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Gebrauchsmusik as Wartime Exile Response: Hanns Eisler's *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*

Caleb T. Boyd

In the summer of 1941, Hanns Eisler spent three and a half months with Joachim and Sylvia Schumacher – and their young son Mark – in the rural village of Woodbury, Connecticut.¹ The Schumachers taught at the Westover School for young girls in nearby Middlebury. Through the course of his summer respite near the East Coast, Eisler penned his *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, a collection of twenty short a cappella choral songs for Westover's glee club. The *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* is a strange work of dual character that contrasts light children's verses with somber and highly personal contemplations that express Eisler's frustration with living in wartime exile. In order to appeal to younger voices, Eisler largely drew his texts from Anglo-American nursery rhymes, eventually setting fifteen to music. However, he also included four austere German-language ruminations on exilic reality, which he placed toward the end of the cycle. The final song, a new setting of the English Christmas carol 'I Saw Three Ships,' concludes the collection with a more festive character. Previous scholarship has addressed the contradictory character of the Woodbury songs, with particular interest directed more toward the German-language installments, while Eisler's original intention for the cycle as Gebrauchsmusik for amateur female choir has been overlooked.

Eisler had already heard several of his songs sung by amateur American voices before he set to work on the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* that summer. Prior to his arrival in the United States, Eisler had written numerous agitational *Kampflieder* for the European workers' movement. In the 1930s, many politically engaged American activists, amateurs, and performance groups sang his robust and strident songs, as well. Since 1938, Eisler lived and worked as an exiled composer in the United States, and he consequently tempered his agitational proclivities in order to avoid deportation. With the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, Eisler turned to writing pieces for amateur American voices. In his unpublished memoirs, Joachim Schumacher recalls Eisler working that summer of 1941 on an unidentified piece of chamber music as well as the score for the Joseph Losey

1 This article is a revised version of my paper at the conference *Neue Sachlichkeit, Political Music, or Vernacular Avant-Garde? Hanns Eisler and his Contemporaries* (Copenhagen, 2015). My thanks to Todd Decker for his assistance in the completion of the article. Eisler had also spent the summer of 1938 with the Schumachers at their previous home in Valley Cottage, New York.

documentary film *A Child Went Forth* (1942).² He approached Eisler and proposed he write some new music for Westover's glee club:

Of course, I had told [Eisler] all sorts of things about the Westover School. He wanted to know what music they performed there. Well, after all, Sylvia performed there, and there is no better piano teacher. Music history classes, choral performance and a group of gifted girl soloists were also there. They sang English madrigals, some Brahms, and also popular Broadway-kitsch. I may have casually suggested to Hanns, 'You could surely create something fun for these cute kids in a snap.' It is possible that Hanns spent his leisure time along these lines.³

According to Schumacher's account, the idea for the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* started with his suggestion, and Eisler followed through with the challenge.

Whereas Eisler intended his earlier mass songs for vocal activists earnestly seeking and demanding social change, he prepared his twenty Woodbury songs for amateur choirs, like those found in high schools and other academic or social institutions. Eisler's original objective for these songs as *Gebrauchsmusik* has not been explored at length. Since the score was not publicly available until 1973, the Westover Glee Club never performed the work.⁴ Nevertheless, analysis of the published score confirms that Eisler constructed the collection of songs as educational pieces for amateur groups like the Westover Glee Club. He employed various choral styles and fashioned songs that recall historic forms, like the madrigal and the British part-song. However, Eisler also made the songs difficult enough to challenge amateur choirs and introduce them to modern sonorities unassociated with their traditional glee repertoire.

Gebrauchsmusik and the American Glee Tradition

In his *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik*, Stephen Hinton dispels the misconception that the term 'Gebrauchsmusik' began with Paul Hindemith.⁵ Indeed, the word appears as early as the 1920s in Paul Nettl's musicological writings, wherein he distinguished two types

2 Joachim Schumacher, *Skizze meines Lebens und Portraits der Lebensfreunde Ernst Bloch, Hans [sic] Eisler, Max Raphael*, unpublished manuscript (Box 1, Schumacher Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Connecticut Libraries), 175–6. Three drafts of Schumacher's unpublished memoirs are available in the Schumacher Papers located at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. Most information from Schumacher's memoirs, unless otherwise noted, is pulled from this draft dated 'Nov. 1979–Februar 1980'.

3 *Ibid.*, 179. English translation by the author.

4 Hanns Eisler, *Woodbury-Liederbüchlein für Frauen- oder Kinderchor* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973). Throughout this article, when referring to the musical work, I will use the correct spelling of the town, 'Woodbury'.

5 Stephen Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik* (New York: Garland, 1989).

of seventeenth-century dance music – music for dancing, and music for listening.⁶ Shortly thereafter, musicologist Heinrich Bessler connected the term to music used by amateur performers in ordinary social situations. Bessler contrasted *Gebrauchsmusik* with the ‘so-called art music’ associated with bourgeois culture, including the increasingly abstract, autonomous music of the Second Viennese School.⁷ Ernst Krenek noted that *Gebrauchsmusik* ranged from recorder exercises for children, to Soviet socialist realist marching songs, to music found in the political theater of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.⁸ In Weimar Berlin, many leftist artists viewed many modernist trends as isolationist and elitist. Yet, these two types of music – the modernist and the occasional – need not be mutually exclusive spheres. Hindemith believed that *Gebrauchsmusik* should incorporate contemporary musical aesthetics to carry messages with sociopolitical import.⁹ Although Eisler considered his teacher Arnold Schoenberg a petit bourgeois figure, Eisler also argued that skilled composers could effectively ally revolutionary consciousness with modern musical techniques. Recognizing that the new media of radio and cinema had nurtured the listening habits of young audiences, Eisler called for composers to abandon their isolation from the masses, access the happening world, and choose texts and subjects relatable to the present-day needs of the broader public.¹⁰

