

(Un)Covering Hanns Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook*

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RECOVERING HANNS EISLER

The music of Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) has never enjoyed greater popularity, and it has never been performed in so many different genres and contexts than in recent history. In this article, we ask why that is. We are particularly concerned with the resurgence of Eisler's music and the re-evaluation of Eisler as a twentieth-century composer in the almost two decades since the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), in other words, the end of the great socialist project of East Germany, to which Eisler devoted his musical energies in the closing years of his life. Why, in other words, does Eisler's music thrive in a post-GDR, post-socialist, and post-modern world?

Though we consider the historical contexts of Eisler reception, our primary concern here is with the musical texts and their transmission, particularly in the ways Eisler's music lends itself to covers and covering, being a composer who covers music of his own and from others in the course of his compositional process as well as a composer, whose music was extensively covered by others. More commonly focused on the adaptation and transmission of popular music, theories of covering might, we argue, be extended to art music and composed traditions, in which authority and authenticity seemingly rest in the privileged object of a score. Covering, nonetheless, also results from the fluid movement between written and oral tradition, in other words, the transformation of the score through performance. Boundaries between genre and performance, between original versions and covers, therefore, become increasingly blurred. The different musical texts in a network formed of intertextuality enter different contexts, in the case of Hanns Eisler, those formed of a world very different from one he imagined for the socialist project of East Germany.

1 Throughout this essay we employ the collective personal pronoun 'we', which we consciously cover with multiple meanings. In the first order, it refers to the authors, whose engagement with Hanns Eisler began in different ways but has insistently converged over the past few years. Together, they presented an earlier version of this essay as a lecture at the Department of Musicology of the University of Copenhagen on 6 June 2005. The response and engagement of colleagues there lent new dimensions to 'we', for the authors found themselves indebted to the stimulating discussion and critical remarks of our Copenhagen colleagues, whom we now thank: Michael Fjeldsøe, Jette Barnholdt Hansen, Fabian Holt, Diddan Degn Karstensen, Annemette Kirkegaard, Tore Tvarnø Lind, Morten Michelsen, Nils Holger Petersen, Jane Mink Rossen, and Heinrich W. Schwab. We should like to thank the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) and the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, which brought us as student and professor, daughter and father, to the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in 2005.

Hanns Eisler did, however, recognize and shape the potential for covers and covering in many of his compositional projects, not least among them the *Hollywood Songbook*, composed during his American exile during 1942–43. It is only with difficulty that the *Hollywood Songbook* allows itself to be pinned down as, say, a song cycle, mass songs, or newly-composed folk songs. Instead, it reveals a striking affinity to repertoires of popular song, such as the so-called ‘Great American Songbook’, which exists primarily as an intertextual network lending itself to covering. As performative transmission, even of printed and recorded texts, the theory of covering that we develop from examination of the *Hollywood Songbook* offers new possibilities for understanding the music history of the present.

There seems to be no end to the obituaries for the GDR. Almost two decades after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the East German state, the counterpoint of ideological and political pronouncements that nervously project the life-after-death of the GDR shows few signs of reaching a final stretto. Recovering the past has a name, *Ostalgie*, coined to convey a shared sense of ‘nostalgia for the East’. Song intones meaning for a past that will not go away, finally or irrevocably. Anthologies of GDR composers and compilations of GDR youth groups appear frequently, recovering the official and the unofficial music from the past, celebrating the sense of solidarity that died with the state.²

The quality of a cover song to transform ownership and to sustain the past could not be clearer than in the vocal repertory of Hanns Eisler.³ Eisler’s songs live in the present, providing historical meaning and memory for the GDR. It is hardly surprising that they contribute to an aesthetic and ideology of covering *Ostalgie* itself, not infrequently under the banner, ‘Hanns Eisler heute!’⁴ Covering Eisler, it seems all too obvious, must establish the ethnographic present so trenchantly vibrant in proclamations of ‘Hanns Eisler today’.

2 See, e.g., Michael Berg, Albrecht von Massow, and Nina Noeske (eds.), *Zwischen Macht und Freiheit: Neue Musik in der DDR* (KlangZeiten – Musik, Politik und Gesellschaft, 1; Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2004); *Unser Zeichen ist die Sonne: Die schönsten Lieder der FDJ* (BMG 74321 69977 2), 1999.

3 His songs for piano and voice were collected in the GDR as Hanns Eisler, *Lieder für eine Singstimme und Klavier*, ed. Stephanie Eisler and Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag, 1976). They will appear again in a new volume in the Eisler complete edition as Hanns Eisler, *Musik für Singstimme und Klavier* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, forthcoming). Eisler’s songs constitute a large percentage of other collections, for example, in Fritz Henneberg, *Brecht Liederbuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984). The North American folk-music revival, with its socialist underpinnings, also created its own Eisler compilations, crucially with ‘singable’ English translations; see, e.g., *Songs of Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler: Forty-Two Songs in German and English*, music edited by Earl Robinson, with piano arrangements and guitar chords (New York: Oak Publications, 1967).

4 ‘Hanns Eisler today!’ See Heiner Goebbels, compiler, *Eislermaterial* (Munich: ECM Records, 2002). The calls for an Eisler of today to seize the mantle of an earlier rhetoric; see, e.g., Manfred Grabs (ed.), *Hanns Eisler heute: Berichte, Probleme, Beobachtungen* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1974).

