir auch gleichgültig.”



artist and composer, to be valued by a spouse; even she subscribed to contemporaneous beliefs about the limitations of female creativity. In her relationship with Alexander Zemlinsky, however, she had a glimpse into a seemingly ideal scenario: a partnership in music appreciation and composition in which each party respects the work of the other. Zemlinsky suggested that their art would give them common ground: “I am overjoyed that you have talent, that you, too, are an artist! Because of this we will always understand each other.”<sup>95</sup>

In light of her relationship with Zemlinsky, Mahler expresses concern that things will be different with Gustav Mahler: “One thing pains me: whether Mahler will inspire me to compose—whether he will support my art—whether he will love it, like Alex.”<sup>96</sup> Contemporaneous gender norms provided ample reason for Alma Mahler to suspect that Gustav would not respect her identity of artist. After receiving the infamous letter from Gustav, Alma understood that accepting this marriage proposal would mean the loss of her artistic identity out of deference to his, and her music to his. She was understandably upset that she would have to accept his music, while he rejected hers, and indicated that she had no interest in his music: “He thinks nothing of my art and a good deal of his own. I think nothing of his art and much of my own.”<sup>97</sup> While she did accept his offer, it was

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<sup>95</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 654: “Ich bin so selig, dass Sie Talent haben, so sind auch Sie Künstlerin! In dem Punkt werden wir uns immer treffen.”

<sup>96</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 732: “Eines peinigt mich: ob Mahler mich zur Arbeit animieren wird—ob er meine Kunst unterstützen wird—ob er sie lieben wird, wie Alex.” Mahler wrote this on December 3, 1901, just days before she received the infamous composition ban from Gustav Mahler on December 19, 1901. *Ein Glück ohne Ruh'*, 104–11.

<sup>97</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 744: “Er hält von meiner Kunst gar nichts—und von seiner viel—ich halte von seiner Kunst gar nichts und von meiner viel.”

not without a good deal of consideration and a certain degree of confusion to diary readers.

The loss of her burgeoning identity as composer gave way to her identity as muse. Mahler's memoirs reveal the extent to which she sought connection with talented and innovative artists—male artists. She played an active role in the construction of her identity as muse and patron of the arts; recent scholarship has appropriated these roles as powerful positions for women of the time. Megan Brandow-Faller, for example, suggests: “Alma Mahler elevated musedom to a form of art and thrived on being a ‘Creator of Creators,’ a self-consciously active and aggressive facilitator of artistic genius.”<sup>98</sup> This shift in identity was orchestrated by Mahler and seems to have caught on among recent audiences and authors. Cate Haste, in a recent biography,<sup>99</sup> and Mary Sharratt, in a recent work of historical fiction,<sup>100</sup> both celebrate Alma Mahler as the triumphant, if also problematic, muse.

Alma Mahler's shift in identity from aspiring composer in her diaries to triumphant muse in her memoirs seems to have been largely successful, even if the shift was not a conscious decision, but rather a realization that came much later. It seems likely that as Alma Mahler reflected on her life and relationships, she understood her greatest contribution to have been as muse to great artists. In order for this shift in identity to work, though, it required the passage of time. Specifically, it required audiences who could conceive of the role of muse as powerful and desirable. It also

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<sup>98</sup> Brandow-Faller, “Man, Woman, Artist?”

<sup>99</sup> Cate Haste, *Passionate Spirit: The Life of Alma Mahler* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

<sup>100</sup> Mary Sharratt, *Ecstasy* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019).

required an audience that would not castigate a woman for extramarital sexual relationships. It is hard to imagine that audiences were primed for either of these at the initial publication of the memoirs in 1958 and 1960.

### Temporality

*“How do narrative tone and narrative intention shift with the shifts in historical moments or times in the narrator’s life cycle? If the narrator has written or voiced a series of autobiographical texts, are the same events and life experiences narrated from successive, perhaps conflicting, perspectives?”*<sup>101</sup>

The diaries were written in a specific period earlier in Alma Mahler’s life and they are limited to a short time period between 1898 and 1902. Both the English- and German-language memoirs were written later in her life and summarize her life more selectively and, of course, in long retrospect. This raises the question of whether the last word should be considered the most accurate or representative. With respect to Mahler’s compositional work, the memoirs offer much less insight into her compositional process and output than do the diaries. The diaries frequently record sometimes mundane daily occurrences, while the memoirs give preference to the highlights and offer Mahler the license to create and shape the story to her liking.

In the final paragraph of *And the Bridge of Love*, Mahler claims, “Everything, I feel, is simultaneous. Time does not pass.”<sup>102</sup> She continued by explaining that the beauty and pain of her past were still alive and present in her life.<sup>103</sup> Both the diaries and

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<sup>101</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 249.

<sup>102</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 308.

<sup>103</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 308.

memoirs evoke this simultaneity by looking back and forward in time. Considering the limitations of the format, this may be more surprising in the case of the diaries, but Mahler does reflect on the past in some of her diary entries.<sup>104</sup> The timing of all of Mahler's published life writing is both fixed, in that we know something about when it was initially penned and finally published, and dynamic, in that she deviates from conventions of diary and memoir writing to offer insights and perspectives not only from the present, but also from the past.

Alma Mahler's diaries are riddled with anti-Semitism, which, although common among her contemporaries, is nonetheless a stain on her legacy. Steven Beller has written extensively on anti-Semitism in Vienna during this period.<sup>105</sup> He notes that "Antisemitism did not accompany nationalization and modernization in Central Europe by chance, and it was not just the result of an ancient atavism."<sup>106</sup> Instead, Beller suggests, the combination of these and other factors—including nationalism, modernism, the traditional place of Jews in Viennese society and culture—created a uniquely hostile environment. Mahler's writings confirm that she had internalized the hateful rhetoric of her time and was openly anti-Semitic. In fact, in the preface to the *Diaries 1898–1902*, Antony Beaumont acknowledges Mahler's anti-Semitism as the most critical editorial

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<sup>104</sup> Mahler includes a conversation with Zemlinsky, for example, during and after which she noted what she perceived as a lack of a childhood relative to other girls. Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 372.

<sup>105</sup> See Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Steven Beller, *The Habsburg Monarchy: 1815-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>106</sup> Steven Beller, *The Habsburg Monarchy: 1815-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 219.

concern: “*The Diaries* include remarks on Jews and Jewry which, in my opinion, cannot go to press without comment.”<sup>107</sup>

The memoirs were written and published after the end of World War II, when such beliefs and statements were less welcome, at least in public discourse. Published in the relatively recent aftermath of horrific violence and atrocities against Jews, the memoirs had to be stripped of statements and stories that reveal the extent of Mahler’s antisemitism. K.M. Knittel notes a similar phenomenon in the publication of *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*.<sup>108</sup>

The *Diaries* present in unexpurgated form what the *Memories* have whitewashed and censored for a very different world: first published in Amsterdam in 1940 and translated into English in 1946, even Alma had to know that it was no longer acceptable to give voice to the casual antisemitism that had preceded, indeed enabled, the Shoah. Yet the remnants of everyday, fin-de-siècle Viennese antisemitism structure the portrait of [Gustav] Mahler presented in the *Memories*, and to ignore them is to accept a view of Mahler that remained uneasy, to say the least, with his “race.”<sup>109</sup>

Alma Mahler’s hateful words in both the diaries and memoirs not only evoke the bigotry of the author’s time and place, but also serve as a potent reminder to readers that espousing the beliefs of your time will not excuse you from being on the wrong side of history.

The passage of time between diaries and memoirs had allowed Mahler to observe how her life had unfolded and to witness how people responded to the stories she told. She realized that she had not accomplished, per her standards, her adolescent dream of

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<sup>107</sup> Antony Beaumont, “Introduction,” in *Diaries 1898–1902*, xvi.

<sup>108</sup> Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Erinnerungen und Briefe* (Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1940).

<sup>109</sup> K. M. Knittel, *Seeing Mahler: Music and the Language of Antisemitism in Fin-De-Siècle Vienna* (London: Routledge, 2016), 36.

composing something great. She received little acclaim for her Lieder during her lifetime. Where she had found her great success was in coupling herself with bright and influential men and taking credit, regardless of how fairly or accurately, for her contributions to their great works. It was this narrative that she chose to tell in her memoirs, that of a successful and fulfilled life as muse.

### **The Self-Stories Mahler Told**

Smith and Watson suggest asking:

What we expect life narrators to tell the truth about. Are we expecting fidelity to the facts of their biographies, to lived experience, to self-understanding, to the historical moment, to social community, to prevailing beliefs about diverse identities, to the norms of autobiography as a literary genre itself? And truth for whom and for what? Other readers, a loved one, the narrating I, or for the coherent person we imagine ourselves to be?<sup>110</sup>

Readers hoping to pin down fact and truth in Mahler's life writing would be better served by consulting other sources. That is, we should not necessarily expect her to tell us the truth about fin-de-siècle Vienna, or any of the other times and places in which she lived. Neither should we expect her to objectively document the daily activities of Gustav Mahler, or her relationship to him, as scholars of his work sometimes suggest. Seth Monahan finds irony and fault in Alma Mahler's shifting rhetoric: "And we know this, ironically, thanks to Alma's own diaries, which paint a very different picture from her published memoirs."<sup>111</sup> This chapter proposes a variety of purposes and aims that Alma Mahler's diaries and memoirs served in her life. Monahan later asserts that diaries are an

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<sup>110</sup> Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 15.

<sup>111</sup> Seth Monahan, "I Have Tried to Capture You...": Rethinking the Alma Theme from Mahler's Sixth Symphony," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 1 (2011): 119–78, 140.

inherently more trustworthy form of life writing than are memoirs;<sup>112</sup> if Gustav Mahler scholars believe—as many have indicated that they do—that Alma Mahler has fabricated her biographical writings, why should one form be more factual or credible than another and why should any of it be of interest?

Mahler's life was long and varied and she left behind extensive sources. Some of these were carefully prepared for large audiences, and others received less editing and polish, but were nonetheless performed versions that she was comfortable committing to paper. Alma Mahler hardly imagined herself to be a coherent person; she was reborn with each new relationship. Her life writing accordingly presents inconsistencies and incoherence to readers. Readers should not, however, understand these as lies, but rather as signposts of shifting rhetorical stances corresponding to differences in her life.

The impact of her shifting rhetorical postures on the reception of her music is an important consideration. As Mahler leveraged the medium of memoirs to fashion her legacy as a muse to great men, she willingly diminished the importance of music composition in her life. By relegating her experience and activities in music composition to a few pages near the beginning of her memoirs, she suggests that they were but a childhood fancy. And perhaps she would identify no problem with this choice; her memoirs assert the fulfilment she found in her chosen role.

The 1898–1902 diaries, of course, tell very different stories. In these early diaries, Alma Mahler documented the centrality of music to her life, her keen interest to express herself through music, her desire to create a great artistic deed, and her need for music.

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<sup>112</sup> Monahan, “I Have Tried to Capture You.” In note 42, Monahan indicates that Alma Mahler destroyed all diary entries from mid-1905 until Gustav's death in 1911; might not this act of destruction suggest that she censored her diaries? Note 111 on pages 164–5 both questions and asserts the potential validity of her diary entries.

She also made statements therein that suggest self-consciousness about her work, her desire to have it both ways, or her inability to achieve greatness. Alma Mahler's self-deprecation as relates to her music composition was, at least in part, an act. Because the act was so deeply ingrained in all aspects of her upbringing, development, and socialization, however, she was nonetheless required to perform this self-deprecation in the private venue of her diaries.

Unfortunately, the stories we tell ourselves very often come true. Alma Mahler talked herself out of aspiring to greatness in the field of music composition and chose instead the well-trodden path of marrying. This is where the story frequently ends for women, and that is what is truly exceptional in Alma Mahler's life. By reclaiming the narrative and emphasizing her role in the greatness of her husbands' and lovers' works, she managed to appropriate some of that power and greatness for herself.



### CHAPTER 3

#### IN HIS WORDS: ALMA MAHLER IN THE MALE IMAGINATION

Alma Mahler fashioned herself as muse to her husbands and lovers, but she has continued to inspire and captivate artists working in every imaginable medium. Mahler has been the subject of and inspiration for hundreds, if not thousands, of works of art, including works of literary fiction, non-fiction, theatre, music, visual arts, and media. Just as Mahler's own rhetoric shifted among the various sources of life writing to which she contributed, there have been significant shifts in how Alma Mahler has been represented throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Authors and artists have imagined and depicted Mahler very differently according to their own goals and understandings of who she was and what they understood to be central to her existence. Where Mahler re-envisioned herself as triumphant muse in her memoirs after initially detailing her work as an aspiring composer, the reverse has been true in recent works of art that take Mahler as her focus. Although previous biographies and works of fiction focused almost exclusively on her connections to men of genius, the most recent accounts, especially those authored by women, are increasingly interested in her compositional work and present her fictionalized life story in the format of a *Künstlerroman*.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I will discuss a variety of textual sources that take Alma Mahler as their topical focus.<sup>2</sup> I will then investigate four works by creators who identify as men to

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<sup>1</sup> The *Künstlerroman*, or artist novel, is a specific type of *Bildungsroman*. In the *Bildungsroman*, the development and self-actualization of the typically young and male protagonist is depicted through his struggles for self-determination and endeavors to establish a meaningful role in society. In the case of the *Künstlerroman*, the subject is an artist, and most typically a visual artist. Mary Sharratt's *Ecstasy: A Novel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018) is a recent example of a novel on Alma Mahler that could be read as a *Künstlerroman*.

<sup>2</sup> Purely musical or visual representations of Mahler will not be discussed in this chapter, neither will art dedicated to Mahler.

consider the gendered implications of men fictionalizing Mahler. Martin Chervin's one-woman play *Myself, Alma Mahler* presents the life of Gustav Mahler as filtered through an actress depicting his wife,<sup>3</sup> Sašo Dimoski's *Alma Mahler* presents "the imagined memories of a talented, passionate woman living in the shadow of a famous husband,"<sup>4</sup> Gavin Kostick's libretto for *The Alma Fetish*, an opera with music by Raymond Deane, is "based on real events surrounding the doomed love affair between Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka and Alma Mahler, widow of composer Gustav,"<sup>5</sup> and Max Phillips's novel *The Artist's Wife* is "a sumptuous reimagining of the life of Alma Mahler."<sup>6</sup> I will examine the thematic constructs used by these men to reimagine Alma Mahler's life in various fictional genres. Before investigating the gendered implications of fictionalizations of Mahler, however, it is important to understand the diversity of literary depictions of, or otherwise inspired by, Alma Mahler.

### **Alma Mahler in Others' Words**

Twenty-first-century Alma Mahler scholarship draws heavily on a rich selection of twentieth-century primary sources beyond the diaries and memoirs discussed in the previous chapter. Alma Mahler edited two early collections of Gustav Mahler's correspondence: *Gustav Mahler Briefe 1879–1911*<sup>7</sup> and *Gustav Mahler: Erinnerungen*

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Chervin, *Myself, Alma Mahler: An Original Play*. Manuscript in the Thompson Library Jerome Lawrence & Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute Stacks, The Ohio State University Library. Ronda Chervin, the widow of the author, released a revised edition that I have also consulted and will cite, accessed 10 November 2020, <https://enroutebooksandmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Alma.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Sašo Dimoski, *Alma Mahler* trans. by Paul Filev (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Gavin Kostick and Raymond Deane, *The Alma Fetish* (Dublin: The Contemporary Music Centre Ireland, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Max Phillips, *The Artist's Wife: A Novel* (New York: H. Holt, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Gustav Mahler and Alma Mahler, *Briefe 1879–1911* (Berlin: P. Zsolnay, 1924).

*und Briefe*.<sup>8</sup> In the second of these, the letters follow approximately two hundred pages of memories. In a preface to the first English edition dated Summer 1939, Mahler claims to have written this “many years ago, and my only reason for doing so was because no one knew Gustav Mahler so well as I.”<sup>9</sup> Gustav Mahler scholar Henry-Louis de La Grange explains in the introduction to his definitive biography of Gustav Mahler that he was able to consult her “original manuscript of *Gustav Mahler*, which contains many passages she later suppressed and numerous unpublished letters from her husband, as well as long and fascinating excerpts from her private diary that sheds new light on the couple’s relationship.”<sup>10</sup> Comparing the published and unpublished versions provided him with insight that has led to discussions about the “Alma Problem,” her alleged suppression and amending the historical record, especially as relates to her depiction of Gustav Mahler.<sup>11</sup>

Seth Monahan provides insight into the impact of this perceived problem on Gustav Mahler research: “For students of her first husband’s life and works, Alma Mahler-Werfel is... a purveyor of legends, an essayist whose evocative and often sensational writings have profoundly shaped our understanding of Gustav Mahler the man and musician.”<sup>12</sup> Monahan notes “inaccuracies and embellishments” and

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<sup>8</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel and Gustav Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Erinnerungen und Briefe* (Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1940).

<sup>9</sup> Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, ed. Donald Mitchell (New York: Viking Press, 1946), xxxix–xl.

<sup>10</sup> Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Mahler* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1973), I: xix.

<sup>11</sup> Henry-Louis de La Grange, “Mahler and the New York Philharmonic: The Truth Behind the Legend” in *On Mahler and Britten: Essays in Honour of Donald Mitchell on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Philip Reed (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1995), 56–77.

<sup>12</sup> Seth Monahan, “‘I Have Tried to Capture You...’: Rethinking the Alma Theme from Mahler’s Sixth Symphony,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 1 (2011): 119–78, at 119.

“fabricated” elements in Alma Mahler’s writings, even as he invites readers to reconsider nonetheless the implications of her words on hearing a Great work.<sup>13</sup> When he “invites us to imagine *Alma herself* (or at least a fictionalized projection of her)” and as a “tragic hero” at that, it suggests to me that when the rational male cannot find fact in Mahler’s words, he is entitled to fictionalize her as an unruly subject.<sup>14</sup>

Letters from Gustav to Alma Mahler were edited and annotated by Gustav Mahler scholars Henry-Louis de La Grange, Günther Weiss, and Knud Martner and published in 1995.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Martina Steiger edited the correspondence between Alma Mahler and Alban and Helene Berg<sup>16</sup> and Haide Tenner edited the correspondence of Alma Mahler and Arnold Schoenberg.<sup>17</sup> There are several other examples of published collections or excerpts of Mahler’s correspondence.<sup>18</sup> This later wave of edited primary source scholarship is more aware of issues particular to the history of Mahler’s documentation practices. A *Library Chronicle* article highlights high-profile

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<sup>13</sup> Monahan, “I Have Tried to Capture You,” 120; footnote 4 on the same page provides additional sources asserting “The Alma Problem,” even if the phrase is not used explicitly.

<sup>14</sup> Monahan, “I Have Tried to Capture You,” 123. The “tragic hero” theme is fleshed out later in his article and aligns with my analysis of male fictionalizations of Alma Mahler that tend to focus on Gustav and deny her creative agency or success.

<sup>15</sup> Gustav Mahler and Alma Maria Mahler-Werfel, *Ein Glück ohne Ruh’: die Briefe Gustav Mahlers an Alma: erste Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Henry-Louis de La Grange, Günther Weiss, and Knud Martner (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Alma Maria Mahler-Werfel, Alban Berg, and Helene Berg, *Immer wieder werden mich thätige Geister verlocken: Alma Mahler-Werfels Briefe an Alban Berg und seine Frau*, ed. Martina Steiger (Vienna: Seifert, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Alma Mahler and Arnold Schönberg, *‘Ich möchte so lange leben, als ich Ihnen dankbar sein kann’: der Briefwechsel*, ed. Haide Tenner (St. Pölten: Residenz, 2012); Arnold Schoenberg and Alma Mahler, *Schoenberg’s Correspondence with Alma Mahler*, ed. by Elizabeth L. Keathley and Marilyn L. McCoy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> For example, Friedrich Torberg and Alma Mahler, *Liebste Freundin und Alma: Briefwechsel mit Alma Mahler-Werfel* ed. David Axmann and Marietta Torberg (Munich: Langen Müller, 1987).

correspondents; much of her correspondence is now housed in University of Pennsylvania's Mahler-Werfel Manuscript Collection along with various other primary sources.<sup>19</sup>

The large legacy of primary resources has led to a proliferation of publications, literary responses, and even songs and films about Alma Mahler. Of these documents, however, few focus on her identity as a composer. Several biographers pull from the same primary sources to tell different versions of her story. Many of her acquaintances, however, were able to add anecdotes to the sources Mahler left behind. Walter Sorrell (1905–1997), who worked as a translator and culture writer, included a chapter on Alma in his 1975 book *Three Women: Lives of Sex and Genius*.<sup>20</sup> Sorrell is able to relate personal accounts and reflections on her character that are unique. Nobel Prize-winning author Elias Canetti (1905–1994) was another acquaintance who published a significant amount of information about Mahler in his own autobiography, among other writings.<sup>21</sup> Canetti was openly critical of Mahler, even during her lifetime, just as she was of him and his writing. Canetti's criticism focuses on her character, though, and not her music. Erich Rietenauer (1924–2014) was a near contemporary of Mahler's daughter Manon and

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<sup>19</sup> Adolf Klarmann and Rudolf Hirsch, "Note on the Alma Mahler Werfel Collection," *Library Chronicle* 35 (1969): 33–35; The finding aid for this collection is more detailed: Mahler-Werfel papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania, [http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/ead/upenn\\_rbml\\_MsColl575](http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/ead/upenn_rbml_MsColl575).

<sup>20</sup> Walter Sorrell, *Three Women: Lives of Sex and Genius* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Elias Canetti, *Das Augenspiel: Lebensgeschichte 1931–1937* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015).

offers personal memories “of a legend,” frequently filtered through both of their ties to the Moll family.<sup>22</sup>

Karen Monson wrote the first of several English-language biographies that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>23</sup> The author made extensive reference to materials in the University of Pennsylvania’s Mahler-Werfel Papers, but nonetheless presents a popular-press biography that diverges little from Mahler’s memoirs and emphasizes, through its title and content, Mahler’s role of muse. Berndt Wessling, who has been accused of falsifying sources in his biographies,<sup>24</sup> published one of the earliest German-language biographies, which also focused on Mahler’s role as wife to great men.<sup>25</sup>

Susanne Keegan’s popular-press biography *Bride of the Wind* became the basis for the film by the same title and is named after Oskar Kokoschka’s painting of Mahler by that name.<sup>26</sup> Françoise Giroud published a commercially successful biography *Alma Mahler ou l’art d’être aimée* in 1987 and it has since been translated into at least fifteen other languages.<sup>27</sup> Astrid Seele wrote a slim but detailed German-language biography that cites a broad array of sources from psychology articles (focusing on the breakdown of Gustav

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<sup>22</sup> Erich Rietenauer, *Alma, meine Liebe: Persönliche Erinnerungen an eine Legende* (Vienna: Amalthea, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Karen Monson, *Alma Mahler: Muse to Genius* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983). Monson also wrote a biography of Alban Berg and worked as a music critic; she brought a nuanced understanding of Mahler’s specific artistic context to this book.

<sup>24</sup> Gert Woerner, “Nichts erfunden, nichts gefälscht? Zu Berndt W. Wesslings Ossietzky-Biographie” *Die Zeit*, 43 (October 20, 1989), accessed 10 November 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/1989/43/nichts-erfunden-nichts-gefaelscht>.

<sup>25</sup> Berndt Wessling, *Alma—Gefährtin von Gustav Mahler, Oskar Kokoschka, Walter Gropius, Franz Werfel* (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> Susanne Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind: The Life and Times of Alma Mahler-Werfel* (New York: Viking Press, 1991); *The Bride of the Wind*, directed by Bruce Beresford (Paramount Classics, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Françoise Giroud, *Alma Mahler ou l’art d’être aimée* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1987).

and Alma Mahler's marriage) to contemporaneous accounts of Mahler from friends and foes.<sup>28</sup> These authors are not musicologists and they do not treat Mahler's compositional output and activities in any depth.

Three recent biographies deal more substantively with Mahler as a composer. Historian and music biographer Oliver Hilmes contributed a well-researched biography that includes an in-depth discussion of all sources consulted.<sup>29</sup> He discusses her musical training and suggests that the reason she never made it beyond "gifted amateur" was for "lack of a role model" and attributes her self-conscious judgments to internalization of the "misogynistic cliché of her time."<sup>30</sup> Susan Filler notes Hilmes's "refreshingly irreverent assessment of her character."<sup>31</sup> He nonetheless uses language that could easily be interpreted as misogynistic.<sup>32</sup> Cate Haste's 2019 biography makes ample use of Mahler's diaries to assert the centrality of music to her life.<sup>33</sup> Susanne Rode-Breymann, who prepared Mahler's diaries for publication and authored the only monograph that focuses on Alma Mahler as a composer, wrote a biography that is informed by this

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<sup>28</sup> Astrid Seele, *Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Oliver Hilmes, *Witwe im Wahn: Das Leben der Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Munich: Siedler, 2004); translated into English by Donald Arthur as *Malevolent Muse: The Life of Alma Mahler* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Hilmes, *Malevolent Muse*, 25-26.

<sup>31</sup> Susan M. Filler, *Alma Mahler and Her Contemporaries: A Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 22.

<sup>32</sup> As an example, Hilmes refers to Mahler as "the classic hysterical woman," *Malevolent Muse*, 252. Sally Macarthur conducts a Deleuzian criticism of Hilme's work noting not only his sexist language, but also that "the rational author is pitted against the irrational subject, this mirroring the patriarchal norms that inform biographical writing." Sally Macarthur, "Facts, Fictions and the Alma Mahler Machine: A Schizoanalysis" *Musicology Australia* 41, no. 1 (2019): 70.

<sup>33</sup> Cate Haste, *Passionate Spirit* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

extensive research.<sup>34</sup> The biographies by Haste and Rode-Breymann read as more sympathetic to Mahler than does Hilmes's; both women recognize Mahler as a passionate, contradictory, and complex subject and treat her musical training and aspirations with seriousness.

Many full-length biographies of her husbands and lovers dedicate a chapter to Mahler as muse, femme fatale, or eternal feminine. In her 2002 monograph on Alexander Zemlinsky, Lorraine Gorrell discusses how Mahler embodied the role of eternal feminine in Zemlinsky's life and discusses gender roles in turn-of-the-century Vienna.<sup>35</sup> Alfred Weidinger uses Oskar Kokoschka's artwork to document the stormy love affair he shared with Mahler, but does not focus in any depth on her as composer or individual.<sup>36</sup> Constantin Floros offers an analysis of the sacrifices Alma Mahler made to facilitate Gustav's work.<sup>37</sup> Mahler is also featured—in varying degrees of centrality—in biographies that investigate one of her lovers or a specific relationship; examples include Hilde Berger's monograph of Mahler and Oskar Kokoschka,<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Buchmayr's monograph of Johannes Hollnsteiner,<sup>39</sup> Klaus Gallwitz and Stephan Mann's catalog for

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<sup>34</sup> Susanne Rode-Breymann, *Alma Mahler-Werfel: Muse-Gattin-Witwe* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Lorraine Gorrell, *Discordant Melody: Alexander Zemlinsky, His Songs, and the Second Viennese School* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler: Testimony to a Passionate Relationship* (New York: Prestel, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Constantin Floros, "Alma—Der 'Asket' und die lebenszugewandte Frau" in *Gustav Mahler: Visionär und Despot—Porträt einer Persönlichkeit* (Zürich: Arche, 1998), 131–44.

<sup>38</sup> Hilde Berger, *Ob es Hass ist, solche Liebe?: Oskar Kokoschka und Alma Mahler* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Buchmayr, *Der Priester in Almas Salon: Johannes Hollnsteiners Weg von der Elite des Ständestaats zum NS-Bibliothekar* (Weitra: Bibliothek der Provinz, 2003).



an exhibition of Kokoschka's works,<sup>40</sup> and Reginald Isaacs biography of Walter Gropius.<sup>41</sup>

Mahler is included in several books that discuss the women behind Great Men.<sup>42</sup> Phyllis Rose discusses Mahler in a collection of nine biographies of women who represented "various strategies by which exceptional women lived their lives."<sup>43</sup> Rose's brief biography of Mahler, whom she described as a "superwife," was largely positive.<sup>44</sup> Megan Brandow-Faller has also embraced acknowledging exceptional women in the role of muse. In her dissertation and subsequent articles, Brandow-Faller has appropriated musedom as an empowering and powerful role for women in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, including and especially Alma Mahler.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Martina Steiger investigates Mahler's role as patron to Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg and emphasizes how her musical understanding empowered to take on this important work.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Oskar Kokoschka, Alma Mahler, Klaus Gallwitz, and Stephan Mann, *Oskar Kokoschka und Alma Mahler: die Puppe: Epilog einer Passion: Städtische Galerie im Städel: Ausstellung vom 6. August bis 18. Oktober 1992, Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt: Die Galerie, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Reginald R. Isaacs, *Gropius: An Illustrated Biography of the Creator of the Bauhaus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> For example, Friedrich Weissensteiner, "Sklavin, Muse, und Matrone" in *Die Frauen der Genies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Phyllis Rose, "Alma Mahler" in *Writing of Women* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 12.

<sup>44</sup> Rose, "Alma Mahler."

<sup>45</sup> Megan Brandow-Faller, "An Art of Their Own: Reinventing 'Frauenkunst' in the Female Academies and Artist Leagues of Late-Imperial and First Republic Austria, 1900–1930" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2010); Megan Brandow-Faller, "Man, Woman, Artist? Rethinking the Muse in Vienna 1900" *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2008), accessed 10 November 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0667237808000060>.

<sup>46</sup> Martina Steiger, "Alma Mahler: 'Achtung Scheck!' Alma Mahler als Mäzenin von Alban Berg und Arnold Schönberg," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 63, no. 10 (2008): 17–30.

Heike Herrberg and Heidi Wagner focus on Mahler's role as salon host in the 1920s and do not deal substantively with her role of composer.<sup>47</sup> They nonetheless ascribe power and intelligence to her role of muse and salonnière.<sup>48</sup> Patricia Stanley takes a unique approach to investigate whether Mahler's "surreptitious love affairs were a different sort of manifestation of the creativity she was otherwise unable to pursue," but ultimately concludes that "the complicated love relationships of Alma Schindler Mahler Gropius Werfel offer more evidence of the dangers of self-abnegation."<sup>49</sup>

Alma Mahler's life and legacy have also been the focus of interdisciplinary work in biography studies. Melanie Unseld discusses how Mahler's contemporaries documented varied and contradictory experiences with her.<sup>50</sup> Unseld uses Robert Schumann's song cycle *Frauenliebe und Leben* to represent nineteenth-century expectations for a woman's life; this depiction is, of course, in stark contrast to the life Mahler lived.<sup>51</sup> Juliane Vogel identifies music as a central problem of Alma Mahler's

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<sup>47</sup> Heike Herrberg and Heidi Wagner, *Wiener Melange: Frauen zwischen Salon und Kaffeehaus* (Berlin: Ebersbach, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Herrberg and Wagner, *Wiener Melange*, 42: "Seitdem gilt ihre Leidenschaft der Entdeckung und Förderung von (männlichen!) Genies, und Sie beweist dabei enormen Kunstverstand und -instinkt sowie einen bedingungslosen Glauben an den Aufgespürten."

<sup>49</sup> Patricia Stanley, "Marriage as Self-Expression in the Life of Alma Mahler-Werfel and Helene Schweitzer," in Workshop 36: The Role of Women in Literature, Painting, and Sculpture in the Wilhelminian Era, chairperson Margarethe Heukaeufer, *The European Legacy* 1, no. 3 (1996): 931–6, at 935 and 936.

<sup>50</sup> Melanie Unseld, "Alma Mahler: Biographische Lösungen eines unlösbaren Falles?" in *Lebens als Kunstwerk. Künstlerbiographien im 20. Jahrhundert* ed. Christoph F. Laferl and Anja Tippner (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 147–64.

<sup>51</sup> Elissa S. Guralnick offers a gender-informed analysis of this poetry and music that might provide useful context to readers unfamiliar with this cycle in "'Ah Clara, I am not worthy of your love': Rereading 'Frauenliebe und Leben', the Poetry and the Music," *Music and Letters* 87, no. 4 (2006): 580–605.

autobiographical works.<sup>52</sup> The three women Vogel discusses in this chapter—Mahler, Lou Andreas-Salomé, and Gina Kaus—are better known for their relationships to great men. That Mahler lived outside of societal norms and accordingly did not fit into existing biographical models has no doubt contributed to the interest that she and her autobiographical writings hold for authors.

Mahler's life and autobiographical works have inspired numerous recent literary and theatrical works, not to mention the music, texts, and art created for her by her contemporaries. Some of these have been quite earnest, such as Kristina von Held's collection of poetry.<sup>53</sup> Many, however, have been tongue-in-cheek. Shortly after her death, Tom Lehrer composed a song that satirized her legacy by focusing on her role as a femme fatale: "I'm writing Das Lied von der Erde and she only wants to make love!"<sup>54</sup> More recent popular culture references have been similarly focused, if less explicit. Lehrer's work, however, set a certain tone for subsequent cultural allusions and focused the narrative on her sexuality. A more recent example of satire involving Mahler depicts her and three of her prospective suitors in a modern dating app held in what one would assume to be Mahler's hand. Andrew Crust's design in Figure 3.1 shows imagined messages to Alma Mahler from Walter Gropius and Alexander Zemlinsky, as well as rendering a "new match!" to Gustav Mahler. Unlike many other male fictionalizations of

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<sup>52</sup> Juliane Vogel, "Freundinnen bedeutender Männer: Fatale Strategien ihrer Autobiographie," in *Autobiographien in der österreichischen Literatur: von Franz Grillparzer bis Thomas Bernhard*, ed. Klaus Amann (Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, 1998), 93–111.