Musicians in the United States monitored Weimar Germany’s modern musical experiments. As the 1929 stock market crash had placed people out of work and fueled the popularity of unionism and American Communism, the left-leaning Composers Collective (based in New York City) sought to reconnect with struggling workers by writing new politically charged mass songs.¹¹ For compositional models, the Collective – which included classically trained composers like Marc Blitzstein, Alex North, and Charles Seeger – looked across the Atlantic to artists like Alexander Davidenko, Hanns Eisler, and Stephan Wolpe. The Collective’s multifaceted proletarian efforts varied from the Jewish choruses of Lan Adomian to the socially aware concert songs of Ruth Crawford, to Aaron Copland’s ‘Into the Streets, May First’ (1934), an agitational song inspired by American folk music with modernist embellishments.¹²

6 Paul Nettle, ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte der Tanzmusik im 17. Jahrhundert’, *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, 4 (1921–22), 257–65.

7 Heinrich Bessler, ‘Appendix: Fundamental Issues of Musical Listening (1925)’, trans. Matthew Pritchard with Irene Auerbach, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 8/1 (2011), 59.

8 Ernst Krenek, ‘A Composer’s Influence’, *Perspectives on New Music*, 3/1 (1964), 38.

9 Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik*, 212.

10 Hanns Eisler, ‘On the Situation in Modern Music’ (1928), in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 30–31; and Hanns Eisler, ‘Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer’ (1935), in *ibid.* 106–13.

11 Melissa J. De Graaf, *The New York Composers’ Forum Concerts, 1935–1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 13.

12 Hans Gutman, ‘Young Germany, 1930’, *Modern Music*, 7/2 (1930), 6.

Eisler's choruses and agitational mass songs for the European workers' movement provided some American composers with a promising model, and for a short while his songs enjoyed moderate success in the United States, and he even wrote new songs for activist American audiences. Eisler believed his songs' malleable forms – coupled with a vitriolic, melodically simple, and instantly engaging style – resulted in performance pieces that could be adapted by any group for any immediate purpose or situation. Adomian's New York-based Freiheit Gesangs Verein performed several of his choruses. American composer Elie Siegmeister, a friend and enthusiastic supporter, imitated Eisler's compositional style in such works as *Strange Funeral in Braddock* (1936). During his 1935 tour of numerous cities across the United States with baritone Mordecai Bauman, some audiences sang Eisler's European agitational songs in English translations. Some of these songs appeared in English-language workers' songbooks, and Timely Records released five of Eisler's songs for the first American recordings of activist music.¹³ In late January 1936, leftist American newspaper *The Daily Worker* published Eisler's new song 'Mother Bloor', written in honor of American women's rights activist and unionist leader Ella Reeve Bloor.¹⁴ The same month, the International Workers Order Band and the Freiheit Gesangs Verein featured Eisler's European songs 'Comintern', 'Red Front', and 'United Front' at a Lenin Memorial held at Madison Square Garden on 20 January 1936. Furthermore, the capacity crowd sang Eisler's arrangement of the 'Internationale' at that event.¹⁵

In 1938, with a professorship at New York's New School for Social Research and amidst troubles acquiring a permanent visa, Eisler began to tone down his political activism. Since Eisler's 1935 American tour, *The Daily Worker* occasionally reported on his musical activities, even addressing him as 'comrade'. On 10 July 1938, the American government requested Eisler's appearance for an interrogation at Ellis Island. In order to have his visa extended, Eisler claimed that his music was anti-fascist, not communist, because under American law he could be deported for associating with the Communist Party. The following year, Eisler penned three songs for Hoffman R. Hays' red play *A Song about America*, staged at Madison Square Garden on 23 January 1939 as part of a Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of Lenin's death. In order to conceal his identity, Eisler used the pseudonym John Garden.¹⁶

13 For more information, see Jürgen Schebera, 'Red Decade: Hanns Eisler und die linke New Yorker Musikszene der 1930er Jahre', *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, 63 (2017), 28–32; and Caleb T. Boyd, 'From Proletarian Champion to Modernist Artist: Eisler in the American Concert Hall (1935–1938)', *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, 57 (2014), 24–27.

14 The song appeared in print on the same day as a banquet held in Bloor's honor at New York Hotel Linsmore. It is not known whether Eisler's new song was sung on that occasion. Kenneth Hunter and Hanns Eisler, 'Mother Bloor: A Song', *Daily Worker*, 28 Jan. 1936.

15 'Eisler Songs Will Feature Lenin Meeting', *Daily Worker*, 18 Jan. 1936.

16 For more on Eisler's early work with American leftist groups, see Schebera, 'Red Decade'; Boyd, 'From Proletarian Champion to Modernist Artist'. For more on *A Song about America*, see Caleb T. Boyd,

Furthermore, in March 1940 Eisler asked the politically engaged Theatre Arts Committee of New York City to remove his name from their advisory board.¹⁷

Although Eisler subsequently redirected his creative focus toward chamber music and film scores, he briefly returned to *Gebrauchsmusik* with his *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*. On 25 June 1938, Eisler addressed the Ladies' Garment Workers Union, a group with its own history of choral performance. He complained: 'Mostly [workers' choirs] sing cheap lyrical rubbish by fourth- or fifth-rate composers. Such music is not only boring to sing, but is intolerable to listen to'.¹⁸ Eisler stressed the importance of writing new works for choir with a proper balance of classical and modern musical language but always in a fresh and witty manner to facilitate accessibility.