THE GENEALOGY OF COVER SONGS

Covers spawn multiple offspring and span multiple generations. Covers bridge the gaps between oral and written transmission, and they repopulate the border areas between genres.⁵ Covers become meaningful through their mobility and their migration from one musical medium to another. On the move, covers are claimed by new singers wanting to make old songs their own. The use-value of covers increases as versions enter the everyday, where they are revoiced as a people's music. Thus, for a committed creator of people's music such as Hanns Eisler, covers spread the aesthetic and political cause across a vast genealogy.

The proliferation of cover songs also generates paradox, for it lays bare the distinctions between an original and a covered version. If covers are everywhere and if ownership is universalized, who can claim authority and authorship? Does the authenticity of a song – the song itself in any authentic, composed form – diminish or disappear? Ironically, the modern conditions of covering songs render these questions more paradoxical. With modernity, the media that disseminate songs proliferate themselves.⁶ Each generation of recording technology makes covering easier, but complicates the problem of ownership. The musical culture of modernity may well be awash in covers, and it may be that the very superabundance of covered music has emerged as an abiding symbol of postmodernism.⁷ Hanns Eisler's genealogy of covering emerged during the transition from modernism to postmodernism and was steeped in the paradox of covering that came to characterize this age. Eisler inhabited an age of in-betweenness, and the question we must consider is whether Eisler's propensity to cover was symptomatic of this age of in-betweenness or whether Eisler seized the violent change of the era and the crisis of modernity to stake new claims on the practice of covering itself.⁸

At each stage in his biography, Hanns Eisler assumed not just numerous roles but different and contradictory roles. As a composition student of Arnold Schoenberg, organizer of workers' choruses, composer of serial chamber music, Brecht collaborator, Austrian in the Hollywood exile community of artists, co-author with Theodor W. Adorno of *Composing for the Films*, composer of the national anthem of the GDR, and more, Hanns Eisler participated in many and varied musical communities.⁹ In the

5 The question of genre in-betweenness receives especially incisive treatment in Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), passim but esp. 31–49.

6 The mediation of modernity is the fundamental argument in the now-classic Friedrich A. Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 3rd edn. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995).

7 George Plasketes suggests that the plenitude of covers in music has led to a generation he calls the 'Cover Age'. See his 'Re-Flections on the Cover Age: A Collage of Continuous Coverage in Popular Music', *Popular Music and Society*, 28/2 (2005), 137–61.

8 Eisler himself insisted that music and musical performance were never separable from the age in which music was created and performed. His abundant writings insist upon a consideration of the historical and political contexts of the work of art. See, e.g., Hanns Eisler, *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs, transl. Marjorie Meyer (London: Kahn & Averill, 1999).

9 Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Komposition für den Film*, ed. Johannes C. Gall (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006).

years since his death, performers and musicologists have in turn identified with and focused on specific languages of this musical ‘polyglot’.¹⁰

In order to locate Hanns Eisler in this world of covers, we turn to a few theoretical considerations about covering music. As we do so, we want to make it clear from the outset that we are thinking about covering and uncovering Hanns Eisler from two perspectives. First of all, we want to think about Eisler as a composer who covers music in the course of his compositional process. Second, we examine the extraordinary degree to which Eisler’s music was itself covered. Eisler was an inveterate self-borrower, and part of the enigma of his identity is due to the diverse ways in which he reused the same music in different ways. The question, nonetheless, is whether self-covering and other-covering are mutually dependent. These may well be two separate topics, but in fact we prefer to think of them as related, even dialectically so.

The two perspectives we employ here rely on the grammatical flexibility of the word ‘cover’ itself, both as a noun and as a verb. As a noun, a cover is an object, which derives its initial meaning from the surface of a musical piece, usually a song. The objective attributes of the surface necessarily establish a particular relation to what is covered, to the objective attributes below the surface. As a verb, to cover results from an act and therefore specifies an agent and agency. Covering music transforms it into a subject, and it establishes the conditions of subjectivity. A covered song – as subject – might do cultural work different from that of the original version of a song – as object. The subject positions of the creator/performer/coverer change in the course of the song’s transformation from its original form to its covered version.

We also wish to use the concept of cover in both general and specific ways. Specifically, we really do mean to address the use of covers in popular musics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One musician performs a song created by another, transforming and personalizing it through performance. In popular music, a cover refers both to songs and to recordings. Although there is slippage between the two, the distinctions are relevant in this essay. A *cover song* is one that has been previously recorded, but then is performed by musicians. A *cover record* refers to a recording that is exactly like an original, previously recorded song, but now with different musicians. The cover record provides an attempted objective reproduction to the original; the cover song serves as a subjective response.¹¹

In the broader historical sense, it is important to remember that covers have been around for a long time, and that they assume many forms and genres. In folk and popular music, covers go by all sorts of names: contrafact and broadside ballad in English; *Flugblattlied*, *Moritat*, and *Bänkelsang* in German; *skillingsblad* and *skillingsrise* in Danish, to list just a few. In sacred music, covers proliferate during periods when popular religion is on the rise: the explosion of Marian songs during the Counter-Reformation, shape-note hymnody during the American Great Awakenings

¹⁰ Joy Haslam Calico, ‘Hanns Eisler, Marxist Polyglot’ (*Perfect Sound Forever*: Sept. 2002, <http://www.furious.com/perfect/hannseisler.html>, accessed 16 Sept. 2007).

¹¹ For more on this distinction see Don Cusic, ‘In Defense of Cover Songs’, *Popular Music and Society*, 28/2 (2005), 174.

in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or hymnody as a national historical narrative in the United States.¹² Covers are crucial to the spread of ideological movements, for example, in the Grundtvigian *Folkehøjskole* movement in Denmark. Because of their constant transformation of meaning through processes such as parody, covers may become the canonical repertory in some genres, say, cabaret.

