

Hanns Eisler and the FBI

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To judge from the waves of scholarship and performances that marked the 1998 centennial of his birth, the composer Hanns Eisler has already attained the status of national hero in his native Germany. But in the United States, where he lived from 1937 until 1948, Eisler remains by and large a shadowy figure.¹

Musicological treatment of Eisler in the United States—indeed, in the west in general—amounts to a brush-off. When serious interest in Eisler has been expressed, typically it has centered on the handful of scores he wrote for Hollywood films and a theoretical book about film music that he co-authored with Theodor Adorno.² Beyond that, the standard “read” on Eisler is that he was once upon a time an adventurous musical modernist but then consigned himself to the sidelines when, in the mid-1920s, he espoused the idea that music is useless if it is directed only toward sophisticated ears. As rapidly as Eisler’s music gained in aural simplicity, it seems, so it lost status in the minds of western critics. More than a quarter-century ago British composer-musicologist David Blake, one of Eisler’s few non-German champions, concluded his *Grove Dictionary* article on Eisler with what amounts to an exhortation: “No composer has suffered more from the post-1945 cultural cold war. As the cross-currents between Eastern Europe and the west increase, a proper international assessment of his achievement *must* be made.”³ Blake’s revised article for the 2000 *Grove* refers to

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¹ Along with the works cited in these footnotes, Eisler studies by American musicologists include—and arguably are limited to—Thomas Nadar, “The Music of Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, and Paul Dessau in the Dramatic Works of Bertolt Brecht” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1974); Joy Calico, “Hanns Eisler Reception in the United States after 1947,” in *Hanns Eisler: 's müßt dem Himmel Höllenangst werden*, ed. Maren Köster (Hofheim: Wolke, 1998): 120–36; Joy Calico, “The Politics of Opera in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1961” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1999); Sally Bick, “Composers on the Cultural Front: Aaron Copland and Hanns Eisler in Hollywood” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2001); Margaret R. Jackson, “Workers, Unite! The Political Songs of Hanns Eisler, 1926–1932” (D.M.A. thesis, Florida State University, 2003); and Joy Calico, “Brecht and His Composer / Eisler and His Librettist,” *Communications* (International Brecht Society) 34 (June 2005): 67–72.

² *Composing for the Films* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947). When the book was first published only Eisler was listed as an author. In a postscript for the 1969 German edition (*Komposition für den Film*, ed. Eberhardt Klemm), Adorno explains that he withdrew his name because he “did not seek to become a martyr” in “the [political] scandal” in which Eisler, in 1947, was involved. See *Composing for the Films*, revised edition (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 167.

To this day, the authorship of the book—that is, how much it came from Adorno, how much from Eisler—remains problematic. For discussions, see Klemm’s introduction to the 1969 German edition; James Buhler and David Neumeyer, review of Caryl Flinn’s *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* and Kathryn Kalinak’s *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 369–70; and Martin Hufner, “Composing for the Films (1947): Adorno, Eisler, and the Sociology of Music,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (October 1998): 535–40.

³ David Blake, “Eisler, Hanns,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980). Emphasis added.

the founding in 1994 of the International Hanns Eisler Society and the launching, in the same year, of a critical edition of Eisler's collected works. But these German projects, Blake writes, are simply "cause for optimism that a proper international assessment of his significance *can* be made."⁴

Blake's encouragements notwithstanding, it will likely be years before American critics afford Eisler's music even a fraction of the attention, let alone respect, it has attracted in Germany.⁵ In the meantime, however, Eisler in the United States will not suffer posthumously from lack of name-recognition. Eisler's claim to fame is in fact quite solid. Unfortunately, it is based not on his work as a composer but on his reputation as a suspected enemy of the American government.

At 686 pages, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's once-secret file on Eisler is one of the more voluminous collections now available on the Freedom of Information Act website.⁶ The first item in the file is a memorandum (27 February 1942) in which bureau director J. Edgar Hoover instructs the agent in charge of the New York office to determine if Eisler had ever been an employee of the Works Progress Administration or any other federal agency.⁷ Although the New York agent found that Eisler had not been so employed and one of the bureau's assistant directors advised that "no further action [be] contemplated" (see Fig. 1), Hoover nevertheless ordered an investigation that involved not just an exegesis of virtually all of Eisler's published writings but also an elaborate series of wiretaps, tails, and break-ins engineered to uncover incriminating evidence.

⁴ David Blake, "Eisler, Hanns," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 2000). Emphasis added.

⁵ Aside from introductions to collections of Eisler's own writings and numerous encyclopedia entries the older German literature includes, but is by no means limited to, Eberhardt Klemm, "Bemerkungen zur Zwölfkloppentechnik bei Eisler und Schönberg," *Sinn und Form* 16 (1964): 771-84; Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Musik einer Zeit, die sich eben bildet* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1976) [published in English as *Hanns Eisler, Political Musician*, trans. Bill Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)]; Albrecht Dümmling, "Schönberg und sein Schüler Hanns Eisler: Ein dokumentarischer Abriss," *Die Musikforschung* 29, no. 4 (1976): 431-61; Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler im USA-Exil: Zu den politischen, ästhetischen und kompositorischen Positionen des Komponisten 1938 bis 1948* (Berlin: Editorial Akademie, 1978); Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Bildbiographie* (Berlin: RDA, 1981); Manfred Grabs, ed., *Wer war Hanns Eisler: Auffassungen aus sechs Jahrzehnten* (Berlin: Verlag das Europäische Buch, 1983); Manfred Grabs, *Hanns Eisler: Komponistionen-Schriften-Literature. Ein Handbuch* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1983). German literature stemming from the centennial includes Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern und Dokumenten* (Mainz: Schott, 1998); Frank Kämpfer, "Mythen, Traditionen und Trauerarbeit: Neue Fragen und Thesen zu Hanns Eisler (1898-1962)," *Neue Musikzeitung* 47, nos. 7-8 (July-August 1998): 19; Jürgen Schebera, *Eisler: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern und Dokumenten* (Mainz: Schott, 1998); Maren Koster, *Hanns Eisler: 'S Müsst dem Himmel höllenangst werden* (Berlin: Wolke, 1998); Albrecht Dümmling, "Eisler und Brecht: Bilanz einer produktiven Partnerschaft," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 159, no. 6 (November-December 1998): 4-9; Eckhard John, "Ohr und Verstand: Eislers Überlegungen zum Musik-Hören," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 159, no. 6 (November-December 1998): 14-17; Kersten Glandien, "Gegen den Strich: Eisler, Wiederentdeckt," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 159, no. 6 (November-December 1998): 18-22; Konrad Boehmer, "Nach Eisler: Aporien Kritischen Komponierens heute," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 159, no. 6 (November-December 1998): 42-45; Gerd Rienäcker, "Nachdenken über Hanns Eisler: Reflexionen am Ende des Eislerjahres 1998," *Musik in der Schule* 11, no. 6 (November-December 1998): 304, 313-4; Kyung-Bonn Lee, "Hanns Eisler der Zeitgenosse: Positionen-Perspektiven; Materialien zu den Eisler-Festen 1994/95," *Die Musikforschung* 53, no. 1 (2000): 13; Laurent Guido, "Eine 'neue Musik' für die Massen: Zwischen Adorno und Brecht: Hanns Eislers Überlegungen zur Filmmusik," *Dissonanz* 64 (May 2000): 20-27; and Johannes Gall, "Hanns Eislers Musik zu Sequenzen aus 'The Grapes of Wrath': Eine unbeachtete Filmpartitur," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 59, no. 1 (2002): 60-77.

⁶ The Eisler file, No. 100-195220, was put on-line in 2000. <http://foia.fbi.gov/>

⁷ Documents in the Eisler file range in size from one-page memoranda and telegrams to lengthy transcripts of interviews and translations of foreign-language publications. They are arranged—but only for the most part—in the chronological order of their creation, and they do not bear individual labels. Thus in this article the documents are identified, in the main text, only by date and descriptive type.

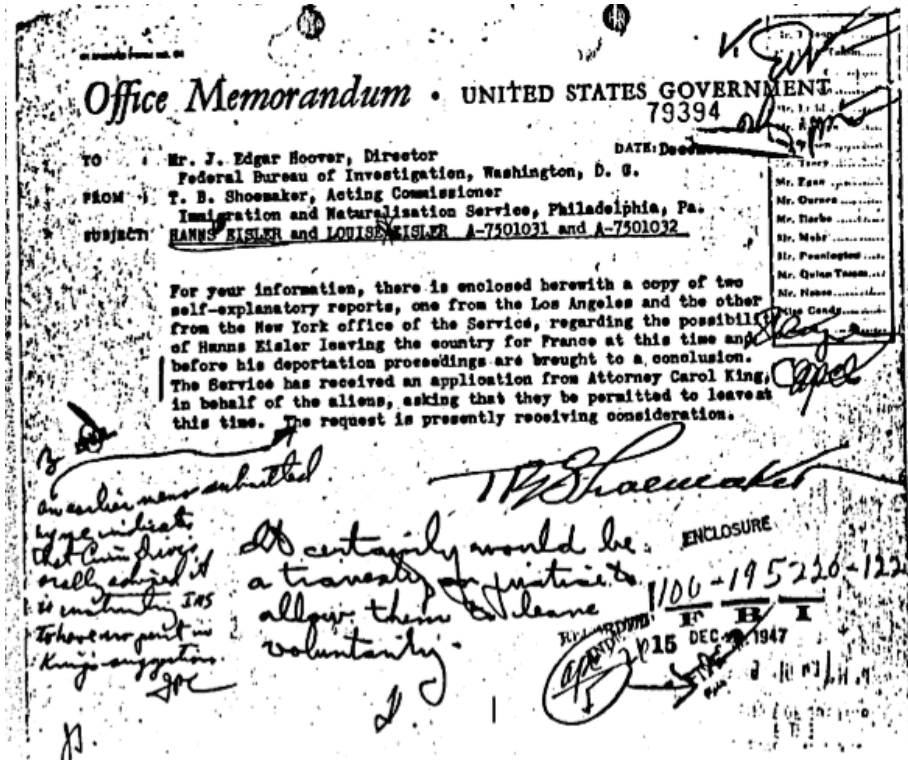


Figure 2. Memo from INS acting commissioner T.B. Shoemaker to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, 15 December 1947 (public domain)

There is no doubt that Eisler throughout his adult life leaned toward the political left, which is to say that he believed in individual freedoms and favored reform that served the good of the so-called common man. But before his 1948 departure from the United States he was never a Communist, that is, a member of the Communist party in any country (for the purposes of this essay, the word “Communist” is used only to designate the official organization.). And his set stances were always anti-fascist, never anti-American and seldom even overtly anti-capitalist.⁸ Although during the 1940s his brother Gerhardt was indeed an active member of the American Communist party, Hanns Eisler, during the same period, led a remarkably nonpolitical life.⁹ During his California sojourn he associated comfortably with a left-leaning crowd that included Fritz Lang,

⁸ For a thorough discussion of Eisler’s political views, see Georg Knepler, “Hanns Eisler and ‘Interventive Thought,’” trans., J. Bradford Robinson, *Journal of Musicological Research* 17 (1998): 239–60.

⁹ In May 1949 Gerhardt Eisler was found guilty of making false statements on a passport application, but his only imprisonment in the United States, early in 1948, stemmed from charges of contempt of Congress after he refused to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee; based on his allegedly giving contradictory testimony before HUAC, later in 1948 deportation proceedings were launched but then dropped. During his release on bail following the 1949 conviction he illegally exited the United States by stowing away on a ship bound for England; discovered in transit and arrested upon his arrival in Southampton, he was set free by a British magistrate who denied the U.S. government’s request for extradition. For details, see George A. Finch, “The Eisler Extradition Case,” *American Journal of International Law* 43, no. 3 (July 1949): 487–91. While charges of espionage were never brought against him, it was nevertheless assumed by many anti-Communists that Gerhardt Eisler was a Soviet agent. Indeed, a character named “Gerhardt Eisler” figures as the chief villain in the 1951 film *I Was a Communist for the FBI*.