Humor, pop and satire should be an important part of all your performances. People like jazz and swing, they can be used in your productions, but not in the corrupt manner of Hollywood and Broadway. Good modern music has rhythm, humor and vitality, and you must exploit it.¹⁹

Eisler followed these trajectories he had outlined to the Ladies' Garment Workers Union as he composed the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, with the intention that amateur female choirs like Westover Glee Club could use the cycle as an introduction to contemporary musical language combined with popular jazz and blues elements, as well as familiar and fun texts and subjects.

As a collection of songs for high school girls, the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* belongs to a healthy and thriving American amateur glee culture, which sprouted from the seventeenth-century British tradition of all-male clubs that sang homophonic, English-language part-songs with simple harmonization.²⁰ In his role as superintendent of music for Boston schools, composer and pedagogue Lowell Mason (1792–1872) introduced choral singing as part of the American curriculum.²¹ The number of singing societies and glee clubs increased along with the growth of American public school programs.²²

'H.R. Hays' Red Play "A Song about America": A Musical History Lesson and CPUSA Appeal to the African-American Community', *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, 65 (2018), 9–16.

17 Letter from Hanns Eisler to Theatre Arts Committee, New York City, 27 Mar. 1940, in Hanns Eisler, *Briefe 1907-1943*, ed. Jürgen Schebera and Maren Köster (Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe Ser. IX, Bd. 4.1; Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010), 155–56.

18 Hanns Eisler, 'Labor, Labor Movement and Music: Speech to the Choir of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union' (1938), in *Rebel in Music*, 142–43.

19 *Ibid.*, 146.

20 Lawrence J. Fried, 'Glee', *Grove Music Online*, accessed 4 Dec. 2019 <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002256658>>.

21 H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (1969; repr. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 67.

22 Iris S. Levine, 'Women's Choirs: Giving Women Voice', *The Choral Journal*, 51/7 (2011), 81.

Two prominent amateur American glee clubs, those at Harvard and Yale, were established in the mid-nineteenth century. According to J. Lloyd Winstead, the first joint concert of men's clubs at Harvard featured a variety of material, like unaccompanied 'Mendelssohn part songs, Latin choruses, drinking songs and college songs.'²³ The Harvard Club's earliest material also included marches, rondos, and Scotch and Irish airs.²⁴ In the early twentieth century, the Harvard Glee Club expanded its performance repertoire to include early sacred Italian music and English madrigals.²⁵ In *The Dilemma of American Music* (1928), composer Daniel Gregory Mason, grandson of Lowell Mason and instructor at Columbia University, lamented that the contemporary mechanization of music through modern apparati like the player piano, radio, and phonograph prompted an unfortunate drop in amateur musicmaking in the United States, while the growth of college vocal groups indicated a present and persistent desire for more amateur choral music.²⁶

Although the glee was historically associated with male voices, the growing number of all-women choruses and high school glee clubs in the early twentieth century prompted an escalation in the composition and publication of songs for these groups.²⁷ In the late 1800s, amateur women's choral groups increased in number as more local female leaders organized their own music clubs.²⁸ American music publishers, like Oliver Ditson & Co. in Boston and G. Schirmer, Inc. in New York City, responded to present demand by publishing more sheet music and songbooks for women's choirs.²⁹ Many American composers responded to the increasing demand for performance material. Boston composer Amy Beach (1867–1944) wrote numerous sacred and secular works for female voices, including *An Indian Lullaby* (1895), *Three Shakespeare Choruses* (1897), and a setting of the 23rd Psalm (1923).³⁰ In the early 1900s, music publisher G. Ricordi & Co. released a

23 J. Lloyd Winstead, *When Colleges Sang: The Story of Singing in American College Life* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 65.

24 *Ibid.* 54.

25 Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636–1936* (1936; repr. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 433.

26 Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Dilemma of American Music* (New York: MacMillan, 1928), 28–39.

27 Fried, 'Glee'.

28 Winstead, *When Colleges Sang*, 63–64 and 138–39.

29 For examples, S. [Selmar] Müller, *Part Songs, for Three and Four Female Voices: For the Use of Normal Schools, Young Ladies' Institutes, &c.*, trans. Fanny Malone Raymond (Boston: O. Ditson, 1861); William S. Tilden (ed.), *Choice Trios for Female Voices: Intended for Seminaries, High and Normal Schools, and Vocal Classes* (Boston: O. Ditson, 1873); Max Spicker (ed.), *The Seminary Series: A Collection of Two and Three Part Songs for Women's Voices with Piano Accompaniment*, 4 vols. (New York: G. Schirmer, 1890); Carl F. Mueller (ed.), *Schirmer's Favorite A Cappella Selections for Women's Voices* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1945).

30 For more, see Adrienne Fried Block and E. Douglas Bomberger, 'Beach [Cheney], Amy Marcy', *Grove Music Online*, 16 Oct. 2013; accessed 28 Jan. 2020 < <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002248268>.>

series of choral scores for women's groups ('G. Ricordi & Co.'s Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Women's Voices') that included numerous new arrangements by Harry Burleigh (1866–1949) of Negro stage spirituals such as 'Deep River' (1917), 'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child' (1919), and 'Balm in Gilead' (1919).³¹ Eisler's *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* belongs within this American tradition of new works or arrangements for amateur female choral groups.