As we seek to expand a theory of covers and covering, we recognize that we confront paradox and contradiction. We necessarily untether covering from its application to popular music, with the implicit teleology leading from oral performance to written transmission. There is a danger of broadening the theory to the extent that it might seem as if all music, once a performance moves beyond some initial version, even the composer's intent, is a cover in one form or another. How, we ask in this article, can we expand the metaphysical borders of covers and covering without, at the same time, eliminating them?

First of all, it is crucial to recognize that certain borders are more fluid, so much so that they may not *separate* a cover from an original. This is the case when we consider orality and literacy. We are hardly the first to claim that all musics are both oral and literate. Critically, then, art song might not be, *ipso facto*, different from popular song because the former is literate and the latter oral. This is surely the case in Hanns Eisler's aesthetic of mass song. It is also one of the reasons that he deliberately leaves the traces of folk, popular, and vernacular song in art songs, such as those in the *Hollywood Songbook*.

Second, just as we draw a distinction between a *cover* and *covering*, so too do we recognize a distinction between a *performance* and the *performative*. We should go so far as to represent these related distinctions with the algorithm, a cover is to covering what a performance is to the performative, or:

cover : covering :: performance : performative

The two pairs in the algorithm each embody the relation of object to subject, or product to process. We represent them in this way to emphasize aspects of each pair that might otherwise be overlooked, or rather oversimplified, in other words the dynamic subjectivity of covering and the objective limitations of performance.

Third, as interested as we are in pushing the theoretical boundaries of covers and covering, we do not wish to remove them or even to suggest they can conceptually be removed. We do not believe that all covers are the same, or that all performative acts of covering are the same. Here is where distinctions between text and context do enter into the algorithm. Eisler–Brecht songs in the American folk-song revival of the early Cold War have a very different historical context than do Eisler–Brecht songs in the GDR in the post-Cold War. In the former, Eisler songs almost statically slipped into fixed covers, which we felt and feel compelled to perform in a frozen,

¹² See, e.g., the essays on American hymns and hymnody in Philip V. Bohlman, Edith L. Blumhofer, and Maria M. Chow (eds.), *Music in American Religious Experience* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

1950s, authentic version.¹³ In the latter, Eisler songs have entered a fluid oral tradition, moving into and out of popular genres. In this article, we call for the necessity of examining these two historical contexts comparatively, not to explain the ways in which covers and covering were the same, but rather why they are different.

The various historical and cultural roles of the cover, therefore, pose metaphysical questions to musicology, asking us to rethink questions about sameness and difference in music. First, all these covers appear at the boundaries between orality and literacy, and they create a process of movement between them. The mobility of covers generates both intertextual and intergeneric signification. There is constant and necessary slippage between the objective and subjective attributes of covers.¹⁴ Second, covers become possible through the intervention of technologies of one kind or another – the printing press in early modern Europe or digital sampling at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Third, covers are inherently performative through the ways they create a new musical object that is meant to be performed with as much ease as possible.¹⁵ Finally, covers connect the popular and the political because, musically, they create a public space in which the popular and the political overlap.¹⁶

It is because of all these characteristics that covers have a bad name in the Modern Era and in the music of twentieth-century modernism, which implicitly and explicitly privileges art music over popular music. Wrenched from its objective status as a musical work, the cover loses its privileged status in the post-Enlightenment museum of musical works.¹⁷ Covered music, moreover, lacks the attributes of Modern music, for its reference and identity come from the past, reviving it and musically retrofitting it. Anchored partly in the past, covered music falls short of fully joining the present, for it does not possess the sense of moving forward or of telos. Speaking of cover songs in popular music, Don Cusic goes so far as to suggest that they express ‘the songwriter’s soul and not the artist’s’ and ‘this denies the timelessness of great works.’¹⁸ Ultimately, the autonomy of music and the capacity of music to be self-referential, so crucial to modernity and aesthetic modernism, are sacrificed through the processes of covering.

Situated in a modernist aesthetic, covering would not only be anti-modernist, but also anti-art music; it would undermine the work of art, and return it to the people.

13 Cf. *Songs of Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler*.

14 Among these are the attributes of in-betweenness that Fabian Holt describes in Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*. Intertextuality itself maps the movement between versions in different ways, not least in the different media of reproduction and performance; see Serge Lacasse, ‘Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music’, in Michael Talbot (ed.), *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

15 Eisler, for example, meant that his songs should be singable; see the essays on workers’ music in Eisler, *A Rebel in Music*.

16 Because of its public performativity, particularly through improvisation, jazz persistently, one might say, insistently, politicizes the standards on which it is based. See also Middleton’s discussion of popular song and ‘the subjects of repetition’ in Richard Middleton, *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 137–97.

17 See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

18 Cusic, ‘In Defense of Cover Songs’, 176.

In the aesthetic vocabulary of marxist folk- and popular-music scholarship, covering would affirm songs as 'democratic' and 'oppositional' (*demokratisch-oppositionell*), transforming art song so that it would become 'functional' (*werkfähig*).¹⁹ It was to do precisely this – to complicate art song and unravel its intertextuality – that attracted Hanns Eisler to the potential for covering in the *Hollywood Songbook* and in his other vocal compositions. Covering for Eisler politicized art song.