<sup>53</sup> Kristina von Held, "A Whole Canvas Glowing: Poems of Alma Mahler" (MFA thesis., University of Akron, 2010). This collection was written by von Held as though in the voice of Alma Mahler.

<sup>54</sup> Tom Lehrer, "Alma" lyrics, accessed 10 November 2020, <http://www.songtexte.com/songtext/tom-lehrer/alma—bc72df6.html>.

Mahler, Crust allows for the expression of her artistry when she identifies as “Composer, influencer, too sophisticated for you.”



Figure 3.1. Alma Mahler’s Dating App Image by Andrew Crust<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Crust, 9 September 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/stick.and.brush/>.

Françoise Lalande's play "Alma Mahler" was first performed in 1987 at the Theatre du Cheval Fou in Avignon and reflects "Alma's insatiable appetite for life in all of its dramatic intensity and mystery."<sup>56</sup> Joshua Sobol's "polydrama" *Alma: a Show Biz an Ende* has been presented over 511 times in multiple cities since 1996<sup>57</sup> and has also been presented as a television mini-series.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the most notable for its commercial success was the 2001 film *Bride of the Wind*, with a screenplay written by Marilyn Levy and based on Keegan's biography. Martin Chervin's play *Myself, Alma Mahler* and Gavin Kostick's libretto for the 2012 opera *The Alma Fetish* will be discussed later in this chapter. Two composers have fictionalized Mahler through song, but both opted to use her own words in their portrayals. By drawing exclusively on the words of Alma Mahler and composing in her genre, Manuela Kerer's 2012 and Mohammed Fairouz's 2011 song cycles present fictionalizations that read as more authentic and sympathetic to Alma Mahler as a composer and as a human.<sup>59</sup>

Mary Sharratt recently authored *Ecstasy: A Novel*, an historical fiction account of Mahler's life.<sup>60</sup> The provocative title trades on the trope of Mahler as femme fatale, but also refers to one of Mahler's compositions, a Lied entitled "Ekstase." Sharratt's

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<sup>56</sup> Françoise Lalande, "Alma Mahler" in *The Key to Our Aborted Dreams: Five Plays by Contemporary Belgian Women Writers*, ed. Anne-Marie Glasheen (New York: P. Lang, 1997), 23–83.

<sup>57</sup> "Interview with Joshua Sobol," *Alma: A Show Biz an Ende*, accessed 10 November 2020, [http://www.alma-mahler.com/deutsch/sobol/sobol\\_interview1.html](http://www.alma-mahler.com/deutsch/sobol/sobol_interview1.html).

<sup>58</sup> "Alma: A Show Biz an Ende," IMDB, accessed 10 November 2020, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252121/>.

<sup>59</sup> Manuela Kerer, *Alma Phantasien: für Sopran und Klavier* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2018); Mohammed Fairouz, "Jeder Mensch (2011)," accessed 10 November 2020, <http://mohammedfairouz.com/work/jeder-mensch/>.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Sharratt, *Ecstasy: A Novel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018).

portrayal clearly communicates the centrality of artistry to Mahler's identity and demonstrates how Mahler's passion and creativity were integral to her success as muse to great men. Sharratt's work, like that of Brandow-Faller, seeks to reclaim Mahler's role of muse as empowering and powerful.

Several accounts of Mahler's life have been written by women, and many of these women have sought to portray Mahler's search and struggle for identity and self-definition in a positive light. Several have written empowerment and fulfillment into these stories, just as Mahler did when she asserted: "My life was beautiful" at the end of *And the Bridge is Love*.<sup>61</sup> Feminist scholars of literary studies have articulated the struggle for self-definition and search for identity as central to the female experience in literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>62</sup> Mahler's memoirs and the work of recent women authors allow Mahler this opportunity to articulate an identity and define herself in successful terms. The question of how men portray Mahler, especially in works of fiction, provides an opportunity to investigate the gendered nature of fictionalizing women and consider whether male authors allow female subjects this struggle and search for an autonomous identity. Sharratt and several of her female contemporaries have deemed Mahler worthy of a *Künstlerroman*; the following section

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<sup>61</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 308.

<sup>62</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for example, have identified "woman's quest for self-definition" as central to the writing of nineteenth-century women, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 76; Elaine Showalter similarly identified "self-discovery" and "a search for identity" as central to women's writing in the twentieth century, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 13.

investigates whether male authors portray Mahler in a way that takes her artistic aspirations seriously and acknowledges her agency in seeking her own creative identity.<sup>63</sup>

### **Alma Mahler in the Male Imagination**

The frustration that “well-behaved women seldom make history” persists.<sup>64</sup> The opposite side of the same coin—that scandalous women are seldom forgiven or forgotten—also endures. In light of these realities, it is important to ask how authors are complicit in sensationalizing less than well-behaved women and perpetuating myths and de-contextualized truths. In the case of Mahler’s biographies and fictionalized representations, several constants can be identified: her story has been sensationalized by diverse authors and across all formats. In the following section, I will describe four fictional works purportedly about Alma Mahler—Martin Chervin’s *Myself, Alma Mahler*, Sašo Dimoski’s *Alma Mahler*, Gavin Kostick’s *The Alma Fetish*, and Max Phillips’s *The Artist’s Wife*—and then discuss the commonalities and differences in how they have constructed Mahler as a fictional character.

### **Martin Chervin’s *Myself, Alma Mahler***

*Myself, Alma Mahler* was first performed by Judith Barcroft at Columbia University under the sponsorship of the Mahler Society.<sup>65</sup> Subsequent performances were

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<sup>63</sup> Tina Olsin Lent has considered similar questions and argued that women artists are treated differently as subjects than men in her article on the fictionalization of Artemisia Gentileschi. “‘My Heart Belongs to Daddy’: The Fictionalization of Baroque Artists Artemisia Gentileschi in Contemporary Film and Novels,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2006): 212–18.

<sup>64</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668–1735,” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1976): 20, “Well-behaved women seldom make history; against Antinomians and witches, these pious matrons have had little chance at all.”

<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, no date is given for the première, accessed 24 November, 2020, <https://enroutebooksandmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Alma.pdf>.

given by Pam Fields in Arizona, California, and Nevada, mostly in the late 1990s.<sup>66</sup> Despite its title, this one-woman show focuses almost exclusively on Gustav, and not Alma Mahler. Gustav's music—including excerpts from First, Sixth, and Eighth Symphonies, *Kindertotenlieder*, and *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*—is programmed throughout the show and none of Alma Mahler's music was included. This exclusion initially seemed to me a wasted opportunity to highlight her music. Because the play is actually about Gustav Mahler, however, incorporating something so personal to her would not have made sense.

The play begins as Alma Mahler contemplates her name; she considers defining herself in turn through her father, Gustav Mahler, and her other husbands and lovers. For a play entitled *Myself, Alma Mahler*, the author consistently shifts the focus from her to almost anyone else. In even the most personal moments, such as childbirth and labor, Chervin has chosen Gustav—not Alma—as the focus. Not only is this consistent throughout Chervin's play, this is a consistent theme across all of the fictionalizations of Mahler considered here. Mahler can apparently only be considered through the lens or experience of men. In Chervin's play, Gustav Mahler and his experiences, words, and music dominate the narrative, even though Alma Mahler is alone on stage.

There are several elements of the depiction that do not read as faithful to the life and experience of Alma Mahler. Chervin's Alma is a staunch feminist and makes statements that the real Mahler would not likely have made. For example, Chervin's Alma states: "Find me among the struggling-to-be-free spirits of my sex ... Someday, a

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<sup>66</sup> Pam Fields previously maintained a website of these regional performances, which are now only available in the archival version, accessed 24 November 2020, [https://web.archive.org/web/20040421144120/http://www.myalmashow.com/html/contact\\_us.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20040421144120/http://www.myalmashow.com/html/contact_us.html).



woman—it could be me!—will conduct the Vienna Philharmonic!”<sup>67</sup> Chervin’s Alma later offers feminist literary critiques of Goethe’s *Faust* and other classics: “All of literature crowds in with the guilt-figures of women idealized by men ... Someday, I am going to rewrite Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* from the viewpoint of Donna Elvira!”<sup>68</sup> As I discussed in Chapter 1, not only had Mahler internalized contemporaneous gender norms, she rather openly expressed contempt for women’s capacity for creative achievement.<sup>69</sup> The play also depicts Mahler as contemptuous of scholars: “There are experts here! Mahler Scholars! ... Is it any wonder they make me feel uncomfortable? Every time I give one of these lectures, they gather to denounce me.”<sup>70</sup> This hints at the so-called “Alma Problem,” which may have been familiar to Chervin, but was unlikely to be a consideration for Mahler herself.

Chervin depicts Mahler as less than serious about her music and artistry: “As the daughter of a celebrated painter—of course, I flirted with Art and, of course, artists!”<sup>71</sup> When she mentions her music to Gustav Mahler, she does so in a flirtatious way:

Indeed, you flatter me! Vielen Dank, Herr Gustav! I bow to your compliment ... but falsely, I fear it is not truly meant for me. I am Alma Schindler—not Gretchen at the spinning wheel! Certainly not the plodding, faithful and much abused hausfrau—the soul of pots and pans! I am a musician like yourself. I compose my own songs. Who do you think I am?<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, revised version, 42.

<sup>69</sup> Frequent examples are provided in her diaries: Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, translated by Antony Beaumont (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, revised version, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, 8.

Chervin's Alma implores Gustav to look at her songs: "GUSTAV! Will you look at my songs?"<sup>73</sup> Mahler's diaries indicate that the opposite may have transpired.<sup>74</sup> Chervin mentions the importance of music in Vienna: "In those dear, dead days before politics took charge, we fought over music in Vienna. We ate, drank, slept with it."<sup>75</sup> Mahler's own engagement with musical composition is so limited in Chervin's depiction, that when, after her marriage to Gustav, Chervin's Alma asks "Why else did I swallow my own songs?" audiences cannot fully appreciate what this sacrifice might have meant to the protagonist.

Chervin's Alma defines herself as the type of woman that men, and especially painters, "went wild over."<sup>76</sup> She frequently comments on and expresses anxiety about her appearance, imploring the audience, for example, "Look at me and see the young lovely girl under the wrinkles."<sup>77</sup> Chervin's Alma willingly objectifies herself, and seemingly for the sake of the entertainment value it would potentially hold in live theatre. Male exploitation of a woman's self-consciousness in her body for the sake of theatre may not sit well with contemporary readers. Mahler's diaries and memoirs do indeed indicate interest, awareness, pain, and pleasure in her body and its health and appearance. It would

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<sup>73</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, revised version, 12.

<sup>74</sup> Mahler records Gustav as having requested that she send him her music ("He asked me to bring him one of my pieces") and indicates that he sent her all of his songs, Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, 443 and 447.

<sup>75</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, revised version, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, revised version, 4.

<sup>77</sup> Chervin, *Myself*, revised version, 13.

be naïve to hope that her embodied experience be excluded from a play involving human actors. The problem is in translating this embodied experience from Mahler's writings into masculine fictions without their being distorted by the male gaze. Women's self-writing is frequently embodied; Judith Kegan Gardiner indicates that

A woman's sense of her gender, her sexuality, and her body may assume a different, perhaps a more prominent, shape in her conception of herself than these factors would for a man. Women are encouraged to judge their inner selves through their external physical appearance and to equate the two. At the same time, they are taught to create socially approved images of themselves by manipulating their dress, speech, and behavior.<sup>78</sup>

Mahler's depiction of her embodied experiences are her own, and the male fictionalization of female embodiment expressed by Chervin's Alma trivialize and cheapen them.

### **Sašo Dimoski's *Alma Mahler***

Sašo Dimoski begins each chapter of *Alma Mahler* with a musical incipit of Gustav Mahler's music and, with the exception of an introduction entitled "Death," each chapter is named after Gustav's symphonies, from Symphony no. 1 ("Titan") to the sketch for the unfinished Symphony no. 10. Originally published in Macedonian in 2014, Dimoski's *Alma Mahler* was translated into English in 2018 and purports to treat "the many intellectual and emotional sacrifices Alma makes in order be a helpmate to [Gustav]." <sup>79</sup> Despite this sympathetic description, Dimoski, like Chervin, keeps his focus on Gustav even though the first-person speaker is Alma Mahler.

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<sup>78</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 347–61, at 360.

<sup>79</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, book jacket description.

Dimoski's Mahler is unable to define herself through her own success or identity and instead defines herself through Gustav; the only acknowledgement of herself is through perceived failure. She opens by answering the question "Who am I?": "I was your shadow. Alma Mahler, the failed composer... Your wife, lover, the mother of your dead child, your governess, cook, nurse."<sup>80</sup> She repeats no fewer than ten times that she is stupid, but also silent and prideful: "Stupid and silent Alma Mahler, unable to die for the sake of herself, instead she died a little for others."<sup>81</sup> Dimoski's Mahler claims: "If not for you, I would never have been the person I am. But, had I not existed, you would always be Gustav Mahler."<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, Dimoski suggests that she was, indeed, influential in his life: "You drew your inspiration for creating music from me."<sup>83</sup> By refusing Mahler a separate identity from that of her husband, Dimoski does not provide a particularly insightful or nuanced depiction of her experience. Dimoski repeatedly allows Gustav to be definitive and determining over the protagonist Alma Mahler: "There is no submission here. Just admiration. Reverence. Bowing down before greatness."<sup>84</sup> Gustav Mahler's greatness and Alma Mahler's failure are common themes in male fictionalizations of her life; this raises in turn the question of why male authors found her to be a sufficiently interesting subject for their work.

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<sup>80</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 54.

Dimoski's book includes factual inaccuracies, which is, of course, the author's prerogative and not uncommon in historical fiction.<sup>85</sup> The combination of factual inaccuracies and the self-deprecation in which Dimoski so frequently has his protagonist engage, however, read as antagonistic mansplaining. The statement "Leave music to the composers,"<sup>86</sup> made by Dimoski's Gustav, is an obvious exaggeration of what Gustav communicated to then Alma Schindler in the infamous composition ban.<sup>87</sup> Other statements are less rooted in reality and highlight instead author's contempt: "Everything can be learned, Alma. Besides talent. Either you have it or you don't."<sup>88</sup>

Dimoski frequently objectifies his protagonist, focusing on her aging body and skin.<sup>89</sup> He goes as far as calling her "an automaton ministering to the needs of the great Gustav Mahler."<sup>90</sup> Referring to Alma as an automaton dehumanizes her and invalidates her experiences as an individual with thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences. Representing her in this way arguably allows Dimoski to subject Mahler to additional insults and a depiction that is far less sympathetic than the book description suggests.

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<sup>85</sup> For example, Dimoski, writes that Alma remembers "when you [Gustav] began to write Titan," which was premiered in 1889, when she was 10 years old and had not met him. *Alma Mahler*, 14.

<sup>86</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Gustav's December 19, 1901 letter in which he asked her to accept his music as her own does not say this explicitly, though the impact of his words and her decision creates an atmosphere in which she no longer identifies as a composer. Gustav Mahler, *Ein Glück ohne Ruh': die Briefe Gustav Mahlers an Alma: erste Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Henry-Louis de La Grange, Knud Martner, and Günther Weiss (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), 104–11.

<sup>88</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 19.

<sup>89</sup> She refers to her "spotted hand," 14; "wrinkled hands and weathered appearance," 23; in Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*.

<sup>90</sup> The "great" feels excessive here. Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 19.

Dimoski's Alma regrets the loss of her life and wasted opportunities: "Today, I know what is lost: my opportunity to have done something worthwhile with my life."<sup>91</sup> Such statements not only diminish her own artistic work and accomplishment, but also dismiss the influence that she exercised as a muse and patron of the arts, both of which Mahler identified as worthwhile pursuits in her memoirs. Dimoski's Alma asks herself, "What happened to Alma Schindler?,"<sup>92</sup> which likely implies the aspiring composer Alma Schindler. She claims that "all that remains is my ability to believe that I still possess some features considered worthy of attention. But no one pays any attention to me besides myself."<sup>93</sup> Dimoski's Alma contradicts this when she asserts: "You locked away all of your talents in a small box and buried them ceremoniously. A pointless waste of skills. And of knowledge too, perhaps."<sup>94</sup> Dimoski weaponizes the inconsistencies and exaggerates the self-doubts found in Mahler's own life-writings. The result is a caricature of Mahler's worst qualities and not insight into her perspective or experience.

Dimoski's Alma claims, "I made up for my own lack of talent with the talent belonging to the men I loved."<sup>95</sup> As presented, Dimoski's Alma is not engaging or interesting; she is hardly a fully-fledged protagonist. The second to last page concludes: "You will never write such music," which succinctly summarizes Dimoski's portrayal of Alma Mahler.<sup>96</sup> Dimoski's Alma recognizes Gustav's greatness, questions her own value

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<sup>91</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 13.

<sup>92</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 40.

<sup>93</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 27.

<sup>95</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Dimoski, *Alma Mahler*, 61.

and cannot confidently claim, as she did in her memoirs, that her work in support of her husbands and lovers was sufficient and fulfilling.

### **Gavin Kostick's *The Alma Fetish***

*The Alma Fetish*, with music by Raymond Deane and a libretto by Gavin Kostick, was premiered in the National Concert Hall in Dublin on September 17, 2013. Like the other fictionalizations of Mahler, this libretto is indeed based on elements of her life story. This one differs, however, in its narrow focus. This opera is focused exclusively on her relationship with Oskar Kokoschka and on his relationship to the doll he has fabricated in her likeness. Given this focus, Mahler's work and identity as a burgeoning composer are entirely excluded; in this story she is only femme fatale and muse. She does, however, sing and play the Liebestod from *Tristan and Isolde* to seduce Oskar.

There are four primary characters in this story: Oskar, Alma, Hulda (Oskar's maid), and the doll. Nonetheless, the "great Mahler," meaning Gustav, looms large.<sup>97</sup> Other fictionalizations filter Mahler through the lens of the men in her life, but in this story, at least initially, she has the agency and controls her relationship with Oskar: "You will have no other woman, No other muse. Your eyes are now banned from seeing other than me."<sup>98</sup> But this empowerment turned sour as Oskar grew increasingly anxious about Mahler's fidelity and presence, especially as she pressured him to enlist in the war: "Why has Alma not written? And that it was my duty to sketch some of the things I had seen so that people would know what it means to be in a war!"<sup>99</sup> Mahler herself expresses

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<sup>97</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 11.

exhaustion with the work of a muse: “Spare me the love of great men. To be a muse is so tiring. Their talent so requiring.”<sup>100</sup> Neither is satisfied with their role and their relationship to the other.

Mahler is sexualized from the outset. The female chorus sings in act one, scene one: “How tactfully she describes the sweaty, carnal act.”<sup>101</sup> After fighting in the war, Oskar learns that Mahler has remarried, but he is nonetheless keen for her company. He writes to a doll maker, describing in great detail what exactly he expects. His fervid desire is that “this doll shall be alive!”<sup>102</sup> Oskar hoped that his Alma would be reborn and was disappointed when the doll arrived and was a “a grotesque parody of her.”<sup>103</sup> Oskar requested a doll created with Mahler’s dimensions, skin and hair color, and even specifics of her feel, according to Oskar, of course. This process of designing and building a doll explicitly sexualizes, objectifies, and demeans Mahler, of course, but this is not Kostick’s invention. It is historical fact that Kokoschka purchased an Alma doll created with specifications he provided. It is nonetheless noteworthy that the librettist and composer selected this particular episode to set as an opera. Investigating the fictionalization of how this episode is portrayed, and the extent to which it was sensationalized, provides insight into male fictionalizations of Mahler.

The character of Alma sings off-stage as the doll, played by a non-speaking, female actress, comes to life: “I see my master, I see my maker...I see myself through

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<sup>100</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 3.

<sup>102</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 18.

<sup>103</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 21.



this man's eyes. In my reflection in him I see myself. He is turning me into something of his pleasing."<sup>104</sup> The empowered Alma in the first Act has become a doll controlled by Oskar in the second. Oskar, however, does not seem in complete control of his senses as he implores his maid: "Please stop calling her a doll—can't you see this is Alma? Alma yet again—you must call her Alma!"<sup>105</sup> This assertion is taken up by the doll: "Oh no, I have a name ... Alma, Alma!"<sup>106</sup> Oskar hosts a party in act two, scene two, and his guests propose a toast: "We toast to your queen, to your partner in art."<sup>107</sup> Oskar replies that they do not understand: "That ugly fetish was transformed by love! She was a tool, as much as a brush, necessary for a time but not the source."<sup>108</sup> Oskar made the doll and Kostick's Oskar violently and aggressively destroys it. Kostick sensationalizes this act of destruction by writing Oskar as engaging in showmanship; Oskar sings to his party guests as he beheads the doll: "I shall prove it!" This violent moment seems to be the moral of the story. Mahler, and not just the doll, was merely a means, an artistic tool at Kokoschka's disposal. Having gotten what he needed out of her, Kokoschka violently dispatched her.<sup>109</sup> Framing this as the moral of the story is not an empowering or sensitive fictionalization.

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<sup>104</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 19.

<sup>105</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 24.

<sup>106</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 24-25.

<sup>107</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 30.

<sup>108</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 30.

<sup>109</sup> I do not wish to imply that Kokoschka, either through his words or actions, innocent of any violence in fiction derived from this episode. As the author of *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (*Murderer, Hope of Women*), his art frequently evoked violence. The illustrated version of *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* has been digitized and is on the Museum of Modern Art website, accessed 14 December 2020, [https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection\\_ge/object/object\\_objid-26715.html](https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection_ge/object/object_objid-26715.html).

The final scene (act two, scene three) is set twenty years later in Venice, where Alma and Oskar have a chance encounter. They sing a duet confirming the importance each has played in the other's life: "I have lived that time with you, and you with me. I breathed in you, and you breathed in me."<sup>110</sup> They acknowledged that their love was too much to endure and Alma suggests: "You would have overwhelmed me and made me only a doll."<sup>111</sup> She suggests that it is for the best that she broke his heart, claiming it: "is good for an artist. I gave you your subject."<sup>112</sup> She regains her power and agency by asserting the importance of her role of muse in his life and art. Ending on this note suggests that Mahler was not merely a doll created and destroyed at the hands of a man, but that she was instead a human with limited agency who created her legacy where she could—in support of the artistic achievements of men. Despite this seemingly happy ending, the sensationalized violence against Mahler lingers beyond the final curtain.

### **Max Phillips's *The Artist's Wife***

Max Phillips's novel *The Artist's Wife* was a *New York Times* notable book in 2001 and likely has reached the largest audience of the four fictions considered here. This fiction is also the one that engages most explicitly with Mahler's own words; Phillips explains in a note at the end of the novel that several quotes and paraphrases are taken from her writings.<sup>113</sup> Making frequent and explicit use of her own statements lends a feeling of authenticity, but it may also imbue the text with a trustworthiness that is not

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<sup>110</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 33.

<sup>111</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Kostick, *The Alma Fetish*, 34.

<sup>113</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, "Note," 253-4.

typically associated with fiction and might not be merited. As an example, Phillips's Alma claims "I screeched all the Wagner roles until I ruined a good mezzo-soprano voice"; this passage is almost a direct quotation from Mahler's writings.<sup>114</sup> In the same paragraph, however, Phillips's Alma attributes a statement to her composition teacher Josef Labor that was actually much closer to a statement she ascribes to Alexander Zemlinsky in her diaries.<sup>115</sup>

After a brief reflection on death, Phillips's protagonist starts at the beginning, which, as in her memoirs, is with her father Emil Schindler.<sup>116</sup> Despite the fact that this reflects her own starting point in the memoirs, it reiterates the tendency of male authors to define Mahler through her relationships to Great Men and through their understanding of her. Of all of the fictions under consideration, however, this one focuses most clearly on Mahler and her experiences. But the title and much of the writing nonetheless indicate that the interest she holds is that of wife to artists and not as an artist, or even individual, herself. Like the others, this fiction is no *Künstlerroman* and her compositional ambitions are not treated with seriousness.

Mahler's sexuality, and men's contempt for it, is emphasized from the first page, where Gropius is evoked and describes her as a whore.<sup>117</sup> Mahler was thought to be

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<sup>114</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 19; Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 10: "I...kept screaming Wagner parts until my beautiful mezzo-soprano had gone to pieces."

<sup>115</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 19; Reference from Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 380: "Either you compose or you socialize—one or the other. If I were you, I'd stick to what you do best—socialize." 4 March 1901.

<sup>116</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 13). The third sentence reads: "Ich bin die Tochter eines großen Monumentes, gewissermaßen." Mahler also begins the second page of her English-language memoirs with her father, after a brief description of her first encounter with the poetry of Franz Werfel. Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 1.

attractive, but Phillips's Alma indicates that her good looks were "the main thing about me back then."<sup>118</sup> Phillips writes about Mahler's developing body in a way that objectifies her, for example: "I saw two puffy little hills in a sort of cambric twilight."<sup>119</sup> Phillips also makes male characters complicit in this objectification. Mahler notes, for example, "Perhaps [Max] Burckhard wasn't used to seeing my face so high up, because somehow or other his eyes kept wandering lower."<sup>120</sup>

Phillips passes judgement on Mahler's body, but he uses his protagonist to do so: "I had what they called the *mollige figur*, plump and big-bosomed, but with a narrow waist. In fact, my waist was thick, but this I didn't know, because I was careful never to notice myself unless I was well corseted."<sup>121</sup> Her alleged fatness becomes a theme throughout the book; Phillips asserts Mahler's interest in fatness to a degree that is not evidenced in her own writings.<sup>122</sup> He specifically objectifies Mahler, again using her own statements to do so: "I started losing my looks. I still had the eyes, and my skins stayed good for some reason, but my jaw was getting soft and untidy, no matter how I raised my chin. My hair lost that nice bread-blond color ... I was getting stout, too."<sup>123</sup> This sexualization and objectification of Mahler is troubling, if not shocking. Several theorists have investigated women's embodied experience and how that intersections with

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<sup>118</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 17.

<sup>119</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 16.

<sup>121</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 17.

<sup>122</sup> Phillips's Alma calls Anna von Mildenburg "that coarse fat thing" while acknowledging that they were "pretty much the same type, powerful and well-fleshed," *The Artist's Wife*, 55.

<sup>123</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 195.

identities. Sandra Bartky, for example, suggests: “Our identities can no more be kept separate from how our bodies look than they can be kept separate from the shadow selves of the female stereotype.”<sup>124</sup>

Phillips does not emphasize Mahler’s interest or activity in musical composition, though he does acknowledge both. He instead asserts Mahler’s role as muse and allows his protagonist to find fulfillment in it. Phillips’s Alma, in the audience as Gustav Mahler conducted, asserts: “I knew he was my purpose and my meaning.”<sup>125</sup> But, upon meeting Oskar Kokoschka, she told him “Mahler crushed the life from my songs like a great wheel. Any other woman would have fallen prey to drink, or taken lovers.”<sup>126</sup> Phillips’s Oskar, in particular seems to mock Mahler’s purpose and role of muse: “Hello, muse. Have you come to aid me in my labors?”<sup>127</sup>

Phillips’s Alma is not particularly interested in motherhood, nor did she find it fulfilling: “The fact is, from girlhood until the day I died, I had the real horror of being a mother...A woman of my time and class didn’t see her children much, and that was fine with me.”<sup>128</sup> Phillips’s Alma introduces doubt about her fulfillment in the role of muse when she, upon the first public performance of her music, claims: “I kept telling myself this was the beginning of my true life as an artist.”<sup>129</sup> This continues later in the story as

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<sup>124</sup> Sandra Lee Bartky, “On Psychological Oppression,” in *Philosophy and Women*, ed. Sharon Bishop and Marjorie Weinzwieg (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1979), 33–41.

<sup>125</sup> Phillips, *The Artist’s Wife*, 57.

<sup>126</sup> Phillips, *The Artist’s Wife*, 123. This is likely intended ironically, as she did both.

<sup>127</sup> Phillips, *The Artist’s Wife*, 144.

<sup>128</sup> Phillips, *The Artist’s Wife*, 68.

<sup>129</sup> Phillips, *The Artist’s Wife*, 104.

Phillips's Alma asserts: "I was becoming an ordinary middle-aged woman, but this struck me as dreadfully unfair. I felt that, all my life, people had prevented me with a thousand horrid petty details from reaching the heights I was meant to reach."<sup>130</sup> Phillips's Alma reads as dissatisfied and disgruntled, but sarcastically so. Her witty and pithy remarks trivialize the challenging choices Mahler encountered throughout her life.

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A close read of four fictional texts written by men suggests several common approaches taken when male authors fictionalize Alma Mahler. They are seemingly unwilling or unable to portray Mahler herself, but rather do so through the lens or experiences of the various men in her life. Although she may have contributed to this in her own life writing, when male authors do so in their fictionalizations, it diminishes her capacity for self-actualization and determination. Male authors sexualize and objectify Mahler, and some even evoked language that dehumanized her. For the study at hand, however, the most egregious offense may be how Mahler's compositional work and artistic endeavors were consistently diminished, often in stark contrast to the source material on which male authors based their fictions. Male fictionalizations of Mahler's life story are not presented in the empowering models of *Künstlerroman* or *Bildungsroman*; they do not portray Mahler's eventual achievement of self-actualization, creative or otherwise. When men have taken control of Mahler's narrative, their stories instead read like cautionary tales of deserved punishment; she got what she deserved and deserved what she got.

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<sup>130</sup> Phillips, *The Artist's Wife*, 196.

Published literature about Mahler diverges considerably on the question of her compositional legacy. Musicology has offered a variety of responses to her musical training and compositional output, but popular literature largely ignores the topic. Although feminist scholars have focused on Mahler's compositions and accept them as her own work, much of the scholarship from traditional musicology has engaged with her compositional output only to speculate about the involvement of men in her published Lieder and dismiss her contributions. This aligns with historian Joan W. Scott's finding that non-feminist historians respond to women's role in history by "acknowledgement and then separation or dismissal."<sup>131</sup> Like musicology, fiction also has not presented a unified response to the question of the legacy of Alma Mahler as a composer. Nonetheless, the authors studied in this chapter constructed Mahler in several consistently negative ways. Having discussed writings surrounding the life and compositional aspirations of Alma Mahler, it is now time to take her at her work, and not the words of herself and others.

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<sup>131</sup> Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1055.

## CHAPTER 4

### TAKING HER AT HER WORK: TEXT SELECTION AND MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MAHLER'S SONGS

Alma Mahler's colorful life and the array of sources she left behind have inspired a proliferation of responses in diverse formats, including literary, musical, cinematic, theatrical, and even podcast. Few of these responses, however, focus on her identity as a composer, or provide substantive analysis of her music. As a composer of Lieder, the genre of German-language art songs, most typically for solo voice accompanied by a keyboard instrument, Mahler was deliberate in her selection of texts and her musical settings. This chapter will examine literature on Mahler as a composer of Lieder and explore her approach to text setting, both individually—what she values and prioritizes when adapting poetry to music—and comparatively—what distinguishes her settings from her contemporaries.

In “Discourse in the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the centripetal and centrifugal forces that shape language.<sup>1</sup> I argue similarly that simultaneous forces of centralization and decentralization are at play in Alma Mahler's composition of songs; she was well aware of genre conventions and the need to adhere to them in order to find success, and she nonetheless composed songs that are uniquely personal responses to texts she loved. Recent scholarship has asserted subversive feminism among the centrifugal forces at work in Mahler's Lieder.<sup>2</sup> By examining what has been written about her Lieder, investigating her song settings, and comparing them those of a male

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<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” *Dialogic Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Sally Macarthur, “The Power of Sound, The Power of Sex: Alma Mahler-Werfel's Ansturm,” in *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 63–80.



contemporary, I challenge the construction of Mahler's Lieder as subversive and emphasize instead their musical and expressive value.

### **The Composer Alma Mahler: Literature Review**

Susanne Rode-Breymann, who prepared Mahler's diaries for publication with Antony Beaumont,<sup>3</sup> leveraged Mahler's account of her musical endeavors to publish the first and only book-length study of Mahler as a composer.<sup>4</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Mahler depicts herself—and especially her compositional identity and activities—very differently in these diaries than she did later in her memoirs.<sup>5</sup> Although music and composition fill the pages of her early diaries, she discusses them only fleetingly in her memoirs.<sup>6</sup> This brief treatment has provided some scholars with justification to dismiss the Lieder as unimportant to the composer, but Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson caution that “life narrators may present inconsistent or shifting views of themselves. They may even perpetrate acts of deliberate deceit to test the reader or to hint at the paradoxical ‘truth’ of experience itself.”<sup>7</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, the seemingly inconsistent views of her compositional activity do hint at her shifting legacy from aspiring composer to

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<sup>3</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten 1898–1902*, ed. Antony Beaumont and Susanne Rode-Breymann, (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Susanne Rode-Breymann, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Hannover: Niedersächsische Staatsoper, 1999). Although the book focuses on Mahler as composer, analytical approaches to the music are not featured.