Bertolt Brecht, Clifford Odets, Harold Clurman, Jean Renoir, Charles Chaplin, and Peter Lorre, but his purpose in Hollywood—as seems to be verified by the FBI’s file—was simply to earn a living. The Hollywood feature films for which Eisler provided music are *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), *None But the Lonely Heart* (1944), *Jealousy* (1945), *The Spanish Main* (1945), *A Scandal in Paris* (1946), *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), *Woman on the Beach* (1947), and *So Well Remembered* (1947). Most of these are middle-of-the-road genre pieces, but the first two—in keeping with the spirit of the times—feature screenplays strongly supportive of the Allied war effort.¹⁰

Hoover’s FBI turned up not a shred of evidence to suggest that Eisler had ever been a threat to American security. Yet for half a dozen years Eisler was the target of intense investigation, and his questioning in 1947 by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)—in effect the start of HUAC’s purge of the motion picture industry—was unusually prolonged and harsh.¹¹

Why was he so treated? Why was Eisler—among all the foreign-born leftists that Hoover might have targeted—given such special treatment?¹² Why, before newsreel and television cameras, was he publicly humiliated?¹³ Was there something about Eisler, personally, that Hoover hated? More to the point, was there something about Eisler that Hoover feared? The official reason for Eisler’s hounding was his alleged but never proven affiliation with the Communist party. Yet the FBI’s exhaustive research fairly proved not only that Eisler had never actually been a Communist but also that, as Eisler himself informed HUAC, in all his political activities he had never been anything more than a composer.¹⁴ The fact that Eisler *was* a composer leads one to wonder: Was it somehow his music that made him seem dangerous?

¹⁰ For critical commentary on Eisler’s Hollywood film music, see Claudia Gorbman, “Hanns Eisler in Hollywood,” *Screen* 32 (1991): 272–85; Jürgen Schebera, “Die Filmkomponist Hanns Eisler,” in *Hanns Eisler der Zeitgenosse: Positionen-Perspektiven Materialien zu den Eisler-Festen 1994/95*, ed. Günter Mayer, 41–59 (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1997); Horst Weber, “Eisler as Hollywood Film Composer, 1942–1948,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (October 1998): 561–6; Jürgen Schebera, “Hangmen Also Die (1943): Hollywood’s Brecht-Eisler Collaboration,” *Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (October 1998): 567–73; Gerd Gemünden, “Brecht in Hollywood: *Hangmen Also Die* and the Anti-Nazi Film,” *The Drama Review* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 65–76; and Sally Bick, “Political Ironies: Hanns Eisler in Hollywood and Behind the Iron Curtain,” *Acta Musicologica* 75, no. 1 (2003): 65–84.

¹¹ The group was officially called the House of Representatives’ Committee on Un-American Activities but was commonly known, perhaps for the sake of a euphonious acronym, the House Un-American Activities Committee. In an attempt to ferret out Hollywood insiders of leftist persuasion, HUAC in 1947 interviewed more than forty persons involved with filmmaking. Of the nineteen persons named as suspected leftists, ten (Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Adrian Scott, and Dalton Trumbo) famously refused to cooperate with HUAC and served prison sentences for contempt. Under HUAC pressure, the others identified dozens of their colleagues, and the result was the Hollywood “black list” that endured well into the 1950s. There is no evidence to suggest that Eisler was ever questioned about the political leanings of his Hollywood colleagues or that any of HUAC’s “friendly witnesses” ever pointed an accusatory finger in his direction.

¹² At 1,923 pages, the FBI file on Charles Chaplin is notably larger than the file on Eisler. The files on Bertolt Brecht, Peter Lorre, and Thomas Mann, however, amount to only 360, 180, and 95 pages, respectively. Jean Renoir has no file of his own, but his name is cross-referenced on 95 pages in files relating to other subjects.

¹³ Footage of Eisler’s appearances before HUAC is included in *Solidarity Song: The Hanns Eisler Story* (Oley, Pa.: Bullfrog Films, 1997) an 84-minute documentary made by Canadian filmmaker Larry Weinstein on commission from ZDF-German Television/ARTE.

¹⁴ Pressed by HUAC on his pre-American activities, Eisler famously responded: “The communists, they were heroes. Me? I was only a composer.” The bitter quip—often with an emphasis on the word “only”—has frequently been quoted, and it figures in the title of Julian Silverman’s “‘Only a Composer’: Reflections on the Eisler Centenary,” *Tempo* 206 (September 1998): 21–28. The exact wording of Eisler’s testimony can be found in “Hearings Regarding Hanns Eisler: Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eightieth Congress, First Session,

This, of course, remains a matter for speculation. At its conclusion, this article will indeed speculate—not so much for the sake of offering a theory but simply for the sake of exploring music-related reasons as to why Eisler *might* have been perceived as a threat and thus subjected to an especially rigorous investigation. So that readers might better formulate their own opinions, this article for the most part will simply report the investigation’s details, with emphasis on its chronology, its elaborate methods, and its considerable scope. For the sake of perspective, however, the article begins with a survey of Eisler’s music and politics.

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In a statement prepared in advance of his second HUAC hearing (24–26 September 1947), Eisler summarized his compositional work over the previous seven years. “These, gentlemen, are my activities in the United States,” he wrote, “and I must suppose that these are what the Committee considers ‘un-American.’ Apparently you are not connoisseurs of music.”¹⁵ The words were facetious, intended to suggest that HUAC was barking up the wrong tree. But perhaps the quip was more on the mark than Eisler realized.

Referring to his compositions that had recently been performed in the United States, Eisler’s HUAC statement lists a 1923 divertimento for woodwind quintet (op. 4), the 1932 *Kleine Sinfonie* (op. 29), a 1937 sonata for violin and piano (“Die Reisesonate”) and, from the same year, a group of nine cantatas for alto and chamber ensemble, a 1941 set of variations for piano, and the 1943 Piano Sonata No. 3. In addition, five of eight Hollywood scores are mentioned.

Had Eisler chosen to itemize all the works for the concert hall that he had produced since he took up what he hoped might be permanent residence in the United States, he could have noted a chamber symphony (op. 69), a septet (op. 92a), and a quintet titled *Fourteen Ways of Describing Rain* (op. 70) from 1940; a nonet and a set of twenty songs for female or children’s chorus (the *Woodbury-Liederbüchlein*) from 1941; a set of eight songs (the *Hollywood Elegies*), with texts by Brecht and himself, from 1942; settings for voice and piano of texts by Mörike (the *Anakreontische Fragmente*), Brecht (*Gedichte im Exil*, *Die Mutter*, *Das deutsche Miserere*, and *Vom Sprengen des Gartens*), Eichendorff (*Auf der Heimat hinter den Blitzen rot*), and Hölderlin (the *Hölderlin-Fragmente*) from 1943; incidental music for Brecht’s *Furcht und Elend des dritten Reiches* from 1945; settings for voice and orchestra of texts by Brecht (*Die Gesichte der Simone Machard*) and Goethe (*Glückliche Fahrt*) from 1946; and a septet from 1947.

Public Law 601, Section 121, Subsection Q (2), September 24, 25 and 26, 1947” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947) and in Eric Bentley, *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938–1968* (New York: Viking, 1971).

¹⁵ Eisler was not allowed to read his statement at the hearing. Under the title “Fantasia in G-Men,” the document was published in the 14 October 1947 issue of *New Masses*; one month later it appeared in German translation in Vienna’s *Tagebuch*. The statement is available in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs (London: Kahn & Averill, 1978), 150–52, and in *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik Schriften: 1924–1948* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1983), 521–23.

Clearly, Eisler was a busy composer during his American years. Just as clearly, he was a *serious* composer. The film scores, of course, were works for hire; they display craftsmanship but also abound with cliché, and on the whole their style is in keeping with the generic style of countless other composers who serviced narrative films during Hollywood's so-called classical period. Most of the works cited above, however, are staunchly individualistic in expression as well as technique. And, like certain passages in the film scores, most of them adhere to a methodology that in the context of the central decades of the twentieth century is fairly synonymous with musical modernism.

Eisler was born on 6 July 1898 in Leipzig but grew up in Vienna, where his father, Rudolf Eisler, an Austrian Jew who had earned his doctorate in philosophy in Leipzig, eked out a living as an editor and translator. Both of his parents were amateur musicians, and from early childhood Eisler immersed himself in music. It would not be until 1918, however—after he spent two years of World War I in a Hungarian regiment—that he had any formal lessons.

None of the works composed while Eisler was a schoolboy survives, but the output apparently included a piano sonata, numerous songs, incidental music for Hauptmann's play *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*, and a symphonic poem based on the writings of Jens Peter Jacobsen. Sketches for an oratorio titled *Gegen den Krieg* were made and lost during Eisler's service at the front; the extant wartime compositions are limited to songs for piano and voice featuring poems by Christian Morgenstern and translations by Alfred Klabund of Chinese poems. Written under enemy fire, the settings of the Chinese texts ("The Tired Soldier" and "The Red and White Rose") are emotionally uninhibited responses to the horrors of war. The Morgenstern settings—a half-dozen *Galgenlieder* ("Gallows Songs") and a pair collectively titled *Die Mausefalle* ("The Mousetrap")—were composed while Eisler recuperated from injuries first in a field hospital and then in a convalescent facility near Vienna, and they are more indicative of the direction Eisler's music would take over the next decade. These songs, too, are responses to wartime experiences, but their overall tone is detached and wry, as if Eisler "protects himself by retreating into parody, grotesquerie and wit in a way not dissimilar to what was to become a Brechtian distancing."¹⁶

After his discharge from the army in November 1918, Eisler studied composition with Karl Weigl at the New Vienna Conservatory and supported himself with proofreading work at the Universal Editions publishing house. Penniless but deeply in love with a woman (Irma Friedemann) with whom he shared an apartment, Eisler composed prolifically during his first few months as a civilian. Probably inspired more by his relationship with Friedemann than his lessons with the stiffly old-fashioned Weigl, he produced dozens of songs with texts by such poets as Morgenstern, Trakl, Rilke, Tagore, and Eichendorff; most of these are romantic, even sentimental, in nature, and all of them remained in manuscript until Friedemann brought them to light after Eisler's death. Study with Weigl, whom Eisler described as simply "a very respectable musician," served primarily to clarify procedure for a young composer hitherto self-taught in composition and harmony.¹⁷ Eisler's

¹⁶ David Blake, "The Early Music," in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 13.

¹⁷ "Ein sehr anständiger Musiker." Quoted by Jürgen Schebera in *Hanns Eisler: Eine Bildbiographie* (Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft: Berlin, 1981), 15.

formative musical education began in the late summer of 1919, when he was accepted for private instruction, without fee, by Arnold Schoenberg.

In 1919, Schoenberg was Vienna's most illustrious practitioner of musical Expressionism, a genre that erupted simultaneous with the outbreak of World War I and which was characterized not just by extreme volatility but also by bold rejection of the tonal system that had governed pitch relationships in European music for the previous three centuries. Frustrated with the chaos inherent in the deliberately atonal music he helped create, Schoenberg in the early 1920s invented a "method of composing with twelve inter-related tones." Whereas tonal music involved linear melodic/harmonic movement from stasis to dissonance to resolution, and whereas atonal music favored a stream-of-consciousness flow of whatever pitch combinations might come to a composer's mind, Schoenberg's new method entailed the arrangement of all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale into a germinal row, or series, whose permutations—backwards, forwards, inverted, and so on—formed the substance of an entire work. As is evidenced by the obvious differences in affect between the post-1920 compositions of Schoenberg and his two most famous pupils—Alban Berg and Anton Webern—the so-called "serial" method was not a musical style but simply a means of organizing musical materials. While accommodating all the dynamic and sonic individuality a practitioner might muster, the serial method at the same time allowed for abdication of certain subjective thought processes; logical to the extreme and based to a large extent on pre-compositional decisions, the method was an appealing haven for young composers who, like Eisler, might have felt overtaxed by their wartime outpourings of musical emotion.