It should come as no surprise that one of the reasons Hanns Eisler comes under attack is that he frequently borrows from the past and uses it to cover in the present. Listening to Hanns Eisler's songs, we often have the feeling that we have heard them before – and, of course, we have, often as fragments, but sometimes relatively intact.²⁰ His *Neue deutsche Volkslieder* are a return to, not a departure from, German folk song in the GDR. Clearly, Eisler turns to previously existing material consciously, and no less clearly, he uses that material to realize connections between the past and the present. In a word, he approaches composing itself from an awareness of the creative processes set in motion by the performativity of covering, the *Vortragsweise* (both 'melody' and 'means' of performance) that connects a song to its covers.²¹ In the composer's hands, the cover is more, rather than less, creative. In a performer's hands (or voice), such as that of the great Eisler interpreter, Ernst Busch, covering is more, rather than less, performative. In his own compositions, therefore, Eisler draws attention to the cover rather than obscuring it.

RECOVERING THE *Hollywood Songbook*

Sixty-five years after it came into being, questions of identity still surround the *Hollywood Songbook*. Just what is the *Hollywood Songbook*? Is it a song cycle? What relation does it have to the poetry of Bertolt Brecht's poems of the same name, *Hollywood Liederbuch*, which were themselves written as a response to the rise of fascism in Germany and exile from Germany, not only in Hollywood but in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland *en route* to the United States? Did these poems of Brecht's exile resonate with Eisler's exile, which in some ways paralleled that of Brecht, passing through Denmark before reaching Los Angeles? If there is an indebtedness to Brecht, his collaborator for song and stage for many years, what does it mean that the closing songs in the *Hollywood Songbook* detour toward other poets and other forms of literature? We might understand that Eisler would generate some of his own texts for his own exile (e.g., 'Nightmare'), but how does this explain a turn toward earlier

19 For the crucial role of these concepts in East German musicology and ethnomusicology, see Wolfgang Steinitz, *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1978); cf. the original use of such concepts in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Über Literatur und Kunst*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 218–29. Ethnomusicologist Jürgen Elsner redeploys the concepts from folk song to Eisler's composed songs in Jürgen Elsner, *Zur vokalsolistischen Vortragsweise der Kampfmusik Hanns Eislers* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1971).

20 See Elsner, *Zur vokalsolistischen Vortragsweise*, 77–79 and 134–36, for comparative transcriptions of songs taken by Eisler from oral tradition and composed for piano and voice.

21 *Ibid.*

poetry, to Goethe ('Der Schatzgräber'), Eichendorff ('Erinnerung an Eichendorff und Schumann'), Hölderlin ('Hölderlin-Fragmente'), and even the Bible ('Der Mensch')? What forms of narrative unity and continuity do the songs have in common with each other? With other Brecht poems and Eisler songs that bear similar names, such as the *Hollywood Elegien*? For that matter, what does 'Hollywood' have to do with the songs?

The simple answer to all these questions is that there is no simple answer to them. Composed in 1942–43, the songs of the *Hollywood Songbook* seemingly resisted unity and completion. We can speculate that he meant the songs to appear as a single volume, for he sketched a preface for that volume, stating 'in a society that understands and loves such a songbook, life will be lived well and without danger. These pieces have been written with such a society in mind'.²² The potential wholeness of Eisler's projection notwithstanding, he was never to hear a complete performance of the *Hollywood Songbook* during the remaining two decades of his life, in exile or after his return to the GDR.

Whatever the *Hollywood Songbook* might be – a song cycle, an autobiographical conversation between artists in exile, a metaphorical journey, or diaspora and return – it resists being bounded by any single category of repertory, style, or genre. Many of the songs explicitly announce themselves as art songs, using allusions to the great Lieder repertoires of the nineteenth century. Others are explicitly folk-like. The small range of most melodies suggests ease of singing but belies the underlying difficulty with which other songs challenge performers. There is modernist, non-tonal writing, no less than there are songs bearing witness to the Jazz Age in Germany and America, at once distant and close. It is with great difficulty that one identifies which Eisler songs are or are not in the *Hollywood Songbook*. Only perhaps one third of the songs actually come from Bertolt Brecht's poems gathered under the same name. Others enter the songbook from other Brecht sources, for example, 'Über den Selbstmord' from *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* and 'Winterspruch' from *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*. At least another third has no claim to the name beyond common textual themes and the consciously similar musical style with which Eisler treats them. Finally, there is the third that does not fit, seemingly flaunting any distinctive style and the violent shifts between mood and texture. At one moment, we imagine we have unraveled the *Hollywood Songbook*; at the next, Eisler calls us to task for our presumptiveness.

If contrast and contradiction abound, one way to account for their presence in a work with fluid boundaries is to concentrate on the autonomy of individual motifs, songs, and meanings. If priority is given to what Claudia Albert, following Adorno, calls the 'autonomization of aesthetics', the 'materials' employed by Eisler acquire meaning because they are indices of negativity.²³ Their very materiality – in other words,

22 Quote in Albrecht Dümmling, 'Expelled into Paradise – On the *Hollywood Songbook* of Hanns Eisler,' liner notes for *Eisler: The Hollywood Songbook* (London: Decca 289 460 582-2, 1998), 9.