<sup>5</sup> Daphne Fetting compares Mahler's diaries with *Mein Leben*, Mahler's German-language memoir, first published in 1960 by Fischer, in “Alma Schindler: Tagebuch und Autobiographie, zwei Quellen – ein Leben?” (Diplomarbeit, Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Diaries and memoirs have different intended audiences, purposes, and formats. Both are nonetheless texts (or “verbal constructs”) and should be interpreted as such. Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1985), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 15.

victorious muse. Smith and Watson reiterate that life writing should not be understood as historical record because the author is “performing several rhetorical acts: justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures, among others.”<sup>8</sup> Mahler’s various forms of life writing may provide seemingly contradictory information on her music composition, but the intensity of her early musical work and the quality of the songs themselves are reason enough to study and perform this music.

Despite the paucity of comprehensive studies and some unanswered questions related to the composition, revision, and publication of Mahler’s songs, authors do indeed consider Mahler’s compositional contributions in female-composer anthologies, analytical studies, and dissertations. Several themes emerge. Mahler’s compositional work is frequently treated only perfunctorily; is dismissed as being either the work of a man, derivative, or overly influenced by male composers; is increasingly praised for being formally, harmonically, and melodically inspired by and true to the text; and, especially when interpreted through a feminist lens, is analyzed in language that is overtly sexual.

Mahler’s compositional output has led to her inclusion in several German-language biographical anthologies and reference books focused on female composers. Eva Rieger highlights excerpts from Mahler’s memoirs in a brief chapter in an anthology of female composers.<sup>9</sup> Rieger separately discusses Gustav’s demand that Alma give up

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<sup>8</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Eva Rieger, “Dem Genie die Steine aus dem Weg räumen Alma Mahler-Werfel” in *Frau und Musik*, ed. Eva Rieger (Kassel: Furore-Verlag, 1990), 117–26.

her compositional work in favor of his own in a monograph dedicated to the exclusion of women from the study, performance, and scholarship of music.<sup>10</sup> In another anthology of female composers, Brunhilde Sonntag depicts an intelligent and artistic woman who, despite her own statements to the contrary, lived the life she intended and was no sacrificial lamb.<sup>11</sup> In her 1994 anthology *Allein mit meiner Musik*, Danielle Roster dismisses Sonntag's suggestion that Mahler willingly gave up her compositional activity and provides an in-depth analysis of the perceptions of Mahler in the literature, from siren to snake.<sup>12</sup> Beatrix Schiferer profiles composers, authors, salonnières, and other creative women in her Vienna-specific anthology.<sup>13</sup> Her chapter on Mahler is brief, but it highlights Mahler as salon host in both Vienna and California and cites *Mein Leben* to evoke the importance of music throughout her life. Mahler's compositional output is discussed in entries in standard Western music reference sets, such as *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*,<sup>14</sup> as well as specialized lexicons, such as *210 österreichische Komponistinnen: vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*.<sup>15</sup> All of these treat Mahler's

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<sup>10</sup> Eva Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft: Zum Ausschluss der Frau aus der deutschen Musikpädagogik, Musikwissenschaft und Musikausbildung* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Brunhilde Sonntag, "Alma Mahler" in *Annäherungen II: an sieben Komponistinnen*, ed. Brunhilde Sonntag and Renate Matthei (Kassel: Furore, 1987), 7–17.

<sup>12</sup> Danielle Roster, "Alma Mahler-Schindler (1879–1964)" in *Allein mit meiner Musik* (Echternach, Luxemburg: Editions Phi, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Beatrix Schiferer, *Vorbilder: kreative Frauen in Wien, 1750–1950* (Vienna: Verband Wiener Volksbildung, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Alma Mahler does not appear in the 1960 or prior editions, but she does have a short entry in *MGG* beginning in 1994. Susanne Rode-Breymann, "Alma Mahler-Werfel," in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart; allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*, volume 11, ed. Friedrich Blume, Britta Constapel, and Ludwig Finscher (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994), 856–7.

<sup>15</sup> Eva Marx and Gerlinda Haas, *210 österreichische Komponistinnen: vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2001).

compositional work briefly; their focus is largely on her biography, and how music influenced it.

Alma Mahler's compositional work is also treated in several brief English-language profiles of women composers. Patrick Mahoney offered a brief article in *Composer* in 1972.<sup>16</sup> Marcia Citron includes Mahler in a chapter on "European Composers and Musicians 1880–1918" in *Women and Music*.<sup>17</sup> Peter Franklin contributed an entry on Mahler for the *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*.<sup>18</sup> Ellen Lee wrote a brief article on Mahler for *Clavier* in 1999.<sup>19</sup> Mary McVicker included a brief biography of Mahler in her 2011 reference work featuring 369 women composers.<sup>20</sup>

In 1950, Warren Storey Smith became the first of a few scholars to publish analysis of Mahler's compositions. His brief article addresses Lieder collections published in 1910 and 1915 and discusses only general characteristics.<sup>21</sup> The next to analyze Mahler's music was Robert Schollum, whose research focuses on twentieth-century Vienna, including composers Ernst Krenek and Egon Wellesz.<sup>22</sup> Schollum

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<sup>16</sup> Patrick Mahoney, "Alma Mahler-Werfel," *Composer* 45 (1972): 13–17.

<sup>17</sup> Marcia Citron, "European Composers and Musicians 1880-1918," in *Women and Music: A History*, ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 123–41.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Franklin, "Mahler (-Werfel) [née Schindler], Alma Maria," *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 305–6.

<sup>19</sup> Ellen Lee, "The Amazing Alma Mahler: Musical Talent, Bountiful Charm, and a Zest for Life," *Clavier* 38, no. 4 (1999): 20–23.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Frech McVicker, *Women Composers of Classical Music: 369 Biographies from 1550 into the 20th Century* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Warren Storey Smith, "The Songs of Alma Mahler," *Chord and Discord* 2 (1950): 74–78.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Schollum, "Die Lieder von Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 34, no. 11 (1979): 544–51.

seconds Gustav's estimation of her melodic gift and draws parallels between her compositions and those of contemporaries including Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg. He seriously considers her musical output and discusses evidence for the influence of Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, and Alexander Zemlinsky, but not without contrasting Alma Mahler to her "genius" husband Gustav and attributing a perceived lack of rigor and development to her gender.<sup>23</sup> Susan M. Filler, who later established herself as a Gustav and Alma Mahler specialist by compiling their joint bio-bibliography,<sup>24</sup> preparing two collections of Alma Mahler songs for publication,<sup>25</sup> editing songs for inclusion in anthologies of women's music,<sup>26</sup> and compiling a research guide on Mahler and her female contemporaries,<sup>27</sup> wrote "A Composer's Wife as Composer: The Songs of Alma Mahler," in which she offers an analysis of Mahler's Lieder and exploration of her compositional training, influences, and challenges.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Schollum, "Die Lieder von Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," 548: "Als typisch weiblich könnte man die vielen ausgezeichneten, aber nicht durchwegs auch sinnvoll ausgewerteten Ideen bezeichnen, die schon auf den kleinsten Textanstoß hin vorhanden sind."

<sup>24</sup> Susan M. Filler, *Gustav and Alma Mahler: A Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> *Alma Mahler, Vier Lieder*, ed. Susan M. Filler (Bryn Mawr, PA: Hildegard Publishing Co, 2001); *Alma Mahler, Two Lieder*, ed. Susan M. Filler (Bryn Mawr, PA: Hildegard Publishing Co, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Susan M. Filler, "Alma Mahler: Der Erkennende" in *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Susan Filler, "Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," in *Women Composers: Music Through the Ages*, Volume 7: Composers Born 1800–1900, ed. Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Schleifer (New Haven, CT: Thomson Gale, 2003), 649–71.

<sup>27</sup> Susan M. Filler, *Alma Mahler and Her Contemporaries: A Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Susan M. Filler, "A Composer's Wife as Composer: The Songs of Alma Mahler" *Journal of Musicological Research* 4 (1983): 427–42.

Edward F. Kravitt investigates existing copies of Mahler's Lieder to consider when the pieces were written and revised, and the role of Gustav Mahler in this process.<sup>29</sup> He suggests that Gustav was responsible for changes to harmony and cuts to the song "Erntelied." His tone throughout is skeptical, although he offers no conclusive proof: "Since we cannot yet conclude that revision of Alma's manuscripts are not her own, the Universal edition must be evaluated on its own merits."<sup>30</sup> In a chapter from his essay collection *Verklärte Nacht: Einübung in Jahrhundertwenden*, Otto Brusatti outlines several of his "problems with Alma," among them that her songs sound just like Zemlinsky's from the period and may in fact be his, or their joint (precoital) work.<sup>31</sup> Suggesting that Zemlinsky composed the works ignores the fact that Mahler composed Lieder both before and after she studied composition with Zemlinsky.

In a needlessly provocatively titled article, Jörg Rothkamm cites Alma Mahler's letters to Walter Gropius to suggest that Gustav Mahler had undue influence on her published Lieder.<sup>32</sup> By emphasizing the number of Gustav's corrections in a printer's copy, Rothkamm diminishes the importance of Alma Mahler's own work. Rothkamm also distorts Mahler's statements indicating insecurity about her compositions to dismiss their value and significance. Rothkamm is dismissive of Rode-Breymann's scholarship;

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<sup>29</sup> Edward F. Kravitt, "The Lieder of Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," *The Music Review* 49 (1988): 190–204.

<sup>30</sup> Kravitt, "The Lieder of Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," 203.

<sup>31</sup> Otto Brusatti, "Probleme mit Alma" in *Verklärte Nacht: Einübung in Jahrhundertwenden*, ed. Otto Brusatti (Vienna: Niederösterreichisches Pressehaus, 1998), 129–51, at 142: "Angeblich sind sie, die beiden, Alma Schindler und Alexander Zemlinsky, beim Erfinden dieser neuen Frauen-Musik (?), beim (gemeinsamen?) Komponieren, am Klavier gekauert, für einander, prae-coitiv."

<sup>32</sup> Jörg Rothkamm, "Wer komponierte die unter Alma Mahlers Namen veröffentlichten Lieder? Unbekannte Briefe der Komponistin zur Revision ihrer Werke im Jahre 1910," *Die Musikforschung* 53, no. 4 (2000): 432–45.

he questions her methodology, for example, and suggests that she has overestimated the volume of Mahler's compositional output. Rothkamm explores two versions of the song published under the title "Erntelied" in Gustav's hand to discuss the differences between these, the version published in 1915, and Filler's 2003 version.<sup>33</sup> Once again, he cites letters between Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius to suggest that "most of the changes in 'Ansturm' and 'Erntelied' that ended up in the published version of 1915 were made by Gustav Mahler."<sup>34</sup> Although it is evident that Gustav played a role in the revision of these songs, Rothkamm's citing Alma Mahler's gendered statements—for example, that Gustav "knew much more about such matters than she"—as definitive proof is not satisfactory.<sup>35</sup>

In stark contrast to the previous four articles, which question not only the quality but also the legitimacy of Mahler's Lieder, the following studies demonstrate the value some find in her work. Sally Macarthur offers a feminist musical analysis of Mahler's Lied "Ansturm."<sup>36</sup> In it, she compares Mahler and Zemlinsky's settings of the text by Dehmel to consider how and if it matters that women's music may be different than that of men. Specifically, she compares the placement of the songs' climaxes to discuss gendered differences in sexual identity and finds that Zemlinsky's work reinforces gender norms and Mahler's work subverts them. Diane Follet is among the first to provide an in-

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<sup>33</sup> Jörg Rothkamm, "A Husband and Wife Who are Both Composers'? An Unpublished Song Version of the So-Called 'Erntelied' ('Gesang am Morgen') in the Hand of Gustav Mahler in Light of the Correspondence Between Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius," *News about Mahler Research* 72 (2018): 7–34; Filler, "Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Rothkamm, "A Husband and Wife Who are Both Composers'?" 23.

<sup>35</sup> Rothkamm, "A Husband and Wife Who are Both Composers.'"

<sup>36</sup> Sally Macarthur, "The Power of Sound, The Power of Sex."

depth analysis of a single song.<sup>37</sup> Her analysis of “Die stille Stadt” identifies and discusses the importance of various key areas and thematic material to the work. Follet argues that seemingly “enigmatic harmonies are compelled by her poetic choices. Time and time again, she demonstrates that her music serves the text.”<sup>38</sup> In a recent anthology chapter, Kadja Grönke compares love songs by Gustav (“Liebst du um Schönheit”) and Alma Mahler (“Ich wandle unter Blumen”) to relate their compositional approaches to their understanding of love.<sup>39</sup> Grönke argues that Alma Mahler derives her compositional concept from the song’s text and in Gustav’s setting “the text and harmony of the Lied stand in open contradiction.”<sup>40</sup>

Marion Gerards suggests that although the extent of Gustav’s substantive involvement in the revision of Alma Mahler’s songs cannot be known, he nonetheless had a profound influence in their selection, preparation, and publication.<sup>41</sup> By selecting only love songs for the 1910 publication of *Fünf Lieder*—Alma Mahler set texts with diverse subjects—Gerards suggests that Gustav articulated his own conception of love and expressed his own feelings in this volume.<sup>42</sup> Most recently, Deborah Calland and

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<sup>37</sup> Diane Follet, “Redeeming Alma: The Songs of Alma Mahler” *College Music Symposium* 44 (2004): 28–42.

<sup>38</sup> Follet, “Redeeming Alma,” 40.

<sup>39</sup> Kadja Grönke, “Contrasting Concepts of Love in Two Songs by Alma Schindler (-Mahler) and Gustav Mahler” in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. Aisling Kenny and Susan Wollenberg (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 217–29, at 223.

<sup>40</sup> Grönke, “Contrasting Concepts of Love in Two Songs,” 223.

<sup>41</sup> Marion Gerards, “‘Bei dir ist es traut’ Die Lieder von Alma Schindler-Mahler und ihre existentielle Bedeutung für Gustav Mahler” in *Gustav Mahler und die musikalische Moderne*, ed. Arnold Jacobshagen (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011), 131–43.

<sup>42</sup> Gerards, “‘Bei dir ist es traut,’” 133–4: “Bei der Auswahl aus dem Konvolut der Lieder seiner Frau sind für Mahler die Liedsujets zentral, die seine emotionale Befindlichkeit während der Ehekrise widerspiegeln. Indem er genau die fünf Lieder auswählt, revidiert und in einem Liederheft in genau dieser Reihenfolge



Barry Millington consider the unpublished song “Einsamer Gang,” which was recently discovered in the Mahler-Werfel papers at University of Pennsylvania.<sup>43</sup> The authors note how Mahler shifts from rich chromaticism to diatonicism to express the mood and meaning of the text.

Theses and dissertations in both English and German highlight Mahler’s compositions, even though her songs are frequently included among those of other female song composers. Most of the following were submitted as requirements for performance degrees (DMA) and not for musicology or music theory degrees. Sarah Click and Monica Joanne Murray both include vocal works by Mahler and other female composers in their 1993 DMA dissertations.<sup>44</sup> In her 2003 DMA dissertation, Rebecca Hanna Tomlinson-Brown offers performance instructions for the singing of selected Mahler Lieder as inspired by the composer’s biography and discusses stylistic influences, including modernism, symbolism, and the secessionist movements.<sup>45</sup> Angela Marie Dilkey focuses on biographical elements of the composer, noting her influence on contemporaneous music, art, and literature.<sup>46</sup> Juliane Urban, who later prepared Mahler’s

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herausgibt, artikuliert er mit den Lieder seiner Frau, die diese als junge Frau vor ihrer Eheschließung komponiert hat, seine Konzeption von Liebe und verleiht seinem Empfinden musikalischen Ausdruck.”

<sup>43</sup> Deborah Calland and Barry Millington, ““Lonely Walk”: An Unpublished Song by Alma Schindler-Mahler,” *Wagner Journal* 12, no. 3 (2018); *Wagner Journal* published “Einsamer Gang” as a supplement to volume 12, no. 3. The finding aid for the Mahler-Werfel Papers collection at University of Pennsylvania Library is provided online, accessed 10 November 2020, [http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD\\_upenn\\_rbml\\_MsColl575](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD_upenn_rbml_MsColl575).

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Click, “Art Song by Turn-of-the-Century Female Composers: Lili Boulanger and Alma Mahler, a Lecture Recital” (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 1993); Monica Joanne Murray, “A Parallel Study of Solo Vocal Works by Women Composers: Comparison to Works from the Standard Repertory” (DMA diss., University of Minnesota, 1993)

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Hanna Tomlinson-Brown, “Unmasking Desire: The Lieder of Alma Schindler-Mahler in Performance” (DMA diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Angela Marie Dilkey, “Alma Mahler and Vienna: The City that Loved Her” (DMA treatise, Florida State University, 2005).

“Leise weht ein erstes Blühn” and “Kennst du meine Nächte?” for publication with Susan Filler, provides musical analysis for all published songs in her master’s thesis, which was unfortunately not published and is no longer available.<sup>47</sup>

Manuscripts related to Mahler’s songs and their publication are held in different collections, and several are missing. The University of Pennsylvania’s Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts holds manuscripts for three Mahler’s songs, including printed copies of “Einsamer Gang,” “Kennst du meine Nächte?” and “Leise weht ein erstes Blühn,” all of which include handwritten emendations. A handwritten copy of “Einsamer Gang,” dated September 16, 1899 is also available.<sup>48</sup> Manuscripts of “Der Erkennende,” “Hälfte des Lebens,” and “Hymne” are in the music collection of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.<sup>49</sup> The manuscript of *Vier Lieder* (1915) in Gustav Mahler’s hand and with corrections of both Alma and Gustav is recorded as being in the collection of Henry-Louis de la Grange, and it was also microfilmed in 1956 and added to the Toscanini Memorial Archives at the New York Public Library.<sup>50</sup> Corrections to Mahler’s *Fünf Lieder* (1910) are in the

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<sup>47</sup> Juliane Urban, “Die Lieder von Alma Mahler-Werfel geb. Schindler (1879–1964)” (M.M. thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 1994). A librarian at Freie Universität has confirmed that this title is no longer available: “leider hat das Institut KEINE Magisterarbeiten mehr. Die Anzeige in Primo ist nicht korrekt. Wir sammeln keine Abschlussarbeiten hier – und der Altbestand ist beim Umzug in dieses Gebäude (1996) entsorgt worden. Also wenn es keine Buchpublikation gibt (wozu der Prüfling ja eigentlich verpflichtet ist) weiß ich auch keinen Weg... Barbara Behrens [email correspondence], 9 September 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Mahler-Werfel papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania, accessed 10 November 2020, [http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/ead/upenn\\_rbml\\_MsColl575](http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/ead/upenn_rbml_MsColl575).

<sup>49</sup> Direct links to descriptions are in the Austrian National Library catalog, all of which were accessed 10 November 2020, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14279530>; <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14320989>; <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14320990>. “Hälfte des Lebens” is not accounted for in any publication of Mahler’s music, nor in any of her biographies or entries in reference materials.

<sup>50</sup> Filler, *Alma Mahler and Her Contemporaries*, 9; [Four songs by Alma Mahler], “Gustav abschriften meiner Lieder, 1911, Alma Maria Mahler.” Toscanini Memorial Archives, ZBT-51, no. 5.

Musikhandschriften section of the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, formerly the Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek.<sup>51</sup> Both Alma and Gustav Mahler made corrections on the copy for engraving: “Copyist’s transcription with occasional corrections by Alma Mahler and numerous corrections by Gustav Mahler, mostly referring to dynamics and phrasing.”<sup>52</sup> A lack of documentation, dating, and publication history—whether accidental or intentional—poses challenges to studying and understanding Mahler’s compositional work. The existing performance scores, however, provide sufficient material to begin to engage with Mahler’s Lieder.

### **Analytical Approaches to Mahler’s Lieder**

Alma Mahler’s Lieder may be productively studied and analyzed in a variety of ways. Because there are so few existing songs, relatively speaking, one can study the entirety of Mahler’s compositional output. Although Mahler records working in other genres in her diaries, only her Lieder survive. Table 4.1 lists the existing songs of Alma Mahler in order of their publication date.

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<sup>51</sup> The corrections have been digitized and can be viewed via the “Link zur Ressource,” accessed 10 November 2020, <https://permalink.obvsg.at/wbr/LQH0265304>.

<sup>52</sup> Ernst Hilmar, “Mahleriana in the Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek,” *News about Mahler Research* 5 (1979): 3–18, at 13.

**Table 4.1. Songs attributed to Alma Mahler, listed by publication date.**

Title	Poet	Initial Publication	Notes
Die stille Stadt	R. Dehmel	1910, Universal Ed.	
In meines Vaters Garten	O. Hartleben	1910, Universal Ed.	Comp. Nov. 2, 1901* <sup>53</sup>
Laue Sommernacht	O. Bierbaum	1910, Universal Ed.	Falke initially listed as poet
Bei dir ist es traut	R. M. Rilke	1910, Universal Ed.	
Ich wandle unter Blumen	H. Heine	1910, Universal Ed.	Comp. Jan. 7, 1899*
Licht in der Nacht	O. Bierbaum	1915, Universal Ed.	Comp. 1901; rev. 1911 <sup>54</sup>
Waldseligkeit	R. Dehmel	1915, Universal Ed.	Comp. 1911
Ansturm	R. Dehmel	1915, Universal Ed.	Comp. 1911
Erntelied	G. Falke	1915, Universal Ed.	Comp. 1901; rev. 1911
Hymne	Novalis	1924, J. Weinberger	
Ekstase	O. Bierbaum	1924, J. Weinberger	Comp. March 24, 1901*
Der Erkennende	F. Werfel	1924, J. Weinberger	Comp. October 1915*
Lobgesang	R. Dehmel	1924, J. Weinberger	Comp. June 16, 1900*
Hymne an die Nacht	Novalis	1924, J. Weinberger	
Leise weht ein erstes Blühn	R. M. Rilke	2000, Hildegard	Comp. Summer 1900?* <sup>55</sup>
Kennst du meine Nächte?	L. Greiner <sup>56</sup>	2000, Hildegard	Comp. Mar. 19, 1900?* <sup>57</sup>
Einsamer Gang	L. Greiner	2018, <i>Wagner Journal</i>	Comp. Sep. 16, 1899 <sup>58</sup>
Hälfte des Lebens	F. Hölderlin	unpublished <sup>59</sup>	Dated 1925 and 1927

<sup>53</sup> \* An asterisk indicates that the composition date is from Rode-Breymann, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 137–8. Rode-Breymann dates Mahler songs based on diary entries.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Filler dates Mahler songs published in 1915 based on dates in the initial publication and on manuscripts in the collection of Henry Louis de la Grange. Susan M. Filler, *Gustav and Alma Mahler: A Research and Information Guide* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 30.

<sup>55</sup> Rode-Breymann indicates that Mahler composed texts by Rilke June 16 and August 16, 1900, but has inexact titles, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 138.

<sup>56</sup> Mahler adapted Leo Greiner's text "Meine Nächte."

<sup>57</sup> Rode-Breymann indicates that Mahler composed a song with the title "Meine Nächte" on this date, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 138.

<sup>58</sup> Calland and Millington, "'Lonely Walk': An Unpublished Song by Alma Schindler-Mahler." The song was published as a supplement to this article in the same volume of *Wagner Journal*.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 7. The manuscript is available in the music section of the Austrian National Library, where it has been attributed to Alma Mahler, accessed 10 November 2020, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14320990>. To my knowledge, no publications or studies of this song exist.

Both the small number of works and the single genre enable scholars and performers to become well acquainted with Mahler's oeuvre. This familiarity allows one to identify commonalities in Mahler's text selection, text setting and declamation, and musical writing for both the voice and piano.

Deborah Stein provides helpful language and tools for the study of nineteenth-century Lieder. Many of Stein's criteria can foster discussion of Mahler's songs, including Poetic Content, Poetic Form, Texture, Elements of Interpretation, Harmony and Tonality, Rhythm and Meter, Form in the German Lied, and Different Settings of a Single Text.<sup>60</sup> In the section that follows, I apply Stein's areas of analysis to Mahler's Lieder, discussing how Mahler frequently approaches various poetic and musical elements and highlighting relevant musical examples.

### **Poetic Content**

Mahler was an avid reader and most frequently set texts by her contemporaries or near contemporaries. Composing was a form of self-expression; her songs were frequently inspired by reading a text and responding emotionally—and immediately—to it.<sup>61</sup> Rode-Breymann uses Mahler's diary entries to confirm that the songs she set align with what she was reading during this period.<sup>62</sup> Unlike other Lied composers of the late nineteenth century, such as Johannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf, Mahler only infrequently set classical and early Romantic German poetry. No surviving songs set texts by Goethe,

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<sup>60</sup> Deborah J. Stein, *Poetry into Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>61</sup> Rode-Breymann, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*.

<sup>62</sup> Rode-Breymann, *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel*, 133: "Zumind est die beiden Bierbaum-Vertonungen ... sowie die Falke-Vertonung, lassen sich problemlos Almas literarischen Interessen vor 1902 zuordnen ... Ähnlich könnte man für Rilke argumentieren."

for example, but a few Heinrich Heine and Novalis settings exist.<sup>63</sup> Mahler preferred texts by near contemporaries Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865–1910), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) and Leo Greiner (1876–1928). Unsurprisingly, several of her male colleagues were also inspired to set the texts Mahler selected.<sup>64</sup>

The poems Mahler chose to set varied considerably in the topic and content. Gerards placed Mahler's songs into the following categories: Life, Belief; Love, Happiness; Love, Sorrow; Women's Role; and Other.<sup>65</sup> Although many of Mahler's songs deal with love, Gerard suggests that as many of the extant songs set texts about life and belief as do happiness in love. Stein discusses poetic progression and *Stimmung* as essential to understanding poetic content of nineteenth century *Lieder*.<sup>66</sup> Poetic progression actively traces movement, whether physical or psychological, and *Stimmung* sets a mood, or describes an environment. A single text may demonstrate either or both. Mahler preferred dramatic texts with elements of emotional volatility. The texts she selected frequently had elements of both poetic progression and *Stimmung*. The following two examples, "Gefunden" and "Lobgesang," both evoke a vivid natural setting; the first depicts a starless, mild summer night and the second the crashing waves

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<sup>63</sup> Rode-Breymann, indicates in *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel* that Mahler set the Goethe texts "Wanderers Nachtlied" and "Gleich und gleich," based on diary entries, but neither survived, 133.

<sup>64</sup> I will discuss options for comparing different settings of the same text later in this chapter.

<sup>65</sup> Gerards, "'Bei dir ist es traüt,'" 134; there is room to problematize these categories and the degree to which any of Mahler's settings can be contained within a single one.

<sup>66</sup> Leo Spitzer's monographic treatment of *Stimmung* offers further insight into the term: "the unity of feelings experienced by man face to face with his environment (a landscape, nature, one's fellow man); it encompasses and unites "the objective (factual) and the subjective (psychological) into one harmonious unity... from fugitive emotionalism to an objective understanding of the world." Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony; Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word "Stimmung"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), 5–6.

of the ocean. “Gefunden” traces the progression of a passionate surrender to love and “Lobgesang,” while hardly stagnant, describes the ways in which love is like the ocean.

**Gefunden**<sup>67</sup>

Laue Sommernacht: am Himmel  
Stand kein Stern, im weiten Walde  
Suchten wir uns tief im Dunkel,  
Und wir fanden uns.

Mild summer night: in the heavens  
Stand no stars, in the wide woods  
We searched deep in the darkness  
and we found ourselves.

Fanden uns im weiten Walde  
In der Nacht, der sternenlosen,  
Hielten staunend uns im Arme  
In der dunklen Nacht.

We found ourselves in the wide woods,  
In the night, the starless one,  
Amazed, we held each other in our arms  
In the dark night.

War nicht unser ganzes Leben  
Nur ein Tappen, nur ein Suchen?  
Da: In seine Finsternisse  
Liebe, fiel Dein Licht.

Was not our entire life  
But a groping, a searching?  
There: in its darkness  
Love, your light fell.

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<sup>67</sup> Translations from German to English are the author’s unless otherwise specified.

## Lobgesang<sup>68</sup>

Wie das Meer ist die Liebe,  
Unerschöpflich, unergründlich,  
unermeßlich:  
Woge zu Woge stürzend gehoben,  
Woge von Woge wachsend verschlungen,  
Sturm- und wettergewaltig nun,  
Sonneseelig nun, willig nun dem Mond  
Die unaufhaltsame Fläche,  
Doch in der Tiefe stetes wirken  
Ewige Ruhe, ungestört,  
Unentwirrbar dem irdischen Blick,  
Starr verdämmernd in gläsernes Dunkel

Und in der Weite stetes Schweben  
Ewiger Regung, ungestillt,  
Unabsehbar dem irdischen Blick,  
Mild verschwimmend im Licht der Lüfte

Aufklang der Unendlichkeit  
Ist das Meer, ist die Liebe.

Love is like the ocean,  
Inexhaustible, unfathomable, vast:  
Wave to wave, heaving and falling,  
Wave to wave, surging and plunging,  
Now powered by storm and weather,  
Now blessed by sun, obedient to the moon  
The interminable expanse.  
Yet in the deeps there is  
An eternal silence, undisturbed,  
Inaccessible to terrestrial sight,  
Motionless, condemned to glassy  
darkness.  
And hovering in the distance  
An eternal movement, unsubdued,  
Immeasurable with terrestrial sight,  
Gently blurred in the light of the  
atmosphere;  
An echo of infinity  
Is the ocean, is love.

### Poetic Form

Alma Mahler most frequently set texts by her contemporaries, and accordingly, there is a good amount of formal diversity. Although contemporaneous poets did sometimes adopt conventional poetic forms, there is, overall, more diversity and less predictability in their poetic structure than in, say, Clara Schumann's song texts. Musically, this opened the door to more varied musical forms beyond the strophic or ternary forms traditionally used in Lieder. Formal division, rhyme scheme, alliteration and assonance, and poetic meter are all elements of poetic form that influence musical settings of Lieder.

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<sup>68</sup> Translation from German to English copyright © 2011 by Michael P. Rosewall, 10 November 2020, [https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get\\_text.html?TextId=73361](https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=73361).



In the poems provided above, “Gefunden” has a regular pattern of a four-line stanza; the first three lines of the stanza have eight syllables and the final line five. “Lobgesang” does not have regular formal divisions, which reinforces the image of the ever-changing, infinite sea. There is no evidence of the rhyme schemes so common to German poetry of the classical and Romantic periods here, neither end-rhyme nor interior rhyme. There is, however, some assonance in “Lobgesang.” Because it falls within the same line (“Unerschöpflich, unergründlich, unermesslich”), however, it does not influence the rhyme scheme. Like the form of “Gefunden,” the poetic meter is trochaic (or strong weak / ) throughout. “Lobgesang” is less consistently trochaic, though that is the prominent meter.

### Texture

The texture of a Lied refers primarily to the vocal and accompaniment styles: it is implied that the instrumentation for the work is piano and voice only. Mahler did not add obbligato instruments to any of her existing songs, nor did she orchestrate them.<sup>69</sup> All of Mahler’s songs are for middle voice and are most frequently performed by mezzo sopranos. The vocal range in her published songs extends from Bb3 up to A5. Settings are largely syllabic, but there are limited examples of florid singing (as in an extended phrase on “Ah” in “Erntelied”).

As previously mentioned, scholars have commented on Mahler’s talent for writing lyrical melodies. She is nonetheless willing to eschew lyrical vocal lines and

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<sup>69</sup> Although Mahler did not orchestrate her songs, several have been recently orchestrated by others. See, for example, Alma Mahler, David Matthews, and Colin Matthews. *Sieben Lieder: für mittlere Stimme und Orchester* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 2001); Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Four Early Songs: Orchestrated by Mufrida Bell* ([s.l.]: M. Bell, 1991), <https://lcn.loc.gov/93729023>. Unpublished orchestrations by Andrew Crust and others have also been performed and recorded.

beautiful melodies to make an expressive point. There are passages of parlando-style vocal lines (marked, for example, as “fast gesprochen” in “Ansturm,” or “sprechend” in “Kennst du meine Nächte?”), or passages of repeated notes (for example, in “Ich wandle unter Blumen”) that serve an expressive and not lyrical purpose. The vocal lines are most frequently scalar—smoothly and closely written, with few large intervallic leaps. When these leaps do occur, they add excitement and drama to the vocal line. Mahler does not shy away from jarring intervals, but rather highlights them. In “Ansturm,” shown in Example 4.1, the vocal line leans into an ascending augmented 5<sup>th</sup>, diminished 5<sup>th</sup>, and minor 7<sup>th</sup> which adds intensity to the initial climax.

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The top staff is marked "Doppeltes Tempo" and "fast gesprochen". It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4. A dynamic marking "f" is placed above the B4. The lyrics "muß es her - aus" are written below the notes. The staff then continues with a whole rest, a half rest, and another whole rest. A time signature change to 3/4 is indicated by a double bar line with a "3" above and a "4" below. The tempo is marked "Schnell" with a metronome symbol (♩ = ♩). The melody continues with a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note A4. The lyrics "ans" are written below the final note. The bottom staff is marked "Tempo I." and begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter rest, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The lyrics "Licht!" are written below the first note, "ans" below the B4, and "Licht!" below the C5.

**Example 4.1. Ascending augmented 5<sup>th</sup>, diminished 5<sup>th</sup>, and minor 7<sup>th</sup> in “Ansturm,” *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]). This example and all subsequent examples from the score are presented with kind permission by Universal Edition Vienna.**

Examples 4.2 and 4.3 show the ascending chromatic lines and diatonic scalar passages that Mahler frequent employs as melodic mechanisms in the vocal line.

Example 4.3 shows how Mahler punctuates the scalar passages with more disjunct descending mechanisms.