Woodbury and the Westover School Glee Club

In the early 1940s, the Woodbury community inhabited a rural village with steep hills, dense forest, and scattered farmland with roaming cows. The town served as a small haven for artists like wood engraver Clare Leighton (1898–1989) and sculptor Alexander Calder (1898–1976), famous for his mobile sculptures. In the late 1800s, American composer Charles Ives had grown up in nearby Danbury (about 35 kilometers away). He later evoked his childhood hamlet's local musicmaking through several symphonic works, such as *Three Places in New England* (rev. 1929). The Woodbury that Eisler visited in 1941 encompassed the same rustic, idyllic environment that Ives sonically conveyed. Eisler's summer in Woodbury offered pastoral seclusion and a peaceful respite from city noise, not unlike Gustav Mahler's cabins in Toblach. In his memoirs, Schumacher says Eisler arrived from New York City in May 1941. He procured for Eisler a makeshift shack for daily uninterrupted composition. The small space had a piano but no telephone. While not composing in his hut, Eisler and the Schumachers would swim at Hammonasset Beach (about 85 kilometers southeast on the Connecticut side of Long Island Sound), bask in the sun, and eat hot dogs. Lou, Eisler's wife, occasionally visited on the weekends. In the evenings, this group of friends would gather back in Woodbury, talk, make music, sing, drink and play cards until very late. Schumacher proudly admits that despite Woodbury's four churches, he had the luxury to live on *Heidenallee* ('Heathen Avenue').³²

The Schumachers both worked as instructors at the Westover School for girls in nearby Middlebury. Joachim taught art history and Sylvia worked as a part-time piano instructor. In Joachim's words: 'Westover School is a very well-known, rather strange institution for rich and gifted girls. ... Politically, Westover School is "Republican" and oriented toward and visited by the upper class. ... As an immigrant, I was not only toler-

31 Harry Burleigh, 'Deep River' (New York: G. Ricordi, 1917); Burleigh, 'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child' (New York: G. Ricordi, 1919); Burleigh, 'Balm in Gilead' ([New York]: G. Ricordi, 1919).

32 Joachim Schumacher, *Dritte Kopie Rücksprache mit meinem Leben und dem Lebensfreunden Ernst Bloch, Hanns Eisler, Max Raphael*, Teil II, unpublished manuscript (Box 1, Schumacher Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Connecticut Libraries), 183. Schumacher marked this document as completed in May 1980.

ated but valued.³³ According to Schumacher, in the early 1940s the students at Westover came from financially prosperous and politically conservative families. For local girls, their studies at Westover acted as a launching pad toward a continuing education at higher institutions. Established in 1909 by educators Mary Hillard, Helen LaMonte, and Lucy Pratt, Westover School in the 1940s was developing from a girls' finishing school into a college preparatory school.³⁴ Each member of the 150-student body encountered a rigorous curriculum of mathematics, science, art history, Roman history, literature and composition, French, German, and Latin.³⁵

Westover also offered its students excellent music instruction and opportunities to hear some of the most talented contemporary professional musicians and composers. Musical electives available at the school in 1941 included music history, harmony, and instruction in voice and violin. Bruce Simonds, a professor of music at Yale University some 40 kilometers to the south, supervised piano instruction at the school. Due to Westover's proximity to several East-Coast metropolises, concert programs at the school's Red Hall often featured recitals by high-quality talent, like members of the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra. In 1917, the Tuskegee Singers presented a concert of Negro spirituals; Wanda Landowska performed on the school's harpsichord in 1924; and Nadia Boulanger provided a lecture and organ recital in 1939.³⁶

The Westover Glee Club functioned as the center of the school's musical culture. At the beginning of the academic year, the school required each student to undergo a voice placement test. From these vocal exams, the faculty determined each girl's proper voice parts for the school songs and hymns sung at the daily Episcopalian chapel services. Girls who exhibited the highest quality talent were selected to join the glee club, which led those services and performed a couple of recitals in the second half of the academic year.³⁷ At the end of each year, the graduating head of the choir would leave written instructions for the next year's leader concerning her expected responsibilities and detailing the club's repertoire. In her 1931 notebook – now located in the Westover archives – choir head Nancy Doyle explains to her successor that the glee trials are 'a perfect riot'. However, she warns: 'Don't laugh at the poor little new girls because they are scared to death anyway, and sometimes burst into tears. It is most difficult at times to keep from laughing!'³⁸

33 'Westover School war eine sehr bekannte, eher strange Schule für reiche und begabte Mädchen. ... Politisch galt Westover School als "republikanisch", also grossbürgerlich orientiert und besucht. ... Als Immigrant wurde ich nicht nur toleriert sondern geschätzt', Schumacher, *Skizze meines Lebens*, 156. English translation by the author.

34 Laurie Lisle, *Westover: Giving Girls a Place of Their Own* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 1 and 55–56.

35 *Westover School, 1940–1941*, course catalog, Westover School Archives, 1–3.