23 Claudia Albert, 'Das schwierige Handwerk des Hoffens': Hanns Eislers 'Hollywooder Liederbuch' (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1991), 12–14.

the performativity that arises from materiality – resists the unified wholeness that would lead to an understanding of the *Hollywood Songbook* as a song cycle. The musical setting of a poem, therefore, creates an interpretive subjectivity, which, according to Albert, sets various processes of exchange between music and language in motion. Hollywood is both a theme, or *topos*, in the songbook and a reality in Eisler's life in exile.²⁴

Performances, recorded and from the stage, must also presume if they are to suture the parts into a whole, but there is simply no single version that scholars or musicians could claim as authentic. In the complete editions of Eisler's songs or of the musical settings of Brecht's poetry, the identity is no less confused, beyond a sort of vague realization of common ground, the world of exile and its complex intersections of historical narrative, shared by Eisler, Brecht, and other exiled artists in wartime Los Angeles.²⁵ In the 1985 GDR edition of Eisler songs, the songs begin with 'Der Sohn' and conclude with 'Die Landschaft des Exils', but there is otherwise no differentiation of the songs from other songs by Brecht and the poets to whom Eisler commonly turned.²⁶ This grouping approximates the dates of composition that we can determine for the songs, the two parts of 'Der Sohn' dated on 30 May 1942 and 'Die Landschaft des Exils' dated on 2 September 1943.²⁷ The generally accepted order of the songs, as well as the contents of the songbook, follow what we know of Eisler's work on them over the course of approximately fifteen months.

Perhaps the boundaries of identity are clearest in their fuzziness if one compares modern recordings of the *Hollywood Songbook*. The most extensive recording project solely committed to the *Hollywood Songbook*, Matthias Goerne (baritone) and Eric Schneider's (piano) recording for the 'Entartete Musik' series of 'Music Suppressed by the Third Reich', contains 46 tracks and unfailingly follows the GDR complete edition, affording it the authority of an *Urtext* that stands as a simulacrum for Eisler's life in exile.²⁸ On the Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau recording entitled *Hollywood Songbook*, which contains other Eisler songs, there are 32 tracks. Eisler songs in general and the *Hollywood Songbook* in particular, have become staples in the revival of twentieth-century cabaret. Recordings that revive Weimar German and Jewish exile cabaret commonly draw extensively from the *Hollywood Songbook*.²⁹

Musically and stylistically, the common turf of the *Hollywood Songbook* grows from the extreme degree of intertextuality. In this essay we claim that this intertextuality is

24 Ibid. 36–54.

25 Writing as a German scholar of exile, Albrecht Dümmling equates virtually every piece of evidence associated with Eisler's North America years to be a chronicle of the tragic dimensions of exile; see Dümmling, 'Expelled into Paradise', 7–9. Exile in the songs themselves of the *Hollywood Songbook* provides the analytical framework in Markus Roth, *Der Gesang als Asyl: Analytische Studien zu Hanns Eislers 'Hollywood Liederbook'* (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2007).

26 Eisler, *Lieder für eine Singstimme und Klavier*, 73–155.

27 Albert, 'Das schwierige Handwerk des Hoffens', 59–60.

28 Eisler: *The Hollywood Songbook*.

29 See, e.g., Geoffrey Burtleson and Maria Tegzes, *Urban Cabaret* (Acton, Mass.: Neuma 450-83, 1993); see also the CD accompanying Philip V. Bohlman (ed.), *Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

dependent on Eisler's understanding of covering songs in order to transform them into a corpus of self-referential works with specific historical narratives.³⁰ Common to these topical songs sold and sung on the streets of the metropole are the specific references to time, place, and event. Eisler and Brecht, too, specify dates and places in the songs, for example, 'Hotelzimmer 1942' or 'Speisekammer 1942'. Eisler, however, tends to appropriate these specific references as his own. Brecht's title for 'Speisekammer 1942' is, in fact, 'Finnische Gutsspeisekammer 1940', thereby using the song to locate him in the time and place of his Finnish exile on the eve of his 1941 travel to Los Angeles. In the most literal sense, Eisler uses the narrative specificity of the broadside to craft a new broadside. His song covers Brecht's poem. The literal appropriation of covering in popular music also appears in other songs. Tragic events are memorialized in 'Gedenktafel für 4000 Soldaten, die im Krieg gegen Norwegen versenkt wurden' (Memorial Plaque for the 4000 Soldiers Drowned in the War against Norway). Here, again, Eisler covers Brecht's meaning by removing the phrase, 'des Hitler', from its qualifying position before the war, in other words 'Hitler's war'. It is hard to know why, or even if, this is an act of depoliticizing, or simply personalizing. Subtle shifts in ownership are sometimes very significant in the covers, for example, in the penultimate song of the complete edition, which Brecht called 'Rückkehr' (Return), but Eisler renamed as 'Heimkehr' (Homecoming).

The songs of the *Hollywood Songbook* also rely on parody, particularly on a type of parody resulting from the juxtaposition of the real and the unreal, history and fantasy, the absence of *Heimat* through exile and the ironic playfulness of the *unheimlich*, or uncanny. We witness this in songs such as 'Der Kirschdieb' (The Cherry Thief), in which the narrator awakens to a boy outside his window, who is stealing cherries from a tree in the garden. There seems to be nothing consequential about this youthful playfulness. It is followed, however, by one of the most consequential and specific of all songs in the *Hollywood Songbook*, 'Hotelzimmer 1942', written in fact when Eisler was living during 1942 in a Los Angeles hotel room. Pairing two songs set in what amount to bedrooms in this way, Eisler renders the local at once real and eerie (see Figure 1).