Etwas drängend

Sehr frei im Vortrag \*)

Laue Sommer-nacht, am

Him-mel stand kein Stern, im wei-ten Wal-de such-ten wir

stringendo rit. p cresc. pp a tempo f p nachgeben

The image shows a musical score for the song "Laue Sommer-nacht". It consists of two systems of music. The first system features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "Laue Sommer-nacht, am". The piano accompaniment starts with a *p* dynamic, followed by a *cresc.* marking, and then a *rit.* marking. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "Him-mel stand kein Stern, im wei-ten Wal-de such-ten wir". The piano accompaniment includes dynamics *pp*, *f*, and *p*, along with the instruction "nachgeben". Performance directions include "Etwas drängend" and "Sehr frei im Vortrag \*)".

Example 4.2. Ascending chromatic passage in “Laue Sommernacht,” *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).

**Allegro Mit freiem Vortrag**

In mei - nes Va - ters Gar - ten... bli - he, mein Herz, blih'  
auf - in mei - nes Va - ters Gar - ten stand ein schat - ten - der

**Example 4.3. Ascending scalar passage in “In meines Vaters Garten,” *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).**

As the examples throughout the chapter suggest, Mahler employs diverse styles of accompaniments in her Lieder. Follet suggests that Mahler’s comfort with the piano as a performer allowed her to add drama to her songs: “she employs huge chords reminiscent of Brahms and Liszt. Her accompaniments are complex, and her rapid harmonic rhythm adds a restless quality. The textures are dense—at times, using the pedal, five octaves sound at once.”<sup>70</sup> Mahler uses a mix of static chords, simple arpeggiated chords in repeated rhythmic figures, dense chords, non-chordal figures, and combinations of all of these. The vocal line is often doubled in the accompaniment; occasionally the piano plays the vocal line in the same register and in complete unison, as demonstrated in Example 4.4. More frequently, however, the piano and vocal lines intersect in a more flexible and

<sup>70</sup> Follet, “Redeeming Alma,” 31.

nuanced manner, as demonstrated in Example 6. Although the texture is frequently dense and rich, there are numerous exceptions to this. The thin and simple accompaniment to “Leise weht ein erstes Blühn” provides an example of such an exception. From the static chordal opening of “Ekstase” (Example 4) to the rhythmic crashing of the waves in “Lobgesang” (Example 5), Mahler’s accompaniments were crafted to evoke the text and support its declamation.

**Sehr breit**

Gott, del - ne Him - mel sind mir auf - ge - tan,

**Example 4.4.** Static chordal texture of the opening of “Ekstase,” *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).

*drängend*

*rasch und leidenschaftlich*

Wo - - - ge zu Wo - ge stür - - - zend ge - ho - ben,

**Example 4.5.** Accompaniment evoking crashing waves in “Lobgesang,” *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).

## Elements of Interpretation

According to Stein, elements of Lieder interpretation include dynamics, timbre (vocal, accompaniment, and ensemble), vocal accent and stress, and persona.<sup>71</sup> In her editions of Mahler's published scores, Susan Filler offers explanatory notes regarding a variety of such elements of interpretation. For example, Filler specifies in the critical commentary when note values were changed or arpeggiations or octaves were added, and some directions are indicated in brackets, where others are not.<sup>72</sup> My assumption is that unbracketed dynamics, at least in the Filler score, reflect Mahler's markings in the available manuscripts. In the corrections to the *Fünf Lieder* (1905), the indicated dynamics match what was eventually published.<sup>73</sup> The manuscript versions of "Erntelied," however, show considerable differences from the published source.<sup>74</sup> Mahler's expressive song settings require a wide range of dynamics and tempos, as well as sensitive changes to timbre. All aspects of interpretation contribute to the effective portrayal of persona, which Edward T. Cone asserts enables us to "arrive at a more just appreciation of the dramatic portrayal inherent in a song."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Stein, *Poetry into Song*.

<sup>72</sup> Filler, *Two Lieder*.

<sup>73</sup> Alma Schindler-Mahler, [Fünf Lieder] Abschrift mit eigh. Korrekturen, femer mit eigh. Korrekturen von Gustav Mahler und Verlagskorrekturen, accessed 10 November 2020, <https://www.digital.wienbibliothek.at/wbrobv02/content/titleinfo/1838932>.

<sup>74</sup> Rothkamm, "A Husband and Wife who are Both Composers?"

<sup>75</sup> Edward T. Cone discusses the vocal persona in *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). Cone continues the discussion in "Poet's Love or Composer's Love?" in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* ed. Steven P. Scher (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 177–92, at 179: "By acknowledging the protagonist as the conscious composer of words and music alike (often including, as I shall argue, the accompaniment), we can frequently—if not regularly—arrive at a more just appreciation of the dramatic portrayal inherent in a song."

Vocal, piano, and ensemble timbre can be suggested by the text of the poem, compositional directions, or the music itself. The text provides the best starting point, and Mahler's directions frequently reiterate what is suggested by the text. Performers would do well to understand the text first before attempting to interpret these songs. Mahler provides markings specific to the vocal line (for example, "Leise-flüsternd," "Traumerisch," "Geheimnisvoll, zart," or "Begeistert, mit großem Atem"). These indicate to the singer the desired tone or vocal quality. Similarly, Mahler indicates the desired emotion or quality for the accompaniment specifically (for example, "Begleitung so undeutlich als möglich" or "zart bewegt"), or the ensemble generally ("Etwas drängend," "Traumend," or "Ernst"). The vocal accent and stress typically align with German diction for singing.<sup>76</sup>

### **Harmony and Tonality**

Much like the texts she sets, Follet argues, Mahler's harmonies are "bold and ambiguous."<sup>77</sup> Traditional harmonic analysis of Mahler's songs is challenging; major and minor sonorities are rare and even diminished and augmented sonorities are spelled out in ways that make them difficult to identify unambiguously. In comparing Mahler's songs to her teacher Zemlinsky's, Schollum finds that although both composers were bound to tonality, they wrote "iridescent" harmonies and seemed to struggle against the constraints

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<sup>76</sup> Theodor Siebs wrote the standard German pronunciation guide for theater and classical singing. Theodor Siebs, Helmut de Boor, and Paul Diels, *Deutsche Hochsprache: Bühnenaussprache* (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1958).

<sup>77</sup> Follet, "Redeeming Alma," 31; Follet explores modal mixture and the co-existence of major and minor in Mahler's song "Die stille Stadt." Tonal pairing can be explored in William Kinderman and Harald Krebs, *The Second Practice of Nineteenth-Century Tonality* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

of tonality.<sup>78</sup> Some of Mahler's songs are straightforward harmonically ("Bei dir ist es traut" and "Leise weht ein erstes Blühn," for example); determining the tonic at any place in the song is straightforward and unambiguous. In other songs, however, these "iridescent" harmonies make determining the key and harmonic direction challenging.

Many of the songs, especially those published after 1910, are more harmonically ambiguous. Writing of the song "Ansturm," Macarthur asserts that Mahler "avoids establishing a key or key center for the song and uses nonfunctional harmony extensively, thus indicating a move in the direction of atonality."<sup>79</sup> Rather than atonal, I wonder if Mahler's ambiguous tonality could be understood as implicit. Stein defines implicit tonality as when a specific key is suggested in the music but is not fully or explicitly presented.<sup>80</sup> The opening of "Waldseligkeit" in Example 4.6 presents an example of a tonally ambiguous beginning. It sounds to me like D minor is implied, based on the key signature and early emphasis of D, but there is no unqualified and explicit evidence, such as a cadence in D minor.

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<sup>78</sup> Schollum, "Die Lieder von Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," 544–551, at 548: "Vergleicht man Zemlinskys Lieder mit denen seiner Schülerin, so findet sich die gleiche tonal gebundene, aber harmonisch doch oft stark irisierende Klangwelt: man merkt das Ringen um Überwindung der Tonalität, das auch für Strauss bis zur *Salome* und *Elektra* ein Zentralproblem war."

<sup>79</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 73.

<sup>80</sup> Stein, *Poetry into Song*.



Geheimnisvoll, zart

Gesang

Der Wald beginnt zu rauschen, den

Piano

*pp*

Bäu - men naht die Nacht, als ob sie se - lig

**Example 4.6. Tonally ambiguous opening to “Waldseligkeit,” *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).**

There are also instances where the key is initially quite clear but is then clouded through use of chromaticism and added notes, for example, the passage from “Laue Sommernacht” in Example 4.7 is in A major throughout, but at certain moments, that is less clear.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Laue Sommernacht" by Gustav Mahler. It consists of two systems of music. The first system features a vocal line in G major with the tempo marking "etwas zögernd" and the lyrics "in der dunk-len Nacht." The piano accompaniment is marked "warm" and "f". The second system continues the vocal line with the tempo marking "a tempo (poco string)" and "rit.", and the piano accompaniment with "rit." and "p". The lyrics for the second system are "War nicht un-ser gan-zes Le-ben nur ein Tap-pen, nur ein Su-chen,". The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation, and phrasing.

**Example 4.7. “Laue Sommernacht,” A major, but sometimes obscured, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).**

Mahler’s use of chromaticism and nonfunctional harmony has implications for genre conventions and listener expectation. The need for resolution can be integral to the composition of late nineteenth-century Lieder. When tonic is not clearly established in a song, this drive towards resolution becomes less important and other factors shape the form and structure.

### **Rhythm and Meter**

After discussing rhythmic and metric norms and organization, Stein indicates that Lieder composers “readily disrupt these phrase norms in the interest of text depiction.”<sup>81</sup> She suggests that to do so, they typically use one of two methods: phrase expansion or

<sup>81</sup> Stein, *Poetry into Song*, 175.

phrase contraction.<sup>82</sup> Mahler frequently expands and contracts musical phrases to better communicate the song text. Because she frequently sets texts that are less predictable and consistent in their form, her music cannot rigidly adhere to four-measure phrases.<sup>83</sup> An example of a work that largely stays within the four-measure hypermeter, “In meines Vaters Garten,” is presented in Example 4.8.

**Allegro Mit freiem Vortrag**

In mei - nes Va - ters Gar - ten... bli - he, mein Herz, blüh'  
auf in mei - nes Va - ters Gar - ten stand ein schat - ten - der

**Example 4.8. “In meines Vaters Garten,” four-square phrases, mostly, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).**

<sup>82</sup> Several others have also discussed phrase expansion and contradiction in the context of Lieder. See, for example, Stephen Rodgers, “Thinking (and Singing) in Threes: Triple Hypermeter and the Songs of Fanny Hensel,” *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 1 (2011); Harald Krebs, “Hypermeter and Hypermeteric Irregularity in the Songs of Josephine Lang,” in *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis*, edited by Deborah J. Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 13–29.

<sup>83</sup> Which is not to say that four-measure phrases are not, or cannot be, expressive. Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers recently discussed how Clara Schumann introduced complexity into seemingly square phrase rhythm “by overlaying intricate voice-leading patterns, colorful harmonic twists, textural interplays, and formal deviations.” Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers, “Beyond Vierhebigkeit: Phrase Structure and Poetic Meaning in Three Lieder by Clara Schumann,” Presented at the Society for Music Theory Virtual Conference 2020, accessed 17 January 2021, <https://guide.societymusictheory.org/sessions/nov15/midday/clara-and-robert-schumann>.

When phrases within a song with otherwise regular phrase structure are extended or compressed, as happens later in “In meines Vaters Garten,” it creates rhythmic dissonance and the music falls out of sync.<sup>84</sup> In Example 4.9, the phrase is extended by two measures (enclosed in brackets). The first two measures of the phrase, marked 1 and 2, are the same as in the preceding phrase. This makes the bracketed measures, with their recitativelike texture, feel like an interruption to the established 4-measure phrases. Following this extended phrase, the rhythm returns to four-measure phrases.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the song "In meines Vaters Garten". It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system has the lyrics "sprach so leis- blü-he, mein Herz, blüh' auf! Die Drit-te sprach und". The second system has the lyrics "sprach so leis: Ich küs-se dem Lieb-sten des Klei-des Saum- sü-Ber". The third system is marked "Andante." and has the lyrics "Traum- ich küs-se dem Lieb-sten des". Handwritten annotations in blue ink are present: "2", "3", and "4" above the first system; "2", "3? 1?", "4? 2?", and "3" above the second system; and "4" and "2" above the third system. A yellow bracket highlights the second and third measures of the second system, which correspond to the lyrics "Ich küs-se dem Lieb-sten". The piano part in the second system includes dynamic markings like "pp" and "stills".

**Example 9. “In meines Vaters Garten,” four-square with instance of 4+2, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).**

<sup>84</sup> Yona tan Malin, “Metric Displacement Dissonance and Romantic Longing in the German Lied,” *Music Analysis* 25, no. 3 (2006): 251–88.

## Form

Like those of her contemporaries, many of Mahler's songs are predominately through-composed. Thinking about the repetition and recurrence of musical materials can provide insight into the song form and introduce nuance into formal analysis. Victoria Malawey presents a model for interpreting song form, which she created to analyze the songs of Amy Beach, Mahler's near contemporary.<sup>85</sup> Malawey's spectrum is useful for visualizing the relative repetition of musical content in a piece and considering the form accordingly, rather than forcing songs into narrow definitions of strophic, ternary, or through-composed. Even though Mahler does not typically employ rigid structural forms, she adds shape to her songs in a variety of ways. The repetition of musical material can evoke formal structure. More specifically, recalling music from the beginning of the song at the end, as Mahler does in "Die stille Stadt," "Bei dir ist es Traut," "Waldseligkeit," and others lends formal coherence. Follet notes that Mahler frequently makes use of fermatas and caesuras to delineate sections within a song.<sup>86</sup> This, too, creates a sense of formal shape.

Mahler's song "In meines Vaters Garten," for example, includes a great deal of melodic and harmonic recurrence, such that it does not feel like a through-composed song. It is not purely strophic or ternary, but the use of repeated motives and musical

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<sup>85</sup> Victoria Malawey, "Strophic Modification in Songs by Amy Beach," *Music Theory Online* 20, no. 4 (2014): <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.4/mto.14.20.4.malawey.php>, at paragraph 6: "To better understand the many permutations of form in art song, Figure 1 presents a continuum from strophic to through-composed, accounting for hybrid formal designs that fall in between. The continuum includes five stages ranging from maximal recurring material (strophic) to minimal recurring material (through-composed), yet the figure is more helpful for what lies between each point along the continuum rather than for what falls on specific points."

<sup>86</sup> Follet, "Redeeming Alma."

phrases diminishes its through-composedness. “Leise weht ein erstes Blühn” is among the most formally repetitive of Mahler’s Lieder, roughly in a symmetrical ABCCBA form, it ends as it began, creating a cyclical effect.<sup>87</sup> As in all of Mahler’s songs, there is an intention to match the music to the text. In Rilke’s publication of the text, the sections are indented; Mahler’s musical setting parallels these indentions, created different musical materials for each discrete section. Figure 4.1 presents the first half of Rilke’s text as published in 1898; the second half reverses the indentation pattern.<sup>88</sup>

Leise weht ein erstes Blühn  
 Von den Lindenbäumen,  
 Und, in meinen Träumen kühn,  
 Seh ich Dich im Laubengrün  
 Hold im ersten Muttermühn  
 Kinderhemdchen säumen.

Singst ein kleines Lied dabei,  
 Und Dein Lied klingt in den Mai:

Blühe, blühe Blütenbaum  
 Tief im trauten Garten.  
 Blühe blühe Blütenbaum,  
 Meiner Sehnsucht schönsten Traum  
 Will ich hier erwarten.

**Figure 4.1. The first half of Rilke’s “Leise weht ein erstes Blühn,” *Advent* (Leipzig: P. Friesenhahn, 1898), 83–84**

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<sup>87</sup> An analysis of this piece as ABA would misrepresent an extended middle section that contains two unique sections, each of which are mirrored in near perfect symmetry.

<sup>88</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, “Leise weht ein erstes Blühn” in *Advent* (Leipzig: P. Friesenhahn, 1898), 83–84. Accessed 10 November 2020, <http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-buch?apm=0&aid=432>. Appropriately, this text is from a cycle entitled “Mutter” and the previous text introduces it by indicating “Und [Sie] sitz und singt ein Wiegendlied” (And [she] sits and signs a lullaby).

The cyclic nature of Mahler's music suits the circle of life depicted in the text. As the trees begin to blossom, a young mother is imagined hemming a child's garment and singing a lullaby that evokes the longing she feels. The song ends noting the sun has transformed the blossoming trees and one suspects that the mother, although still depicted as hemming the child's garment, has also been transformed. Ending as she began not only allows Mahler to show respect and understanding for the text she is setting, and it also provides formal coherence.

### **Different Settings of a Single Text**

One avenue of analysis, successfully demonstrated by L. Poundie Burstein is the investigation into the gendered elements of settings by a woman relative to her male contemporaries.<sup>89</sup> Such comparisons might be made, for example, of settings of "Hymne" with a text by Novalis and set by Franz Schubert as "Hymne I," D 659 and Alphons Diepenbrock. "Lobgesang" has a text by Richard Dehmel and was set by Vítězslav Augustín Rudolf Novák. "Hymne an die Nacht" by Novalis was set by Alphons Diepenbrock, Luise Reichardt, Johann F. Reichardt, and Franz Schubert as "Nachthymne", D 687. "Die stille Stadt" by Richard Dehmel was set by Hans Pfitzner, Jean Sibelius, and Kurt Weill. "Licht in der Nacht" with a text by Otto Julius Bierbaum was set by Heinrich Molbe.

Four particular texts that afford interesting opportunities for comparing gendered elements in songs settings are "Gefunden," "Waldseligkeit," "Ich wandle unter Blumen," and "Ansturm." Otto Julius Bierbaum's "Gefunden" was set by at least two women, including Mahler and Anna Cramer (1873–1968) and several men. It is rare to encounter

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<sup>89</sup> L. Poundie Burstein, "Their Paths, Her Ways: Comparison of Text Settings by Clara Schumann and Other Composers," *Women & Music* 6 (2002): 11–28.

a fin-de-siècle text that was set by more than one woman for which the music is still readily available. “Waldseligkeit,” with a text by Dehmel, is another example of a turn-of-the-century text set by multiple women, including Lise Maria Mayer (1894–1968) and several contemporary men, including Richard Strauss, Max Reger, and Joseph Marx. Comparing Mahler’s setting for voice to Zemlinsky’s setting for piano solo presents potential challenges and rewards. Heinrich Heine’s “Ich wandle unter Blumen,” like many of his texts, has been set multiple times. Notably, this text was set specifically for male voices, including Gerhard Lampersberg’s setting for baritone, Arshak Andriasov’s setting for tenor, and Stanley Grill’s setting for countertenor. Many Lieder composers do not specify voice type, at least not to this degree of specificity. A comparison of Mahler’s woman persona with one or more these male protagonists, especially Grill’s countertenor, would be potentially interesting. Mahler, Zemlinsky, and Conrad Eduard Reinhold Ansgore set Richard Dehmel’s “Ansturm.” Mahler and Zemlinsky’s settings of this text, and specifically their treatment of climax, will be the focus of the case study presented in the following chapter. Before addressing the specifics of musical climax, however, I will compare the composers’ general approaches to setting this text.

### **Mahler and Zemlinsky’s Settings of Richard Dehmel’s “Ansturm”**

Alma Mahler’s setting of “Ansturm” was published in *Vier Lieder* (1915), and was likely written in 1911.<sup>90</sup> Alexander Zemlinsky’s setting “Ansturm” was published posthumously and was written in 1907.<sup>91</sup> Macarthur has argued that Mahler’s setting was

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<sup>90</sup> Alma Maria Mahler-Werfel, *Vier Lieder* (Vienna: Universal, 1915).

<sup>91</sup> Alexander Zemlinsky, and Antony Beaumont, *Lieder aus dem Nachlass: Gesang und Klavier* (Munich: Ricordi, 1995), 15.



a response to Zemlinsky's, but I have not found evidence indicating that she was familiar with it.<sup>92</sup> Both composers set the text as presented, though Mahler and Zemlinsky opt to repeat the text "ans licht!" and Zemlinsky also repeats the text "dann bebst du." The poem is divided into two four-line stanzas. In both stanzas, the first line and third lines have nine syllables and the second line has eight. The fourth line has six syllables in the first stanza and nine in the second stanza. Both composers set the text in a declamatory fashion, with each syllable on a single note. Mahler does extend "stran-," "-det" "zürnst"; each is a pair of descending eighth or dotted eighth to sixteenth.

Both songs are scored for voice and piano, and no specific voice type is specified by either composer. Texturally, the songs are very different. Zemlinsky maintains a driving, syncopated chordal accompaniment throughout his piece, as depicted in Example 4.10. Mahler opts for a more varied texture throughout the piece. The texture is initially sparse and recitative-like (Example 4.11), but there are considerable shifts at the end of the first stanza (Example 4.12) and the beginning of the second stanza (Example 4.13). The piano accompaniment grows quicker and the sustained block chords are arpeggiated downward.

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<sup>92</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 76: "The opening accompaniment figure in the piano part of the Zemlinsky setting is appropriated by Alma Schindler-Mahler for the voice part."

**Leidenschaftlich bewegt**

O zür - ne nicht, wenn mein Be -

**Example 4.10.** Zemlinsky, “Ansturm,” measures 1–3, *Lieder aus dem Nachlass: Gesang und Klavier* (Munich: Ricordi, 1995). This example, and all subsequent examples by Zemlinsky are © Universal Music – MGB Songs on behalf of G. Ricordi & Co., Buehnen Musikverlag GmbH.

**In heftiger Bewegung. Rubato**

**Gesang**

O zür - ne nicht, wenn mein Be - geh - ren dun - kel aus sei - nen Grenzen

**Piano**

**Example 4.11.** Mahler, “Ansturm,” measures 1–3, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).

**Doppeltes Tempo**  
*fast gesprochen* *f*  $(\text{♩} = \text{♩})$  Schnell

muß es her - aus ans

*molto accel.* *ff* l.H.

**Tempo I.**

Licht! ans Licht!

*ff*

Original from

Example 4.12. Mahler, “Ansturm,” measures 8–14, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).

23

Fühlst ja, wie all mein Inn-res bran-det,

und wenn her - auf der

*p* l.H.

Example 4.13. Mahler, “Ansturm,” measures 15–18, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).

Elements of interpretation, or dynamics, vocal accent and stress, and persona vary considerably between the two settings. Both songs have a wide range of dynamics, Mahler's range from *pp* to *ff* with extensive use of *sforzando* and Zemlinsky's range from *p* to *ff*. Zemlinsky makes extensive use of accents in the piano line that highlight the aggressive syncopation. The persona in the Zemlinsky's setting seems more constant, and Mahler's more variable. For example, Zemlinsky sets the opening text "O zürne nicht, wenn mein Begehren" in the higher part of the vocal range with an assured and sustained vocal line that demands that the listener not be angry. Mahler's conversational, rubato opening entreats the listener not to be angry, and almost sounds explanatory. This could easily be understood as gendered; he demands and she entreats. Zemlinsky does relent, temporarily, at the beginning of the second stanza with the question "Fühlst ja, wie all mein Innres brandet." Both composers set the first line of the second stanza similarly (Examples 4.14 and 4.15) in the voice, but Zemlinsky's syncopated chordal accompaniment persists and Mahler's changes again.

17 *zarter beginnen*

Fühlst ja wie all mein Innres brandet!

**Example 4.14. Zemlinsky, "Ansturm," measures 17 and 18, *Lieder aus dem Nachlass: Gesang und Klavier* (Munich: Ricordi, 1995).**

**Example 4.15. Mahler, “Ansturm,” measures 16 and 17, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).**

Both songs make extensive use of chromaticism and have lush harmonic sonorities. Zemlinsky’s piece is in D minor and ends in D major. Macarthur argues that Mahler’s setting is much more harmonically adventurous than is Zemlinsky’s; an example of this is that Mahler resists compositional norms by closing on a “highly unstable feeling” V7 and not the tonic, as might be more appropriate given the conclusiveness of the text.<sup>93</sup> I would argue that Mahler’s setting has not “violated both the requirement of the poem to attain closure and the musical framework within which she has chosen to work” as Macarthur asserts.<sup>94</sup> Mahler’s setting provides the closure suggested by the song in its extended *dolce espr.* postlude. Admittedly, Mahler’s setting does not conclude with a perfect authentic cadence. The ten measures after the second climax, however, allow listeners to adjust their expectations and accept the relatively open conclusion. Additionally, the text ends (“du zürnst mir nicht”) as it began (“O zürne nicht”) and where Zemlinsky demands at the beginning and assumes at the end, Mahler’s

<sup>93</sup> Macarthur, “The Power of Sound, The Power of Sex,” 74.

<sup>94</sup> Macarthur, “The Power of Sound, The Power of Sex,” 74.

less insistent and conclusive approach on both counts could be read as gendered—a desire for consent and unwillingness to assume.

Mahler's setting switches between various time signatures and has considerable irregularity in rhythm, but it does consistently have two-measure phrases. Zemlinsky's setting is in common time throughout but does not have consistency in phrase length. In the two phrases in Example 4.16, my hypermetrical analysis might address this internal expansion by reading 1, 2, 2, 3, 4 and, perhaps, 1, 2, 2, 2, 3, 4.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> William Nathan Rothstein discusses internal expansion as one technique for extending phrases in *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), which is not to suggest that Rothstein would agree with my creative numbering.

17 *zarter beginnen*

Fühlst ja wie all mein Inn - res bran - det! Und wenn her -

20 *steigernd*

- auf der Auf-ruhr *f* bricht, *mp* jäh ü - ber dei - nen

23 *breiter, mit großem Ausdruck*

Frie - den stran - det, dann bebst du, dann bebst du

26 *rit.* *sehr ruhig* *rit.*

a - ber zürnst mir nicht.

Example 4.16. Zemlinsky, “Ansturm,” measures 17–29, *Lieder aus dem Nachlass: Gesang und Klavier* (Munich: Ricordi, 1995).

Both songs are through-composed, but Mahler's setting may be considered less formally traditional than Zemlinsky's. He maintains a very consistent accompaniment throughout, and his repetition of musical materials lends familiarity and coherence, if not structure. The changes in both the piano and vocal lines in Mahler's setting thwart listener expectations for beginning, middle, and end. Both songs seem to have two climaxes, the first on the text "ans Licht!" at the end of the first stanza. Mahler's second is on the syllables "stran" and "det," both of which she extended, and Zemlinsky's is on "dann bebst du," which he opted to repeat. Mahler's concludes with a four-measure piano postlude.

Macarthur's comparison of gendered climaxes in Mahler and Zemlinsky's settings of "Ansturm" will be the focus of chapter five. Although I disagree with some aspects of her analysis, I also see the value in considering differences of gender and voice in song settings. I found it eye-opening, for example to recognize how authentically Clara Schumann expressed female personas in her song settings, especially relative to her male contemporaries.<sup>96</sup> Questions of gender, voice, and persona become all the more interesting in the case of Alma Mahler, who most frequently set texts by male composers written and from a masculine perspective. She composed at a time in which few other women were celebrated for doing so and wanted her songs to be considered great at a time when only men were capable of greatness.

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<sup>96</sup> Burstein, "Their Paths, Her Ways."



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The limited availability of manuscripts and records regarding the composition, revision, and publication history of Alma Mahler's Lieder have led some scholars to cast doubt on their legitimacy. Others have decided that her songs lack originality and merit. Increasingly, however, scholars and performers alike have asserted the value of Mahler's existing Lieder by studying and programming them. Many recent studies compare and contrast Mahler's songs to those of her male contemporaries, as I have done here and will do in the following chapter. Although such comparisons can be fruitful in highlighting differences in style and approach, they might also suggest that Mahler's work is not worthy of analysis. Mahler's Lieder—as evidenced by the increasing rate at which they are performed and studied—are indeed worthy of substantive analysis and offer sufficient complexities and nuance to challenge even the most expert performers and scholars.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**SHOT INTO THE AIR LIKE A ROCKET:**  
**EXPLORING CLIMAX IN MAHLER'S LIEDER<sup>1</sup>**

Had a dreadful night. Not a wink of sleep until 7:00 a.m.—just creepy dream-visions. Initially, I must admit it was rather fun. I was playing Z[emlinsky] one of my piano pieces. It began softly and came to a wonderful climax, shot into the air like a rocket. But suddenly the music stopped—I saw only the arc of the sheaf and the dripping balls of fire. What an after-glow...<sup>2</sup>

In feminist analysis of music by women composers, the appropriation of musical climax as an act of subversion has become a common claim. Goal-oriented narratives of tonal classical music imply a linear and teleological development; this focus on the tension and release of climax has been called out by feminist music scholars, most notably Susan McClary, as overtly masculine and even violent.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have argued that when women composers approach musical climax differently than their male counterparts, it is based on gender-specific differences, or differences in sexual experience, and is inherently subversive. Sally Macarthur, for example, contends that musical climaxes falling at the divine ratio are not representative of female sexual experience.<sup>4</sup> Ellie Hisama, who discusses climax within the framework of feminist double-voiced discourse, demonstrates how even a conventional musical climax can be

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this paper were submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for MUTC 8265. I am grateful to Dr. Jeremy Orosz for his input and feedback.

<sup>2</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 372–373.

<sup>3</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002).

subversive.<sup>5</sup> I argue that perceived differences in Alma Mahler's composition of musical climax are not based in gender as much as they are a product of composing in a late-tonal style and of her commitment to expressing the poetic text. Here again, I see the interaction of centripetal and centrifugal forces in Mahler's *Lieder*.<sup>6</sup> Mahler's composition of musical climax existed within the constraints of a masculine tradition; nevertheless, her timing and use of climax was part of her personal vision for each song.

Discussions of climax in the work of male composers active in the Romantic era take a different tone, and frequently not one of empowerment and subversion. Recent analysis of Gustav Mahler's "overwhelming" symphonic climaxes and "releases of musical-expressive energy that overspill conventional boundaries" link these to mass appeal and seeking approval from lay audiences.<sup>7</sup> Richard Strauss is responsible for the "monstrosity of Salome's sexual and chromatic transgressions...[by which] extreme violence seems justified – even demanded – for the sake of social and tonal order."<sup>8</sup> Hugh Macdonald notes a "volcanic temper" with a climax that "seeks and finds its own violent resolution in Franz Schubert's instrumental music."<sup>9</sup> Verismo opera composers create "violent vocal outbursts, heavy orchestration, big unison climaxes, and agitated

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<sup>5</sup> Ellie Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 425: "These are respectively the centralizing and decentralizing (or decentering) forces in any language or culture. The rulers and the high poetic genres of any era exercise a centripetal—a homogenizing and hierarchicizing—influence; the centrifugal (decrowning, dispersing) forces of the clown, mimic and rogue create a lternative 'degraded' genres down below."

<sup>7</sup> Peter Franklin, "Mahler's Overwhelming Climaxes: The Symphony as Mass Medium," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 15, no. 3 (2018): 391–404.

<sup>8</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 100.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Macdonald, "Schubert's Volcanic Temper," *The Musical Times* 119, no. 1629 (1978): 949.

duets.”<sup>10</sup> Esteban Buch offers a largely positive—if also explicit—take on “Climax as Orgasm” in Claude Debussy’s “L’isle joyeuse,” to reconsider the sexual relationship of that composer to Emma Bardac.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars often characterize late-tonal musical climaxes as excessive and aggressive, that is excessive in size, and not in frequency. Techniques for delaying climax may contribute to their aggressiveness when finally achieved. Even if climax is a cheap compositional trick executed to emotionally engage listeners and secure a wide base of appeal, it is nonetheless an important part of late nineteenth-century music composition and listener expectation. V. Kofi Agawu indicates that “the phenomenon of climax is central to our musical experience. In no other repertoire is this more evident than that of the nineteenth century.”<sup>12</sup> In her discussion of canon formation, Marcia Citron discusses the predictive and normative functions of musical genres.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Alma Mahler’s songs, for example, what would become of a romantic-era Lied with no climax? Citron argues that compositions that challenge genre norms may not be performed or studied as frequently and can accordingly be devalued. Subverting listener expectations and genre norms can have profound implications for the initial reception and ongoing performance of Western classical music. Though not specific to the genre, listener expectations and

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<sup>10</sup> Matteo Sansone, “Verismo,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 2nd edition, vol. 26 (London: Macmillan, 2001), 477–8.

<sup>11</sup> Esteban Buch, “Climax as Orgasm: On Debussy’s ‘L’isle Joyeuse,’” *Music and Letters* 100, no. 1 (2019): 24–60.

<sup>12</sup> V. Kofi Agawu, “Structural ‘Highpoints’ in Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*,” *Music Analysis* 3, no 2 (1984): 159. Agawu establishes the need formulate the experience of highpoints into an analytical model, which he does in this study—coupled with Schenkerian analysis—and in a subsequent monograph. Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 124–7.

genre norms exert a centripetal force on Lieder composers, compelling them to stay within the bounds.

In order to understand if musical climax is gendered in the work of Mahler, I will first identify where the climaxes fall in sixteen of her seventeen published songs and consider the musical climaxes in relation to textual climaxes. By measuring and analyzing these data, I can consider the assertion that she subverts tradition and expectation with “top-heavy” climaxes.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, by measuring climaxes in the contemporaneous work of her composition teacher Alexander Zemlinsky, I will consider whether the timing and number of climaxes in Lieder should be considered gender-specific or related to the extended chromaticism and formal diversity of late nineteenth century Lieder. Before this investigation, however, I will present and discuss the claim that Mahler’s climaxes are gendered and subversive.