Rather than instruction in the creation of atonal or serial music, Eisler's study with Schoenberg focused on exercises in eighteenth-century counterpoint and harmonic analyses of the music of Johannes Brahms. But Eisler breathed deeply the air of Schoenberg and his circle: he was given a low-level administrative job with the prestigious Verein für Musikalische Privataufführungen (Society for Private Musical Performance) that Schoenberg had founded in 1918, and he frequently accompanied his teacher on music-related trips outside Vienna. As might be expected, Eisler composed music in the early 1920s that very much shows the influence of his mentor, which is to say that it is solid in design and dense in content. Quite unlike the consistently sober music of Schoenberg, however, Eisler's first published works feature many moments of levity.¹⁸ Although based on the ordered unfolding of twelve-note series, the harmonies in their progressions often allude to traditional syntax, and the music's rhythmic propulsion typically draws from the vernacular rhythms of jazz and other popular genres.

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A self-taught Expressionist who vented *Angst* with humor and later a well-trained serialist who referenced tradition in order to temper a rigorous new methodology, Eisler almost from the start was a composer who valued connection with his immediate audience over an imagined seat in some futuristic pantheon. But however "light" his music might have seemed during his years under

¹⁸ These include the op. 1 Piano Sonata (1923), the op. 2 set of six songs with texts by Japanese poets, the op. 3 Piano Pieces, and the op. 4 Divertimento for wind quintet, all from 1923.

Schoenberg's tutelage, it lightened up far more when in the autumn of 1925 Eisler accepted a teaching position at the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory in Berlin. The stylistic shift was prompted by political ideology.

Almost by definition, the Schoenbergian aesthetic was elitist: to actually hear relationships between one form or another of a twelve-tone series demanded phenomenal listening skills, but simply to appreciate why some composers might find it necessary to create music in the serial vein required a well-educated understanding of the history of nineteenth-century European art music and its connection with economically fueled societal issues. That Eisler was anti-elitist at heart is evidenced by his involvement, while still in Vienna, with various "workers" singing societies.¹⁹ But after moving to Berlin, where his brother and sister had for several years been active Communists, Eisler became a zealot. In 1926 he applied for membership in the German Communist party; that he was denied membership, as is documented by the FBI files, had mostly to do with the fact that he failed to pay his dues on time. Also as is documented by the FBI files, Eisler in 1926 began to write articles on music for the Communist periodical *Die Rote Fahne*. And he fairly threw himself into the creation of anthems, marching songs, and pieces for unaccompanied men's chorus that were not just overtly supportive of the proletariat in their texts but also self-consciously "accessible" in their musical content.²⁰

Not surprisingly, this led to a break with Schoenberg. Schoenberg, who moved to Berlin in January 1926 to teach at the Prussian Academy of Arts, accused Eisler of being disloyal. Eisler in turn accused Schoenberg of being esoteric and, more damningly, bourgeois.²¹ In a bitterly rejective letter to his once-revered teacher, Eisler wrote:

Modern music bores me, it doesn't interest me, some of it I even hate and despise. Actually, I want nothing to do with what is 'modern.' As far as possible, I avoid hearing or reading it. (Sadly, I must also include my own works of recent years.) . . . Also, I understand nothing (except superficialities) of twelve-note technique and twelve-note music.²²

Eisler, of course, understood a great deal about twelve-note music, and despite his bravado he was not about to abandon either his serial skills or his awareness of the melodic/harmonic possibilities that the serial method afforded. This led to a dilemma.

¹⁹ Specifically, the Karl Liebknecht Gesangverein and the Stahlklang Chorvereinigung.

²⁰ Among the best-known of Eisler's proletariat songs, popular not just in Germany but throughout Europe, are *Der heimliche Aufmarsch*, *Kominternlied*, *Solidaritätslied*, and *Stempellied*.

²¹ As late as 1935 Eisler would write, in an article for a New York newspaper, that he considered Schoenberg to be "the greatest modern bourgeois composer. If the bourgeoisie do not like his music that is regrettable, for they have no better composer." Hanns Eisler, "On Schönberg," in *New Masses*, 26 February 1935. Reprinted in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs (London: Kahn and Averill, 1999), 75.

²² Undated letter from Eisler to Schoenberg, presumably written before 10 March 1926. Quoted in Eberhardt Klemm, "I Don't Give a Damn about this Spring: Hanns Eisler's Move to Berlin," in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, 4. The article, which originally appeared in *Sinn und Form* 39, no. 3 (1987), is translated by Karin von Abrams.

Vis-à-vis their falling-out, the correspondence between Eisler and Schoenberg is reprinted in *Wer war Hanns Eisler: Auffassungen aus sechs Jahrzehnten*, ed. Manfred Grabs (Berlin: Verlag das Europäische Buch, 1983). It is generally assumed by Eisler scholars, however, that Eisler's disparagement of Schoenberg began with a casual conversation on a train between Eisler and Schoenberg's brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky. For details, see Stephen Hinton, "Hanns Eisler and the Ideology of Modern Music" in *New Music, Aesthetics and Ideology / Neue Musik, Ästhetik und Ideologie*, ed. Mark Delaere (Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, Heinrichshofen-Bücher, 1995), 80-81.

On the one hand, Eisler had good reason to believe in his potential as a serious composer. His music was being published, at Schoenberg's recommendation, by Universal Editions, and he had been awarded the prestigious Vienna Art Prize in April 1925. On the other hand, Eisler was in the throes of rebellion against the very system that allowed him his burgeoning success.

Early in his retreat from the world of "elitist" music, Eisler composed two works that demonstrate the ambivalence he must have been feeling. One of these, based on bitterly sarcastic excerpts from his own diaries, is the op. 9 *Tagebuch des Hanns Eisler*, for three female voices, tenor, violin, and piano (1926); the other, based only in part on the more or less grim newspaper clippings suggested by the title, is a set of ten songs that make up the op. 11 *Zeitungs Ausschnitte* (1925–27). Neither piece makes use of serial techniques, but the *Tagebuch* craftily juxtaposes a quotation from the "Internationale" with references to Schoenberg's 1923 op. 9 Chamber Symphony and harmonically vertiginous episodes based on whole-tone scales, and the *Zeitungs Ausschnitte* throughout is decidedly brittle and nonlyrical. A notebook kept by Eisler in 1928 but not published until 1983 teems with comments and musical sketches that suggest that Eisler, however bold his public statements and activities, was in fact torn between aesthetic/political allegiances.²³ Eberhardt Klemm rather understates the case when he writes that Eisler's 1928 journal "allow[s] one to recognize a contradictory spirit whose rejection of his bourgeois past was certainly not without difficulties."²⁴

Eisler's *Tagebuch* and *Zeitungs Ausschnitte* received their premieres in 1927, the one in Baden-Baden at a festival of contemporary music organized by Paul Hindemith, the other on a concert sponsored by the Berlin chapter of the International Society for New Music. At least for a while, these would be the last of Eisler's efforts to participate in what Eisler acridly described as "the bourgeois concert business."²⁵ Over the next half-dozen years Eisler concentrated almost entirely on projects that in one way or another furthered the proletariat cause. Along with vocal pieces that fall more or less into the category of "Kampflieder" ("songs for the struggle"), these include scores for a handful of films²⁶ and—triggered by meetings with director Erwin Piscator in 1928 and, significantly, writer Bertolt Brecht in 1930—suites of incidental music for a large number of theatrical productions.²⁷

²³ In the Addenda section of *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik Schriften*.

²⁴ Klemm, 5.

²⁵ The "bürgerlichen Konzertbetreib." Eisler's article under that title appeared in *Die Rote Fahne* on 15 April 1928; it is reprinted in the original German in *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik Schriften*, 74–76, and in English translation (by Karin von Abrams) in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, 69–71.

²⁶ Along with music for Walter Ruttmann's abstract 'silent' film *Opus III* (1927), Eisler composed scores for Victor Trivas's *Niemandsländ* (1931), Alexis Granowski's *Das Lied vom Leben* (1931), Ernst Ottwalt and Slatan Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), and Joris Ivens's *Die Jugend hat das Wort* (also known as *Heldenlied* and, in Russian, *Magnitogorsk*, 1932). For details on the politically oriented narrative content of early sound films in Germany, see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

²⁷ In 1928 Eisler provided music for the revue *Hallo, Kollege Jungarbeiter* and for the plays *Die Bergarbeiter* (Gmeyer), *Maggie* (Barrie), and *Kalkutta, 4 Mai* (Feuchtwanger). In 1929 he wrote music for *Der Kaufmann von Berlin* (Mehring) and *Dantons Tod* (Büchner). Eisler began his collaboration with Brecht in 1930 with the production of *Die Massnahme*, and his other stage pieces from that year are *Heer ohne Helden* (Weisner-Gmeyer), *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (Kraus), and *Das Gerücht* (Munro). In 1931 Eisler wrote music for Brecht's *Das Mutter*; in 1932 his music accompanied *Rote Revue: Wir sind ja sooo zufrieden* (Brecht), *Kamerad Kaspar* (Schurek), and *Agitpropstück: Bauer Baetz* (Wolf).

The exile that Eisler experienced between 1926 and 1933 was self-imposed and based not just on a strident political attitude but also on ideological reaction to prevailing trends in contemporary music. The exile that began in January 1933 was of an entirely different sort. Eisler happened to be in Vienna, supervising the music for a production of Brecht's play *Die Mutter*, on the day that Germany's president assigned to Adolph Hitler the title Chancellor of the Reich. Well aware that his life was now in danger, the outspokenly anti-fascist Eisler wisely chose not to return to Berlin.

Before Hitler's rise to power, Eisler had twice—in 1930 and 1931—briefly visited the Soviet Union. After Hitler's installation as Chancellor, Eisler moved not east but, for the most part, west. Not until January 1938 would Eisler “settle in” to a teaching position at the New School for Social Research and what he hoped would be permanent residence in the United States. Before that his odyssey took him to Prague, Paris, Amsterdam, and London (1933); to Copenhagen, Paris, and London (1934); to Strasbourg, London, Moscow, Prague, and—on two occasions—New York (1935); to London, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Copenhagen (1936); and to Madrid, Copenhagen, and Prague (1937).²⁸

Even under the duress of traveling almost constantly and without a passport, Eisler managed to compose. His output from these years includes film scores and, as one might expect, music overtly supportive of the proletariat cause.²⁹ But it also includes concert works that suggest Eisler, now a refugee, was experiencing a change of heart regarding musical techniques that just a few years earlier he had vociferously eschewed.

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The op. 29 *Kleine Sinfonie* and the op. 30 *Suite No. 4 for Orchestra* that Eisler completed just before exiting Germany certainly show the hand of a serial composer. More self-consciously serialist, as is evidenced by the explanatory essay that accompanies it, is Eisler's 1934 *Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H*, op. 46, for string trio.³⁰ The op. 50 *Deutsche Sinfonie*—started in 1935 and completed in 1939—is composed entirely in what Blake calls “Eisler's distinctively tonal type of serialism.”³¹ Likewise for all nine of the *Chamber Cantatas* for voice and various accompanying ensembles that Eisler produced in 1937 and, from the same year, the *Two Sonnets* set to texts by

²⁸ Eisler's visit to Moscow, in the summer months, was for the purpose of presiding over the International Music Bureau. The first visit to the United States extended from February through May and involved a concert tour whose itinerary included New York, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Denver, Detroit, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Los Angeles; the second visit, from October 1935 through April 1936, involved lectures at the New School for Social Research in New York.

²⁹ During his years of travel Eisler wrote film scores for Victor Trivas's *Dans le Rues* (1933), Joris Ivens's *Zuiderzee* (also known as *Nieuwe Gronden*, 1933), Jacques Feyder's *La Grand Jeu* (1933), and Karl Grune's *Abdul the Damned* (1934). Theatrical productions for which he provided music are Ernst Toller's *Feuer aus den Kesseln* and *Peace on Earth* (both London, 1934) and Brecht's *Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe* (Copenhagen, 1936). Eisler composed a large number of politically oriented songs during this period, probably the best-known of which are “Das Einheitsfrontlied” and “Das Saarlid” from 1934—written during the 1937 visit to Spain—“The Song for the Seventh of January,” the “March of the Fifth Regiment,” and “No Pasaran.”