Finally, we want to suggest as part of our thesis about covering in Hanns Eisler that it depends on the ways in which there is constant referentiality to the machines and the machinery of modernity. In the songs explicitly about war and exile, history – in other words, war and its victims, exile and death – is accomplished through machines, the ships and trains, the vehicles that take men into battle and those allowing them to flee to the farthest parts of the earth. The counterpoint of narrative and musical voice, too, is possible because of machines, radios and loudspeakers. Narration turns to agency, the mediation of the radio performs exile (see Example 1).

The personal nature of songs becomes more and more intense through the impersonality of machines. There are the machines that represent reality by transforming it

30 See Lacasse, 'Intertextuality and Hypertextuality'.

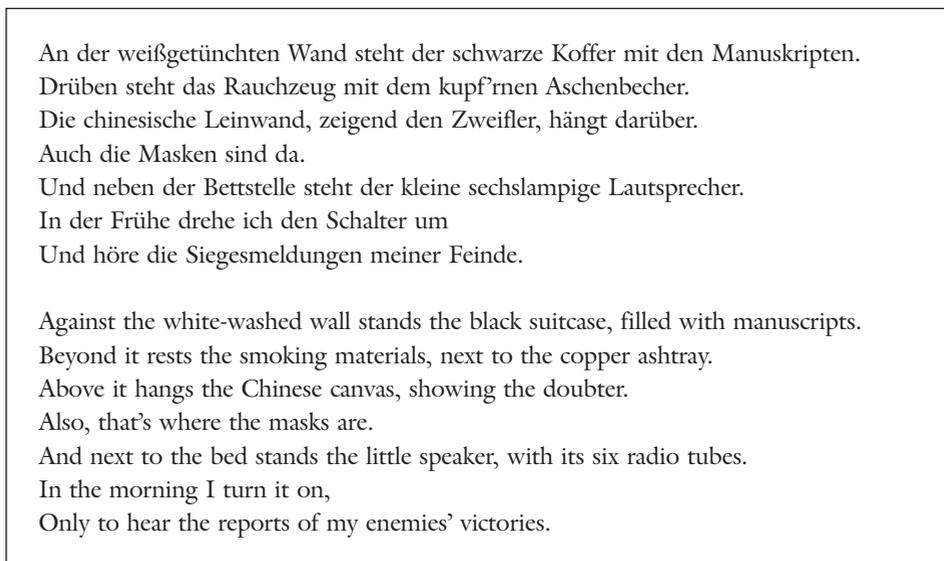


Figure 1. ‘Hotelzimmer 1942’ – ‘Hotel Room 1942’, from the *Hollywood Songbook*.

into fantasy. In a word, we witness in these songs Hollywood itself, which draws Brecht and Eisler toward it, texts and scores in the suitcases standing in their ‘Hotel Room 1942’. For Hanns Eisler, Hollywood’s machines of modernity will accelerate his aesthetic rethinking of modernity, not only the *Composing for the Films*, which he co-authored with Theodor W. Adorno,³¹ but also his later film projects, such as his 1956 collaboration with Jean Resnais on the first documentary on the concentration camp at Auschwitz, *Nuit et brouillard* (Night and Fog). With the machines of modernity and modernism at his disposal, Hanns Eisler would take the techniques of covering to their extreme, truly exposing and unleashing the political power of music.³²

DISCOVERING AMERICA

Hanns Eisler’s Hollywood was already distinct from that of his friend and collaborator, Bertolt Brecht. We have already pointed out the ways in which he personalized it, locating it on the landscape of his own experiences in America. Eisler’s Hollywood was also different from that of other German and Austrian immigrants – Arnold Schoenberg, Ernst Toch, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Alfred Döblin, Friedrich Hollaender, Bruno Walter, to name only a few – who had traveled to the Los Angeles of the 1940s, with its explosive culture of popular music and film. The literature on exile

31 Adorno and Eisler, *Komposition für den Film*.

32 The mediating intertextuality of modern machines provides the central theoretical metaphor in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, transl. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Du klei - ner Kas - ten, den ich flüch - tend trug, daß mei - ne". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, written in a treble clef, starting with a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking. It features a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, written in a bass clef, featuring a simple harmonic accompaniment with long notes.

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Please refer to a printed copy of the issue.

Example 1. Score of 'An den kleinen Radioapparat' from the *Hollywood Liederbuch* (Copyright by Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig).

often portrays this generation of intellectuals and musicians with a collective biography of exile. The overwhelming emphasis on exile as expulsion denies the influence of America, and it belies the possibility of American music as a context for hermeneutic

interpretation. The question must therefore be posed: Are there other meanings of America – of Hollywood – in the creation and reception of the *Hollywood Songbook*?

We believe that the answers to that question lie in the role played by covers and covering. The *Hollywood Songbook* does, after all, announce itself as an American songbook, and in so doing, we wish to argue, it bears comparison with the ‘Great American Songbook’, a comparison it has heretofore never received. If one asks any performer or arranger of popular song in the United States about the existence of the ‘Great American Songbook’, the responses are unequivocal: Of course there is, because we all (and here the authors mean to include themselves) draw upon it constantly for everything from jazz standards to musicals to revival cabaret. The scholarship on American popular song presumes the existence of the ‘Great American Songbook’ and has never failed to designate canonic songwriters and repertoires.³³ The songbook’s composers are well known: Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, Duke Ellington, George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Kurt Weill, to name only a few.