### **Subversive and Gendered Climaxes**

Sally Macarthur compares Mahler’s and Zemlinsky’s settings of Richard Dehmel’s “Ansturm” and leverages this analysis to discuss gendered differences in sexual identity and voice, suggesting, “It is possible to view Schindler-Mahler’s music in terms of difference based on the particularities of her sex.”<sup>15</sup> She argues that Mahler departs from compositional norms and ideals by climaxing early, where Zemlinsky reinforces them by climaxing approximately two-thirds of the way through the song. Macarthur discusses the compositional impact and import of the divine ratio in music.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> By “top-heavy,” Macarthur refers to a climax that comes earlier than might be expected. In Macarthur’s analysis, early and late are relative to the divine ratio. Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> In musical analysis, the use of golden ratios is contentious, regardless of whether or not it is perceived as gendered, but I include it here because it is central to Macarthur’s argument.

She cites a variety of music scholars who assert that canonical works frequently climax at the proportion of 0.618 through the end of the work, but argues that these studies privilege and perpetuate classical music produced by men because of their alignment with a “stereotypical idea of male sexual desire and release.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to using the golden ratio as a framework for measuring climax, Macarthur makes a few other arguments to support her claim about the subversive nature of Mahler’s “Ansturm.” Macarthur suggests that Mahler appropriates and “radically transforms” Zemlinsky’s opening accompaniment figure but does not explain how. The opening accompaniments are drastically different, and any relationship is not obvious to me.<sup>18</sup> Macarthur’s argument about harmonic closure has far more potential, in my estimation, to relate compositional choices to subversiveness. By concluding the song on V7, Macarthur argues, Mahler resists compositional norms that Zemlinsky reinforces by closing on the tonic. Although ending a song inconclusively is not unique to Mahler or to women composers, it nonetheless constitutes what might be referred to as a weak, or “feminine ending” and provides an opportunity to discuss gendered closure in this setting.<sup>19</sup> Macarthur asserts: “By not ending on a tonic chord, she [Mahler] has violated

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<sup>17</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 70. I agree with Macarthur that studies employing golden section have largely perpetuated “great masterworks from the canon” (70). I do not understand, however, how appropriating this framework, which is largely received as controversial, elevates the music of Alma Mahler.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter 4 provides a more detailed comparison of the two pieces, including the opening accompaniment.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Schumann, for example, ended the first piece in *Dichterliebe*, “Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,” on a V7. Deborah Stein, “An Introduction to Musical Ambiguity,” *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). This unresolved longing and lack of closure may have contributed to characterizations of Robert Schumann as effeminate, for example, as by Otto Weininger (discussed in Chapter 1). Susan McClary most famously discusses “gendered aspects of traditional music theory,” including cadence and closure, in *Feminine Endings*, 9–12.

both the requirement of the poem to attain closure and the musical framework within which she has chosen to work.”<sup>20</sup> If this were an isolated occurrence, it would be more easily written off as an exception. However, and as Macarthur notes, concluding a song on an open, or irresolute harmony, was not necessarily uncommon in Mahler’s oeuvre.<sup>21</sup> Mahler avoided closure in multiple songs; this pattern of flouting genre conventions and user expectation may be interpreted as intentional and yield a more fruitful discussion of subversion.<sup>22</sup>

Macarthur explains that beyond departing from compositional norms by composing an early climax, Mahler is “representing passionate love from a female perspective.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, she suggests, Zemlinsky represents, or at least does not question, traditional and masculine representations of erotic love. Macarthur refers to Susan McClary’s analysis of Janika Vandervelde’s *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and Elizabeth Sayrs’s interpretation thereof, to discuss gendered representations of desire and release. “Representations of male desire and release are regularly discussed in terms of erection-penetration-climax-closure,” per Macarthur.<sup>24</sup> Those of women, Macarthur asserts by

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<sup>20</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Macarthur lists the titles of two other Mahler songs that close on V7 in footnote 43. I wish this argument, and not the focus on climax as measured by golden ratio, had been the focus of the chapter.

<sup>22</sup> I would want this argument reconciled, somehow, with Macarthur’s assertion that “the composer avoids establishing a key or key center for the song and uses nonfunctional harmony extensively, thus indicating a move in the direction of atonality.” Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 73. I wonder about the implications of Mahler’s extensive use of nonfunctional harmony for the expectation of harmonic closure.

<sup>23</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 70; Elizabeth Sayrs, “Deconstructing McClary: Narrative, Feminine Sexuality, and Feminism in Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings*,” *College Music Symposium* 33 (1993): 41–55.

quoting Renée Cox, are “multiple and indefinite, cyclic, without set beginnings and endings.”<sup>25</sup>

Macarthur uses beat-counting analysis to measure climax more accurately, she asserts, because counting measures does not account for tempo changes and beat-counting can.<sup>26</sup> She measured the climactic proportions of song settings, both of which she analyzed as ABA’ form, with Mahler’s at 3:1:1 and Zemlinsky’s at 5:1:10. Macarthur cites other examples of women’s “top-heavy” ratios, including Moya Henderson’s *Sacred Site for Grand Organ and Tape* (5:1:1:2) and Marcia Citron’s analysis of the first movement of Chaminade’s *Piano Sonata* (5:1:2). In her analysis of Mahler’s “Ansturm” she finds “Little foreplay ... premature ejaculation.”<sup>27</sup> Perhaps other readers will be more convinced that a lack of foreplay and “premature ejaculation” are subversive and redemptive. Upon listening to both settings with classmates in a seminar, we reached the consensus that settings by Zemlinsky and Mahler in fact had two musical climaxes, both falling on the same text. This disconnect between Macarthur’s argument and our hearing prompted me to investigate these claims further.

Macarthur is not the only author to investigate climax and suggest that a woman composer used climax to subvert the dominant and masculine climactic ideal. Hisama argued that Ruth Crawford Seeger subverted expectations for climax by building cyclical

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<sup>25</sup> Renée Cox, “Recovering Jouissance: An Introduction to Feminist Musical Aesthetics,” *Women and Music: A History* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1991): 331–40.

<sup>26</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 75. I agree that beat-counting can provide a more nuanced assessment than counting measures. This is especially poignant, perhaps, in the case of Mahler’s extended and much slower piano postlude to “Ansturm.”

<sup>27</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 75.



degrees of twist into the third movement of her 1931 String Quartet.<sup>28</sup> Despite the composer's presentation of a traditional climax, Hisama shows how it was undermined by a cyclical weaving effect created by voice-crossings and timbral displacements, which she measured and analyzed using "twist tool," and permutations. Hisama discusses the conflict of the traditional climax and subversive weaving in light of "double-voiced discourse," a term that originated in the work of Bakhtin.<sup>29</sup> Elaine Showalter, among the first to apply "double-voiced discourse," argues that women's work "always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant."<sup>30</sup> Hisama compellingly reconciles biographical and musical analysis to document how dominant and muted interact in this particular work of Ruth Crawford Seeger.

Related to "double-voiced discourse" is the stylistic synthesis in which members of marginalized groups appropriate mainstream elements and blend them with elements of "their own readily recognized idiom," but McClary argues that this strategy is not necessarily available to white, middle-class women because there is "no traditional woman's voice."<sup>31</sup> She discusses Janika Vandervelde's "Genesis II" to consider a successful musical alternative to goal-oriented narratives that build over time, increasing in urgency, until finally, in a "spasm of ejaculatory release," they recede, fulfilled and

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<sup>28</sup> Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism*.

<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 324: "It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings, and two expressions."

<sup>30</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 201.

<sup>31</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 114.

exhausted.<sup>32</sup> Vandervelde's work includes minimalistic patterns that are repeated cyclically, creating a mechanistic effect. The listener, according to McClary, has no expectation for change or traditional narrative development. This is because Vandervelde "is aware that many of her inherited musical gestures are phallic, for she consistently puts them into contexts that cause them to reveal themselves as such."<sup>33</sup>

### **Climax in Mahler's Lieder**

Identifying where climaxes fall in musical works is subjective and based on the interaction of various musical, textual, and performative factors. Climax can be identified from the perspective of the score, the performer, the listener, or, in the case of Lieder and other music setting a literary text, the text. I explored climax through each of these perspectives so that I did not value one perspective to the exclusion of others. Austin T. Patty discusses listener experience of climax highlighting how "elements of harmony, melody, rhythm, and various musical parameters such as dynamic level and melodic register interact with one another and the expressive implications of those interactions."<sup>34</sup> All of these characteristics do indeed play a role in the musical climaxes of Mahler's Lieder.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 112.

<sup>33</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 124. One wonders, though, if male minimalist composers such as Steve Reich and Phillip Glass are also contending with (the sexism of) these inherited gestures when they compose stylistically similar music.

<sup>34</sup> Austin T. Patty, "Pacing Scenarios: How Harmonic Rhythm and Melodic Pacing Influence our Experience of Musical Climax," *Music Theory Spectrum* 31, no. 2 (2009): 325–367, at 366.

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the divine ratio is more helpful for understanding climax in the sonata form, where the return to tonic is expected around two-thirds of the way through the movement. In the case of turn-of-the-century lieder, however, climax is too dependent on the interaction of a variety of musical, textual, and performative elements to be tied down to timing.

For the study at hand, and in order to measure the timing of the climax in Lieder composed around the turn of the century, I studied and performed the scores of the relevant Mahler and Zemlinsky Lieder and listened to a variety of recordings. I found that climaxes most often had the following characteristics: an ascending vocal line, often climaxing on the highest pitch; an increasing dynamic intensity, frequently climaxing in the loudest section; an increasing textural density in the piano accompaniment; increasing movement—not necessarily faster, but also not harmonically stagnant; and harmonic resolution, from tension to release, or, occasionally, an increasing harmonic tension. The role of harmony in climax is complex; Ji Yeon Lee evokes Kofi Agawu to argue that:

Where dynamics and pitch are straightforward as highpoint parameters, harmony is treated with great flexibility; rather than entailing a fixed harmonic quality, the primary harmonic mechanism for a given highpoint is whether it achieves the highest harmonic tension or releases it. On the one hand, maximum dissonance produces great tension at the moment of its occurrence due to its functional instability, corresponding to what Agawu classifies as “a point of extreme tension” (2008, 61). On the other hand, a decisive harmonic resolution can produce a highpoint through its cathartic effect, which is then carried over into abatement as the aftermath of that release. This type of highpoint falls into Agawu’s “site of a decisive release of tension.”<sup>36</sup>

Example 5.1 provides an excerpt from Mahler’s song “Laue Sommernacht.” In this piece, for example, I identified the climax as falling in measure 19 of 22 total measures. The first beat of the vocal line in measure 19 is an F#5, which is the highest note in the vocal line (in the entire piece). The ascending vocal figure in measure 17 (E4, A4, D5) had occurred twice before in the piece, but had resolved down and led to a

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<sup>36</sup> Ji Yeon Lee, “Climax Building in Verismo Opera: Archetype and Variants,” *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2 (2020): [2.7], DOI: 10.30535/mto.26.2.8; Agawu, *Music as Discourse*.

measure of rest in the vocal line.<sup>37</sup> In this case, the E, A, D figure resolves down, but the vocal line does not rest and climbs instead to a sustained E. The dynamics are marked *piano* at the beginning of the phrase (measure 15). In measure 18, the accompaniment is marked with *forte* dynamics, which combined with the expansive range of the accompaniment and the rolled chords, makes for a dramatic build up to the downbeat of measure 19. Measures 15 and 16 feature a relatively sparse piano accompaniment, with four notes sounding for every chord in 15 and five notes for every chord in 16. In measures 17 and 18, the presence of thicker harmonies—with six or seven notes sounding in every chord in 17 and seven or eight notes sounding in 18—as well as relatively more quickly moving rhythms increase the textural density of the piano accompaniment. The range of notes in the accompaniment also expands considerably from measure 15 and 18, with A2 to C4 on the downbeat of 15 and E1 to D6 in measure 18. This increasing movement shows unprecedented direction and need of resolution, even though harmonic resolution does not arrive until after the climax. Measures 18 and 19 also represent the textual highlight of the song; after searching in the dark night, love's light fell. A falling gesture, from F#5 to G#4, on the text "fiel" is supported by an accompaniment that also pulls back after the climax.

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<sup>37</sup> The vocal range is indicated using the Scientific Pitch Notation system in which C4 refers to middle-C on the keyboard.

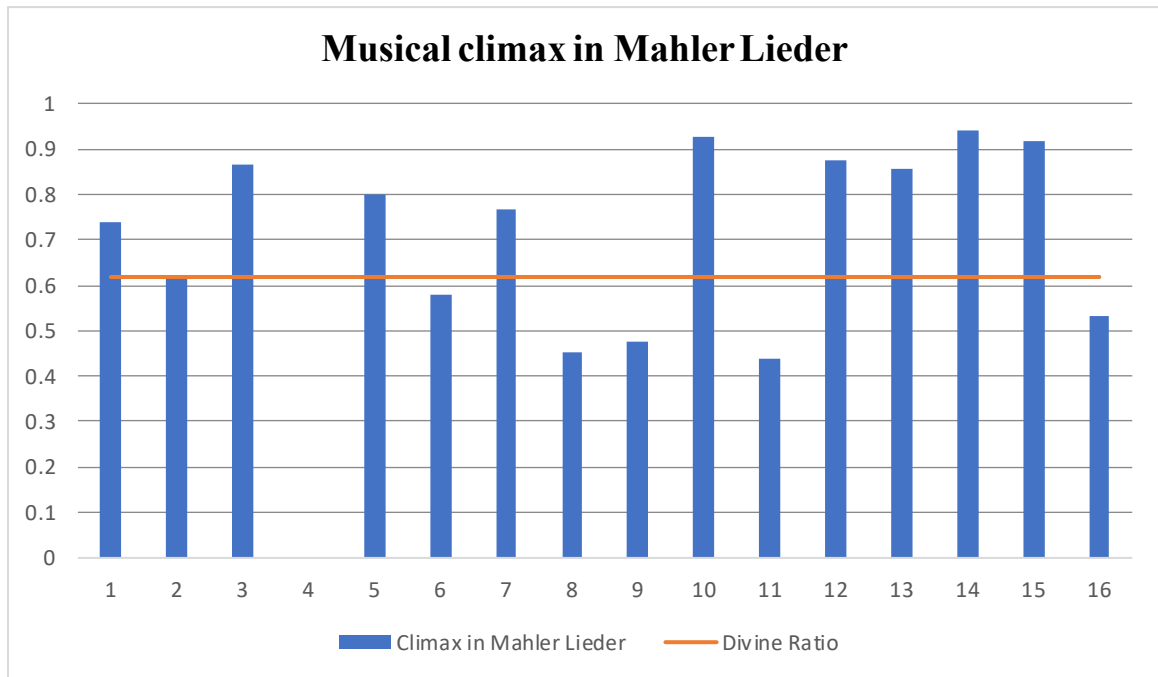
The image shows a musical score for Mahler's song "Laue Sommernacht" (measures 14-22). The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "War nicht un-ser gan-zes Le-ben nur ein Tap-pen, nur ein Sa-chen, da in dei-ne Fin-ster-nis-se, Lie-be, fiel dein Licht, fiel dein Licht! wieder wie zu Anfang". The score includes various performance markings such as "a tempo (poco string)", "rit.", "p", "molto rit.", "pp", and "f".

**Example 5.1.** Mahler's song "Laue Sommernacht," measures 14-22, *Sämtliche Lieder: für Singstimme und Klavier* (Vienna: Universal Editions, [1984]).

Table 5.1 lists the number of measures for each song, and measure at which the climax occurs, followed by the calculation of the proportion to the end of the song in parenthesis.

**Table 5.1. Musical climax in Mahler Lieder**

Title	Total mm.	Climax m.	Proportion
1. Die stille Stadt	38	28	.737
2. In meines Vaters Garten	135	83	.615
3. Laue Sommernacht	22	19	.864
4. Bei dir ist es traut	41	n/a	n/a
5. Ich wandle unter Blumen	15	12	.8
6. Licht in der Nacht	45	26	.578
7. Waldseligkeit	34	26	.765
8. Ansturm	31	14, lesser at 21	.452, .677
9. Erntelied	78	37 & 64	.474 & .821
10. Hymne	97	90	.928
11. Ekstase	64	28 & 7	.438 & .109
12. Der Erkennende	64	56	.875
13. Lobgesang	49	42	.857
14. Hymne an die Nacht	52	49	.942
15. Leise weht ein erstes Blühn	71	65	.916
16. Kennst du meine Nächte?	107	57, lesser at 72 & 88	.533, .667/.822



**Figure 5.1. Musical Climax in Mahler Lieder**

Figure 5.1 shows that the majority of these Lieder have a climax that falls after the divine ratio of 0.618 through the piece. One of the sixteen pieces has no identifiable

climax, six have a climax that falls before 0.618, and nine have a climax that falls after. The assertion that “top-heavy” climaxes are common in the music of women composers is, accordingly, not applicable to the songs of Alma Mahler. Although her Lieder can feature both early and late climaxes, they have more late climaxes. Additionally, calculating the distance between the ideal, or divine ratio, and the averaged early (.515) and late climaxes (.854) reveals a greater distance from the divine ratio to the late climax. That is, the early climaxes are, overall, closer to the divine ratio than the late climaxes. Although this sample is too small to be generalizable, the findings call into question the validity of the divine ratio as a genre norm for Lieder.

### **Textual Climaxes**

In Mahler’s published Lieder, the musical climaxes overwhelmingly align with the textual climaxes. When a text lacks a climax, or is more understated, Mahler’s music follows suit. “Bei dir ist es traut” is the only song with no clear musical climax; the text by Rainer Maria Rilke evokes a quiet and potentially post-coital peace with no need for (further) arousal. Texts with relatively subdued textual climaxes are supported by appropriately subtle musical climaxes. For example, Richard Dehmel’s “Die stille Stadt” climaxes on the phrase “Aus dem Rauch und Nebel begann ein Lobgesang,” (out of the smoke and clouds begins a song of praise). This climax has more to do with clarity than exuberance, following up on the textual cue of a light shining in the phrase preceding the climax (“Da ging ein Lichtlein auf im Grund”; there shone out a little light).

Another Rilke text, “Leise weht ein erstes Blühn,” climaxes on the text “wird dein junges Muttermühn,” (will [be] your young mother’s labor). The opening and closing stanzas have very similar texts and music. The textual climax is based on the intensified

emotion of a first-time mother imagining her child and the musical climax, though understated through diminishing dynamics, is effective because it mimics so closely the sounding of the initial statement. This song provides an example of where the performance and text overruled the score in my measurement of climax. In every recording and in my own performance of the song, the phrase “wird dein junges Muttermühn,” was performed as the climax. Mahler’s score is somewhat ambiguous; she minimizes the effect of the climax by approaching the phrase with a decrescendo but contributes to it with a ritardando that encourages performers to stretch and highlight the highest note in the vocal line.

Several texts have an exultant or otherwise emphatic climax that Mahler sets with appropriately sweeping musical climaxes. Table 5.2 provides the poet, set German text, and translated English text from songs with single and textually emphatic climaxes.



**Table 5.2. Emphatic textual climaxes in Mahler Lieder**

Poet	Song title	German text	English trans.	Note
<u>Bierbaum</u>	<u>Licht in der Nacht</u>	<u>Jesu Christ, des</u>	<u>Jesus Christ, the</u>	
		<u>Herrn,</u>	<u>Lord</u>	
<u>Bierbaum</u>	<u>Gefunden</u>	<u>Liebe, fiel dein</u>	<u>Love, your light</u>	<u>attributed to</u>
		<u>Licht,</u>	<u>fell</u>	
				<u>and published</u>
				<u>as “Laue</u>
				<u>Sommernacht”</u>
<u>Dehmel</u>	<u>Lobgesang</u>	<u>Ist die Liebe</u>	<u>Is love</u>	
<u>Dehmel</u>	<u>Waldseligkeit</u>	<u>ganz nur dein!</u>	<u>yours alone</u>	
<u>Heine</u>	<u>Ich wandle unter</u>	<u>fall ich dir sonst</u>	<u>I fall to your feet</u>	
	<u>Blumen</u>	<u>zu Füßen</u>		
<u>Hartleben</u>	<u>In meines Vaters</u>	<u>Küsst mir als</u>	<u>Kissed me as</u>	
	<u>Garten</u>	<u>Sieger</u>	<u>victor</u>	
<u>Novalis</u>	<u>Hymne</u>	<u>Von Ewigkeit zu</u>	<u>from eternity to</u>	
		<u>Ewigkeit</u>	<u>eternity</u>	
<u>Novalis</u>	<u>Hymne an die Nacht</u>	<u>In heiliger,</u>	<u>In holy, holy</u>	
		<u>heiliger Glut</u>	<u>glow</u>	
<u>Werfel</u>	<u>Der Erkennende</u>	<u>nie und nichts</u>	<u>nothing will ever</u>	
		<u>wird mein,</u>	<u>be mine</u>	
<u>Leo</u>	<u>Kennst du meine</u>	<u>Sommerklar</u>	<u>shines clear as</u>	<u>Mahler</u>
<u>Greiner</u>	<u>Nächte?</u>	<u>leuchten</u>	<u>summer</u>	
				<u>text from</u>
				<u>Greiner</u>

Musical settings featuring multiple climaxes have texts with multiple high points. For example, in Gustav Falke’s “Erntelied,” day banishes the night and “Ruft er mich an seine Brust empor!” (calls me up to its bosom). The second climax falls on the call to let one’s deeds praise the day: “Auf Dein Wirken praise ihn!” In Dehmel’s “Ansturm,” the piece analyzed by Macarthur, the first and strongest climax is set as the protagonist proclaims that the desire, if it is not to consume the pair, must come out into the light: “[Muß es heraus] ans Licht!” The weaker musical climax in Mahler’s setting deals with what some might consider the more explicitly orgasmic text: “und wenn herauf der

Aufruhr bricht, jäh über deinen Frieden strandet, dann bebst du” (and when the wave breaks and abruptly strands itself on your peace, then you tremble).

Bierbaum’s “Ekstase” differs from most of the texts Mahler set in its religious fervor. Mahler appropriately sets the first two stanzas, which end on the text “wie ein Choral,” like a hymn. The two musical climaxes I identified take place at the end of the first lines of the first and second stanzas on the text “[Gott, deine Himmel] sind mir aufgetan” (God, your heavens are open to me) and “[Du bist die Sonne,] Gott, ich bin bei dir” ([You are the sun,] God I am with you), respectively. The final stanza marks a departure in both the text and musical setting, in which the “wanderer” protagonist vanishes into the light and the half/whole-note chordal accompaniment is replaced with arpeggiated figures and repeated eighth-note chords.

### **Zemlinsky Lieder**

Alexander Zemlinsky (1871–1942) was an Austrian composer, conductor, and, importantly for the study at hand, a composition teacher. Alma Mahler studied composition with Zemlinsky around 1900–1901 and for the sake of comparison, I identified Zemlinsky songs composed around the time as Mahler’s. His earliest extant Lieder were composed in 1889, but the songs under consideration were published between 1898 and 1901.<sup>38</sup> The first five songs under consideration were published as 5 *Gesänge*, opus 7 in 1901,<sup>39</sup> the next four songs were published as opus 8 in 1901, and the

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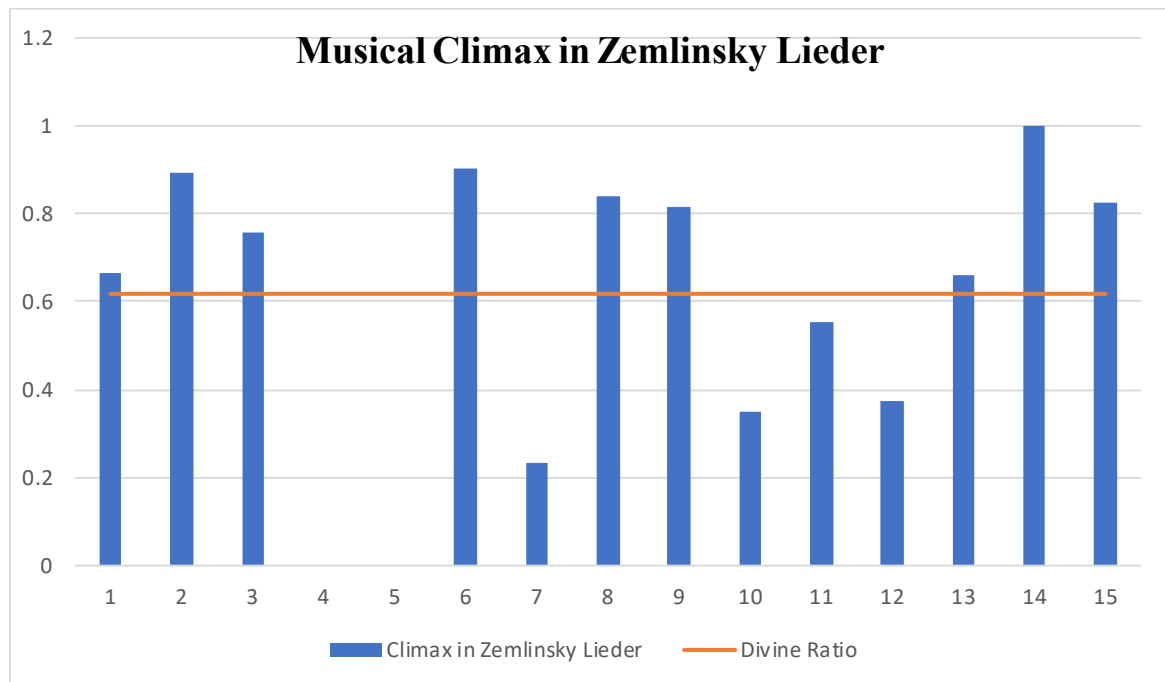
<sup>38</sup> Antony Beaumont, “Zemlinsky [Zemlinszky], Alexander,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000030919>.

<sup>39</sup> Zemlinsky dedicated these songs to Mahler, and she claims that “Irmelin Rose” was “her song”: Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, 381.

final six songs were published as opus 10 around 1901. Table 5.3 lists the timings of the climaxes in Zemlinsky's songs.

**Table 5.3 Musical climaxes in Zemlinsky Lieder**

Title	Total mm.	Climax m.	Proportion
1. Da waren zwei Kinder	21	14	.667
2. Entbietung	38	34	.895
3. Meeraugen	41	31, lesser at 14	.756, .342
4. Irmelin Rose	n/a	No clear climax	
5. Sonntag	n/a	No clear climax	
6. Turmwächterlied	92	83	.902
7. Und hat der Tag all sein Qual	47	11	.234
8. Mit Trommeln und Pfeifen	44	37	.841
9. Tod in Aehren	59	48	.814
10. Ehetanzlied	91	32	.352
11. Selige Stunde	38	21	.553
12. Vöglein Schwermut	43	16	.372
13. Meine Braut führ' ich heim	44	29	.659
14. Klopfet, so wird euch aufgetan	27	27	1.0
15. Kirchweih	131	108	.824



**Figure 5.2. Musical Climax in Zemlinsky Lieder**

Figure 5.2 shows that more of the Zemlinsky Lieder have a climax that falls after the divine ratio of 0.618 than before it. Two of the fifteen pieces have no identifiable climax, four have a climax that falls before 0.618, and nine have a climax that falls after. As in Mahler's Lieder, a few of Zemlinsky's Lieder feature early climaxes, but more songs feature late climaxes. Calculating the distance between the ideal, or divine ratio, and the averaged early and late climaxes in the Zemlinsky's Lieder, however, reveals a greater distance from the divine ratio to the early climax. That is, his early climaxes are further from the divine ratio than his late climaxes and he more prominently subverts expectation with "top-heavy" climaxes than Mahler. For comparison's sake, his early climaxes averaged .378 and Mahler's .515; his late climaxes averaged .818 and Mahler's .854. In the Lieder compared herein, Mahler's Lieder are relatively bottom-heavy.

### **Later Tonal Practice, Formal Diversity, and Feminism**

Mahler's musical settings of climax are varied. Just as they do not necessarily fall at the divine ratio, they also do not follow narrow guidelines as to their frequency, duration, or harmonic resolution. By comparing where climaxes fall in multiple Mahler and Zemlinsky Lieder, I am poised to assert that climax, whether single, multiple, early, or late, is not necessarily subversive or gender-specific in fin-de-siècle Lieder. Instead, the diversity of approaches to climax may be better understood as related to the lack of predictable or prescribed musical structure and regular phrases in late tonal Lieder.

Early romantic Lieder are frequently more homogenous than those composed in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; formally, they were more likely to have a strophic, ternary, or other standardized form that facilitated repetition of musical material. Relatively stable and regular phrase length also contributed to the stability and

predictability of earlier Lieder. Harmonically, earlier Lieder were more likely to begin and end in the same, identifiable key, even if there were multiple modulations.<sup>40</sup> Later works grew less diatonic as composers added chromaticism, made use of multiple tonic areas, and modulated to distant keys, which destabilized the pull of a single tonic center. Piano accompaniments also grew more varied and virtuosic, occasionally outshining the vocalist. Such changes provided turn-of-the-century composers with enhanced opportunities for expression. Both Mahler and Zemlinsky incorporated elements of prior practice while also innovating harmonically, formally, and stylistically.

Poetic texts that were written in the late nineteenth century and popular among Viennese composers including Mahler and Zemlinsky were likewise more diverse in form and style. Macarthur asserts that “Alma Schindler-Mahler’s climaxes correspond with Dehmel’s, but Zemlinsky’s do not”—a statement for which I do not find support—and continues “It might be surmised, then, that Zemlinsky is seeking to satisfy his masculine side, that with masculine intuition he feels the music would become top-heavy if he were to place a major climax so early in the song.”<sup>41</sup> Macarthur’s acknowledgement that Richard Dehmel’s text does not align with the golden ratio provides additional reason to question its use in the analysis of turn-of-the-century Lieder.

It is worth noting that all of Mahler’s published Lieder feature texts written by men. Accordingly, one might argue that in this respect, a gendered, and perhaps even

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<sup>40</sup> The songs of Franz Schubert present an exception in their frequent irreconcilability to diatonic tonality. See Richard L. Cohn, “As Wonderful as Star Clusters: Instruments for Gazing at Tonality in Schubert,” *19th-century Music* 22, no. 3 (1999): 213–32.

<sup>41</sup> Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 76.

masculine, perspective is inherent in and foundational to these songs.<sup>42</sup> Mahler's composition teachers were exclusively men and she expressed contempt for women composers and their gendered limitations—Cécile Chaminade, for example.<sup>43</sup> Mahler read broadly, and her diaries indicate that she read and grappled with the ideas of male authors. Mahler was not a feminist, either by the standards of our time or her own, and to assert that her music actively or intentionally subverts masculine and tonal traditions overlooks the extent to which she wanted her music to fit gendered genre norms, not to mention her explicit contempt for female composers. That her musical climaxes do not align with the divine ratio does not suggest to me that Mahler was actively subverting it, but rather that she was more interested in expressing texts with appropriately sensitive and diverse musical settings. That Zemlinsky's climaxes also do not align with the divine ratio suggests, perhaps, that it is not a helpful analytical tool for Lieder of this period.

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Mahler's gift for melody and her commitment to inhabiting a text and drawing all inspiration from it have garnered her admirers and performers. Female musicologists and theorists have championed her works and provided interesting ways to reconsider how these align with formal and harmonic conventions. Feminist scholarship in the past few decades has contributed significantly to recent and mainstream considerations of Alma Mahler's compositional work. As a fan of Mahler's Lieder, I am grateful for the

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<sup>42</sup> Macarthur does discuss this as relates to "Ansturm," but I do not find the explanation that Dehmel "was in touch with his feminine side" very fulfilling. *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 77. Even if we grant that Dehmel was, what about the remaining male poets that Mahler set?

<sup>43</sup> Mahler points to Cécile Chaminade for evidence that women are incapable of creative work. After attending a performance of Chaminade's Piano Concerto, opus 40, Mahler wrote in her diary: "Sie [Chaminade] ist eine Schande des weiblichen Geschlechts . . . Nun weiss ich, ein Weib kann nichts erreichen, nie, nie, nie." (She is a disgrace to her sex . . . Now I know that a woman can never achieve something, never, never, never.) *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 195.

increased attention scholars have shown them. I also think, however, that it is important to scrutinize claims made about the composer's intent and to question analytical frameworks that are prescriptive or ascribe value only to compositions and composers who work within their narrowly defined systems.

The assertion that Mahler subverted climactic gender and genre norms based on the framework of the golden ratio was not borne out in this study. Where Macarthur contends that Mahler subverted masculine stereotypes, whether consciously or unconsciously, by disrupting climactic expectations based on the divine ratio, I find that early climaxes are not a regular feature of Mahler's Lieder. By comparing the timing of musical climaxes across Mahler and Zemlinsky's songs, I find no indication that either composer's musical climaxes consistently align with or deviate from the divine ratio. I also argue that the divine ratio is not a useful analytical framework for measuring climax in Lieder of this period, and not only because the increased diversity of music and poetic form render it less useful. The divine ratio has been used to ascribe genius to composers whose works are aligned with it and to deny genius to those whose works do not. This is dangerous because it asserts that western formal structures and functional tonality are the only valid systems of value in the study of music; there are a variety of ways to approach and appreciate music written after 1900. Prescriptive frameworks that deny women and other marginalized composers genius are not worth the limited insight they may provide into musical analysis.

In the settings I considered in this chapter, musical and textual climaxes are closely aligned. I assert that Mahler's composition of musical climax can be interpreted as a product of her deep understanding of and commitment to expressing the poetic text.