36 Lisle, *Westover*, 56; and *Yearbook of Westover School, 1938–1939*, Westover School Archives.

37 Lisle, *Westover*, 55 and 63.

38 Nancy M. Doyle, *N.M.D. 1930–1931 Glee Club*, personal notebook, Westover School Archives, 7–8.

1931, 1934, 1937	1932, 1935, 1938	1933, 1936, 1939
Hark, Hark the Lark	My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose	Who is Sylvia?
Loch Lamond	The Night Has a Thousand Eyes	Drink to Me Only
Meeting of the Waters	Ye Banks and Braes	Rock-a-Bye
Auld Robin Gray	Ah! Tis a Dream	O Wert Thou in the Could Blast
Cradle Song	Bells of Shandon	Merry Dance
Has Sorrow Thy Young Days Shaded	Brahms Lullaby	The Harp That Once
Last Night	Highland Lad	Come Back to Erin
Kathleen Mavourneen	Old Folks at Home	All Through the Night
Blue Bells of Scotland	Mary	Highland Lad
Turn Ye to Me	Hedge-Roses	Serenade [Schubert]
Bendemeer's Stream	How Gently	How Steep the Brave
In Yonder Glade	Annie Laurie	Oft in the Stilly Night
How Steep the Brave		Listen Yet Awhile
Keel Row		

Table 1. The Westover Glee Club's Three-Year Rotation of Repertoire.

Even if Eisler had published the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* immediately following his summer retreat in Connecticut, Kenyon Congdon, the choir director at Westover from 1936 to 1942, probably would never have selected it for performance at one of the school concerts. First, at the time the Westover Glee Club held joint programs with other young choirs (all-male or mixed voices) from nearby academic institutions – the Yale Freshmen Glee Club, for example. Thus, limited program space would have hindered a complete twenty-minute performance of Eisler's Woodbury songs. Furthermore, printed concert programs and sheet music in the Westover archives indicate that most of Westover's performance material for the period exemplifies the standard American glee repertoire. The Westover Glee Club usually practiced and presented arrangements of English, Scotch, or Irish folk tunes, like 'The Blue Bells of Scotland,' arranged by composer Frederick Schilling (1836–1905). Moreover, Isaac Beecher Clark, the choir's director from 1910 to 1936, organized for the choir his own arrangements of folk tunes in a close, three- or four-part homophony similar to the choral style found in Protestant Episcopal hymnals.

Finally, the Westover choir not only stuck to an Anglican repertoire rooted in traditional glee performance, but they also programmed roughly the same sets of songs on a three-year rotation. In her 1931 notebook, Doyle explained this process to her successor and listed the expected repertoire for the coming years (see Table 1).³⁹ Concert programs printed in Westover yearbooks from the late 1930s and early 1940s indicate that the

³⁹ Doyle, *N.M.D. 1930–1931 Glee Club*, 7–8.

choir loosely observed this rotation, while sometimes mixing or repeating items within the rotation and also including selections from outside their usual choices. For example, on 24 April 1937 the Westover Glee Club held a joint concert with singers from the Taft School, a boarding school located in nearby Watertown. Most of the music presented by Westover at this concert comes from songs listed in the first column of Table 1, which contains the selections Doyle indicated for the 1937 concerts. Exceptions listed on the concert program include a Dudley Buck arrangement of 'Annie Laurie' (found in the second column), the Schubert 'Serenade' (located in the third column), and Orlando di Lasso's 'Echo Song', not mentioned in Doyle's notebook.

The Westover Glee Club generally adhered to the school's performance customs rooted in the American glee tradition and in Presbyterian hymnody. Due to the level of difficulty of Eisler's music and due to the recycled repertoire at the school, the Westover girls probably would never have attempted to perform a set of songs like the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*. Nevertheless, analysis of the score confirms that Eisler, by including popular musical elements and age-appropriate texts, intended his Woodbury songs as *Gebrauchsmusik*, accessible to amateur female choirs like the Westover Glee Club but difficult enough to challenge them and introduce them to modern sonorities unassociated with traditional glees.

Woodbury Liederbüchlein as *Gebrauchsmusik*

For the first fifteen of the twenty Woodbury songs, Eisler chose children's rhymes as English texts. Whether Eisler had a singular source from which he selected the rhymes is unknown. Perhaps he used one of Mark Schumacher's children's books or a collection of rhymes available at the Westover School or at the Middlebury Public Library. In any case, in addition to the English-language rhymes, Eisler also included four German texts, which he positioned at the end of the collection: 'An den Schlaf', 'Für Lou', 'Ode an die Langeweile', and 'Sommer adieu.' These more serious and introspective songs, which repurpose artistic artifacts of German Classicism and Romanticism for contemporary use, relate to other more subjective vocal works that Eisler also wrote while in exile, like the *Hollywood Songbook*. While the nursery rhymes exude a child-like innocence with no real binding elements besides the frequent appearance of animals, the German song texts are more serious and melancholic.

Within the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, Eisler supplied a variety of pieces, written in styles from the Renaissance to the modern, and for several contrasting vocal textures. He scored most of the numbers for three vocal parts (soprano, mezzo-soprano, and alto), and each song possesses its own unique instructional qualities. Eisler included short pieces in both duple and triple meter, and some songs contain alternating time signatures. Textures vary from the homophonic to the contrapuntal. 'The Five Toes', which features a call and response pattern, divides the girls into two choirs. In general,

harmony is usually not functional. Most of the songs are highly chromatic and many do not have a key signature. The predominance of modern sonorities sets *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* apart from typical music for American choral groups at that time. However, some songs, while containing chromatic moments, are clearly tonal, like ‘Pussy Cat’ and ‘The Old Woman from France’, both in B-flat major.