³⁰ The essay, reprinted in *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik Schriften*, 379–82, is titled “Präludium und Fuge über B-A-C-H (mit 12 Tönen).” The letters B-A-C-H, in German musical nomenclature, refer not just to the name of Bach but also to the pitches B-flat, A, C, and B-natural.

³¹ Blake, *Grove*, 90. For a detailed analysis of Eisler's use of serialism in the *Deutsche Sinfonie*, see Erik Levi, “Hanns Eisler's ‘Deutsche Sinfonie,’” in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, 181–202.

Brecht; the serial writing in the *Sonnets* is especially rigorous, observes German biographer Jürgen Schebera, yet it is serial writing that “through its ‘Eislerian’ handling of materials speaks an utterly clear musical message.”³²

Eisler’s rapprochement with serialism was hardly limited to his years of travel. It may be that the first major work Eisler composed upon his move to New York, the 1938 *String Quartet* (op. 75), is “fundamentally a linear piece: motivic, melodic, contrapuntal,” but its pitch sequences are nonetheless intricately serial.³³ Also intricate in their deployment of serial lines are the 1938 *Five Orchestral Pieces*, the 1940 *Chamber Symphony* (op. 69), and the 1941 quintet titled *Fourteen Ways of Describing Rain* (op. 70). Indeed, the quintet stands out as the most strictly organized piece in the entire Eisler catalog, and perhaps this has something to do with the fact that it was conceived as a birthday tribute to Schoenberg.³⁴

The *Five Orchestral Pieces*, the *Chamber Symphony*, and the op. 70 quintet are works intended for the arguably “elitist” concert hall, yet all of them stem from impulses connected with the “populist” venue of the cinema. Like the fairly light *Scherzo* for violin and orchestra, the tautly serial *Five Orchestral Pieces* derive from music Eisler composed for a 1938 Joris Ivens documentary film on China titled *The 400 Million*. The 1940 *Chamber Symphony* is based on materials that would surface later that year in the score for the short documentary film *White Flood*, and the 1941 quintet is a set of variations designed to accompany a showing of Ivens’s 1929 silent film *Regen* (“Rain”).³⁵

Even in his scores for commercial Hollywood films Eisler occasionally used serial techniques, albeit “in an extremely clarified and transparent form.”³⁶ And even in his most serious concert works Eisler managed to fill serialist prescriptions in ways that are likely to strike most listeners as comprehensible both aurally and emotionally. Regardless of its genre, the music from Eisler’s American period demonstrates what a German writer recently described as “serialism with a human face.”³⁷ In 1941, after he had conducted a study of film music at the New School for Social Research but before he moved to Hollywood, Eisler discussed the cinematic practicality of

the 12-tone system, which was invented and first applied by Arnold Schönberg. We know how difficult the music of this great master is even for musicians, but it is not often realized that the main complication in Schönberg’s complicated style is Schönberg. The 12-tone technique itself

³² Schebera, 105. (“Dies trifft auch auf die streng dodekaphonisch geschriebenen *Zwei Sonette* op. 63 zu, bei denen durch die »Eislersche« Behandlung des Materials eine ganz und gar unverwechselbare musikalische Diktion entsteht.”) For more on serial techniques in the Sonnet titled “An die Nachgeborenen,” see János Maróthy and Márta Batári, “Eisler’s ‘An die Nachgeborenen’: Another Concrete Utopia,” in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, 159–70.

³³ Tim Howell, “Eisler’s Serialism: Concepts and Methods,” in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, 131. The bulk of Howell’s essay is devoted to a comparison of the serial techniques of Schoenberg in general and those of Eisler as demonstrated in the op. 75 *String Quartet*. For more discussion on the same subject, see Eberhardt Klemm, “Bemerkungen zur Zwölftontechnik bei Eisler und Schönberg,” *Sinn und Form* 4 (1964): 771–84.

³⁴ See Howell, 129–30.

³⁵ For discussion of the relationships, see Tobias Fasshauer, “Hanns Eisler’s *Chamber Symphony* op. 69 as Film Music for *White Flood* (1940),” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (October 1998): 509–21.

³⁶ Erik Levi, “Hanns Eisler: Music for the Workers,” *BBC Music Magazine*, August 1998. <<http://eislermusic.com/eriklevi.htm>> (Accessed 17 January 2005).

³⁷ See Martin Hufner, “Auf der Suche nach einam ‘Serialismus mit menschlichen Antliz’—Vortrag auf dem Ersten Internationalen Hanns-Eisler-Symposium in Berlin an 26. Juni 1998.” <<http://www.kritische-musick.de/noframes/eisler-adorno.shtml>> Accessed 12 January 2005.

imposes no more specific a style than the major-minor tonality. But it does have a tendency to produce a more involved musical structure and to exclude the conventional melodic and harmonic musical manners normally supposed to guarantee easy understanding and popularity. To introduce this technique into the world of films at first blush seems as absurd as using Hegelian terminology in a gossip column. My own experience with this extreme technique, however, has been quite rewarding. In two film scores that I wrote before undertaking this experiment—*Four Hundred Million* and *The Living Soil*—I used the 12-tone system exclusively. The fact was not exploited and—perhaps because of that—the scores were quite well received.

Apparently advanced musical material, which average concertgoers may find indigestible and non-relevant, when applied to film loses something of this forbidding quality.³⁸

Eisler's willingness to bend the rules of serialism has doubtless contributed to the exclusion of his music from the twentieth-century modernist canon. But Eisler's idiosyncratically "humanistic" use of serial techniques positions his music at a peculiar ideological cusp. With communication to a non-elitist audience as one of its primary goals, it seems that the entire body of Eisler's serial music represents "a mediation of the most heterogeneous elements," a combination of "the most esoteric avant-garde of music . . . and the most exoteric avant-garde of politics."³⁹ And this persistent dialectic suggests that Eisler was hardly the marginal figure that most American historians of musical modernism make him out to be.

It has convincingly been argued that with his enduring "search for freedom and balance within well-defined but purposefully limited boundaries of serial organization" Eisler vis-à-vis Schoenberg actually took "quite a progressive stance."⁴⁰ Eisler's stance seems even more progressive when his serial music is interpreted through a political filter. Writing in 1958, German musicologist Harry Goldschmidt observed that Eisler rarely identified himself with serialism the way Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern did, and that when Eisler employed serial techniques it was almost always to serve the purpose of social criticism. In the most substantial of Eisler's modernist compositions, Goldschmidt tellingly concludes, "the extreme tensions of blind subjectivism are objectified, the sparks directed not towards the self but towards the real and bloodily actual enemy—fascism."⁴¹

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³⁸ Hanns Eisler, "Film Music—Work in Progress (1941)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (October 1998): 591–2. The document (591–4) is a reprint of Eisler's preliminary report on his studies at the New School for Social Research under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

The second film to which Eisler refers is more commonly known as *The Living Land*; it is a five-minute documentary on soil conservation issued in 1941 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. See Volker Helbing, "Hanns Eisler's Contribution to the New Deal: *The Living Land* (1941)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 4 (October 1998): 523–33.

³⁹ Albrecht Betz, "Music and Politics: Theme and Variations," in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, 393.

⁴⁰ Howell, 132.

⁴¹ Harry Goldschmidt, "Thoughts on Hanns Eisler," in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, 408–09. The article was originally published in 1958 in *Musik und Gesellschaft* 6. More recently, Albrecht Dümmling explored the link between Eisler's serial music and antifascism in "Zwölf-tonmusik als antifaschistisches Potential: Eislers Ideen zu einer neuen Verwendung der Dodekaphonie," in *Der Wiener Schule und das Hakenkreuz: Das Schicksal der Moderne im gesellschaftspolitischen Kontext des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Otto Kolleritsch (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990), 92–106.

As noted, the FBI's file on Eisler begins with a February 1942 memo in which J. Edgar Hoover, doubtless aware that the year before Eisler had written music for a brief documentary film brought out by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, inquires as to whether or not Eisler had ever been a federal employee.⁴² Within the same document, however, the probe turns retrospective. After referring to Walter Steele's 1938 testimony before "the Dies Committee" to the effect that recordings of Eisler's songs amounted to "subversive propaganda," the memo cites a report from January 1941 in which an unidentified informant claimed that "in addition to his radical tie-ups Eisler was known in Germany as having actual Communist connections."⁴³ Reaching back still further, the memo notes that in June 1940 a different informant had alerted the bureau's New York office that Eisler was the brother of someone known as "Edwards," allegedly the American representative of the Communist party, and that "Eisler came to the United States not primarily to compose music but to conduct G.P.U. activities."⁴⁴

In response to Hoover's query, the agent in charge of the FBI's New York division answered in the negative and suggested that further investigation was not necessary. By April 1942, however, Hoover was ordering a thorough check, "under an Internal Security Classification," on the status of Eisler's visa.

The first extensive memorandum was filed on 10 December 1942. Among other things, it noted that Eisler "was known in Germany as having active Communistic tendencies," that in 1939 Eisler had been "a member of the Executive Board of [the] Theater Arts Committee of New York, which organization is now extinct but at that time is alleged to have been Communist controlled," and that in 1936 Eisler was "one of the most prominent drawing cards for the Communist inspired musical schools [in New York, . . . the purpose of these schools [being] to instruct revolutionaries musically inclined."

The information Hoover had officially requested did not surface until four months later, in the form of an "Alien Enemy Control" report that begins with details on Eisler's various comings and goings. Significantly, the report includes a memo from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) office in San Antonio explaining that, because the "stateless" Eisler entered the United States from Mexico without a passport, "the subject's presence in the United States after January 28, 1940, was illegal"; in March of 1940, the INS memo states, Eisler and his wife were ordered to leave the United States, and after their request for an extension of their limited visas was denied "the aliens were expected to depart via Miami, Florida on March 29, 1940, by boat to Cuba." Along with that potentially damning information, the "Alien Enemy Control" report gives Eisler's current address in California, and then offers a detailed synopsis of the Brecht-Dudow play *Die Massnahme* for which Eisler supplied music in 1930. The report notes that Eisler and Brecht were co-authors of the "Song of Solidarity," a march that "was adopted, with the permission of Brecht and Subject, as the song of the Communist youth organization in Germany prior to Hitler's

⁴² See footnote 35.

⁴³ The "Dies Committee" was an unofficial name for the House of Representatives' Special Committee on Un-American Activities, which was established in 1938 with Martin Dies (D-Texas) as its chairman. Walter Steele was chairman of the American Coalition Committee on National Security, and his testimony was given on 16 August 1938.

⁴⁴ The anagram stands for Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie, i.e., the State Political Directorate of the Soviet Union.

rise to power.” In its “undeveloped leads” section, the report states that the bureau’s Los Angeles office will try to determine “whether Subject has violated provisions of the act requiring enemy aliens to register.” Then, in an appendix that demonstrates the FBI’s extraordinary industry, the report concludes with a translation of *Die Massnahme* that runs to twenty pages of single-spaced typing.

A memo dated 5 May 1943 reports that during interviews with the INS Eisler declared both that he was not a Communist and that he believed the American form of government superior to that of the Soviet Union. The same memo notes that the INS had in its “very voluminous file” on Eisler a 1936 letter to the Secretary of Labor in which J.E. Wilkie, a representative of the Arizona Peace Officer’s Association, argues that the “revolutionary and propagandical nature” of Eisler’s concert tour (with baritone Mordecai Bauman) is “sufficiently detrimental to our already steadily menaced peace and tranquility to warrant his expulsion from this country.” Referring specifically to a 10 June 1938 interview with INS agents, the memo states:

In direct answer to the question, “Have any of your compositions been used in connection with political or patriotic songs,” he answered “In Germany, I wrote songs which were anti-Nazi in character. I am a refugee.” He was asked if those songs were Communistic in character, and he answered “No, in character only against Nazi Germany.”