As previous chapters explain, she was frequently inspired by literary works and endeavored to compose music worthy of the text. Although the work of composition in which she was engaged was gendered male during her period of activity, there is no evidence that Mahler was interested in subverting gender norms through this work. She composed songs within an established and admittedly masculine tradition and hoped for them to flourish within that tradition. The centripetal forces of genre, canon, and tradition are evident in her Lieder, and centrifugal elements of that bring out Mahler's uniqueness may be better understood as personal, and not political.



## CHAPTER 6

### TAKE THEIR WORK FOR IT:

#### ESTABLISHING MAHLER'S LEGACY THROUGH PERFORMANCE

Having considered what Alma Mahler wrote, what others have written about her, and some general and specific characteristics of her Lieder, I now turn to the performance of Mahler's Lieder.<sup>1</sup> Although recent textual publications more readily recognize Mahler as a composer than did earlier books and scholarship, I argue that the performance of her songs is a more important indicator of whether or not musical composition is central to her legacy. More specifically, I argue that performing Mahler's Lieder forces musicians to go beyond passive consumption of her work and biography to engage actively with the substance of her creative work. Music scholars including Christopher Small have emphasized differences between the passive consumption and active making of—or even listening to—music.<sup>2</sup> This understanding has parallels outside of the discipline; Roland Barthes, for example, has argued that “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, performers of Mahler's songs, regardless of voice type or even instrument, actively co-

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<sup>1</sup> A growing literature has shifted aesthetic attention from the composition to performance, or the performing activity, and asserts that the act of performance creates meaning. See, for example, Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Aron Edidin, “Listening to Musical Performers,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 13, no. 1 (2015): [https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts\\_contempaesthetics/vol13/iss1/6/](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol13/iss1/6/); Suzanne G. Cusick, “Performance as Research” in *Music Research: New Directions for a New Century* (Amersham, England: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2004): 136–54.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, Richard Miller, Richard Howard, and Honoré de Balzac, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4. Barthes continues, 5: “The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genius, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages.”

produce her complex and multi-faceted songs. These performances have the power to disrupt the fetishized image of Mahler as *femme fatale* and establish her as a composer worthy of our attention.

Anecdotal evidence would suggest that musical performers and audiences increasingly embrace her songs; Mahler's Lieder frequently turn up on recital and festival programs and in diverse live events. In this chapter, I investigate metadata surrounding recorded performances of Alma Mahler's Lieder and leverage social-media-enabled features to consider the trajectory of these performances over the past several decades. My objective in this chapter is to shed light not only on the frequency of performances of Mahler's music, but also on how perceptions of Mahler's compositional work have evolved in the past several decades and how the performance of her songs has impacted her legacy.

The first section of this chapter will investigate formally published recordings of Alma Mahler's songs in the union catalog WorldCat.<sup>4</sup> Almost 18,000 libraries worldwide list their collection holdings in WorldCat; this makes the catalog a very useful source of metadata for formally-published content, such as compact discs (CDs), that are in circulation. The second section will consider recordings of Mahler's songs on YouTube, an online video sharing platform. YouTube videos may, but need not, be formally produced or published; anyone who can create digital videos and has the capacity to upload them can post to YouTube. Accordingly, many of the performances of Mahler songs on YouTube are not commercially available but were rather created to be shared freely. By collecting and analyzing metadata associated with recordings of Mahler's

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<sup>4</sup> OCLC, "WorldCat," <https://www.oclc.org/en/worldcat.html>: "WorldCat is the world's most comprehensive database of information about library collections." Accessed October 4, 2020.

music, I assert the primacy of performances of her Lieder over scholarly assessments of the value of her compositional work. Before collecting these data, however, it may be useful to explore digital humanities projects that have used similar approaches.

### **Data Scraping in the Humanities**

There is a growing precedent for leveraging digital humanities approaches in service of musicology. Nicholas Cook has argued that “broadly scientific methods can open up otherwise inaccessible areas of culture for analysis: in doing this, they do not substitute for, but rather add value to traditional humanities approaches.”<sup>5</sup> Cook has embraced empirical methods, coupled with traditional approaches, to assert the relationship between music analysis and performance.<sup>6</sup> Musicology has had an especially contentious relationship with empirical methods, which have occasionally been perceived as pseudo-science.<sup>7</sup>

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum acknowledges the tradition of skepticism among humanists towards quantitative or empirical methods, which includes computer-enhanced textual analysis. In his study of data mining techniques and their implications for the digital humanities, Kirschenbaum details their utility and promise.<sup>8</sup> Franco Moretti was among the first literary scholars to recognize the opportunities afforded by leveraging big

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Cook, “Between Art and Science: Music as Performance,” *Journal of the British Academy* 2 (2014): 23.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Clarke and Nicholas Cook, eds. *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Giles Hooper, *The Discourse of Musicology* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “The Remaking of Reading: Data Mining and the Digital Humanities,” presented at *The National Science Foundation Symposium on Next Generation of Data Mining and Cyber-Enabled Discovery for Innovation*, Baltimore, MD, 2007.

data. He developed a theory of “distant reading” that elucidates the networks and connections that literary scholars can draw through computational analysis of large literary corpora.<sup>9</sup> Stephen Rose, Sandra Tuppen, and Loukia Drosopoulou note that Moretti’s assertion of the objectivity or independence of interpretation of these methods was received with charges of positivism.<sup>10</sup>

Although doing so remains somewhat fraught, scholars increasingly make use of bibliographic data in service of musicology. Several studies indicate the viability of library-generated metadata for musicological study.<sup>11</sup> Heather Platt and Michelle Urberg independently wrote overviews of digital musicology projects; both highlighted relevant digital repositories, aggregators, and projects, some of which leverage bibliographic data.<sup>12</sup> Sandra Tuppen, Stephen Rose, and Loukia Drosopoulou discuss ideas for the analysis and visualization of bibliographical data for musical materials based on bibliographic information in their article, “A Big Data History of Music.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso Books, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Rose, Sandra Tuppen, and Loukia Drosopoulou, “Writing a Big Data History of Music,” *Early Music* 43, no. 4 (2015): 649–60.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Klaus Keil and Jennifer A. Ward, “Applications of RISM Data in Digital Libraries and Digital Musicology,” *International Journal on Digital Libraries* 20, no. 1 (2019): 3–12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00799-016-0205-3>; Laurence Dreyfus and Carolin Rindfleisch, “Using Digital Libraries in the Research of the Reception and Interpretation of Richard Wagner’s Leitmotifs,” in *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Digital Libraries for Musicology* (New York: ACM, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1145/2660168.2660181>.

<sup>12</sup> Heather Platt, “The Digital Humanities and Nineteenth-Century Music: An Introductory Overview,” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* (forthcoming): <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409820000014>; Michelle Urberg, “Pasts and Futures of Digital Humanities in Musicology: Moving Towards a ‘Bigger Tent,’” *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 20, no. 3–4 (2017): 134–50.

<sup>13</sup> Sandra Tuppen, Stephen Rose, and Loukia Drosopoulou, “Library Catalogue Records as a Research Resource: Introducing ‘A Big Data History of Music,’” *Fontes Artis Musicae* (2016): 67–88.

Several scholars have looked to musical recordings for their empirical studies. Stephen Cottrell, for example, has conducted numerous studies involving musical recordings. In one particular example, he presents case studies on pitch levels over time, cross-cultural pulse salience, and tempo changes.<sup>14</sup> The Digital Music Lab provides an infrastructure for scholars to investigate a diverse corpus of 250,000 music tracks.<sup>15</sup> Few musicologists have studied YouTube videos, and none that I can identify have automated the scraping of YouTube metadata to investigate a composer's reception history.

Data mining and social networking platforms—and not just the analytical techniques associated with both—are not unproblematic. Helen Kennedy and Giles Moss highlight the challenges of mining data on social networking sites, as will be done in this study, noting the undue influence of corporations.<sup>16</sup> Data mining is currently the most efficient way to collect data from online video-sharing platforms; despite the limitations of this approach, I assert the necessity of collecting data from both WorldCat and YouTube to draw more comprehensive conclusions surrounding the performance and reception of Alma Mahler's songs in the twenty-first century.

It may also be worth noting that I am a librarian and have experience creating, extracting, and comparing the metadata similar to that used to describe the recordings in WorldCat and YouTube. This familiarity provides me with the confidence to embark on

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Cottrell, "Big Music Data, Musicology, and the Study of Recorded Music: Three Case Studies," *Musical Quarterly* 101, nos. 2-3 (2018): 216–43.

<sup>15</sup> Samer Abdallah, Emmanouil Benetos, Nicolas Gold, Steven Hargreaves, Tillman Weyde, and Daniel Wolff, "The Digital Music Lab: A Big Data Infrastructure for Digital Musicology," *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 10, no. 1 (2017): 1–21.

<sup>16</sup> Helen Kennedy and Giles Moss, "Known or Knowing Publics? Social Media Data Mining and the Question of Public Agency," *Big Data & Society* 2, no. 2 (2015): DOI: 10.1177/2053951715611145.

such a project and ideas for how to approach the data; because digital humanities approaches are still so new, however, there are not necessarily established methodologies for interrogating these data. Nonetheless, I suggest that investigating data from both platforms will provide a more complete picture of how performers and listeners are engaging with Mahler as a composer and allow us to assess how her legacy has shifted in light of these performances.

### **Alma Mahler Recordings in WorldCat**

In order to understand perspectives on Mahler's compositional work and the performance thereof, I compiled a list of her Lieder recordings represented in the WorldCat online union catalog. To do so, I conducted an author search for "Mahler, Alma" in WorldCat's Online Catalog on December 14, 2020. "Mahler, Alma, 1879-1964" is the authorized format of the composer's name as listed in the Library of Congress Name Authority Record database.<sup>17</sup> I excluded the dates from the search in order to ensure that I would also discover those records that may not be fully cataloged or, for some reason, did not make use of the dates in the author's field. I also limited search results by format to sound recordings. I exported the resulting 252 records with unique OCLC numbers in .csv format and sorted the exported data in turn by "publisher," which includes also date and publisher location, "title," and "author" in order to identify duplicates and irrelevant content.

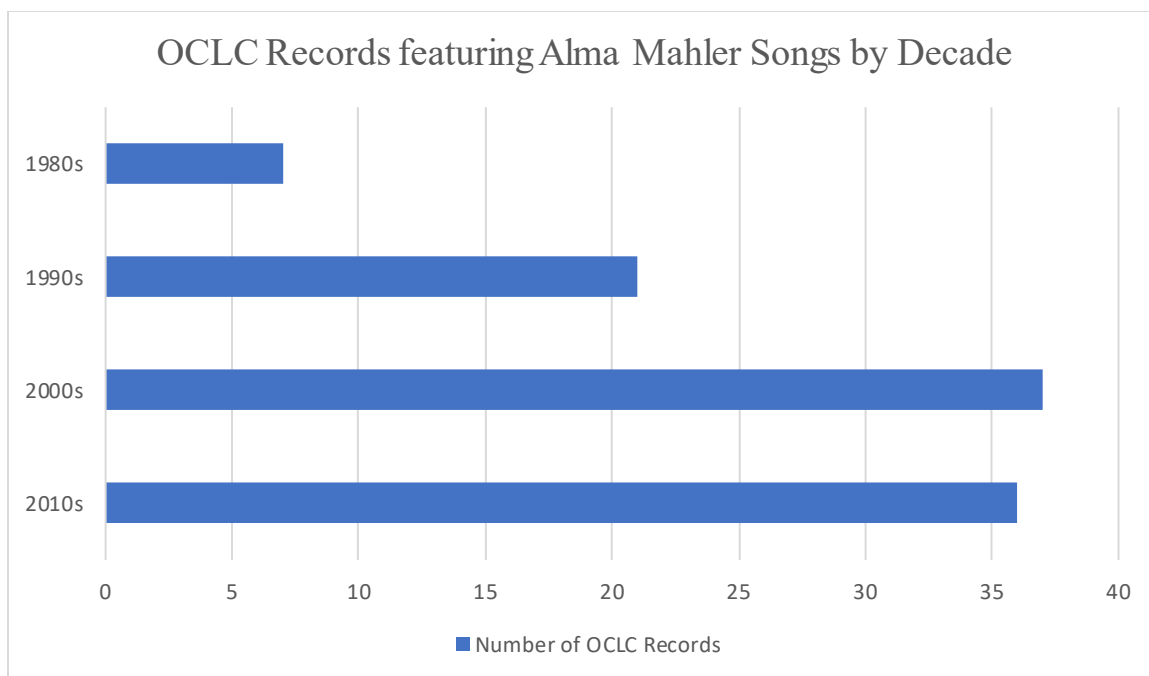
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<sup>17</sup> "Mahler, Alma, 1879-1946," Library of Congress Authorities, accessed 10 November 2020, <https://lcn.loc.gov/n50002491>.

Duplicates exist in WorldCat for a variety of reasons.<sup>18</sup> Individual records are created for different formats (such as LP versus CD) and for different languages of cataloging, for example. I excluded recordings that repackaged the same content in another format, as the music publisher and subscription-based streaming platform Naxos frequently does. In addition to duplicated content, I also had to examine the content to remove results that were not in fact Mahler's Lieder. For example, recordings by the Alma Mahler Sinfonietta ensemble filtered into the results because the ensemble was listed as an added author in the MARC bibliographic record and WorldCat's author search includes this data. Alma Mahler appears as author on recordings of composer Mohammed Fairouz, for example, because he set her texts in his songs. Additionally, Bibliothèque nationale de France individually cataloged many of her Lieder but did not provide any publication or access information; these records were excluded. After confirming suspected duplicates and removing those and any irrelevant results from the list, I identified 102 unique recordings that featured songs by Alma Mahler.

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<sup>18</sup> A more comprehensive account of record uniqueness and duplication in OCLC records can be found in OCLC documentation, "When to Input a New Record," accessed 10 November 2020, <https://www.oclc.org/bibformats/en/input.html>.



**Figure 6.1. OCLC records for recordings featuring Alma Mahler by decade**

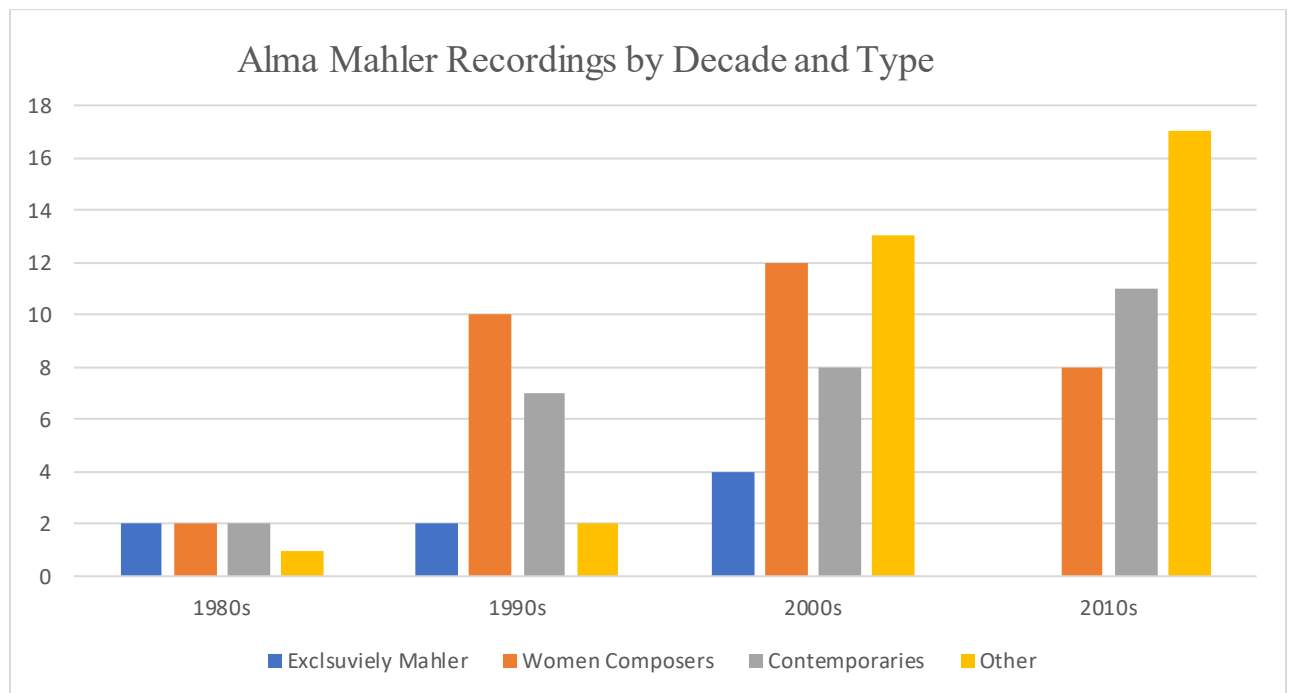
After identifying unique recordings, I organized the recordings chronologically and then thematically by content. The recordings under consideration were released between 1982 and 2019, with a mean of 2005 and mode of 2011. At face value, this shows an acceleration of Alma Mahler recordings from seven recordings in the 1980s, twenty-one in the 1990s, thirty-seven in the 2000s, and thirty-six in the 2010s, as shown in Figure 6.1.<sup>19</sup> I also took note of which recordings were explicitly described as having been presented as recitals within a conservatory or educational setting. Thirty-three recordings were presented as recitals in academic settings. The perceived increase of Alma Mahler recordings may be influenced by such unrelated factors as library cataloging policies for music department recital recordings; the WorldCat results included eleven recitals at academic settings in the 2000s and twenty-two in the 2010s. It

<sup>19</sup> Cataloging is frequently done months, or even years, after a library obtains a recording. Accordingly, it is expected that the number for the 2010s will increase, if slightly, in the coming years.



is possible that the Lieder of Alma Mahler were performed extensively in recitals at conservatories, college, and universities throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but that those recital recordings were never cataloged in OCLC.

As shown in Figure 6.2, all recordings fell into at least one of the following categories: 1) exclusively Alma Mahler Lieder, 2) Lieder from Mahler and her contemporaries, 3) anthologies featuring the works of female composers, and 4) mixed vocal repertoire. Eight recordings featured only the songs of Alma Mahler, twenty-nine focused on the music of Mahler and other contemporaries. Thirty-two recordings featured primary female composers, but a few of these included songs composed by men setting texts by women. The remaining programs did not focus exclusively on the work of Alma Mahler, her contemporaries, or female composers. The data by decade suggests that Mahler’s music is less frequently restricted to women-only recordings.

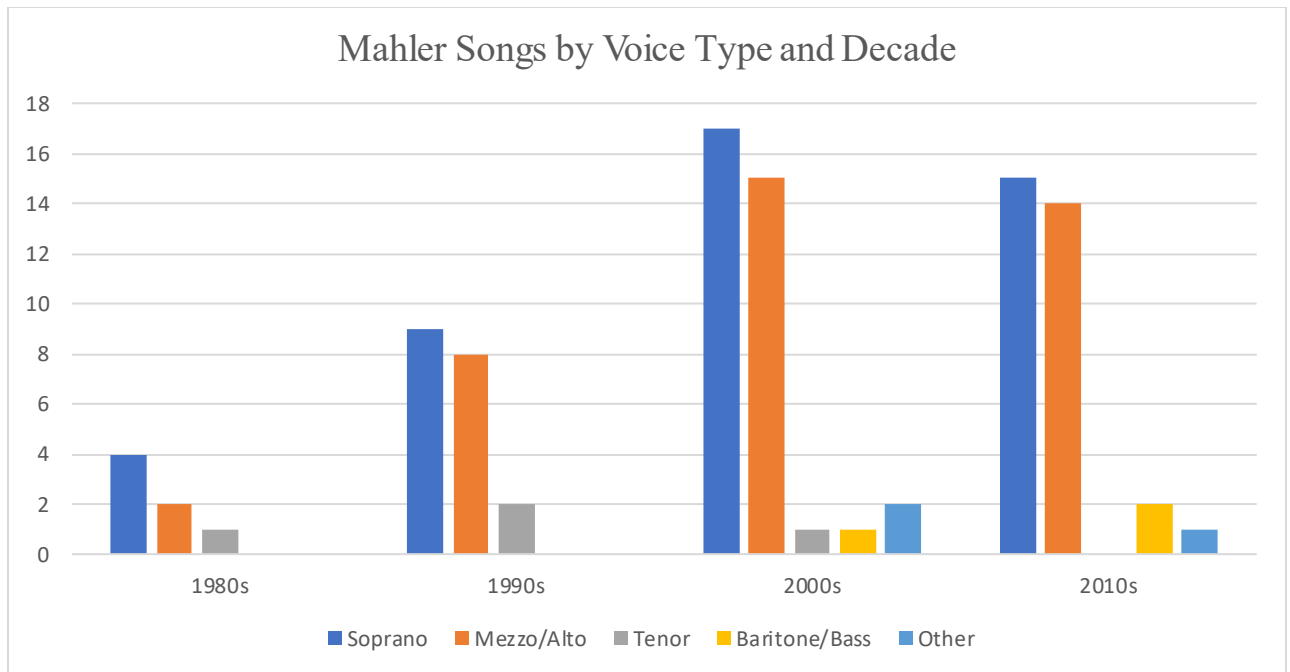


**Figure 6.2. Alma Mahler Recordings by decade and type**

The results in Figure 6.3 show that the majority of those performing these songs are women. The OCLC records indicate that men have orchestrated and arranged the songs (as for chorus in OCLC# 823380307), but tenors Christopher Norton-Welsh and Heinz Zednik, and baritone Thomas Hampson are among the few men to have performed solo vocal versions of Mahler's work in a commercially released recording available on WorldCat. This parallels the written scholarship, in which those who engage with Alma Mahler as a composer are frequently women. Another parallel to the literature is Mahler's inclusion in anthologies among other female composers. It is interesting to note that in the recordings, the proportion of woman-composer recordings seems to be declining: ten primarily female composer recordings were produced in the 1990s and twelve in the 2000s. Only eight of the 2010s results featured primarily female composers.<sup>20</sup> Again, this may instead be attributed to cataloging practices or other factors unrelated to my hypothesis.

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<sup>20</sup> One might hope that recordings devoted exclusively to female composers are rarer because they are less necessary in a slightly more enlightened world, or out of a feeling that singling women composers out will tend to exclude them further from the mainstream, but Sally Macarthur et al assert that a decline in the performance of women's music is related to a decline in the research and discussion surrounding the topic of women composers presses since the 1990s: Sally Macarthur, Dawn Bennett, Talisha Goh, Sophie Hennekam, and Cat Hope, "The Rise and Fall, and the Rise (Again) of Feminist Research in Music: 'What Goes Around Comes Around,'" *Musicology Australia* 39, no. 2 (2017): 73–95.



**Figure 6.3. Alma Mahler songs by voice type and decade**

The dates of recordings in WorldCat suggest that Mahler’s Lieder are being performed at an increasing rate. Additionally, her songs are less likely to be performed on specialized programs of women’s music than they were previously. Numerous recordings programmed Alma Mahler’s music along with that of Gustav Mahler, Alexander Zemlinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, and other contemporaries. Various recitals and concerts program her music alongside canonized Lieder by Johannes Brahms, Franz Schubert, and Hugo Wolf. Recordings of Mahler’s songs also seem to be growing more mainstream. There were initially few recordings of her works on major labels—Angelika Kirchschrager’s 1997 debut recital recording on Sony Classical (OCLC# 37722179) and the 2001 *Bride of the Wind* soundtrack on Deutsche Grammophon (OCLC #47361505) are obvious exceptions. More recently, well-known singers including Kate Lindsey and Barbara Hannigan have both recorded Mahler’s songs on labels that boast wide distribution.

I mentioned having excluded repackaged content, as frequently happens with Naxos records. Because Naxos is available to many prospective performers affiliated with college and universities, however, this redundant content can be much more conveniently accessed and may expand the audience for Alma Mahler's music.<sup>21</sup> Although WorldCat data provides useful insights into some of the performers and performances of Alma Mahler's music, it does not necessarily address the less formal, and user-generated and supplied content on YouTube. Collecting and then comparing these results will help refine our understanding of who, what where, when, and why Mahler's music is performed.

### **Alma Mahler Recordings on YouTube**

As I analyzed the Mahler recordings available in WorldCat, I realized that many performances were not included. Mahler's songs are frequently performed in festivals, recitals, and educational venues that do not necessarily entail a formally produced recording. Accordingly, I identified a need to collect and analyze data from a more casual source to which more performers have access: YouTube. The music available on YouTube, and other online streaming music or video platforms that host user-generated content, is frequently not represented within the bibliographic universe of WorldCat.

WorldCat is a library-led platform whose structured metadata and indexes allow for specialized searching. YouTube, however, is a commercial platform that is designed for ease of uploading and sharing, and not for robust searching. There is no author index

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<sup>21</sup> Corinne Forstot-Burke notes a precipitous decline in circulations of physical media at the University of Kansas. Use of the streaming music database Naxos has also declined, per this study, but it is nonetheless relatively frequently accessed by various user groups. Corinne Forstot-Burke, "Turn Down for What: A Study of Physical and Streamed Media Usage at the University of Kansas Libraries," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (2019): 189–208, DOI: 10.1080/10588167.2019.1570439.

in YouTube, and it is accordingly challenging to separate content about Alma Mahler from performances of her music. Because YouTube currently contains many hundreds of recordings of Alma Mahler songs, collecting the relevant metadata to the project at hand required automated assistance. I employed DataMiner, an application “that helps you transform HTML data in your browser window into clean table format.”<sup>22</sup> More descriptively, DataMiner is a screen scraping plugin for the Chrome web browser that harvests webpage content, metadata, and other technical information from webpages using automated processes. DataMiner can be programmed to identify and capture desired data points and to crawl specified webpages, both of which facilitated the automated capturing of data about recordings of Mahler Lieder uploaded to YouTube.<sup>23</sup>

Before I could program Data Miner by creating what the platform calls “recipes,” I had to investigate how YouTube’s relevancy ranking worked with Mahler’s songs. It became clear that if I wanted to identify performances of her songs, I would have most luck including song titles in my YouTube search query. I achieved the most relevant results when I searched Alma Mahler and the song title, both in quotation marks.<sup>24</sup> Refining my search queries helped with the relevance of search results, however, it also led to the omission of several valid performances of her work. Because all metadata is user-generated, I encountered several typographical errors in the title and description

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<sup>22</sup> Data Miner, “How it Works,” Accessed October 3, 2020. <https://data-miner.io/how-it-works>.

<sup>23</sup> To use Data Miner, the plugin must be installed in the Chrome web browser. After installation, an account is required to create recipes and begin scraping data and crawling websites. The free account was sufficient for my needs, but users can also purchase an account with enhanced features or pay for recipes to be created and the work done for them.

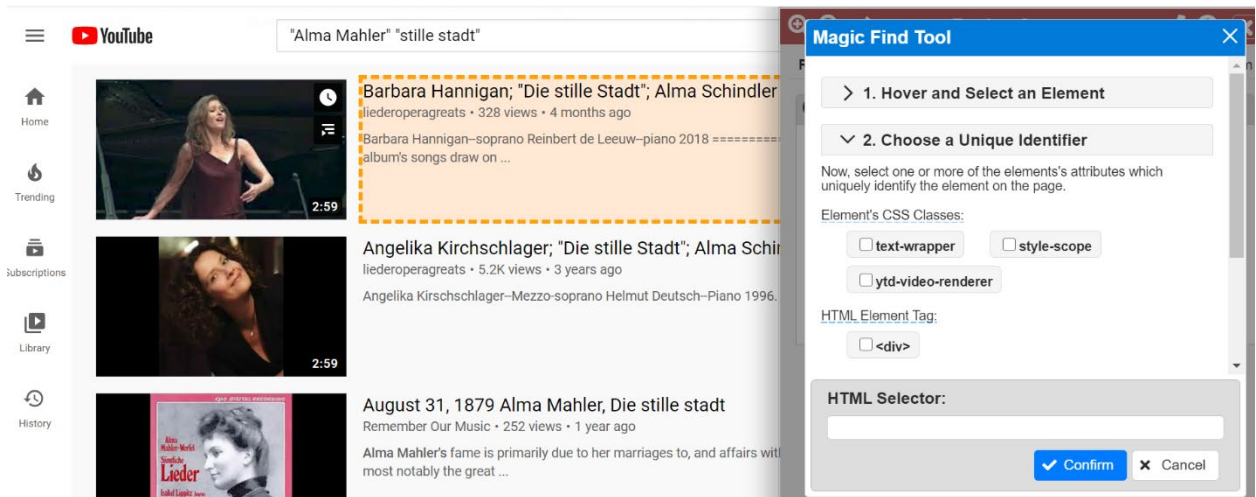
<sup>24</sup> A resulting URL looked like this:  
[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=%22alma+mahler%22+%22laue+sommernacht%22](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%22alma+mahler%22+%22laue+sommernacht%22).

information as I explored results for a variety of searches. I found recordings of “Laue Sommernacht” labeled as “Blave Sommernacht,” for example, and I also found recordings featuring groups of songs that did not feature individual song titles in the scraped text. I had to rethink my approach of searching based on song titles—even though those results were most relevant—and eventually decided to separately search Alma Mahler and Alma Schindler. Because YouTube is a commercial platform, promoted results for other classical music videos were frequently included in groups as recommendations within the results for the searched content. These results were impossible to exclude entirely from the results and were accordingly stripped from the data once exported.

Data Miner recipes specify which elements from the webpage will be scraped and exported. Figure 6.4 shows a page of YouTube results for Mahler’s song “Die stille Stadt” and the first part of the recipe process in which the area of the results to be included is specified. After that is established, the particular data points of interest, called columns are configured. In this case, I wanted to collect URL, title, channel, number of views, date posted, and description.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> I did not program any navigation between results list pages and their detailed entries, or enable any javascript scripts, but those are supported in the recipe creation process.

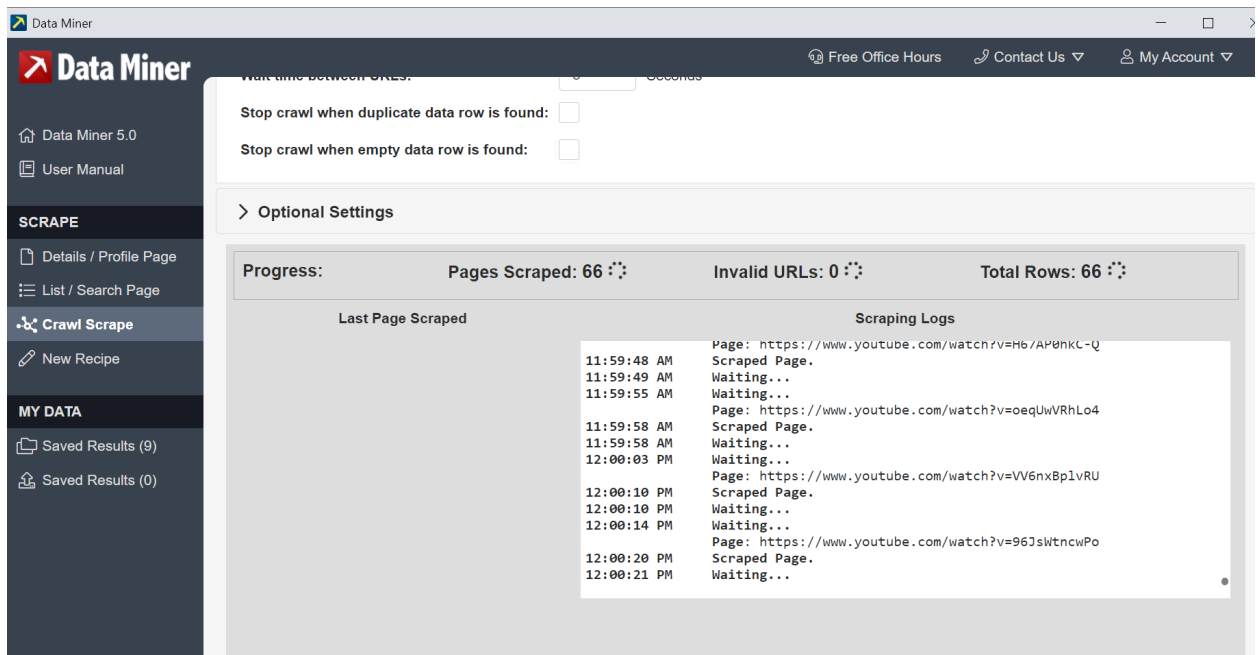


**Figure 6.4. YouTube results list with Data Miner Recipe Creator**

After scraping data from all “Alma Mahler” results on January 9, 2021, I exported the URL, title, channel, number of views, date posted, and description into an Excel spreadsheet. I deduped the data based on URL, because the title, channel, and other data points were not necessarily unique. At this point, I reviewed the results individually to ensure that all were relevant. Of the approximately 847 unique YouTube videos, only 335 were performances of Alma Mahler’s songs, and not discussions of her life, performances of songs with similar titles not by Mahler, or performances of promoted music or films. With a unique list of URLs, I began the second part of the data scraping process.

I used Data Miner’s web crawling feature to indicate which webpages I wanted and what data I wanted collected from them. I copied the list of valid YouTube URLs into the application, created a second recipe that would collect the likes, dislikes, date, views, and user comments, and let the program run in the background. Figure 6.5 shows Data Miner’s Crawl Scrape, which combines web crawling and data scraping functions, in action as the specified recipe is run against the list of webpages. I matched the data

from the crawl against the initial data using the URL as a matching point and did additional work to clean up the data, including removing extraneous data adding during the export process, selecting deduping characters in specified columns, replacing characters encoded in non-UTF-8 with the proper characters, for example, FÃ¼nf lieder to Fünf lieder.