There is, however, no such ‘thing’ as the ‘Great American Songbook’. It lacks the physicality of a publication, possessing only the materiality of the performative; it resists concrete form; recordings acknowledge it as a source, but they don’t reproduce it. The ‘Great American Songbook’ is no more nor less than a vast source for covering. The songs that enter the source come from every possible genre: musicals and films, vaudeville and stage revues, sheet music and big-band jazz. A song finds its place in the ‘Great American Songbook’ through displacement, in other words, from the mobility that allows it to determine new residence and spawn new versions. American identity, too, is fluid and hybrid, and the songwriters and lyricists whose works have migrated into the ‘Great American Songbook’ are overwhelmingly first- or second-generation immigrants or ethnic and racial minorities.

The *Hollywood Songbook* is no more a material object than is the ‘Great American Songbook’. Their identities lie in a much more complex and collective subjectivity. By gathering songs in a songbook, Eisler localized them and translated them for a global moment inhabited by immigrants and exiles alike, the American and the European. The songs, however, loosen and destabilize these identities. They represent the ways in which Eisler charted his journey to America by embracing the recording and film industries of Los Angeles. Like the ‘Great American Songbook’, therefore, the *Hollywood Songbook* is American, with all the mobility, hybridity, and uncanny familiarity that Americanness entails.

33 See, e.g., the classic work, Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators 1900–1950* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); for a concise introduction to the canonical practices of American popular song see Stephen Banfield, ‘Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film’, in David Nicholls (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 309–44; cf. Geoffrey Block, ‘The Broadway Canon from “Show Boat” to “West Side Story” and the European Operatic Ideal’, *The Journal of Musicology*, 11/4 (1993), 525–44.

COVERING AND UNCOVERING THE *Hollywood Songbook*

The *Hollywood Songbook* lives today through the dissemination of covers that retain the performativity of Eisler's vocal *Vortragsweise*. To evoke the breadth of those covers, we present a representative sample of some of the most recent (see Table 1). Albums by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Matthias Goerne, classical recordings, are one principal cause for interest in the *Hollywood Songbook* outside of the former East Germany. *Lieder* specialists draw attention to the lyricism of Eisler's melodies, and it is this attention to voice that unites a first set of covers. Artists moving in the popular mainstream and in the vocal jazz scenes, such as Sting and Theo Bleckmann, speak openly about the beautiful melodies. Sting's cover of 'An den kleinen Radioapparat', when heard in the context of this article, foregrounds the melody in its abandonment of Brecht's text and renaming, 'The Secret Marriage'. Describing 'The Secret Marriage', Sting embraces the contemporaneity of covering:

[Hanns Eisler and Kurt Weill] were classically trained musicians, students of Schoenberg, who crossed a bridge to Broadway shows, to popular music. That bridge still exists. So I'm going from pop music, finding out about them and how they wrote chromatically, and hopefully bringing it back.³⁴

Another set of CDs, this time recordings of Eisler in radio interviews and singing his own music, in part inspired the avant-garde German composer Heiner Goebbels to 'cover' Eisler by turning attention to these sound documents and, more significantly, the sound and melody of Eisler's voice. For his album *Eislermaterial*, which is based on a music theater project, he sought out an untrained singer, Josef Bierbichler, to sing in a seemingly strained tenor quite similar to the thin, hesitant timbre of Eisler's own voice. The links between Bierbichler's covers of *Hollywood* songs and the composer are even clearer when the songs are juxtaposed with Goebbels's splicing of Eisler's interviews, set against a backdrop of free improvisation. The composer's presence is invoked through the voice of covering, juxtaposition, and translation to the machinery of mass production, presented visually as a diagram in the liner notes of the mixing board used for the CD. Heiner Goebbels belongs to a group of musicians from 'generation 68' (*die 68er*), for whom Eisler is a model for their own musical politics. Assorted albums emerged from this scene and the *Hollywood Songbook's* capacity to serve as anti-war music through revival.

A final example from 2003, in which Brecht and Eisler's music-political aims play a large role in informing the artistic presentation, is Ana Torfs's art installation that consists of a series of videos accessible on the internet. In these films, actors are filmed for songs of the *Hollywood Songbook* in three stages. In the first, they listen to the song's accompaniment and act out the emotional content without singing. Then, still dressed in all white, they repeat this process, but vocalize the text and

34 Sting, liner notes to '... *nothing like the Sun*' (London: A&M, 1987).

ART BEARS

Hopes and Fears, Rerelease. Recommended Records, 1992 (Random Records, 1978).

THEO BLECKMANN

Ori-ga-mi. Vancouver, Songlines, 2001. SGL 1534-2.

Berlin: Songs of Love and War, Peace and Exile. Winter & Winter 910 138-2, 2007.

DIETRICH FISCHER-DIESKAU

Hollywood Song-Book. Hamburg: Teldec, 1994. Teldec 97459.

HEINER GOEBBELS

Eislermaterial. Munich: ECM Records, 2002. 461 648-2 ECM.

With the Linksradikales Blasorchester.

MATTHIAS GOERNE

The Hollywood Songbook. New York: London Records, 1998. 289 460 582-2 London.

CHARLIE HADEN AND THE LIBERATION MUSIC ORCHESTRA

Liberation Music Orchestra. New York: Impulse, 1969. AS-9183 Impulse.

Keiner oder Alle: Kampfmusik von Hanns Eisler. Berlin: Barbarossa, 2005.

DAGMAR KRAUSE

Angebot und Nachfrage. Hannibal Records, 1986.

Panzerschlacht: Die Lieder von Hanns Eisler. Island Records, 1986.

GISELA MAY AND ERNST BUSCH

Hanns Eisler Dokumente. Berlin: Berlin Classics, 1995. BC 9058.