Referring to the INS’s concerns over Eisler’s status as an alien, the memo notes that on 17 July 1940 a warrant for Eisler’s arrest had been issued and that five months later the warrant was cancelled. “There is no other information on file at Ellis Island,” the memo states, “which would explain why the subject and his wife are now legally in the United States.”

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The first evidence of the FBI’s close scrutiny of Eisler’s personal activities appears in an “Alien Enemy Report” dated 18 May 1943. Along with lengthy summaries of previously disclosed information that are typical of FBI memoranda, the report notes that “mail cover discloses Subject in contact with Gerhardt Eisler, . . . known contact of Otto Katz, alleged OGPU Agent in Mexico City.” More tellingly, the report states that “a surveillance was placed on the activities of Subject” and it was found that on a particular evening “Subject left his home . . . at about 9:00 p.m., and proceeded in a 1939 Chevrolet sedan, license number 9 X 5100, to the home of Oscar Homolka, 10788 Bellagic Road, Bel Air.⁴⁵ At this address the following license numbers were obtained, and a check with the Motor Vehicles Department disclosed that the cars in question are registered to the following persons.” In the once-secret file that is now available to the public, the names of the car owners have been deleted, but the license plate numbers remain plainly visible.

After concluding that Gerhardt Eisler was indeed the mysterious “Edwards,” Hoover, on 4 August 1943, requested that the United States Attorney General “authorize the installation of a technical surveillance on the residence of Hanns Eisler in Santa Monica, California, for the purpose

⁴⁵ Oscar Homolka (1899–1978) was a Viennese-born actor who in films was typically cast as a “heavy.” It was only because of thespian abilities that he was cast as a politically villainous character in, for example, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Sabotage* (1936), King Vidor’s *Comrade X* (1940), Michael Curtiz’s *Mission to Moscow* (1943), and Frank Tuttle’s *Hostages* (1943).

of determining the extent of his activities in connection with the Comintern Apparatus and for the additional purpose of identifying members of the Apparatus, particularly those who are espionage agents.”

Like the “mail cover,” the “technical surveillance”—in other words, a wiretap—yielded nothing. Accordingly, the FBI’s Los Angeles office on 13 September 1943 advised Hoover that

the information presently available against the subject, . . . although undoubtedly indicative of revolutionary tendencies, is about the same as that developed in the case entitled ‘Bertolt Brecht’. . . . A short time ago, with the Bureau’s approval, the Brecht case was presented to the United States Attorney in Los Angeles, who referred it to the Department for an opinion. The Department, at that time, declined authorization of a Presidential warrant for Brecht’s arrest as a dangerous alien enemy, and there therefore appears to be no reason for referring a similar set of facts pertaining to Eisler to the United States Attorney at this time.

On the same day, the head of the Los Angeles office reported that “investigation conducted to determine whether the subject should have registered as an alien enemy has failed to disclose a violation of this nature,” and that “a review of the file in this case disclosed that all leads set out for other field divisions have been covered.” The agent acknowledged that Eisler’s alleged subversive activities warranted further attention. As far as the immigration matter was concerned, however, the Los Angeles office informed Hoover that “this case is . . . being closed herewith.”

Two weeks later, a higher authority informed Hoover that Eisler was in no way subject to prosecution. A memo dated 28 September 1943 reports that “Assistant United States Attorney John M. Gault, having considered the facts in this case, advised that no request would be made for a presidential warrant for subject’s arrest as a dangerous alien enemy.” According to the memo, Gault considered the case against Eisler to be virtually identical to the case against Brecht. As with Brecht, Gault said, it was determined that Eisler held beliefs that “seem to be [only] anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist and he is therefore not considered a danger to the war effort of this country.”

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The FBI files that cover the next three years are few in number and vague in nature. A memorandum from September 1946, however, indicates a renewed serious interest in Eisler. “This case is being reopened,” it states at the outset, “to report information received from Confidential Informant T-1, on May 30 and August 13, 1945, concerning the personal effects maintained by Hanns Eisler in his residence, which was at that time 889 South Amalfi Drive, Pacific Palisades, California.”

Seventy-eight pages in length, the memorandum begins with an account of Eisler’s birth certificate, various travel documents that Eisler had acquired since 1933, and a letter showing that Eisler had registered with the United States draft board. It continues with summaries of a “rough draft typewritten document” titled “Life History” and an entry on Eisler from the 1942 edition of *Current Biography*. After giving a list of Eisler’s compositions, the report focuses on a scrapbook that contains newspaper articles about Eisler, the earliest of which were published in Moscow in July 1935. One of these, which appeared in English in the *Moscow Daily News*, is simply paraphrased; the other, from the journal *Soviet Art*, is represented by extensive quotations from a

specially commissioned translation. “This article, together with the following articles,” writes the reporting agent, “will be treated in considerable detail herein, inasmuch as they reflect Eisler’s revolutionary character and affiliation with Communism.”

The other articles treated in detail are from *Pravda*, *Evening Moscow*, and *Literary Gazette*, all offered in translations from the original Russian. In FBI memoranda, proper names are generally given entirely in upper-case letters; among the names so transcribed in translations of various of these Russian-language articles are those of Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Leopold Stokowski, Wallingford Riegger, and Nicholas Slonimsky, all of whom, according to the summarizing agent, Eisler identified as American musicians who are in “a progressive mood” and/or have “a tendency to unite with the labor movement.” One of the articles, the reporting agent points out, even quotes Eisler as saying that “the old composer Arnold Schoenberg, an honest, reactionary-thinking master, . . . has now rather naively admitted [that] ‘Communism as a method must be tried.’”

American items found in Eisler’s scrapbook include a clipping from the *Rochester Post Express* (23 October 1935) that mentions the complaint filed against Eisler by the secretary of the Arizona Peace Officers Association; an article titled “New Music League” (from an unnamed, undated publication) that reports on “the formation of a new federation, the United Music League, . . . [based] on a common platform of struggle against war and Fascism, against cultural reaction, and for the development of a broad people’s music movement in America”; a review in *The Daily Worker* (22 November 1935) of Brecht’s play *Mother*; and an article from *The Daily Worker* (19 December 1935) that notes that Eisler’s song “Comintern” has been “sung throughout the world for the past eight years and still stirs the crowds at out-door demonstrations and political meetings.”⁴⁶

Digging more deeply into Eisler’s papers, the FBI’s confidential informant uncovered a list of books that Eisler had apparently left with a friend (Ruth Lowe) in New York; a few typescripts that appear to be rough drafts of projected radio addresses; a huge number of letters, including a copy of one from Harold Clurman to an officer at Columbia Pictures Corporation suggesting that Eisler would be the ideal composer for “your Commando picture” because Eisler “is famous all over Europe for stirring, democratic songs and tunes that have been sung wherever a brave soldier, for the right people, marched”; a series of documents related to the research project for which Eisler had been funded by the Rockefeller Foundation through the New School for Social Research; several contracts with Hollywood film studios; and the complete contents of Eisler’s two address books and personal telephone directories.⁴⁷

In its “undeveloped leads” section, the memorandum notes that some of the letters written in German have yet to be translated. In a memo dated 29 August 1946—that is, a few weeks after the second break-in—an agent reports that “under separate cover there is being transmitted to the Bureau for translation a large number of photographic reproductions of German Language letters obtained from a confidential source from the residence of the above captioned individual.” The

⁴⁶ Brecht’s *Die Mutter* dates from 1931 and features thirteen pieces by Eisler for chorus and orchestra; in 1935 Eisler treated these pieces to new arrangements, most of them featuring a two-piano accompaniment.

⁴⁷ Harold Clurman (1901–80) was known primarily for his direction of staged plays. Although he lived in Los Angeles in the 1940s, in his entire career he directed only one film. This was *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), a murder mystery that featured a score by Eisler.

dozen or so pages that come next in the FBI file bear no dates, but they offer both summaries and complete translations of the letters that for the most part amount to what the writer of the September memorandum had described as “personal chatter.”

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Up to this point, the FBI’s investigation of Eisler is remarkably free of judgment. The memoranda teem with innuendo, of course, but they contain no definitive statements as to Eisler’s complicity in anything resembling criminal behavior. The most solid evidence the FBI had been able to gather concerned apparent irregularities involving Eisler’s entrance into the United States from Mexico on a non-quota immigrant visa in 1939, but this matter had been dropped after the Immigration and Naturalization Service made it clear that it no longer was concerned with Eisler.

That the FBI very much *wanted* to draw conclusions becomes apparent in a series of memoranda that starts early in 1947. A memo dated February 27 1947—to Hoover from D.K. Ladd, head of the Los Angeles office—summarizes the investigation to date and makes reference to the recent testimony before HUAC of Ruth Fischer, who “identified her brother Gerhardt as a comintern agent in the United States and as a ‘dangerous terrorist’” and who also “identified her brother Hanns Eisler as a music composer in Hollywood who is a Communist and whom she also described as ‘dangerous.’” Bearing the same date, a much shorter memo from Ladd to Hoover states that “the Bureau’s investigation has identified Hanns Eisler with many individuals who are known Communists and who are known to be in contact with Soviet Intelligence agents in the United States.” The brief memo further states that, by means of the examination of documents found in Eisler’s home, “Eisler’s reputation as a composer of Communist songs and as a writer for Russian periodicals [has been] established.”

On 7 March 1947 a “blind memorandum summarizing the Bureau files on Johannes Eisler, alias Hans Eisler” was sent to Hoover “in the belief that the House Committee on Un-American Activities will ultimately investigate and publicize Johannes Eisler.” At the bottom of this document is a hand-written note from Hoover that says: “I think we should send to A.G. [the Attorney General] advising him we understand the committee will soon take up this case and while all here contained has previously been sent [to] the [Justice] Dept. . . . we thought we would like a summary in view of publicity which may ensue.”

A series of brief memos from later in March 1947 reviews the details of Eisler’s activities in 1939–40 and outlines a strategy for interviewing Eisler in light of the Congressional hearings that his brother was undergoing. A memo dated 10 April 1947 summarizes an interview in which Hedwig Massing, Gerhardt Eisler’s first wife, stated that Hanns Eisler, although he was “very weak politically” and “strongly dominated by his brother,” often seemed “quite anti-Soviet in his opinions.” On 29 May 1947 a memo informs Hoover that “Hanns Eisler is believed to be going to Washington, D.C., as a possible witness for his brother, Gerhardt Eisler, whose trial for contempt is scheduled for June 4, 1947, in Washington. Hanns Eisler is also scheduled as a witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities on June 16, 1947.”

In preparation for Eisler's appearances before HUAC, the FBI examined Eisler's account at the Westwood Branch of Bank of America and prepared a list of all the deposits made and checks written between February and April of 1947. The FBI also prepared a list of the license-plate numbers of all the cars that had parked outside Eisler's home between February and May of 1947 and a list of all the telephone calls that Eisler had made from his home between 11 December 1946 and 10 March 1947. According to a memo that bears no date but which apparently was written in April 1947, an agent in the Los Angeles office informed Hoover that Eisler's residence would as soon as possible be subjected to a "trash cover."

As Eisler's appointment with HUAC approached, the FBI seems to have been less concerned with collecting evidence than with simply keeping tabs on the object of their attention. An almost palpable urgency runs through a memo dated 11 July 1947, in which an agent reports that at the end of the previous month Eisler received a cablegram from France offering him \$10,000 to score a film based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.⁴⁸ Another memo bearing the same date expresses grave concern that the whereabouts of Eisler, despite the HUAC subpoena, are unknown. Indeed, a memo dated just a few days earlier advises that Eisler "is being sought in California, Washington and New York without success and . . . possibly he has succeeded in leaving the U.S. at one of the Mexican border stations."