The image shows a musical score for three voice parts: Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, and Alto. The music is in 6/8 time and features a mix of lyrics and humming. The lyrics are: 'How do you do, how do you do, neigh - bour? Neigh - bour', 'Hm hm hm hm hm', 'how do you do? Hm hm hm', 'hm hm hm hm hm', 'Ve - ry well Ve - ry well', and 'hm hm hm I thank you.' The score includes a measure number '6' at the beginning of the second system.

Example 1. Hanns Eisler, *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, ‘Evening Talk’, mm. 1–11.

The first Woodbury song, ‘Evening talk’, demonstrates the cycle’s instructional purpose. ‘Evening talk’ comprises a musical ternary form (ABA’), forty-two measures in length with a truncated return of the A material plus codetta. Eisler sets the text – more widely known as the nursery rhyme ‘How do you do, neighbour?’ – as a vocal exercise in the proper execution of major and minor thirds. With the opening measures (see Example 1), the fluctuation between F and A \flat in the sopranos not only signals the third as an important element in the song’s construction, but also evokes the minor third often heard in American folk and blues music. The moments of wordless humming present in all the voice parts in rising and falling thirds recall African-American folk music. For the B-section (mm. 21–28), the altos carry the text while the sopranos and mezzo-sopranos continue to hum in falling thirds. Here, Eisler organizes tonal triads in a descending and tonally nonfunctional harmonic progression: C minor \rightarrow B-flat major \rightarrow A major \rightarrow G minor.

Soprano

Mezzo-Soprano

Alto

Hm _____ hm _____

Example 2. Hanns Eisler, *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, 'Evening Talk', mm. 37–42.

After the truncated return of the A-material, Eisler includes a six-measure humming codetta (see Example 2) that emphasizes the major/minor dichotomy one last time. In the final four measures, as the altos and sopranos hold the pitches A and E, the mezzo-sopranos slowly descend from a suspended D, to a C#, and finally to a C. Although the style and sound is unusual for a traditional glee, the song's good-humored text, and playful, bluesy character would appeal to a choir of young girls while also instructing them on the sonic difference between major and minor thirds.

Mezzo-Soprano

I had a lit-tle Dog-gie, that used to sit and beg.

Alto 1

Alto 2

6

Mezzo

But Dog-gie tum-bled down-stairs and broke his lit-tle leg

A 1

A 2

Example 3. Hanns Eisler, *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, 'I Had a Little Doggie', mm. 1–9.

Like ‘Evening Talk’, several other Woodbury songs feature sonic and rhythmic elements borrowed from contemporary popular music. For example, with ‘I Had a Little Doggie’ in F minor, Eisler organizes the text into a musical AA’ structure (with short codetta) and designates a ‘blues tempo’. He includes textless humming, melodic syncopation and minor thirds, and a predominance of both minor seventh and dominant seventh chords, all elements commonly found in vocal blues and jazz. As the song opens (see Example 3), the altos hum half notes in parallel thirds. Above the altos, the mezzo-sopranos sing the text in melodic segments that encompass the interval of a minor third. Resulting harmonies include fully diminished, minor, or dominant seventh chords (fifths omitted). Eisler rounds out the first A section on a half cadence (see Example 4) with a contemporary chromatic embellishment. For the subdominant harmony, he uses a half-diminished seventh chord, with the flattened fifth in the mezzo-sopranos (m. 16). Although written in F minor, the song concludes with the altos humming a B-flat dominant seventh chord. With ‘I Had a Little Doggie’, Eisler constructed another fun song, like ‘Evening Talk’, with fun and challenging musical elements borrowed from popular music.

The image shows a musical score for three voices: Mezzo-Soprano, Alto 1, and Alto 2. The key signature is F minor (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "and you shall have a col-lar _____ and a pret-ty lit-tle bell. _____". The Mezzo-Soprano part has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes on the word "pret-ty". The Alto 1 and Alto 2 parts provide a harmonic accompaniment with half notes and quarter notes, often in parallel motion.

Example 4. Hanns Eisler, *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, ‘I Had a Little Doggie’, mm. 14–18.

Some of Eisler’s songs feature word painting like one would find in many English or Italian madrigals, which are part of the common repertoire for academic choral groups in the United States. In ‘The Sick Kitten’, mezzo-sopranos and altos use onomatopoeia (‘kling, kling, kling...’) to imitate the sound of a tinkling bell on a cat’s collar while the sopranos ‘meow’. The homophonic ‘Pussy Cat’, twenty measures in length, features a sudden but short skipping melisma on the word ‘play’. A particularly challenging madrigalism occurs in Eisler’s setting of ‘Little Miss Muffat’, a short rhyme about a girl frightened by a spider. Eisler sets the first line of the rhyme (mm. 1–7) in quiet homophony. Suddenly, on the word ‘spider’, the sopranos and mezzo-sopranos burst into melismas that musically depict the bouncing descent of the creature on his thread (see Example 5). At the end of the song, the voices slide upward an octave on the word ‘away’. The effect is a shriek that also sonically portrays Miss Muffat’s flight. The inclusion of madrigalisms in

the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* is both entertaining and instructional. Although the vocal lines are sometimes difficult to execute, the effect is always humorous.

The image shows a musical score for three voices: Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, and Alto. The music is in 2/4 time and E-flat major. The lyrics are 'Spi - - - - - der.' The Soprano and Mezzo-Soprano parts have a similar melodic line with eighth-note patterns, while the Alto part has a more sparse, dotted-note melody. The score is presented in a standard musical notation format with a grand staff.