**Figure 6.5. Data Miner’s “Crawl Scrape”**

With this relatively polished data in hand, I could begin to consider commonalities and differences among these recorded performances and compare them to the data collected from WorldCat. It is important to acknowledge that some of the content on YouTube replicated formally-published content available in WorldCat. Many of the performances on YouTube, however, were not commercial recordings. The diversity of voices, perspectives, and individuals included on YouTube is not commonly found in



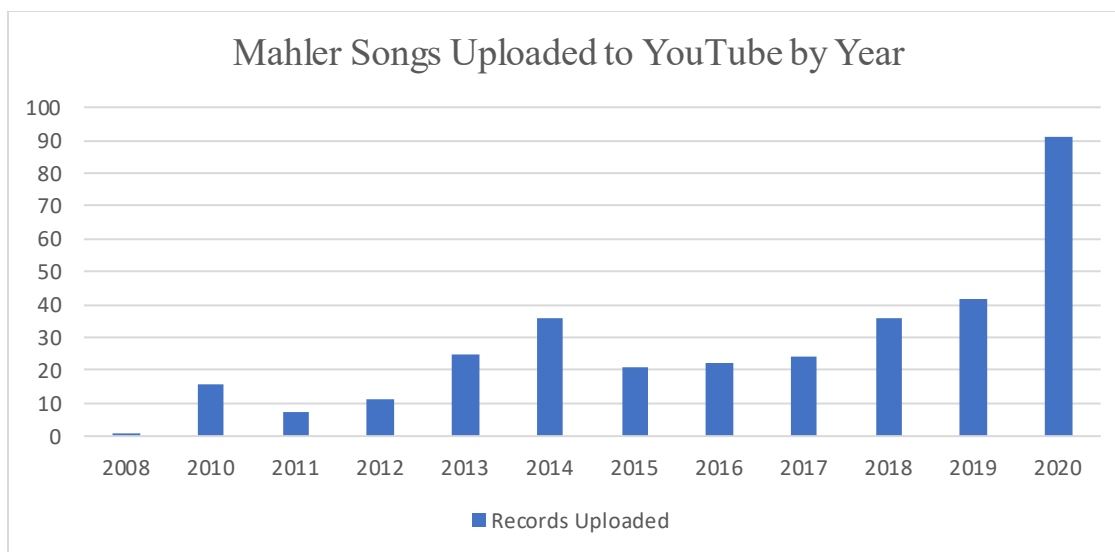
WorldCat.<sup>26</sup> Several performances were recorded in what appeared to be individual's homes, churches, or practice rooms, and not in recording studios or concert halls. The number and variety of recordings of Alma Mahler songs in YouTube provides evidence of the popularity of this repertoire among performers.

### When

The first Alma Mahler song was uploaded to YouTube on November 27, 2008, around three years after the founding of the video-sharing platform. Uploading has increased since 2008, but not necessarily consistently so. Figure 6.6 below shows the number of videos featuring Mahler songs uploaded to YouTube by year.

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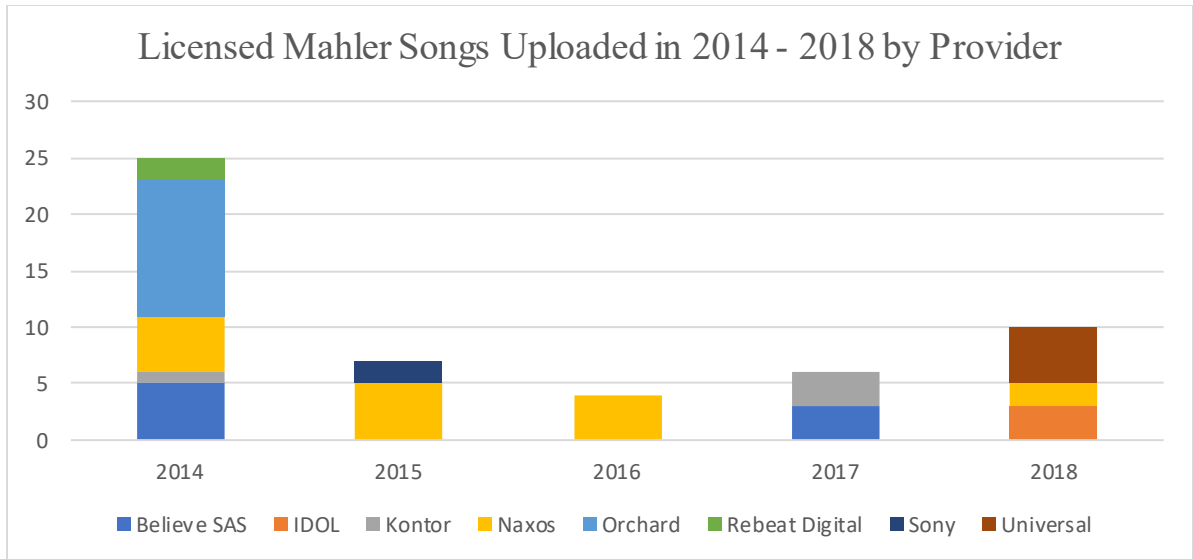
<sup>26</sup> Recent studies investigate the systemic racial inequality within classical music institutions. See, for example, Loren Kajikawa, "The Possessive Investment in Classical Music: Confronting Legacies of White Supremacy in US Schools and Departments of Music," in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines* ed. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019): 155–74. The lack of diversity in classical vocal records may be rooted in systemic inequalities within classical musical training institutions. Numerous studies have also shown how classical music is associated with whiteness and investigated the problems this has and continues to pose to classical musicians of color and audiences. See, for example, Kira Thurman, "Performing Lieder, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (2019): 825–65; Mari Yoshihara, *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).



**Figure 6.6 Alma Mahler songs uploaded to YouTube by year**

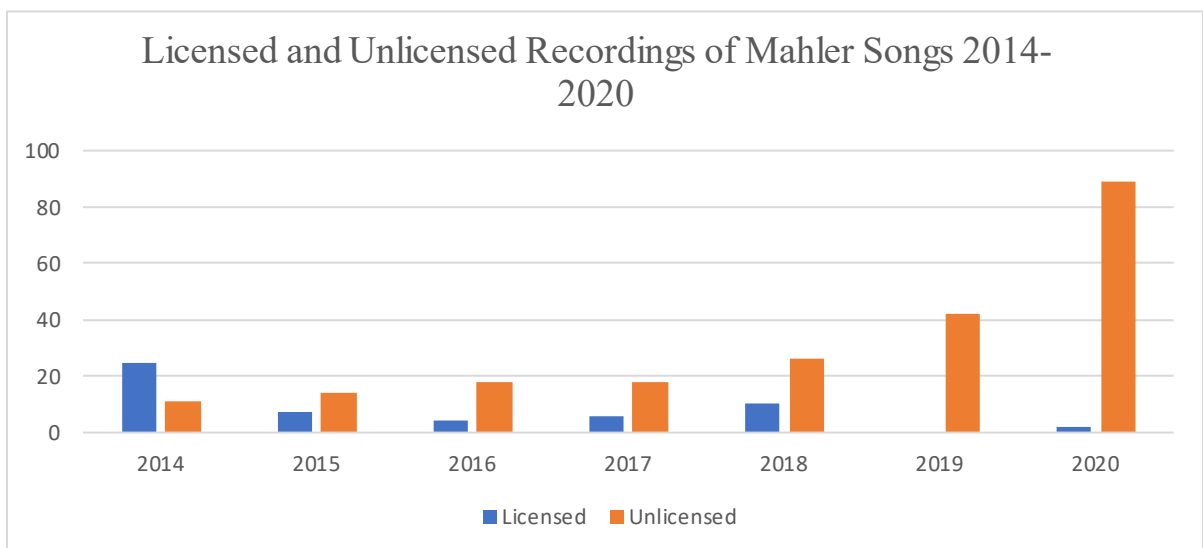
The spike in 2014 has at least one explanation. Beginning in 2014, YouTube began to tag copyrighted music and notify the rights holder.<sup>27</sup> The rights holder could choose between keeping the music on the site and monetizing it via advertisements or removing and blocking the content from the site. Accordingly, beginning in 2014, videos featuring Alma Mahler songs that were copyrighted included a statement in the description that the content was “provided to YouTube” by a given company. Licensed Mahler songs on YouTube have been provided by Believe SAS, Naxos, Orchard Enterprises, Rebeat Digital, Sony, Universal, and Warner, among others. The number of licensed recordings uploaded during this period are broken down by publisher in Figure 6.7.

<sup>27</sup> YouTube and Google’s announcements and explanation of this change are provided here: Tim Grow for the YouTube Official Blog, December 8, 2014, <https://blog.youtube/news-and-events/mystery-solved-what-happens-when-you>; YouTube Help, “How Content ID Works,” <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2797370?hl=en>



**Figure 6.7. Licensed Mahler songs uploaded to YouTube in 2014-2018 by provider**

With Orchard Enterprises alone providing twelve tracks in 2014, the overall trajectory is skewed. If this licensed content were to be removed, however, a pattern of growth from 2008 to 2020 would be more apparent. Figure 6.8 below details the number of licensed and unlicensed Mahler songs in YouTube from 2014 to 2020.



**Figure 6.8. Licensed and unlicensed recordings of Mahler songs 2014-2020**

The question of “when” is treated differently in YouTube than in WorldCat. The date captured during data scraping is the date a video is uploaded. This date supersedes any other dates included in the description or other textual fields such as title. Because videos may be uploaded at any point after an event, for example, we cannot be certain that the recitals or concerts from which Mahler songs are excerpted and posted correlate to the YouTube date. WorldCat dates are more standardized, even if they also do not prioritize the performance date in the case of live performances. The date used in WorldCat is most often a date of publication or copyright.

The question of when also relates to the ongoing interaction with recordings of Mahler’s songs. Although WorldCat does support user-generated reviews and tagging, these features are not well used in the case of classical music recordings. Perhaps this is because the content is not immediately available for listening, as it is on YouTube. YouTube’s social features, including comments, likes, and dislikes, will be discussed later in the chapter. It is worth noting here, however, that viewers can engage with the recordings at any point after a video is uploaded. This is not possible if comments have been turned off, or if the video was live-streamed. The immediacy of YouTube content empowers content viewers and creators to engage in a more sustained manner with the content. This immediacy has implications for the reception of the content over time and across diverse constituents.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The possibilities for immediacy and interaction have not yet been fully realized. Scholars have not found that classical music fans are not highly engaged in social media, at least not in communications surrounding their classical music listening. Garry Crawford, Victoria Gosling, Gwynor Bagnall, and Ben Light found limited interest in engagement specific to orchestra fans in the UK “Is There an app for That? A Case Study of the Potentials and Limitations of the Participatory Turn and Networked Publics for Classical Music Audience Engagement,” *Information, Communication & Society*, 17, no. 9 (2014): 1072–85, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2013.877953; Markus Schedl and Marko Tkalčič found that classical music listeners are less likely to indicate their listening habits on social media than fans of other genres, “Genre-based Analysis of Social Media Data on Music Listening Behavior: Are Fans of Classical Music Really Averse to

## Who

Performances of Alma Mahler songs were uploaded to 190 unique channels.

These channels may represent fans uploading the content of others, performers uploading their own content, and official channels uploading content on behalf of professional artists and ensembles. Content is uploaded by festivals, such as Aspect Chamber Music Series; singing contests, such as Redwood Empire Chapter of NATS; and ensembles, whether professional or not, such as SWR Vokalensemble Stuttgart. A few of these channels seem to have considerable user engagement as evidenced by video views, likes, and dislikes. Of the total 468,182 views of Alma Mahler songs in this sample, for example, 252,198, or over half of all views, came from only six channels:

- 97,184 NPR Music – across 1 video
- 47,032 AllaBreve3 – across 7 videos
- 36,134 Singer Joy – across 1 video
- 25,850 Wellesz Theatre – across 1 video
- 24,412 London Review – across 1 video
- 21,586 Vozbiala – across 2 videos

A high number of views may suggest that these channels have a large audience base, that they are providing unique content, that their videos have been added to automated playlists, that their videos rise to the top of the relevancy ranking, whether intentional or not, or that listeners like and engage with these recordings differently.

Similarly, of the total 4,223 likes and 163 dislikes, came from a handful of channels:

- NPR Music: 1700 likes / 52 dislikes – across 1 video
- Singer Joy: 325 likes / 10 dislikes – across 1 video
- liederoperagreats: 258 likes / 5 dislikes – across 42 videos
- London Review: 257 likes / 13 dislikes – across 1 video
- AllaBreve3: 154 likes / 15 dislikes – across 7 videos

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SocialMedia?” in *Proceedings of the First International Workshop on Internet-Scale Multimedia Management* (New York: ACM, 2014), 9–13.

- George N. Gianopoulos 154 likes / 3 dislikes –
- Wellesz Theatre 141 / 5 dislikes – across 1 video

Unlike views, which could be attributed to luck, users must log in and actively click the like or dislike buttons. This suggests that certain channels have higher levels of user engagement, and that some content is perceived as better or worse than others. Of course, the number of videos on a given channel also contributes to the amount of engagement with the like and dislike features; *liederoperagreats* achieved a relatively high number of likes, but that is due to the fact that they posted forty videos featuring Mahler’s songs to YouTube.

Those recording and sharing Alma Mahler’s music on YouTube sometimes perform transcriptions and arrangements, and not only the work in its original scoring. The majority of videos feature a single singer and pianist, though at least fifty-two recordings feature orchestral accompaniment, many of which utilize the orchestration by David and Colin Matthews.<sup>29</sup> Performances by choral groups singing transcriptions of Mahler songs were also included among the results. Solo performers include several pianists and cornet player Luke Spence.<sup>30</sup> A few recordings featured tracks that had been modified or remixed using electronic means.<sup>31</sup> Pianists not only performed solo transcriptions of Mahler’s works, but also offered piano accompaniment tracks that singers might use to help learn Mahler’s songs and prepare for performance.

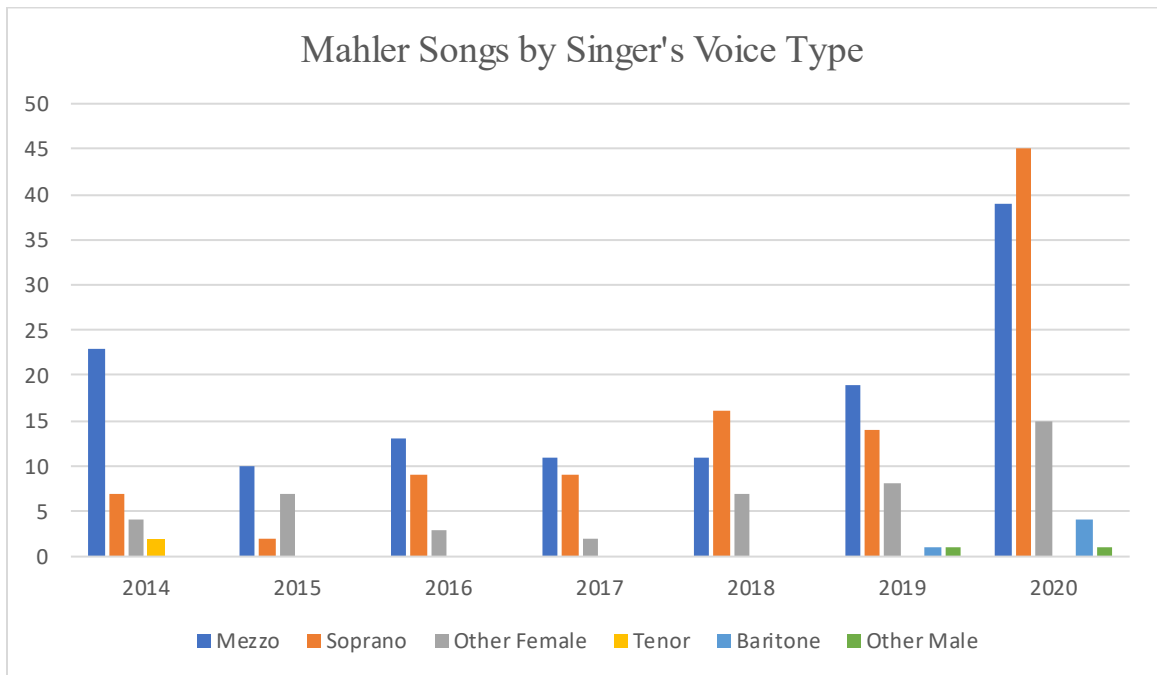
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<sup>29</sup> Alma Mahler, David Matthews, and Colin Matthews, *Sieben Lieder: für mittlere Stimme und Orchester* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Spence’s transcription of “Lobgesang” is available here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSP28AQMnJc>.

<sup>31</sup> One such example is this treatment of Mahler’s song “Hymne”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7eXUssbP5M>.

Unsurprisingly—and similar to the WorldCat analysis—Alma Mahler’s songs in YouTube are most frequently performed by singers with soprano, mezzo-soprano, or alto voice types. 148 records featured mezzo-sopranos, 114 featured sopranos, and 63 included other or unspecified female voices. This is in stark contrast to the four records for baritone and three for tenor and other male voice. Many of the recordings did not list voice type in the available metadata and that is a limitation, perhaps, of this platform. My analysis of the data did include my listening briefly to verify and add voice type when missing. I found this additional step necessary to facilitate more substantive analysis of performer and was inspired to do so when I learned that the voice types of male singers, such as Conrad Schmechel, Heinz Zednik, Rafael Fingerlos, Raoul Steffani, and others, were not provided in the scraped, user-input data. Figure 6.9 provides user-specified voice type by year.



**Figure 6.9. Mahler songs by singer’s voice type**

The professional level of performers is more challenging to investigate with the data provided. Twenty videos had the terms college, university, or conservatory in the record metadata, and many of these further specified that the performance had been part of an undergraduate or graduate degree recital.

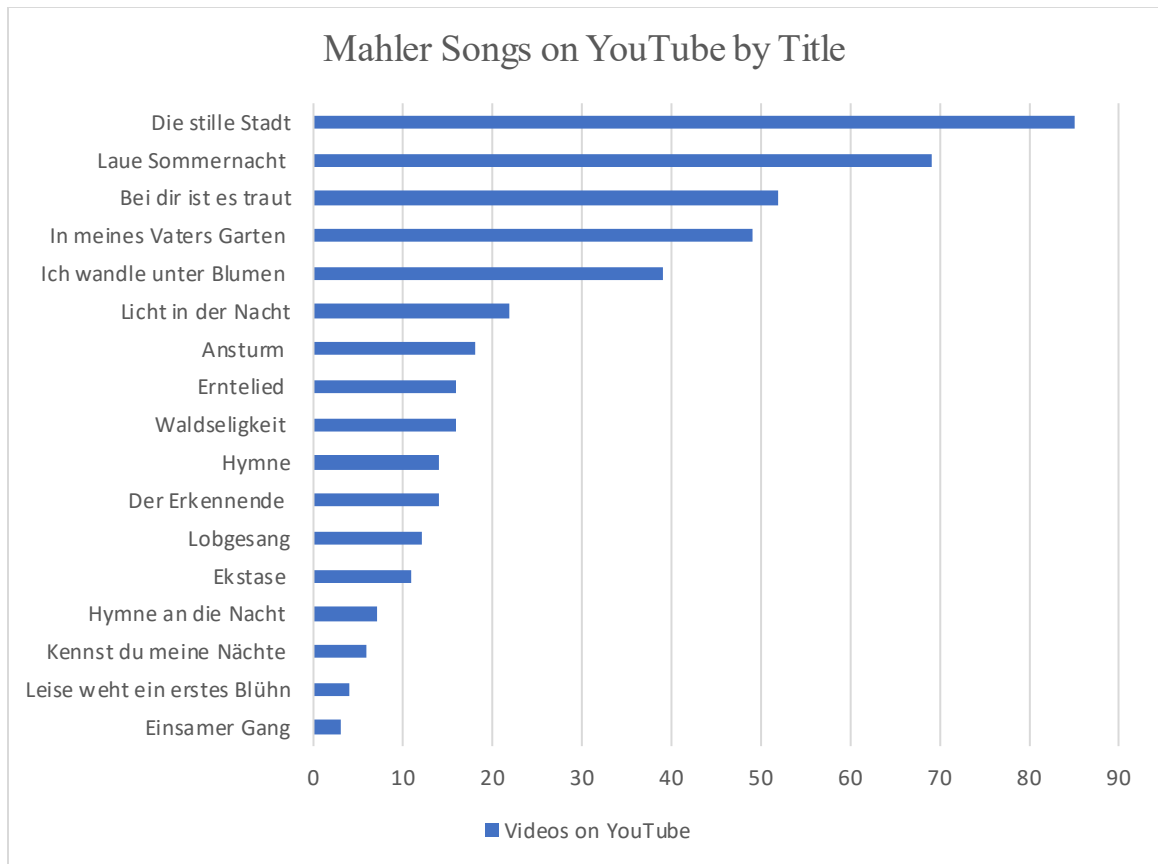
### **What**

The diversity of content is one of the benefits of YouTube, but it can also pose several challenges. Where WorldCat provides musical content in the familiar package of an album, or more occasionally, singles, YouTube includes countless variations in what exactly is presented. A single video may include a single song, a recital-like grouping of similar songs, an entire program, a collection of snippets from an event, a lecture or discussion paired with performance of one or more songs, or something else entirely. Most of the videos feature individual tracks, which is line with how the platform is used in the case of much classical music and other genres of music. Searching the title information specifically, most recordings come from Mahler's 1910 publication of five songs. The recordings with fewest performances, "Einsamer Gang" "Leise weht ein erstes Blühn," and "Kennst du meine Nächte," were all published posthumously.<sup>32</sup> Figure 6.10 lists the number of recordings by song title.

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<sup>32</sup> Two of these were edited and published by Susan Filler: Alma Maria Mahler-Werfel, *Two Lieder: [for voice and piano]*. ed. Susan M. Filler (Bryn Mawr, PA: Hildegard, 2000). "Einsamer Gang" was published as a supplement to a 2018 issue of *Wagner Journal*.





**Figure 6.10. Mahler songs on Youtube by title**

The frequency with which performances of “Die stille Stadt” are uploaded to YouTube suggest that this piece, followed by the other songs published in 1910—“Laue Sommernacht,” “Bei dir ist es traut,” “In meines Vaters Garten,” and “Ich wandle unter Blumen”—are Mahler’s most frequently performed pieces. This also appears to be true of recordings in WorldCat. It should not be surprising that Mahler’s most recently published song, “Einsamer Gang” (2019), is currently among the least frequently uploaded to YouTube. Views per song indicate how frequently they are being streamed, and they may also suggest the interest of prospective performers in particular songs.

The inclusion of Mahler’s songs in diverse events is something that is captured in YouTube, but not well-represented in WorldCat. Some of the events in which her songs were included were celebrations of songs written by women composers, some were

theatre events focused on the life of Alma Mahler, some were general recitals of various works for the solo voice. Some events were streamed live, which might be analogous to recordings created from live performance. When Alma Mahler's music is included among the music of other composers, it is worth noting any similarities among the composers, or any patterns among events. One of several concerts that featured Mahler's among music composed by women was the "Concerto Omaggio alla Donna, Musa e Musicista" on March 6, 2010 in the Sale Apollinee at Teatro La Fenice. The songs of Clara Schumann (1819–1896) and Alma Mahler were accompanied by recitations from both composers' respective writings.<sup>33</sup> Schumann and Mahler both composed Lieder and their lives did briefly overlap, but both women also wrote diaries, correspondence, and other forms of life writing, which is perhaps the more pronounced similarity and unifying theme of the event. An event called "Art Sung" featured songs of Alexander Zemlinsky, Ludwig van Beethoven, Gustav Mahler, and Alma Mahler to bring Alma Mahler's relationships to Zemlinsky and Mahler to life. It is noteworthy that Alma Mahler's music was programmed in this event; in my initial analysis to remove content that did not include at least one Alma Mahler song, I encountered many videos that used Gustav's music—and not Alma's—to tell her life story.

Another way to get at the "what" of these recordings is to investigate the text used in the description field in YouTube. Pasting the contents of all YouTube description text for these songs yields into Voyant Tools yields the word cloud presented in Figure 6.11.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Concerto Omaggio alla Donna, Musa e Musicista" accessed 10 November, 2020, [http://archiviostorico.teatrolafenice.it/scheda\\_a.php?ID=25119](http://archiviostorico.teatrolafenice.it/scheda_a.php?ID=25119).

<sup>34</sup> <https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=3fde97c9b7abcdc5f8faef0b67e09039&visible=145&view=Cirrus>, accessed 14 January 2021.



less frequently comment on classical music videos than other types of performances. Comments on videos featuring Alma Mahler songs unsurprisingly include remarks that could easily be understood as sexist. Casio61, for example, wrote: “More advanced harmonies than I was expecting. Number 2 is very interesting, ending on a major 7th chord wasn’t common in 1915. The woman had some talent.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed she did; qualifying this acknowledgement of her talent with her gender serves to diminish the compliment. Other commenters seem to take her more seriously, but nonetheless forefront Gustav Mahler, or other men in her life. Paul Meyer wrote: “Discouraged by a jealous husband as she ranged from Richard Strauss to Arnold Schoenberg and was among the luminaries of her time.”<sup>36</sup> Again, leading with Gustav Mahler’s alleged jealousy, which is easy to assert, but challenging to prove, shifts the focus from Alma Mahler and her poetry.

The Voyant Tools word cloud for of YouTube comments on videos featuring Mahler songs show the prominence of gender-related words (Figure 6.12).<sup>37</sup> That Alma is one of the most frequently used words may not seem noteworthy, but audiences infrequently refer to Zemlinsky as “Alexander,” or Schoenberg as “Arnold.” Mahler’s statuses as married, wife, mother, woman, and lover were noted in the comments frequently enough to be clearly visible in the word cloud. The terms Jewish and

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<sup>35</sup> Alma Mahler - Four Songs for Soprano and Orchestra (1915) [Score-Video], accessed 10 November 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_SOI90-35g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_SOI90-35g).

<sup>36</sup> Alma Mahler - Four Songs for Soprano and Orchestra (1915) [Score-Video], accessed 10 November 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_SOI90-35g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_SOI90-35g).

<sup>37</sup> <https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=e2ddf77c5d17e1fc2caflae3e97ff442&visible=125&view=Cirrus>, accessed 14 January 2021.



subsequent virtue-signaling about her antisemitic talk, she saved Werfel's life. In 1940 she got him and a motley crew of refugees over the Pyrenées. She walked the walk, literally"; "It's maybe colored by the passage of years, but if Alma Mahler was 'the most beautiful woman in Vienna,' I would purely hate to see the homely ones."<sup>38</sup> Even as audiences hear her music, some prefer to perpetuate stories, diagnose, or sexualize Alma Mahler.

### **YouTube vs. Analog Performances**

With this analysis, I do not suggest that the content on YouTube accurately or comprehensively represents what is being performed at in-person events throughout the world. Nonetheless, investigating YouTube content and its metadata provides insight into the classical music being studied and performed by diverse musicians, especially, perhaps, those in the global North.<sup>39</sup> Digital capabilities realized in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have dramatically shifted the opportunities for reaching audiences and have, perhaps, opened up new venues for classical music performance. The relationship between recorded and live music is, and always has been, complex. Since the advent of music recording, certain musics and performers have been privileged; canonized composers and profitable performers were economically safer bets than less familiar composers and performers.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Bee Wilson: Alma Mahler, Her Music and Men, accessed 14 January 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2QUMN2Ep1c>

<sup>39</sup> According to Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, YouTube is among the most used social media sites among Americans. "Social Media Use in 2018," accessed 10 November 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>; SimilarWeb reports that the United States (21%) leads in traffic to YouTube, followed by Russia and Brazil (5%), United Kingdom (4%), and India (3%), accessed 10 November 2020, <https://www.similarweb.com/website/youtube.com/#overview>.

<sup>40</sup> Marcia Citron has written on the intersections of musical canon and music recording, noting: "The powerful recording industry controls the production and distribution of who, what, and by whom is

Although recordings that are professionally produced and released may reach broader audiences and have more impact, digital platforms including YouTube have created celebrities. There are established industries built up around classical music recordings, but many of these have faced mounting challenges in recent years.<sup>41</sup> Because fewer classical music albums are being released relative to previous decades, I argue that the reception of music in the twenty-first century should also rely on consulting more casual content sharing platforms, such as YouTube.<sup>42</sup> By investigating both the formally produced and the casually shared recordings of Alma Mahler songs, we have more information about performers and audiences. YouTube also provides some insight into how audiences engage with these songs and how their reception either perpetuates or challenges sexist ideas of creativity.

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Mahler songs are being performed in a variety of venues, from private practice rooms to commercially released professional records. Although previous studies have highlighted private performances of Alma Mahler's songs in salon settings, no study has explored the diversity of performances as documented via metadata found in WorldCat and YouTube. My objective with this exploration of performance-related metadata has

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recorded. For art music, only one component in the industry, recordings act as a cultural barometer and negotiator. This shows up in which compositions are issued and re-issued, how many different versions exist, and the nature of the promotion. Of course, recordings reflect the membership of other reportorial canons." Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>41</sup> David Arditi and Marius Carboni separately discuss changes in recording industry business models from one dependent on sales to one based on subscriptions and streaming. David Arditi, "Digital Subscriptions: The Unending Consumption of Music in the Digital Era," *Popular Music and Society* 41, no. 3 (2018): 302–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2016.1264101>; Marius Carboni, "Evolving Business Models in the Classical Record Industry," *The Classical Music Industry* ed. Chris Dromey, Julia Haferkorn (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Carboni discusses how some labels can rely on significant back catalogues rather than new releases for their income; Carboni, "Evolving Business Models in the Classical Record Industry."

been to shed light on the diversity of these performances and investigate how they have influenced perceptions of Alma Mahler's compositional work in recent years.

The performance of Mahler's music—as indicated by recordings in both WorldCat and YouTube—is increasing. This increase suggests to me that performers and audiences are connecting with Mahler's work as a composer and not exclusively her story or life writings. The performers nonetheless remain overwhelmingly sopranos and mezzo-sopranos, which highlights the overwhelming female interest in Alma Mahler's compositional work. One indication of Mahler's increasingly mainstream status is the inclusion of her songs alongside canonical works, especially in recordings of songs from turn of the century Vienna in which her songs join those of Alban Berg, Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg, Hugo Wolf, and Alexander Zemlinsky. That she has not yet entirely mainstream is evidenced by the sexist comments accompanying some of the YouTube videos.

Investigating the recordings of Alma Mahler's songs provides evidence of how her legacy has shifted over the past four decades. From the earliest recordings of her songs in the 1980s—which were often recorded as part of anthologies of songs by women composers—to more recent records of her work alongside those of canonical (and male) composers, one notes that performing her songs is no longer necessarily an act of advocacy. Performers now benefit from a variety of recordings of Alma Mahler's music and can opt to perform and record the songs because they find them musically interesting, vocally gratifying, or any other reason. That performing or listening to Alma Mahler's music is no longer an inherently political act means that it can reach new audiences.



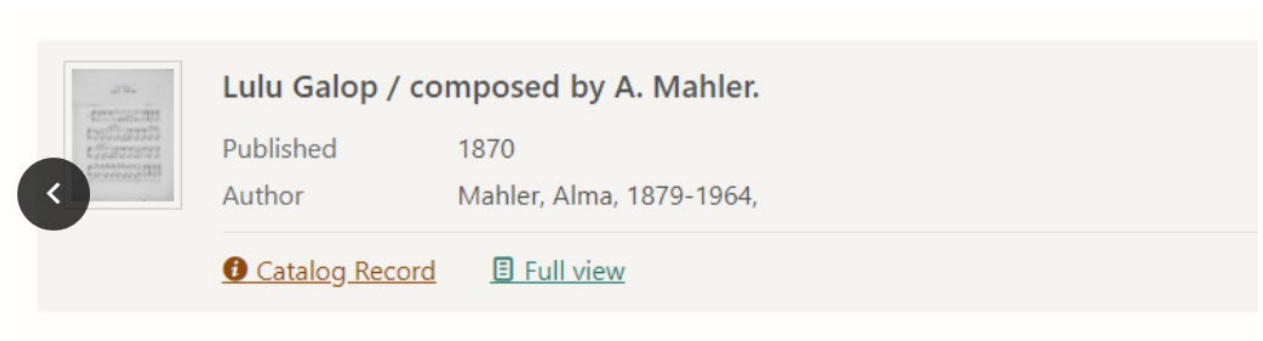
## CHAPTER 7

### CAPTURING ALMA MAHLER: IN THE MIDDLE OF LIFE

The legend of Alma Mahler—the promising young female composer whose talents were quashed by her older, famous fiancé—persists. Everyone knows about Gustav’s demand that she give up composing and accept his work as her own; her decision to focus her creative energies on being a muse to greatness—as she asserts in her memoirs—makes sense in light of his demand. We know the legend because she has been unusually successful in shaping the narratives surrounding her life and work. There is new evidence, however, that despite her not mentioning it as such in her memoirs, her interest in musical composition may have remained intense long after Gustav’s composition ban and even after her last published piece was composed in 1915. Just past the middle of her long life, she seems to have written two more songs, one of them in a decidedly new and more advanced style than either she or Gustav had ever dreamed. Neither of these songs have hitherto been discussed in the literature.