Eisler's appearance before HUAC was postponed because, according to a 9 July 1947 memo, the committee's chairman, J. Parnell Thomas (R-New Jersey), was "tied up in court cases." On 10 July 1947 the FBI launched "an intensive investigation, including checks of all hotels," in an effort to locate Eisler. The next day, doubtless to the FBI's chagrin, Ruth Fischer told newspaper reporters that "it was her opinion that Hanns skipped to Mexico." Later that day, however, a memo informed Hoover that "chairman Thomas had received a long wire from Los Angeles marked at 4:11 a.m., signed Hanns Eisler, in which he indicated he would be available for hearing on September 23."

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Most of the FBI memos from the next several months concern the minutiae of Eisler's travels within the United States. A memo dated 21 July 1947, however, contains information that to a large extent undermines what the FBI hoped would be its "case" against Eisler.

The memo recounts recent interviews with various persons close to Eisler. One of them is Paul Massing, current husband of Gerhardt Eisler's first wife, who said that Hanns Eisler "seemed to be definitely anti-Stalinist and was probably a Trotskyite." Eisler, Massing said, was "outraged at the Hitler-Stalin pact. . . . [T]he best the Communists could expect Hanns to do would be to have him set the stage for a meeting or the like because of his artistic standings, as he does not have the personality or the conviction to be a leader." The author of the memo writes that, according to Massing, "Hanns was never a leader of the Communist Party in Germany and [was never] a

⁴⁸ *Alice in Wonderland* was directed by Dallas Bower and produced by Lou Bunin; it featured music not by Eisler but by Sol Kaplan. Released in France in May 1949, the film should not be confused with Walt Disney's 1951 animated film of the same title.

member of the GPU or the Soviet Military Intelligence.” The memo next refers to interviews with Eisler’s sister, Ruth Fischer, and it cites a series of articles that Fischer wrote for the *New York Journal American* in November 1946. Fischer’s series is for the most part a bitter condemnation of Gerhardt Eisler, and in the first installment (19 November 1946) she implicates her other brother by writing that “Hanns, a well known musician and film composer, was a valuable link to the world of swarming literati, professors, actors, and other American intelligentsia who have found in Stalin’s Russia their spiritual fatherland.” Nevertheless, according to the reporting agent, Fischer concurred with the opinion of Massing (and the opinion of Massing’s wife, expressed in the 10 April 1947 memo) to the effect that Hanns Eisler “was easily swayed and definitely not strong in his political convictions.” Finally, the memo includes information gathered from Eisler’s brother. Since Gerhardt Eisler was not cooperative in his 19 July 1946 interview with the FBI, the reporting agent relies mostly on secondary sources. One of these, apparently an attempt by Gerhardt Eisler to put matters into perspective, is an article in *The Daily Worker* (18 October 1946) in which he says: “I have a brother Hanns who is a musician and who is interested only in music, and I have a sister, Ruth Fischer, a Trotskyite who runs a gutter sheet which has denounced every anti-Fascist as a Stalinist from Roosevelt on down.”

The “gutter sheet” to which Gerhardt Eisler refers is the *New York Journal American*. Toward the end of his memorandum, the reporting agent paraphrases a *Journal American* article (11 May 1947) that bore the headline “Hanns Eisler Gave Red Line.” According to the agent, in this article an “unnamed former Communist” claimed that Hanns Eisler was

more than just a member of the Communist Party—he was one of the real top policy makers in the field of music, movies, and the art[s]. . . . Hanns would outline plans to be followed in Hollywood to recruit movie stars, to place Communist propaganda in screen scripts, and in general was the commissar of the West Coast Party activities on the movie front.

A lengthy memorandum dated 30 July 1947 gives a thorough summary of the FBI’s investigation to date, and in a section labeled “collateral information” it says:

Hanns Eisler appeared on May 12, 1947, before the Sub-Committee of the House Committee on Un-American Activities in its session at the Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel. It has been reported that Hanns Eisler evaded questions and was so unsatisfactory a witness that the Committee summoned him to appear before a complete Committee investigation in Washington, D.C., on June 16, 1947. This appearance before the Committee was subsequently cancelled; however, it has been indicated that Eisler will be requested to appear before the Committee on September 23, 1947.⁴⁹

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A flurry of memos from August 1947 indicates that the FBI worried that Eisler’s appearance before HUAC might never take place. Noting the reports that Eisler might want to go to Paris to score the *Alice in Wonderland* film, a memo dated 14 August 1947 summarizes the legal opinion

⁴⁹ A photocopy of the prepared statement that Eisler read before the HUAC subcommittee in Los Angeles was submitted as part of the 21 July 1947 memorandum. The statement is included in *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik Schriften*, 494–96, and is available on-line at <http://tagg.org/others/eisler/statements.html>.

of Eisler's lawyer, Joe Forer: "The Congressional subpoena does not stop him from leaving the United States but only requires him to appear before the Committee. . . . Eisler does not need an exit permit as he is an Austrian citizen."

Numerous of the memos written over the next several days refer to telephone conversations between representatives of the FBI and other government agencies. One of them (19 August 1947) confirms that the "INS has placed stops with all immigration officers" and then cautions that "such stops do not cover entrances into Canada." Another memo (20 August 1947) warns that a contact at the State Department is of the opinion that "Eisler could leave the country via the Canadian or Mexican borders without having to get an exit permit, but it would be necessary to have such a permit if he left from either the West or East coast."

A telegram (20 August 1947) from Hoover to the head of the FBI's Los Angeles office requests that "spot surveillance" on Eisler be instituted. A memo dated 22 August 1947 reports that "stops" had been placed with Eisler's bank, Western Union, and Trans World Airlines. An "urgent" memo sent over the FBI wire from Los Angeles to Washington (26 August 1947) states that "technical [surveillance is] essential to ensure complete coverage." A memo from Hoover to the Attorney General's office the same day requests that "authorization be granted for the installation of a technical surveillance" on Eisler's residence. Two days later Hoover informed the Los Angeles office that the "technical surveillance" had been approved. On 4 September 1947 the Los Angeles office reported that the wire-tap "will cost approximately \$350.00 for installation due to lack of existing facilities" and that the "monthly service charge in addition will be approximately \$160.00"; since the Los Angeles office had already developed "a physical surveillance" and "an informant coverage" on Eisler, it was recommended that the wiretap not be installed. After a few back-and-forth memos on the subject of expenses, Hoover agreed that a "technical surveillance" was not necessary.

An inter-office memorandum from L.B. Nichols to Clyde Tolson (6 September 1947) contains a summary of the information the FBI intended to deliver to Parnell Thomas in advance of Eisler's HUAC hearing. The memorandum, writes Nichols, "is based on a complete file review prepared by the Security Division. I believe we have deleted all material which might be embarrassing to the Bureau. . . ."

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At around the time the vetted, non-embarrassing package for Thomas was being prepared, the FBI started to express a keen interest in Eisler's literary output. Along with photocopies of various newspaper articles concerning Eisler, the 6 September memorandum contains translations of two articles that Eisler had written for Soviet periodicals more than a decade earlier. "Hanns Eisler Narrates" (*Evening Moscow*, 27 June 1935) is an autobiographical account of Eisler's travels since leaving Germany early in 1933. Probably more significant in the eyes of the FBI was "Annihilation of Art" (*Soviet Art*, 29 July 1935), an essay that explores the relationship between fascism and music

of all sorts.⁵⁰ Along with military marches, workers' songs, and the venerated classics, the essay deals briefly with modernist music. Significantly, "Annihilation of Art" suggests that Marxist "materialism" is implicit in the rigorous methodology of serialism, and therefore serial music, simply because of its theoretical underpinnings, is antithetical to fascism:

Striking changes have . . . taken place in Germany in the realm of music theory. Prior to the Fascist coup d'état leading musical theorists attempted to adopt the materialistic method to the[ir] compositions. This told of the gravitation and sympathy towards the new ideology which became the foundation in the reorganization of one-sixth of the globe. But 'base materialism' under Hitler was replaced by the most primitive idealism which lead the once progressive German musical science to oblivion.

On 7 October 1947 the FBI's New York office sent an "urgent" telegram to headquarters advising that a copy of the 18 July 1935 issue of the *Moscow Daily News* had been located in the New York Public Library. In regard to certain other publications that were being sought, the telegram says, these might be available "under a Russian name" in the "Library's Slavonic Division, which closes at six p.m."

The next day an equally "urgent" telegram from New York to both the Washington and Boston offices advises that photocopies of articles from the *Moscow Daily News* and the *Literary Gazette* had been obtained and were being forward to FBI headquarters. The requested copies of *Evening Moscow* and *Soviet Art*, however, could not be located. The reporting agent writes: "Library Harvard Univ. suggested as possible source. Also suggested possible American-Russian Institute Library has these copies which could be viewed under pretext."

On 9 October 1947 a memorandum from New York advises headquarters that the San Francisco and Chicago offices have been asked to join the search. But this is preceded by another "urgent" telegram from Hoover that informs the FBI's entire communications section as to the Russian names of the *Literary Gazette*, *Soviet Art*, and *Evening Moscow* (respectively, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, *Sovyetskoe Iskusstvo*, and *Vechernaia Moskva*). The telegram requests that "photostatic copies of those newspapers," for dates specified earlier, be forwarded immediately. In addition, the telegram recommends that searches be conducted at the Harvard Library, at the (Herbert) Hoover Memorial Library in San Francisco, and at the Newberry Library and the John Cerar Library in Chicago. The telegram's final line reads: "This request should be given expeditious attention [by] all officers."

A wire from the Chicago office to Hoover, dated 10 October 1947, reports that after searches at not just the Newberry and Cerar libraries but also the Library of International Relations, the University of Chicago's Harper Memorial Library, and the University of Chicago's Art Library, the requested 27 July 1935 issue of *Evening Moscow* and 20 July 1935 issue of *Soviet Art* were still not to be found. The next day a wire from the Boston office reports that a search of Harvard University's Widener Library also yielded nothing.

⁵⁰ The essay titled "Annihilation of Art" does not appear in either *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music* or *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik Schriften*. The latter collection, however, includes two previously unpublished essays that deal more extensively with the material than does the Russian article; these are "Einiges über das Verhalten der Arbeitersänger und -musiker in Deutschland," apparently completed in London in January 1935, and "Musik und Musikpolitik im faschistischen Deutschland," apparently completed in New York in October 1935. See *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik Schriften*, 242-65 and 334-57.

A telegram dated 17 October 1947 from Hoover to the FBI's communications section states: "[A]rticle previously requested is contained in 'Literary Gazette' of 30 July 1935. Obtain photostatic copy immediately and forward. . . ." On the same day, the New York office alerts Hoover that, in regard to his request for the 20 July 1935 issue of *Soviet Art*, such an issue seems never to have existed. The memorandum goes on to inform Hoover that the San Francisco office, however, has located the consecutively numbered 17 July and 23 July (1935) issues of the periodical, and that "a developed strip of 35 .mm photo-record film containing photographs" of those issues is being forwarded. Complicating what seems to have been growing frustration, four days later a telegram from Hoover to the Los Angeles office advises that the 30 July 1935 issue of the *Literary Gazette* is, like the sought-after issue of *Soviet Art*, apparently nonexistent.

Communications from agents assigned to library duty supports the idea that the specified issues of certain periodicals never, in fact, existed. A 21 October 1947 memorandum from the Los Angeles office to Hoover, however, offers encouragement. "Enclosed herewith are two copies of [a] photograph of a Russian language article in what is believed to be the *Literary Gazette*," the agent writes. "It is noted that there is no date printed on the article, but that there is a notation in handwriting at the bottom of the photograph that the article appeared July 30, 1935, in the *Literary Gazette*. . . . It is noted that the only title of the article is translated from the Russian as 'Hanns Eisler'."

A terse and "urgent" message from Hoover to the FBI communications section (27 October 1947) states simply: "Article in *Literary Gazette* located and photostated. No additional investigation desired." Two days later a message to the San Francisco and New York offices reiterates the conclusion: "Article in *Literary Gazette* presently in Bureau's possession. Also, all other articles previously requested have been located. No further investigation desired."