Example 5. Hanns Eisler, *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, 'Little Miss Muffat', mm. 8–14.

In another children's rhyme setting, Eisler demonstrates his penchant for anti-authoritarianism, although his musical choices are not militant and persistent as with his European *Kampflieder*. With 'Hector Protector', he sets the quatrain in E-flat major and for three voices. While Eisler colors the green-clad Hector Protector with tonal harmony in the first, second, and fourth lines, the third line (which introduces the king and queen) features several pitches from outside the scale, resulting with fully diminished seventh chords (fifths omitted) on the words 'queen' and 'king'.

Woodbury Liederbüchlein as Wartime Response

In addition to the children's rhymes, Eisler also includes in this cycle introspective settings of four texts in his native language. At the time of the composition of *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, Eisler had been living in American exile for three years. It had been eight years since Hitler had been appointed Chancellor of Germany. Although spending his summer in a pastoral locale, Eisler worried about the war overseas, his present finances, and the well-being of his family. Concurrently, his brother Gerhart, a Communist functionary, anxiously awaited a visa approval.⁴⁰ Moreover, in letters to his sister, Ruth Fischer, who had just recently immigrated to the United States, Eisler lamented he could not send financial aid, as he had outstanding debts and commitments, which included his son's welfare in England.⁴¹ Lou, who handled their budget, explained to

⁴⁰ Letter from Lou and Hanns Eisler to Ruth Fischer, end of June 1941, in Eisler, *Briefe 1907-1943*, 174–75. During the summer of 1941, Schumacher explains that Eisler once came to his home with an unidentified man, who spoke privately with Hanns and remained only briefly. Schumacher believes that man was Gerhart Eisler. Schumacher, *Skizze meines Lebens*, 179.

⁴¹ Letter from Hanns Eisler to Ruth Fischer, 10 June 1941, in Eisler, *Briefe 1907-1943*, 173.

Fischer: ‘You can still shake it and not a penny drops out.’⁴² The cumulative weight of such depressing circumstances prompted a melancholic and highly introspective artistic response. Thus, the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* possesses dual characters, comprising a collection of short and lighthearted pieces contrasted with highly serious and subjective reflections on war and exile. For Eisler, as Jürgen Schebera explains, ‘A carefree fantasy about American children’s songs was not possible in 1941.’⁴³

At the end of the music for ‘Für Lou,’ set for three voices, Eisler placed a note that reads: ‘Written after a newspaper article, which was not good.’⁴⁴ Schebera believes this remark a reference to the German invasion of the Soviet Union in late June 1941.⁴⁵ ‘Für Lou’ comprises two short pieces labelled *Zwei Sprüche*. Schebera writes, ‘The two choruses decipher as eminently political works, embedded with the cheerful insouciance of the children’s verses.’⁴⁶ The first *Spruch* asks whether the present situation could get any worse, but concludes that anything is possible ‘when stupidity reigns’ (‘wenn die Dummheit regiert’). Concerning the second *Spruch*, Albrecht Dümling has noted, ‘Rain emerges as a political metaphor, as the epitome of a threatening situation.’⁴⁷ Eisler sets both *Sprüche* homophonically and syllabically, however, in the concluding measures, he musically depicts the idea of ‘endless rain’ through a three-measure quivering figure in the first sopranos. The song concludes with a biting augmented triad.

In his oeuvre, Eisler often re-employed poetic and musical selections from the German Classic and Romantic traditions as reflective statements on contemporary exile experience – the *Hölderlin Fragmente* from his *Hollywood Songbook*, for example.⁴⁸ Heidi Hart explains that Eisler’s intentions with such vocal works were to reclaim ‘an aesthetic tradition usurped by Nazi propaganda.’⁴⁹ A few of the German-language Woodbury songs, particularly ‘An den Schlaf’ and ‘Ode an die Langeweile,’ also exemplify such reclamations. With ‘An den Schlaf,’ Eisler returned to a poem by Eduard Mörike he had previously set as a twelve-tone piece in 1940. Mörike’s text praises sleep for making life easier and equates the quietude of slumber with the stillness of death. Perhaps for the despondent Eisler, sleep’s deathlike state offered respite from worry. Eisler’s Woodbury setting of ‘An den Schlaf,’ although not dodecaphonic, is highly chromatic, because Eisler

42 Letter from Lou and Hanns Eisler to Ruth Fischer, end of June 1941, in Eisler, *Briefe 1907-1943*, 174–75. English translation by the author.

43 Jürgen Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Bildbiografie* (Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1981), 121. English translation by the author.

44 Eisler, ‘Für Lou,’ *Woodbury-Liederbüchlein*, 27.

45 Schebera, *Hanns Eisler: Eine Bildbiografie*, 121.

46 Ibid. English translation by the author.

47 Albrecht Dümling, *Laßt euch nicht verführen: Brecht und die Musik* (Munich: Kindler, 1985), 467. English translation by the author.

48 For more, see Heidi Hart, *Hanns Eisler’s Art Songs: Arguing with Beauty* (Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture; Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2018).

49 Ibid. 8.

uses all twelve notes of the chromatic scale by the sixth measure. However, the soft F-major triad at the song's end sonically depicts the peace that finally comes with sleep or death. Additionally, Eisler's 1941 setting bears some similarities to Hugo Wolf's 1888 setting of Mörike's poem for voice and piano. Like Eisler's later setting, Wolf's song also features heavy chromaticism and concludes with a quiet major triad.