NEW BUDAPEST ORPHEUM SOCIETY

Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano. Chicago: Cedille Records, 2002. CDR 90000 065.

Moments musicaux of Jewish Musical Modernism. CD accompanying Philip V. Bohlman (ed.), *Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

STING

'... *nothing like the Sun?* London: A&M, 1987.

ANA TORFS

Performance art installation. <http://www.diacenter.org/torfs/>, 2003.

HANS-ECKHARDT WENZEL

Hanswurst und andere arme Würste: Hanns-Eisler Collage. Conträr Musik, CD9835, 2001.

Table 1. Selected covers of the *Hollywood Songbook*.

Eisler's melody. Finally, they are to perform 'as if for a musical', according to their instructions in full costume, they stare straight at the camera, declaiming Brecht's text, the song now extending beyond even the sum of its parts.³⁵

35 Internet access to these installation covers of Hanns Eisler songs is available at: <http://www.diacenter.org/torfs/>.

IN LIEU OF A DEFINITIVE VERSION – RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION

It has been clear from the outset of this article that its authors are implicated themselves in the covering of Hanns Eisler. We gather our own experiences here, conveying them as ethnographic moments and performance acts. In our own lives, as musicians and scholars, Eisler covers accumulate, making the interpretive processes of covering more pleasurable and more vexing. The metaphorical songbooks that form the bodies of our own collections necessarily respond to the intervention of the politics and history in our own present no less than they did in Hanns Eisler's past. Even as we search for the incomplete cadence in this essay that, like an Eisler song, leaves the questions open at the end of song, the New Budapest Orpheum Society passes from one Eisler project to the next.³⁶ The ensemble's most recent recording and the one it is currently producing both locate Eisler songs from the *Hollywood Songbook* and other parts of Eisler's song oeuvre at the symbolic core of the project; everything else covers and uncovers that core.³⁷ Since its founding in 2000, the ensemble has come to thrive on its own mobility, not just its juxtaposition of different genres to create 'Jewish cabaret', but to perform on every imaginable stage: synagogues, Jewish community centers, universities, Holocaust museums, night clubs, and Broadway. We do not shy away from the political dimensions of a repertory formed from the tragedy of the twentieth century.

As we now cover Eisler and other songs through the performances of the New Budapest Orpheum Society, we increasingly witness the ways in which our audiences in an America no less troubled than that of Hanns Eisler in the 1940s interpret the everyday in a fascist and racist world of the 1930s and 1940s as if it were an earlier version of their own world – our own world, that is, during the era of American imperialism against Islam, the Iraq War, and renewed genocide of global proportions. Covering these Eisler songs has proved not only to be historical, but historicizing and politicizing. We claim it as ours and offer it to those keen to listen, learn, and act. Through Eisler's covers and our covering, the political past has been uncovered to reveal a present that is our own and that the music does not allow us to deny.

In conclusion, we return to the two different perspectives that we introduced at the beginning of the essay, the active and passive voices, or the distinction between the 'cover itself' and 'being covered'. It is no longer possible to think about these perspectives as representing objects that could be reified, but rather as subject positions that Eisler brings to music and politics. Our ultimate focus has been the dynamic movement between covers and being covered, indeed, the tension between the active and

36 Philip Bohlman is Artistic Director of the New Budapest Orpheum Society, a cabaret and Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Chicago; research by Andrea Bohlman guides repertory choice and interpretation of the ensemble.

37 The first CD accompanies the book, Bohlman (ed.), *Jewish Musical Modernism*; the second is a CD of Jewish cabaret in exile, the title of which covers Eisler's 'An den kleinen Radioapparat': New Budapest Orpheum Society, *So That Their Voices Will Not Fall Silent – Jewish Cabaret in Exile* (Chicago: Cedille Records, forthcoming).

passive voices. Ultimately, it is this dynamic movement that allows contemporary listeners to hear the new voices that sing Eisler – Hanns Eisler heute! – and that allow his covers to address our own world. By covering and being covered, Eisler gives voice to the political concerns of generations that followed him – and that will also follow us. Uncovering Hanns Eisler, rather, is an act born of responsibility, political and musical, and of the realization that music is always more than itself.

SUMMARY

Composed during 1942–43, years of Hanns Eisler's exile from Nazi Germany in Los Angeles, the *Hollywood Liederbuch* contains 46 settings of poems, largely by fellow exile Bertolt Brecht, but also by other writers, including in two instances by Eisler himself. This article examines the ways in which the intertextuality of the songs, through the multiple sources and changing performances, between the materiality of the song as object and its performativity as subject, transform musical and textual meanings. Hanns Eisler made extensive use of borrowing and covering as a composer, and in the reception history of his work – and of the *Hollywood Songbook* perhaps more than any other body of works created by Eisler – covers have proliferated in the hands of many performers, in art-song traditions no less than popular music. The authors propose a theory of covering, therefore, that extends its application from popular music to art and composed songs, that is, to the fluid spaces of transmission between oral and written tradition, hence between the 'active' and 'passive voice' qualities of the 'cover itself' and 'being covered'. The identities generated for the *Hollywood Songbook* open it to comparison with the fluid canon of American popular song, the 'Great American Songbook', and accordingly to the Americanness of Eisler's compositional work in exile. In conclusion, the authors examine the remarkable vitality of Hanns Eisler in post-Cold War Europe and attribute aspects of reviving the *Hollywood Songbook* to the renewal that covering its songs inspires.