On 3 November 1947 Hoover informed the executive assistant to the Attorney General that all the material "contained in foreign publications reflecting Eisler's revolutionary and political activity . . . has been located and is presently being translated." Included in the memorandum is a photocopy and translation of a brief biographical entry on Eisler from the 1933 *Great Soviet Encyclopædia* and a photocopy of a lengthy essay by Eisler ("History of the German Workers' Movement from 1848") published in 1935 in *Musical Vanguard: A Critical Review*, a New York-based journal that Hoover says "has been identified as a Communist publication."⁵¹ The memorandum also includes a photocopy of a recent article by Eisler that appeared in *New Masses* on 14 October 1947 under the title "Fantasia in G-Men."⁵²

Translations of the Russian articles that the FBI worked so hard to obtain finally appear in a memorandum dated 12 November 1947. Contrary to information supplied earlier by a field agent, the 30 June 1935 piece in the *Literary Gazette* is titled not "Hanns Eisler" but "With Hanns Eisler,"

⁵¹ Translated by someone identified only as "S.O.," Eisler's essay is similar in content but not identical to the essay "Musik und Musikpolitik im faschistischen Deutschland" noted above. The essay appeared in *Musical Vanguard: A Critical Review* 1, no. 1 (March-April 1935): 33-48. Along with Eisler's essay, the first issue of this short-lived journal included Lawrence Gellert's "Negro Songs of Protest in America," Aaron Copland's "A Note on Young Composers," and Charles Seeger's "Preface to All Linguistic Treatment of Music." Admon Balber, Max Margulis, and Charles Seeger are listed as the journal's editors; identified as contributing editors are Lan Adomian, Henry Cowell, and Elie Siegmeister.

⁵² See footnote 13.

and it is an interview conducted by a writer identified only as “Delman.” The other article, from the 29 June 1935 issue of *Soviet Art*, is titled “Hanns Eisler in Moscow”; in essence it is the same autobiographical account (from the 27 June 1935 issue of *Evening Moscow*) to which the FBI had access when it began its intensive project of bibliographical research.

The much sought-after Russian articles, in other words, contained nothing that the FBI did not already know. And by the time the articles were located and translated, it was too late for their content to matter.

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Eisler’s first HUAC hearing, before a subcommittee in Los Angeles, took place on 12 May 1947; his second appearance, before the full committee in Washington, D.C., took place 24–26 September 1947. While neither hearing yielded incriminating evidence, in a memo dated 19 November 1947 Hoover was notified that the Attorney General’s office was receiving “letters and petitions...protesting the deportation proceedings against Eisler.”⁵³

Hoover advised the FBI’s Los Angeles office (29 November 1947) that an INS hearing for Eisler and his wife was scheduled for 15 January 1948. Acknowledging that “active investigation” was no longer required, on 3 December 1947 Hoover ordered that “spot surveillance” on Eisler should nevertheless be maintained. Twelve days later Hoover was informed by the INS that Eisler—through his attorney, Carol King—was making arrangements to travel to France. At the bottom of this memo Hoover scrawled the “travesty of justice” remark cited earlier. Also scrawled on the document, in Hoover’s hand, is: “An earlier memo submitted by me indicates that Crim[inial] Divis[ion] orally advised it is instructing INS to have no part in King’s suggestion.”

It is hard to believe that at this point the FBI dossier on Eisler was not complete, yet a memorandum dated 6 December 1947 reveals “facts hitherto unknown to the Bureau” that were disclosed by Eisler in his 24–26 September HUAC hearings. The new information includes details about Eisler’s travels in Europe between 1929 and 1936, exact titles of songs Eisler had written over the years, titles for all the films Eisler had scored both in Europe and in Hollywood, and the fact that Eisler had once been “employed by the Department of Agriculture for the purpose of making a short film, the date and title not having been known.”⁵⁴ The memo also reveals that, in regard to Eisler’s early troubles with the INS, Sumner Welles, then Undersecretary of State, received a letter that “expressed the thought that the Eisler immigration case should be reconsidered”; dated 11 January 1936, the letter was signed by Eleanor Roosevelt.

Although it is not mentioned in the FBI files until this time, Eleanor Roosevelt’s involvement in the Eisler case had been made public before Eisler’s HUAC hearing. According to a fourteen-page memorandum (6 December 1947) that contains “data from public sources,” in the 28 August 1947 issue of the *Washington Times Herald* columnist Frank C. Waldrop wrote:

⁵³ Among the signers mentioned are conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos and composers Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and Ernst Toch.

⁵⁴ The film was *The Living Land* (1941).

Mrs. Roosevelt is back in the news again. She is a central figure in the story of Hanns Eisler, the Hollywood musical mugg whose affairs are about to be explored by the House committee on un-American activities.

Hanns is the brother of Gerhard Eisler, recently convicted Communist agent who thought he could sucker the Negroes of the U.S.A. into Communist revolt by promising them a Negro Soviet republic down in Dixie.

Just to give it to you in a capsule, Hanns Eisler wouldn't be in the U.S.A. today except for Mrs. Roosevelt's meddling in State department matters. You will soon be hearing about some letters she wrote Sumner Welles when he was undersecretary of state. One of these goes as follows, and is on White House stationery.

"Dear Sumner: This Eisler case is a hard nut to crack, isn't it?"

And is signed, of course, "Eleanor."

"Dear Sumner" didn't want to crack that hard nut, but "Eleanor" kept on needling him until he caved in and "rescued" this invaluable character, Eisler. It will all be on page one, shortly. Just don't miss it.

As Waldrop's column predicted, media coverage of Eisler's hearings was intense, and by early December 1947 it was common knowledge that Eisler intended to leave the United States as soon as possible. Not known to the public was the opinion of the INS, "leaked" to the special agent in charge of the New York office and communicated to Hoover in a letter dated 13 December 1947, that Eisler "would not attempt to depart illegally" and that "the case against [Eisler]...was extremely weak."

The case was indeed weak, and materials that cover the next several months suggest that the FBI was trying very hard to strengthen it. Much of the correspondence, of course, simply documents Eisler's day-to-day whereabouts. But the file also includes a memo (2 January 1948) informing Hoover that "a source of unknown reliability" claimed that "references to Eisler appear in either *Volksmacht* or *Die Nachrichten*, German language publications of the Communist Party, Germany, in some issue or issues during the years 1931, 1932, or early 1933" and another memo (7 January 1948) containing a translation of an Eisler-damning message, in German, from someone who identified herself only as "an old lady."

More ominously, the file contains a report (7 January 1948) that lists the license-plate numbers of cars parked outside a Beverly Hills home that two months earlier had hosted a performance of Eisler's music (see Fig. 3). The same report offers information from "a highly confidential source" who "made available" to the FBI not only correspondence received by Eisler in the summer and fall of 1947 but also the substance of numerous conversations involving Eisler and/or his wife, and a memorandum dated 15 January 1948 containing samples of Eisler's handwriting. A half-dozen memos from January-February 1948 summarize quick investigations of persons whose names apparently had come up during the FBI's last-minute inquiries; that these investigations proved irrelevant—at least to the Eisler case—is suggested by the fact that in the publicly available file almost the entire contents of these memos is blacked out.

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were going to have a rally on the night of October 20th at the Cartoonist Guild Building, Vine and Tucca Streets, Hollywood at 8:15 p.m. to raise funds for the defense of HANS EISLER. [redacted] had received this information from a "throw away" leaflet which stated that there would be a speaker and LARRY PALMER would furnish music.

Reference report contained the information that a meeting was to be held at the residence of Mrs. JULIAN SIENKOWSKI, 1002 North Maxford Drive, Beverly Hills, California, at 8:30 p.m. on the night of November 5th to hear the subject's attorney, other speakers, and some of EISLER's music. A surveillance of this meeting by Special Agents [redacted] and [redacted] and the writer reflected that the following persons' automobiles were parked in the immediate vicinity of Mrs. SIENKOWSKI's residence. The license numbers of these cars were obtained, and the registered owners were ascertained by Special Employee [redacted] as are set out below.

License Number	Registered Owner
California 4N2190	[redacted] This individual is a known member of the Communist Party in this area.
California 2N5530	[redacted]
California 9F5638	[redacted] This individual is a known contact of LYON FEUCHTWANGER and EISLER.
California 2N9272	[redacted] This individual is known to have been a member of the Communist Party in Los Angeles.
California 8U5800	[redacted] This individual is a well known Communist sympathizer.
California 2T7714	[redacted] This individual is an acquaintance and contact of EISLER and other persons connected with the Free German Movement.

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Figure 3. A page from an FBI report showing license-plate numbers of cars parked outside a house in which Eisler's music had been performed, 7 January 1948 (public domain)

In his HUAC hearings, Eisler admitted that in 1926 he had applied for membership in the Communist Party but denied that he had ever actually been a member of the party. On 4 February 1948 Hoover was informed by telegram that, according to sources within the INS, "Eisler has indicated willingness to execute stipulation admitting his CP membership for purpose of expediting deportation proceedings." The telegram, which was from the FBI's New York office, alerted Hoover that the "approval of stipulation by Atty. Gen. will greatly simplify govt.'s case, as other evidence in support of deportation proceedings is not strong."

Two days later another telegram notified Hoover that INS authorities had indicated that Eisler would be allowed to leave. A telegram dated 12 February 1948 advised Hoover: "Warrant of deportation issued today by INS for Hanns Eisler, which will permit him to depart voluntarily."

Up to this point the United States Central Intelligence Agency had been involved not at all in the Eisler case. On 19 February 1948, however, Hoover wrote to the director of the CIA informing him that a warrant of deportation against Eisler had been issued "following allegations that he was a member of an organization advocating the overthrow of this government by force and violence. The

allegations arose out of Eisler's testimony before the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee on September 25-27, 1947. At this hearing he admitted he had applied in 1926 for membership in the Communist Party of Germany." The letter cites Eisler's plans, as reported in the *New York Times* on 13 February 1948, to fly to Paris to score *Alice in Wonderland* and then to Rome to work on films titled *Galileo* and *Christ in Concrete*.⁵⁵ Hoover's letter to the CIA includes a physical description of Eisler and a note that two photographs are being enclosed. It ends with the statement: "This information is being furnished should you desire to follow the activities of [Eisler] in Europe."

After this, a series of memos describes various travel arrangements that Eisler and his wife had apparently made and then cancelled. A teletype dated 24 March 1948 advises Hoover that Eisler was now scheduled to depart—not for Paris or Rome but for Vienna, via London and Prague—two days hence. On 26 March 1948 Hoover received a teletype confirming that Eisler had indeed left the United States, and on 2 April 1948 Hoover informed the director of the CIA that Eisler had arrived in Prague.⁵⁶

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The FBI's file on Hanns Eisler does not end with the composer's departure for Europe. In a hand-written note affixed to a newspaper report on Eisler's exit, Hoover asked: "Is he going voluntarily and if so doesn't that give him a 'break' so he can apply for return sometime in the future?" In a vague response, on 29 March 1948 D.W. Ladd informed Hoover that "Eisler left voluntarily but under order of deportation. The voluntary departure was by stipulation, to any country except those contiguous to the United States . . . He actually was deported in spite of stipulations agreed upon." At the bottom of this memo Hoover wrote by hand: "Do we know why he was handled differently than the ordinary deportee?" On 2 April 1948 Ladd responded: "Specifically we do not know but statements of INS officials as carried by the newspapers and as made to us indicate that Eisler was allowed to leave without trial in order to speed his departure and to save the government the expense of the trial, the outcome of which would have been doubtful."

On 28 April 1948 Hoover received an inconclusive laboratory report on fingerprints—allegedly Eisler's—that had been submitted the month before. A report from the Los Angeles office dated 3 May 1948 itemizes the disposition of Eisler's bank account and states that "inasmuch as no further investigation remains to be conducted and in view of the fact that Eisler has departed from the United States, this case is being closed."