Eisler continued to repurpose German cultural extracts in his setting of 'Ode an die Langeweile', wherein he combines a text drawn from Goethe's *Venezianische Epigramme* with a musical allusion to Schubert's Lied 'An die Musik' (1817). Whereas the voice in Schubert's song intones a D-major triad on the words 'Du holde Kunst' (see Example 6), the sopranos in Eisler's song outline a G-minor triad on an approximate text, 'Du holdes Kind' (see Example 7).⁵⁰ In his epigram, Goethe expresses gratitude to boredom for leading him through cheerless hours. In his conversations with Hans Bunge, recorded years after he had crossed back over the Atlantic to live in the German Democratic Republic, Eisler explained that he and Brecht through the extent of their exile continuously found inspiration through boredom, which Goethe describes as the tenth muse. Eisler says:

For émigrés who had nothing better to do than look at themselves for twelve hours a day, the greatest inspiration during the emigration wasn't our understanding of the circumstances of class, nor our true and, I hope, decent fight for socialism against fascism, but just ... this tormenting boredom. This is the origin of productive power.⁵¹



Example 6. Franz Schubert, 'An die Musik', D. 547, mm. 3-4, voice only.



Example 7. Hanns Eisler, *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, 'Ode an die Langeweile', mm. 1-3, soprano only.

In 1941, confronted with incessant bad news from overseas, Eisler wanted to write music that progressed the Socialist cause and directly attacked fascist oppression, but he could not do so without risking deportation from his American haven. With 'An den Schlaf' and 'Ode an die Langeweile', Eisler takes back artifacts from his German heritage that Nazi fascists had appropriated and disturbed. He fashions them within a contemporary

⁵⁰ Dümling, *Laßt euch nicht verführen*, 467.

⁵¹ Quoted in Hans Bunge, *Brecht, Music and Culture: Hanns Eisler in Conversation with Hans Bunge*, ed. and transl. Sabine Berendse and Paul Clements (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 58.

context as weapons of resistance, using the sort of modernist progressive language that Nazi cultural czars abhorred.

The angst and stress of exilic isolation prompted Eisler to turn from naive children's rhymes to subjective monologues in his own German language.⁵² He sought solace in the voice and art of his homeland, resulting in very introspective and highly challenging pieces for amateur choir. With the last German song, 'Sommer adieu', which Eisler noted should be sung 'with mournful and regretful expression', he bittersweetly bid farewell to his Woodbury holiday, lamenting that 'die liebe Zeit' has passed.

Conclusion

Inspired by Middlebury, Connecticut's Westover School Glee Club, Eisler devised the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* as Gebrauchsmusik for amateur American women's vocal groups. He included pieces designed in the style of song types associated with traditional American glee repertoire, like English part-songs, Italian madrigals, spirituals, and canons. In order to make the work more interesting to contemporary amateur groups, Eisler infused some of the songs with elements from popular music, like melodic syncopation, jazz harmonies, and blue notes. Although some of the numbers are highly chromatic and challenging to execute, especially the German-language pieces toward the end of the collection, each of the songs contains instructional elements for maturing amateur performers.

Eisler did not publish the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* during his American sojourn, which ended in 1948 with his departure for Europe in order to avoid deportation. However, in early 1942, he wrote to Charles Seeger with the news that he had applied for a teaching position at Vassar College, which at the time was a school for women in Poughkeepsie, New York. George Sherman Dickinson, the head of Vassar's music department, sought to replace Ernst Krenek, who had been teaching there since 1939.⁵³ Eisler asked Seeger to help him secure a meeting with Dickinson and informed him that he had 'already composed 24 pieces for girls chorusses [sic] quite brilliant and easy to perform.'⁵⁴ Thus, in addition to designing the Woodbury songs as instructional pieces, Eisler hoped that his new composition would demonstrate his interest in writing appropriate works for college groups – like the women's chorus at Vassar – and cinch him a job. Had Eisler landed that appointment, the school's chorus (in operation since 1876) in all probability would have sung the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*. Ironically, although Eisler intended the Woodbury songs for immediate use, his Gebrauchsmusik for girls remained unperformed by American voices for many years.

52 According to Schumacher's memoirs, although Eisler began the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* as a project for the local choir, the order in which he composed each song is not known.

53 John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and His Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 221–31.

54 Letter from Hanns Eisler to Charles Seeger, 2 March 1942, in Eisler, *Briefe 1907–1943*, 196.

Abstract

Hanns Eisler spent summer 1941 in Woodbury, Connecticut at the home of philosopher Joachim Schumacher, a lecturer at the nearby Westover School, an academic institution for young girls. That summer, Eisler wrote his *Woodbury Liederbüchlein*, a collection of twenty short a cappella songs for the Westover glee club. He used familiar children's rhymes to teach young singers various choral styles associated with American amateur glee performance, while also introducing young voices to contemporary musical language. However, news of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union that summer darkened Eisler's spirit, prompting him to include four austere German-language reactions. Therefore, the *Woodbury Liederbüchlein* serves a dual purpose as *Gebrauchsmusik* for maturing singers and as an exile's artistic reaction to the existential horrors of war. Eisler scholars such as Jürgen Schebera and Albrecht Dümling have addressed the collection's contradictory character, with particular interest directed toward the German songs. Eisler's original intention for these songs as instructional pieces for amateur female choir has been overlooked. This article draws upon research at the Hanns Eisler Papers at the University of Southern California, the Joachim Schumacher Papers at the University of Connecticut, and the archives at the Westover School in Middlebury, Connecticut.

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