My attempts to capture a more humane version of Alma Mahler—and during a global pandemic at that—have led me down several interesting paths. As I updated her works list and attempted to confirm the locations for her various manuscript scores, I came across new and interesting findings. By new, I do not mean a new book, article, film, podcast, or similar item; the literature surrounding Alma Mahler is vast and proliferates rapidly because she holds a great deal of interest and intrigue as a subject. By new, I mean that in my attempts to understand and account for her compositional output, I came across a few musical compositions attributed to her that were unknown to me. My search for musical compositions and manuscripts in the online catalogs of HathiTrust and the Austrian National Library led to new records of compositions attributed to Mahler.

The record in HathiTrust turned out to be a dead end but introduced some much-needed levity in a rather grim year.<sup>1</sup> Figures 7.1 and 7.2 show the brief record and beginning of the piano piece “Lulu Galop.” The piece has a publication date of 1870 and was attributed to Alma Mahler, even though she would not be born until 1879. If this had been Alma Mahler’s work, it would be the only extant composition outside of the genre of Lieder.



**Figure 7.1. HathiTrust record for “Lulu Galop,” incorrectly attributed to Alma Mahler**



**Figure 7.2. HathiTrust scan of “Lulu Galop”**

<sup>1</sup> “Lulu Galop,” incorrectly attributed to Alma Mahler, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102304294>.

More promisingly, the Austrian National Library catalog described a music manuscript attributed to Alma Mahler setting a text by Friedrich Hölderlin.<sup>2</sup> After requesting and receiving a digital surrogate of the manuscript, presented as Figures 7.3 and 7.4, I was quite surprised by what I saw. Described in the catalog as “Hälfte des Lebens von Fr. Hölderlin. [Lied für Singstimme und Klavier.],” the manuscript actually appears to be two discrete settings of the same text. Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) was a poet associated with German Romanticism, but who was not widely set by nineteenth-century composers; interest in his work was revived through the delayed publication of several works in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Although she was familiar with his works, Alma Mahler does not mention setting any of Hölderlin’s other texts; if she did, they have either not survived or been documented.<sup>4</sup> The catalog record indicates that they are undated ([ohne Jahresangabe]), dates are, however, inscribed on both pieces—one 1925 and the other 1927.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Austrian National Library catalog, “Hälfte des Lebens: [Lied für Singstimme und Klavier.],” accessed 23 December 2020, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14320990>.

<sup>3</sup> The LiederNet archive—intended to be illustrative and not definitive or comprehensive—shows that all of the composers who set “Hälfte des Lebens” were active in the twentieth century: Hauke Jasper Berheide, Benjamin Britten, Harald Genzmer, Olivier Greif, Josef Matthias Hauer, Paavo Heinenen, Philippe Hersant, Karl Horwitz, Gordon Kerry, Gideon Klein, René Leibowitz, Ernst Ludwig Leitner, György Ligeti, Josef Ivar Müller, Wilhelm Petersen, Hermann Reutter, Wolfgang Michael Rihm, Dmitri Nikolaevich Smirnov, Hans Uwe Strübing, Stefan Wolpe, accessed 24 December 2020, [https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get\\_author\\_texts.html?AuthorId=1223](https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_author_texts.html?AuthorId=1223).

<sup>4</sup> At least two letters from Gustav to Alma Mahler mention the poet. The December 15, 1901 letter identifies Hölderlin as one of Gustav’s favorite poets and people: “Weißt Du, daß der ein Lieblingsdichter und -Mensch von mir ist?” Gustav Mahler, *Ein Glück ohne Ruh’: Die Briefe Gustav Mahlers an Alma*, ed. Henry-Louis de la Grange and Günther Weiß (Munich: btb Taschenbücher, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> It was around that this time (14 July 1926) that Mahler reports in *Mein Leben* that she had become quite close to Alban and Helene Berg. Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2008), 171–74. Leon Botstein explores the significance of Alma Mahler to Alban Berg’s *Lulu* and reports that “In the 1930s, Alban and Helene became only closer and more dependent on Alma.” Leon Botstein, “Alban Berg and the Memory of Modernism,” in *Alban Berg and His World*, ed. Christopher Hailey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 299–344, at 332. Mahler’s frequent correspondence with Alban and Helene Berg also suggests the closeness of Mahler with both. *Immer wieder werden mich thätige Geister*

Verzeihen Sie die schlechte Schrift, die infolge einer Farnwollstung "schlecht" ist. Hälfte des Lebens

1925

Zart bewegt, etwas flüchtig.

2

mit gelben Blumen hängt und vollendet Rot der das Land in der See

mf

mf

mf

mf

Holy mit wonach wenns Win ter ist die Blumen und

sff

p

p klingend

Man-ern stehen spärlich und kalt zu Nichte klären die Tälchen

11

**Figure 7.3. "Hälfte des Lebens," dated 1925, Austrian National Library, Musiksammlung, Signatur: F21.Berg.3116/2**

*verlocken*: Alma Mahler-Werfels Briefe an Alban Berg und seine Frau, ed. Martina Steiger (Vienna: Seifert Verlag, 2008).



des Lebens von Fr. Hölderlin.

1927

Andante sostenuto

Mit gel-ben Bir-nen häu-got und roll mit Wil-den Ro-sen das Land in den

see Ihr hol-den Schwär-ze und tra-ken von Küs-sen tunkt ihr das Haupt

ins hei-lij nich-ter-ne Wis-set Etwas-schmel-zer. Neh-mir wo neh-ich wenn es

Wü-ter ist die Blu-men und wo den Son-nen-schein und Schat-ten der er-de

etwas-schmel-zer. Die Mau-er-er ste-hen sprach-los und kalt, im Wü-de-Klein-rod-er-fah-ren.

pp

F21 Berg 3116/2

Figure 4. "Hälfte des Lebens," dated 1927, Austrian National Library. Musiksammlung, Signatur: F21.Berg.3116/2

The catalog description indicates that it is an autograph—a manuscript in the hand of the composer—written in ink, and two pages, each of which measures 33.5 x 27 cm. The collection inventory number (F21 Berg 2116/2) is stamped in the lower-right-hand corner of the piece dated 1927. These pieces are in the library’s Alban Berg collection and their provenance is listed as the collection of Alban and Helene Berg.<sup>6</sup> The online catalog currently includes 293 music manuscripts (Musikhandschrift) in the Nachlass Alban Berg, for which Berg has authorial responsibility of 255. Berg contemporaries including Arnold Schoenberg and Alma Mahler are also represented, among others, with contributions to thirteen and three manuscripts, respectively. In addition to “Hälfte des Lebens,” Mahler’s settings of “Der Erkennende” and “Hymne” are also listed as undated in the catalog.<sup>7</sup> The composition date for “Der Erkennende,” is known; until now, it was thought to be her latest surviving Lied.<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of “Hymne” in the estate of Alban and Helene Berg makes great sense—the song was dedicated to Helene, as shown in Figure 7.5, and Alban is listed as having made notes.<sup>9</sup>

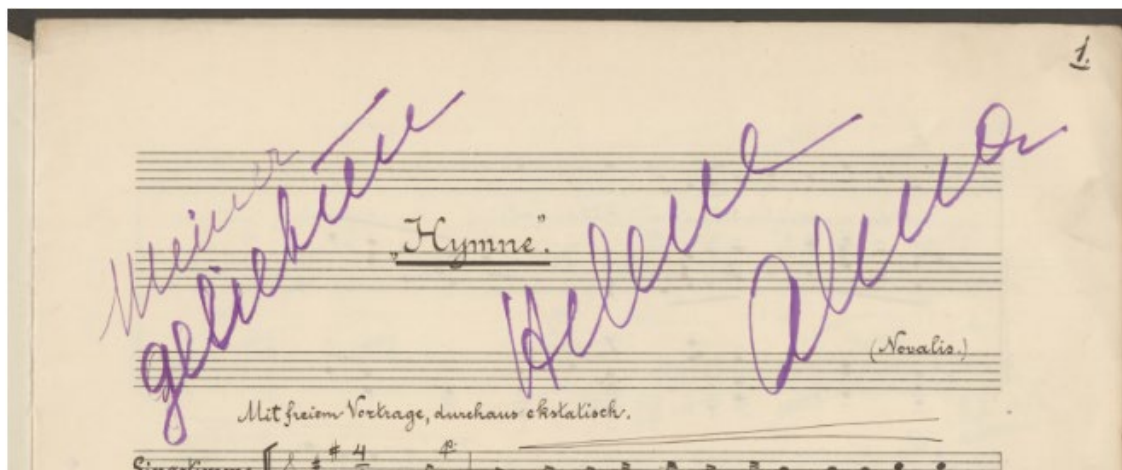
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<sup>6</sup> “Aus dem Besitz von Alban und Helene Berg”; An employee in the music collections confirmed that the Austrian National Library received the estate of Alban and Helen Berg in 1977, after Helene Berg’s 1976 death. The estate was then cataloged; the online catalog has been used since around 2002.

<sup>7</sup> The catalog records for the other two manuscripts are <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14320989> and <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14279530>.

<sup>8</sup> Mahler wrote in *Mein Leben* that she composed “Der Erkennende,” on a text by her future husband Franz Werfel, in October 1915. She describes her reaction to the poem: “Das Gedicht schlug über mir zusammen ... ich war vollkommen gebannt und der Seele Franz Werfels ausgeliefert ... Ich habe, auf den Semmering zurückgekehrt, das Gedicht komponiert. Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben*, 82. “Hymne,” on a text by Novalis, was published in 1924 and the date of composition is not known with certainty.

<sup>9</sup> “Eintragungen von Alban Berg,” <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC14279530>.



**Figure 7.5. Dedication from Alma Mahler to “my beloved” Helene Berg, Austrian National Library, Musiksammlung, Signatur: F21.Berg.346**

I was initially surprised by the handwriting and notation in the manuscript. If these are indeed autographs, the handwriting is considerably different from, say, Mahler’s dedication to Helene Berg in Figure 5, which is larger, slanted, and characterized by loops. Much of Mahler’s unpublished correspondence and other writings are also written in this purplish ink, which had become familiar and likely shaped my expectations. Many of the manuscripts surrounding Mahler’s compositions are not in her own hand,<sup>10</sup> however, and this fact alone should not preclude “Hälfte des Lebens” being attributed to her. The autograph manuscript of Mahler’s “Einsamer Gang,” which she mentions having composed in a September 15, 1899 diary entry, is presented in Figure 7.6 and features handwriting that more closely approximates her other writings.<sup>11</sup> The paper used may

<sup>10</sup> Jörg Rothkamm, for example, studies manuscripts of Alma Mahler songs that are in Gustav’s hand. Jörg Rothkamm, “‘A husband and wife who are both composers’? An unpublished song version of the so-called ‘Erntelied’ (‘Gesang am Morgen’) in the hand of Gustav Mahler in Light of the Correspondence between Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius.” *News about Mahler Research* 72 (2018): 7–34.

<sup>11</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898–1902*, translated by Antony Beaumont. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 194: “I consider the poem very fine, and have, I believe, caught its atmosphere pretty well.”

account for some of the differences; “Einsamer Gang” has twelve staves per page and the K.U.V. Beethoven Papier used for “Hälfte des Lebens” has fifteen.



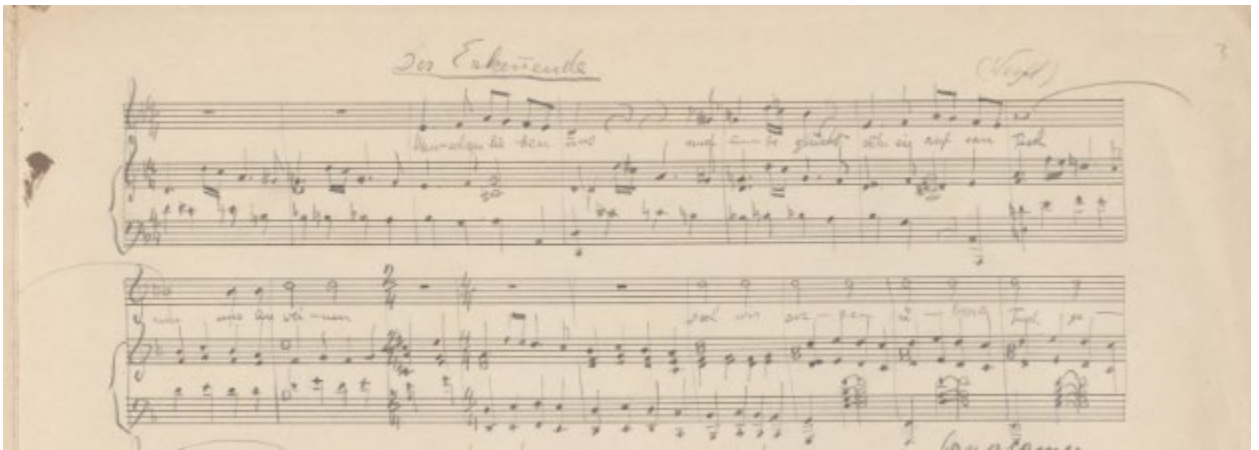
**Figure 7.6. “Einsamer Gang,” autograph manuscript, dated 16 September 1899, folder 1895. Mahler-Werfel papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania**

The handwriting also differs slightly between the 1925 and 1927 pieces, but a note in the 1925 manuscript in figure 3 begs forgiveness for bad handwriting on account of an arm injury, which may explain differences.<sup>12</sup> The handwriting and notation in “Hälfte des Lebens” appear similar to the “Der Erkennende” manuscript, shown in Figure 7.7, which is also recorded as being an autograph score, and which we can be certain is

<sup>12</sup> “verzeihen Sie die schlechte Schrift, die infolge einer Armverletzung schlecht ist.” This note was a message to someone, which suggests to me that the composer may have been seeking input or feedback on the musical content.



her work. The paper used for “Der Erkennende” has 24 staves per page and the writing is compressed in a way that was not required in “Einsamer Gang.”



**Figure 7.7. “Der Erkennende,” Austrian National Library. Musiksammlung  
Signatur: F21.Berg.3116/1**

Although there are some similarities between “Der Erkennende” and “Hälfte des Lebens,” the handwriting does not offer definitive proof of their authorship or hand. Some of the non-standard notation practices, however, may prove more compelling. Mahler’s primary composition teacher, Josef Labor, was blind and was unable to correct errors in her notation. Accordingly, her notation can demonstrate idiosyncratic or inconsistent practices, especially when in draft, or uncorrected, form. In the 1925 setting of “Hälfte des Lebens,” for example, dots appear to be missing from eighth notes in measure five and a beat of accompaniment is unaccounted for in measure 14. The 1927 setting has similar issues; in the first measure of 4/4, the c naturals are notated as a tied 16th and 8th instead of a dotted 8th note, and in the third measure of 5/4, an eighth note is unaccounted for.

I was more surprised that the settings of “Hälfte des Lebens” are dated 1925 and 1927—a full decade after Mahler’s latest piece with a known date of composition. It

seems clear that she was not studying music, at least not formally or with a teacher, and certainly not consistently, during the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> It is also clear, however, that Alma Mahler did not observe Gustav's demand that she cease all compositional activities. In fact, shortly before his 1911 death, Gustav praised her songs and helped to ensure that they were published.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, by the 1920s, she was intellectually and emotionally far removed from her period of regular composition lessons and sustained efforts. Although Mahler did not marry Franz Werfel until 1929, she lived with him throughout the 1920s and had largely subsumed her routines into his. In the spring of 1925, for example, Mahler and Werfel returned to Vienna after an extensive tour of the Holy Land that would serve as inspiration and research for writing.<sup>15</sup> Later that year Mahler accompanied Werfel as he presented lectures throughout Germany. Mahler reports: "I had to keep in step, to feign youth. I had to devote all my interest in life to his growth."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Susanne Rode-Breymann quotes letters between Mahler and Alexander Zemlinsky from 1904 to 1906 that suggest that the two met to make music, but the frequency or exact nature of such meetings cannot be definitively established: "Eine Einschätzung der Häufigkeit dieser Termine läßt sich aus den Briefen nicht gewinnen; vermutlich gab es derer nicht allzu viele—aber es gab sie, und d. h. Alma hatte Zemlinsky zum Arbeiten gehabt." *Die Komponistin Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Hannover: Niedersächsische Staatstheater, 1999), 129.

<sup>14</sup> Mahler records carrying her songs a round for years during her marriage to Gustav and one suspects that she may have occasionally revisited them. She certainly revised those that were published in 1910, 1915, and 1924, though scholars have speculated about the role of others, especially Gustav Mahler, in this revision process. See, for example, Jörg Rothkamm, "Wer komponierte die unter Alma Mahlers Namen veröffentlichten Lieder? Unbekannte Briefe der Komponistin zur Revision ihrer Werke im Jahre 1910," *Die Musikforschung* 53, no. H. 4 (2000): 432–45; Rothkamm, "A husband and wife who are both composers?"; Filler, "Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler," 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Mahler reports in her diaries: "Der Sommer 1925 war von unsagbarer Ruhe und Anspannung. Werfel entwarf und dichtete sein Drama "Paulus unter den Juden," wozu ein frohes Studium notwendig war." Typescript diary "Tagebuch der Alma Maria," 1902-1944, with handwritten emendations. Mahler-Werfel papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

<sup>16</sup> Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), 197.

In the 1920s, Mahler seemingly still held her desire to compose and make music close to her heart, even if she did not record musical activity in her memoirs. Mahler does not record working on compositions during this period as she had in her 1898–1902 diaries. It is worth noting, however, that she also documented little in her memoirs about her period of renewed compositional activity in the early 1910s during which she was preparing and composing Lieder for her 1915 publication.<sup>17</sup> Mahler does note her longing for composition into the late 1920s and beyond. In her memoirs, she indicates being “too depressed to make music” in July 1920, but also reports writing in her diary: “What do you earth-bound morons know of the vast happiness I derive from my imagination, in the intoxications of love, of music, of wine—with my strong religious feelings underneath?”<sup>18</sup>

Although her life writings do not detail her music making or compositional interests during or after her marriage to Gustav Mahler, her correspondence does provide some insight into the music she was hearing and studying. Alma Mahler’s letters to Arnold Schoenberg and Alban and Helene Berg suggest, for example, that she studied the works of both men at the piano.<sup>19</sup> Although much of that work was likely limited to the 1900s and 1910s, she does write to Schoenberg in 1920: “Finally I am here in peace and with—you. For I can do nothing else but play and sing the *Gurrelieder*—they haunt me

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<sup>17</sup> After Gustav’s death in 1912, Alma Mahler reports making music all day long with her daughter but does not refer to composing music or mention any specific pieces. *And the Bridge is Love*, 66–67.

<sup>18</sup> *And the Bridge is Love*, 153; 184.

<sup>19</sup> *Schoenberg’s Correspondence with Alma Mahler*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Keathley and Marilyn L. McCoy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); *Immer wieder werden mich thätige Geister verlocken: Alma Mahler-Werfels Briefe an Alban Berg und seine Frau* (Vienna: Seifert, 2008).

and make me happy ... But your music, Arnold—will not leave me again.”<sup>20</sup> That she kept these activities and exchanges out of her memoirs raises several questions, but it seems clear that she did not see them as sufficiently integral to the experience or image she wished to convey in her memoirs.

The importance she ascribes to creative engagement persists, even if she does not unambiguously document specific compositions or compositional activities.<sup>21</sup> Her profound longing is clearly articulated when Mahler writes of Werfel and Paul von Zsolnay, that: “Neither of them felt with the thirsting woman who longed for her childhood dream ... I wrote in my diary, ‘life becomes simple indeed—a life without fairy tales!’”<sup>22</sup> The simultaneous forces of thirst and resignation had most certainly continued in Alma Mahler long after Gustav Mahler’s 1901 composition ban. She remained passionate about music and composition, even though she was less frequently engaged with them. Her resignation to a life without fairy tales may have exerted some influence on the text she selected and her musical setting thereof.

As I explored the music, I was surprised by how different the two settings of “Hälfte des Lebens” are from her published pieces. The poem has similarities to other texts Mahler set; it provides a wide emotional spectrum—from gratitude and bliss to

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<sup>20</sup> *Schoenberg’s Correspondence with Alma Mahler*, 249.

<sup>21</sup> Although diaries from this period exist, they are in typescript form and include only few, infrequent entries. All of the entries from 1925, for example, fit on fewer than three typescript pages. Unlike the 1898–1902 diaries, these do not offer a similar sense of her day-to-day existence. Typescript diary “*Tagebuch der Alma Maria*,” 1902–1944, with handwritten emendations. Mahler-Werfel papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>22</sup> *And the Bridge is Love*, 186. Considering the timing of this event, Mahler’s “childhood dream” may have been that of a festive Christmas, but “life without fairy tales” would certainly apply more broadly to her life.

despair and resignation—for a potentially dramatic musical setting. This was one of the few poems Hölderlin had published, but because it was considered to be tainted by the author’s mental illness, it has had a complex reception history.<sup>23</sup> The title “Hälfte des Lebens” has been translated as “At the Middle of Life”; the caesura in the exact middle highlights the stark contrast of the two symmetrical stanzas.

**Hälfte des Lebens**

Mit gelben Birnen hängen  
 Und voll mit wilden Rosen  
 Das Land in den See,  
 Ihr holden Schwäne,  
 Und trunken von Küssen  
 Tunkt ihr das Haupt  
 ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm’ ich, wenn  
 Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo  
 Den Sonnenschein,  
 Und Schatten der Erde?  
 Die Mauern stehn  
 Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde  
 Klirren die Fahnen.

**At the Middle of Life**

With yellow pears  
 and full of wild roses,  
 the earth hangs down to the lake,  
 You dear swans,  
 and drunk with kisses  
 you dip your heads  
 into the holy, sobering water.

Woe is me, where,  
 when it is winter, will I find flowers,  
 and where sunshine,  
 and shade of the earth?  
 The walls stand  
 mute and cold, in the wind  
 the weathervanes rattle.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Mahler did not shy away from setting serious texts. Although none of the texts she sets are frivolous, even if “Bei dir ist es traut” is light, “Hälfte des Lebens” seems to be the darkest in its overall outlook. The despairing tone of the second stanza ends with what could easily be interpreted as a death rattle. Mahler would have turned 46 around 1925 and commented frequently about her age compared to Franz Werfel’s; if these settings are her work, one might speculate that the text resonated with anxieties she had about her phase of life and what was to come. She had savored a

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<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Knoop, “Hälfte des Lebens. Wortgeschichtliche Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Gedicht,” In *Hölderlin–Sprache und Raum*, Turm-Vorträge 6, 1999–2007, ed. Valérie La witschka (Tübingen: Hölderlinturm, 2008).

variety of creative experiences in the first half of her life and such richness and fulfillment may have felt unsustainable.<sup>24</sup> Mahler had described herself around this time as a “thirsting woman.” The image of the swans, dunking their heads “into the holy, sobering water” seems precisely the benediction she is seeking, even as she understands that this experience is the purview of youth.

The music written to support this text differs from Alma Mahler’s published works, and even the two settings differ from each other. Initially, I thought that the first might be a sketch for the final second version, but there is no evidence to support that. In fact, there seem to be no real musical commonalities between the pieces that would suggest that one evolved out of the other. The settings reveal a strikingly different understanding of the text from 1925 to 1927, and perhaps different musical aesthetics and influences as well.

The vocal lines in these settings, especially in the 1927 setting, are disjunct and dissonant. Mahler’s gift for melody is certainly more challenging to detect in these settings, though the 1925 setting, if hers, hints at the lyricism of her youth. It includes a tighter vocal line with primarily stepwise motion, much of which is chromatic, and stays within a limited range (from C#4 to F#5). In contrast, the 1927 setting is characterized by an extended vocal range of more than two octaves (from G3 to B5) and dramatic and frequently dissonant intervallic motion. For its extended range, relatively complex rhythms, and lack of tonal grounding, this setting is likely the most vocally challenging Mahler piece to perform.

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<sup>24</sup> Especially, one might argue, for a woman who made use of her physical charm and sexuality to keep herself the center of attention in an artistic milieu.

The 1927 piece appears to be influenced by serialism. As shown in Example 7.1, the 12-note opening vocal phrase is immediately repeated in inversion. The initial row statement is repeated later in the piece, but the piece may not make sufficient use of serialist techniques to be considered serial throughout.

Mit gel - ben Bir - hen hān - get und voll mit will - den Ro - sen das Land in den

See ihr hol - den Schwā - ne, und trun - ken von Küs - sen tunkt ihr das Haupt

**Example 7.1. Initial statement of the row in the vocal line at the opening of the song. An inversion of the row begins at “Rosen” and ends on “Schwäne”**

The relatively sparse piano accompaniment is also stylistically different from what Mahler employed in her earlier Lieder and seems to be influenced by the musical aesthetics of the 1920s. This setting also provides what would be the only use of extended technique that I have noted in Mahler’s songs. Near the end of the piece, the final chord in the right hand is marked “flag.,” which is short for *flageolet*, a piano technique in which keys are silently depressed so that dampers are removed, and the strings can vibrate sympathetically.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Reiko Ishii, “The Development of Extended Piano Techniques in Twentieth-Century American Music,” (Diss., Florida State University, 2005), 14: “Sound may be produced by depressing one or more keys silently to release the dampers without allowing the hammers to strike the strings. These strings then

If hers, the use of extended piano techniques—and more importantly, serialist techniques—would confirm that Alma Mahler was composing music into the late 1920s. The latest piece that she explicitly acknowledges in her memoirs was “Der Erkennende” in 1915. Although Mahler’s description of her musical activities and engagement during this period indicate a profound longing, they do not provide any detail about her study or composition of music. If we take her at her word and acknowledge the intellectual and emotional energy she poured into her music, we risk dismissing the narratives she crafted and controlled during her lifetime. Alma Mahler had the rare privilege of shaping the stories told about her—even after her death—but I suggest that these can coexist with new documents that illuminate her musical contributions and create a more complex, if also contradictory, understanding of her life and work.

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Scholars have been unable or unwilling to treat Mahler as a composer. Unfortunately for Alma Mahler, musicology’s intense focus on Gustav has meant that much of the attention she received has been negative; musicologists have primarily considered Alma as an obstacle to their access to and understanding of Gustav’s musical legacy.<sup>26</sup> As I discussed in Chapter Four, when scholars have considered her work, they have frequently alleged that Gustav Mahler or Alexander Zemlinsky had an undue influence on it. Seth Monahan notes that musicology prefers documentary histories, but

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vibrate sympathetically when certain other keys are struck and released. The undamped strings respond to the overtones of related pitches played by the performer. As far back as the early nineteenth century, some composers employed sympathetic vibration in response to the attack of previous sounds. Robert Schumann (1810–56) uses this technique in ‘Paganini’ from *Carnaval*, Op. 9.”

<sup>26</sup> Seth Monahan, “‘I Have Tried to Capture You...’: Rethinking the Alma Theme from Mahler’s Sixth Symphony,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 1 (2011): 119–178.



Alma Mahler's relatively abbreviated and private period of compositional activity did not produce many of the documents required to study a composer seriously.<sup>27</sup> These disciplinary traditions and limitations are not, however, reasons to ignore a potentially interesting subject, or to fictionalize her life and work.

In order to investigate the composer Alma Mahler, I have chosen to venture beyond the boundaries of traditional musicology to consider the complex social relationships and institutional systems in which her life writings, fictionalizations of her life, the historiography surrounding her life and work, her compositions, and the performances thereof exist. This dissertation provides, I hope, a more holistic approach to understanding and valuing Alma Mahler by accounting for and acknowledging various facets of her experience and identity as framed through her own words and work and those of others. As I bring the dissertation to its conclusion, I hope to make explicit many of the connections I see between the words and works described in the previous chapters. Specifically, I will consider how her written work has influenced the study and performance of her songs, and vice versa.

In her diaries and memoirs, Mahler raises doubt and expresses self-consciousness about her talent as a composer. Had she depicted her compositional work and its importance in a more positive light, scholars might have perceived the music and its import differently. Instead, several scholars have latched on to the doubts Mahler expressed and used them to question the merits or authenticity of her compositional contributions. Others, most often feminist musicologists, have vilified Gustav Mahler's

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<sup>27</sup> Monahan, "I Have Tried to Capture You...", 123. Monahan's hermeneutic "reading relies extensively on 'evidence' of various sorts (musical, circumstantial, anecdotal)" which he suggests is nonetheless inferior to a documentary approach.

demand that Alma stop composing and have mourned her arrested compositional development.

I argue that both of these perspectives delegitimize the value and import of Alma Mahler's existing work; she composed songs that increasingly hold value for performers and audiences. As Marian Wilson Kimber explains in the case of Fanny Hensel:

Centering Hensel's biography on her brother's comments rather than on her eventual publication of her music both denies her the power she did have in life and oversimplifies the historical situation for women composers, replacing the manifold issues surrounding gender and class with a single male villain. Adoption of either traditional male or feminist models for a nineteenth-century female composer's biography creates a story that centers on a woman's failure to achieve public success, a story that does more to undermine the "recovery" of historical women composers than it does to critique the patriarchal conditions in which they lived.<sup>28</sup>

Considering the conflict between and limitations of both traditional male and feminist models, it seems clear to me that a different approach is needed. Although I have sought to engage with a variety of traditional (male) and feminist approaches to the music and legacy of Alma Mahler, I find the most promising approach for the future of Mahler's Lieder to be their performance and recording.

Alma Mahler's acceptance as a composer does not require an audience to know or approve of her personal life or to approve of her handling of Gustav Mahler's estate. She is hardly unique among composers in her espousal of hateful ideologies or her altering, hiding, or strategically selecting which historical records to share. What is noteworthy, if not unique, is the presence of damning self-conscious statements in her diaries and the way in which contemporary scholars have used these to diminish her compositional

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<sup>28</sup> Marian Wilson Kimber, "The 'Suppression' of Fanny Mendelssohn: Rethinking Feminist Biography," *Nineteenth Century Music* 26, no. 2 (2002): 113–29, at 128.

work.<sup>29</sup> The proliferation of conflicting primary source materials surrounding her compositional activities has served to discount the narrative of Alma Mahler as a legitimate composer. We need not take Mahler's self-consciousness or subsequent dismissal seriously, however, as both represent rhetorical posturing that arguably holds less value than the music being examined. Although Mahler's memoirs downplayed the importance of composition in her life, composition was central to her endeavors and her identity during her late adolescence and early adult years; new evidence suggests that composition remained important into the middle of her life. It is time, perhaps, to take Alma Mahler at her work.

Male authors—whether musicologists or authors of fiction—have taken Mahler at her words. They have historically focused on her role of femme fatale and attributed much of the actual work of composition to the men in her life. Female authors and musicians, perhaps more sensitive to the realities and challenges of Mahler's conflicting identities of woman and artist, have more readily, and sometimes enthusiastically, acknowledged Mahler's compositional work. As previously noted, however, a tendency to focus on Alma Mahler's repression by Gustav serves to frame her musical contributions as less than those of men: "The danger," as Wilson Kimber points out, "of telling only the story of repression is that feminist biography will not serve as a

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<sup>29</sup> Other nineteenth-century women composers expressed similarly gender-normative and self-conscious statements about their compositional abilities. Clara Schumann, for example, wrote: "A woman must not wish to compose—there never was one able to do it. Am I intended to be the one? It would be arrogant to believe that. That was something with which only my father tempted me in former days." Clara Wieck, *Clara Wieck Tagebucher, RSH 4877-A3*. November 25, 1839, translated in Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 118. I have not found evidence that scholars have used such statements to delegitimize Schumann's compositional work.

force for the recovery of women into history, but rather a continual documentation of their failures.”<sup>30</sup>

Like my foremothers, I have long been interested in Mahler’s music and in righting some of what I perceived as injustices in her legacy. I began investigating the compositional legacy of Alma Mahler in 2007, when—as a singer and graduate student in library and information science with an aspiration to become a music librarian—I took a music research class with Dr. Christina Bashford. My final project compared Mahler’s depictions of her compositional activities in her diaries and memoirs. As a burgeoning feminist I was horrified at how easily she gave up her compositional aspirations to marry Gustav Mahler; but then, I had already sung an entire set of his Lieder as a sophomore vocal performance major. I can only imagine the intellectual attraction to him and his music, which she denied at the time of the engagement, but that is beside the point. The point, I suppose, is that like other women, I have connected with Alma Mahler through outrage for her relegation to “wife of” status and also the shared experience of simultaneously abandoning and “thirsting” for girlhood dreams. Mahler expresses the manifold personal, intellectual, and creative sacrifices that frequently accompany becoming a wife and mother instead of a professional artist.

Through the process of writing this dissertation and the immense forbearance of my committee, I have learned to check my rage for those who would dare question the artistic contributions of Alma Mahler. By exploring a variety of sources created by or about Mahler, or featuring her music, I hope to have presented a more nuanced and measured account of her legacy in the twenty-first century. I cannot claim to offer an

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<sup>30</sup> Wilson Kimber, “The ‘Suppression’ of Fanny Mendelssohn,” 128.

objective or complete account, however, for like Mahler and all other authors, I do have an agenda. My aim has been to demonstrate that despite all the words used against her—even those she penned herself—her musical work has the capacity to change how her legacy evolves and is understood. In the twenty-first century, diverse musicians study her songs and find them sufficiently rich and rewarding to merit performance and recording. My investigation of recent performances highlights the degree to which Mahler's songs are finding new performers and audiences alike. My hope is that the performance of her songs will redefine Alma Mahler's legacy into the twenty-first century and beyond.

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**Sent:** Saturday, January 30, 2021 3:36 PM

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