⁵⁵ Like *Alice in Wonderland*, neither of these projects, at least for Eisler, materialized. Directed by Edward Dmytryk, *Give Us This Day* (which had had the working title *Christ in Concrete*) was released in England in 1949 and featured music by Benjamin Frankel. No title related to "Galileo" appears on the complete list of Eisler's film credits in the 2001 on-line version of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. The International Movie Data Base, however, lists a thirty-minute film from 1947 titled *Leben des Galilei*, based on Brecht's play and with music attributed (incorrectly) to Eisler.

⁵⁶ After living for a short time in Vienna, Eisler settled in the Soviet-controlled sector of Berlin. He served as a professor at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik, which after his death in 1962 was renamed the Hanns Eisler Conservatory. The German Democratic Republic (i.e., East Germany) used Eisler's 1949 setting of Johannes Becher's poem "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" as its national anthem.

Hardly “closed,” the case lingered for more than a decade. FBI memos from late 1948 and early 1949 deal with all the telephone calls Eisler made just before his departure, with the membership of the Committee for Justice for Hanns Eisler, and with Eisler’s residences on the outskirts of Prague and then in the Russian sector of Berlin, and they offer a confirmation that the fingerprints submitted earlier indeed belonged to Eisler.⁵⁷ Although no rationale for the order is given, a memo from Hoover to the Los Angeles office (21 April 1950) requests that “stop” notices regarding Eisler be placed with the INS and the U.S. Customs department, and a 27 June 1950 memo confirms that earlier in the month a “lookout notice” had been effected on Eisler and his wife. A six-page memo from 26 September 1952 details an interview with an unidentified informant who claimed to have known Eisler socially in the months before his departure. A 10 June 1953 telegram contains information that “appears to have been taken from a translation of certain photographic reproductions of German language letters obtained through a confidential source from Eisler’s home.” A communication from 4 April 1956, presumably from the CIA, offers a “summary memorandum” on Eisler furnished “as a result of your request for an FBI file check.”

The final items in the FBI’s file on Eisler are a pair of documents from March 1959. One of these requests that a review be made of “bulky exhibits” related to “inactive cases” that are “occupying badly needed space.” The other is a memo (30 March 1959) that specifies that “bulky exhibit 100-195220-108” is a phonograph recording of Eisler’s songs “In Praise of Learning” and “Rise Up.” The memo recommends that the disc be destroyed; at its bottom is a hand-written message that consists of just the date (9 April 1959) and the single word: “Done.”

* * * * *

It seems reasonable to assume that at some point during the FBI’s investigation field agents would have been assigned to attend concerts that featured Eisler’s chamber music or orchestral works, to listen to the commercially available recordings of his “Kampflied,” or to watch the films for which Eisler composed scores. Yet the file contains no mention of representatives of the FBI serving as audience members or as music/film critics. The only passages that might be described as “review-like” deal exclusively with printed materials (the lyrics of songs, the text of *Die Massnahme*, various essays), and these take the form of studiously non-analytic summaries. Clearly, an FBI agent’s job in the 1940s was to report on a subject’s activity, not to interpret it. If Hoover or anyone else in the bureau actually passed aesthetic judgment on Eisler’s music, they kept it to themselves. This is not to say, however, that the FBI was indifferent to the fact that Eisler was, first and foremost, a composer.

The most curious section of the FBI file is the part that documents the bureau’s all-out search, in the weeks surrounding Eisler’s second HUAC hearing, for materials that had appeared in 1935 in specific Soviet publications. The investigation thus far had turned up nothing but innuendo and allegation, yet this seems to have been enough to make it almost a certainty that Eisler would soon

⁵⁷ The committee was formed in early February 1948. Its national chairman was Aaron Copland, and the co-chairmen were Leonard Bernstein and Roger Sessions.

be forced to leave the United States. Why, at this late stage of the game, was it so important for the FBI to locate articles that had been written a dozen years earlier?

Until it found them and had them translated, of course, the FBI was unaware that the elusive articles contained nothing that in essence was not already in the file. All the FBI knew was that the articles were either by Eisler or about him. Based on its experience with Eisler-related literature from the mid-1930s that had already been examined, the FBI would have been correct to presume that the sought-after material contained strong expressions of opinion. The FBI would have been correct, as well, to presume that Eisler's opinions had to do not just with European politics but also with the relationship between politics and music.

Reference has been made to German musicologist Harry Goldschmidt's view that all of Eisler's serial compositions are in effect exercises in social criticism, the target of which is fascism. If Goldschmidt is on the mark, the ideological message borne by Eisler's post-1933 modernist works is enormously more subtle than that carried by his musically conservative "Kampflied" and scores for Brechtian theatrical productions. And with subtlety, one supposes, comes increased potency.

Eisler never articulated the "modern music as social criticism" theory as clearly as Goldschmidt did, but it is likely that he would have subscribed to it. As early as 1935, in the Russian-language "Annihilation of Art" essay, Eisler attempted to formulate the idea that certain types of modernist music—not so much because of the way they sound as because of their "materialistic" content and structure—are *ipso facto* anti-fascist. The idea was explored, although not much refined, in other of Eisler's writings from 1935, and to a certain extent it sustained itself well into Eisler's American period.⁵⁸ In an unpublished typescript from 1944, Eisler wrote:

We musicians are apt to consider our art as something a little apart from life and its crises. But on the other hand music is extremely sensitive to all social trends. When fascism first touched German music, German musicians found it difficult to understand this contradiction. If Flaubert for instance could write and publish "L'education sentimentale" under Napoleon III, why couldn't a modern German composer continue to write chamber music under Hitler?

There is a reason: fascism, more organized and brutal than everything Napoleon III could imagine, cannot afford even the slightest dissonance in [its] artificial harmony—or a breath of opposition even in the most abstract and remote arts and sciences. Everything is controlled. Physics, mathematics, even the art of landscape or still-life painting are observed as being potentially dangerous.⁵⁹

Eisler makes the claim that the serialist music of his teacher, Arnold Schoenberg, is especially despised by fascists because it "reflects the complexity and crisis of our times" and because "everything fought for by the Nazis—enthusiasm for their imperialistic goals, devotion to their leader, conformity to their way of life—[is] challenged by the work of Schoenberg." He paraphrases "rules" set out in 1942 by Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister for propaganda, to the effect that "no art for art's sake, no individual choice of subject" is acceptable. "According to such standards," Eisler writes, "modern music became the enemy of fascism."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See footnotes 47 and 48.

⁵⁹ Eisler, "Contemporary Music and Fascism," in *Musik und Politik Schriften*, 490. The annotations by editor Günter Mayer suggest only that that the typescript was intended for publication ("wahrscheinlich für einen Vortrag"); there is no indication as to where Eisler hoped to publish the essay.

⁶⁰ Eisler, "Contemporary Music and Fascism," 490–91.

In the early 1940s the United States was engaged in a fight-to-the-finish with Nazi Germany, and it is unlikely that the FBI or any other American agency would have identified itself with the term ‘fascism.’ But what if the offensive “f-word” were euphemized, translated into something along the lines of “control of potential subversives” for the purely patriotic purpose of ‘maintaining a way of life’ that had been predetermined to be unassailably virtuous? If modern music for the reasons Eisler offered could be the enemy of an overtly fascist regime, could not modern music also be interpreted as the enemy of *any* regime whose attitude toward dissidents was somehow repressive?

If Eisler’s serial compositions are indeed essays in social criticism, perhaps their ineffable point was sensed by at least some of the listeners who made up Eisler’s American audiences in the 1940s. But the music’s political content, if it existed, seems not to have been noticed by the country’s most eminent music critics. Reporting on the concert of Eisler’s music presented at New York’s Town Hall two days before Eisler was first scheduled to leave the United States, Olin Downes in the *New York Times* noted only that the program “showed Mr. Eisler for what he has long been known to be, as a creative musician, that is to say, as a master craftsman of sure technique and taste, and an artist well aware of the most modern developments in his field.”⁶¹ Along with acknowledging that Eisler “has never been represented copiously on New York concert programs,” Virgil Thomson in the *New York Herald Tribune* observed that the impressiveness of Eisler’s work

is due less to any profound originality, as in the case of his master, Arnold Schoenberg, or in that of his sometime model, the German-language works of Kurt Weill, than to [the composer’s] graceful and delicate taste. Eisler’s music, whether the style of it is chromatic and emotional, diatonic and formalist, or strictly atonal in the dodecaphonic manner, always has charm. It has charm because the tunes are pretty, the textures bright and clear, the expressive intentions thoroughly straightforward and clear. Eisler is that rare specimen, a German composer without weight. He uses no heaviness, makes no insistence.⁶²

Downes and Thomson heard nothing political in Eisler’s music. As to how Eisler’s modernist yet charming compositions might have been interpreted by the professional investigators to whom ‘secret messages’ of any sort were of more than a little interest, one can only wonder.

Contemporary theorists, Lydia Goehr writes in a 1994 essay, are convinced that a relation exists between music and politics, but they find it difficult to describe, and so they resort to metaphors that has music “standing to society in a relation of expressing, mirroring, crystallizing, encoding, enmeshing, highlighting, enacting, confronting, intervening, transfiguring, signifying, symbolizing, transforming, prophesying, and foretelling.”⁶³ Eisler’s interrogators likely shared the conviction that music did, or at least could, have a relation with politics, yet they focused on what

⁶¹ Olin Downes, “Eisler Selections Played in Tribute,” *New York Times*, 29 February 1948. The concert took place on 28 February 1948. Its organizers were Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, David Diamond, Roy Harris, Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, and Randall Thompson. The program consisted of the 1932–33 *Seven Piano Pieces for Children*, the 1937 Violin Sonata, the 1938 String Quartet, the 1940 septet (titled *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain*) based on music Eisler had written in 1929 for Joris Ivens’s film *Regen*, excerpts from the 1947 music that Eisler composed for Charles Chaplin’s film *Circus*, and the eight songs that make up the 1942 cycle *Hollywood Elegies*.

⁶² Virgil Thomson, “Concert of Hanns Eisler’s Music,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 March 1948.

⁶³ Lydia Goehr, “Political Music and the Politics of Music,” *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 107.

Goehr calls “the crude view” that the connection needed to be obvious; “they were looking, mistakenly, for a concrete relation” that could not possibly be found.⁶⁴

The FBI was certainly mistaken in its search for such a relation between Eisler’s music and his politics. Yet its search was nonetheless urgent, and a possible rationale is offered in the introduction to a recent anthology of essays that deal with the FBI’s intense involvement with creative persons of all sorts:

Modern art exacerbated Hoover’s degenerist anxieties; he feared that its practitioners were orienting the public toward illicit or dangerous subject matter, the very stuff that could destabilize America, he frequently argued. Hoover’s contempt ran dangerously, and his distaste for modern writers and artists, especially his desire to limit the dissemination of their work through censorship, bullying, and courtroom dramas, came to define the bureau’s attitude toward modernism. With so many writers and artists squarely engaged in revolutionary climates ... , modernists saw fit to capture the spirit of the age by marking their steadfast alignment with politics. The artists involved in the movement were bent on translating into different media the vicissitudes of twentieth-century life, and as such, were likely to sway public understanding and effect dramatic change. Because of this, Hoover labeled many writers and artists as radical insurgents, and ordered bureau agents in field offices across the country to shadow them and to investigate their histories.⁶⁵

During his American sojourn, Eisler was hardly engaged in a “revolutionary climate.” But Hoover was aware of the circumstances that drove Eisler into exile. Surely it occurred to him that whatever Eisler had to say about modernist music vis-à-vis Nazi Germany might apply as well to modernist music in the United States during and after World War II. And surely this thought would have been bothersome, even if Hoover and his FBI agents—as Eisler said of the members of HUAC—were “not connoisseurs of music.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Goehr, “Political Music and the Politics of Music,” 107.

⁶⁵ Culleton, Claire A., and Karen Leick, “Introduction: Silence, Acquiescence, and Dread,” in *Modernism on File: Writers, Artists, and the FBI, 1920–1950*, ed. Claire A. Culleton and Karen Leick (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 8–9.

⁶⁶ Eisler, “Fantasia in G-Men,” in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, 152.