‘Suchend uns selbst und die Heimat’: Ernst Krenek’s Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen

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JAMES PARSONS

Missouri State University

For many the twentieth-century Lied does not exist.¹ For others, to the extent that it does its purpose is largely pessimistic, a sounding symbol on the one hand of German cultural and moral collapse during the twelve-year terror that was the Third Reich, on the other of the putative downfall of high art. For those inclined to view the century just past as the age when highbrow music expired, Richard Strauss’s ‘Im Abendrot’ [At Sunset], from his Vier letzte Lieder [Four Last Songs], affords an arresting poignantly example. Composed in 1948, the same year as the invention of the Frisbee and the first issue of TV Guide, Strauss’s song sets a poem by Joseph von Eichendorff, the last line of which asks, ‘Ist dies etwa der Tod?’ [Is this perhaps death?] Strauss goes on to pose another question when he quotes from a work of his written a half century earlier, the tone poem Tod und Verklärung [Death and Transfiguration, 1889]. Words and music dovetail into a particularized lament, one that has inspired many critics to surmise that he intends the gesture as a farewell to the Lied. For Paul Griffiths it is not just the one song that signals this, but all four comprising the set: ‘Strauss could reasonably have thought his Vier letzte Lieder [. . .] bore their epithet for the genre’.² Or, as Edward F. Kravitt puts it, ‘Strauss’s return late in life to the Lied — when it was of minor importance in the modern world — is further evidence of his conservative nostalgia for things past’, a yearning that ‘reminds one also of the past significance of the Lied’.³

I suggest an alternative view. Instead of administering last rites, I see a composer such as Ernst Krenek (1900–1991), in his Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen [Travelbook from the Austrian Alps, 1929], rebelliously reversing the associative connotations of the Lied as a medium suited to withdrawing from the cares of the world, and, in place of that, taking up the genre as the

¹ Throughout this essay I use the German word Lied to denote a musical setting of a German lyric poem. A short list of canonical composers includes Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf. A synonymous although less-frequently-encountered term is Kunstlied [art song].

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means by which to actively work through life’s larger concerns. In advancing this argument it is helpful to know that during this music’s nineteenth-century heyday most individuals experienced the Lied — in the words of Thomas Mann, ‘etwas national völlig Einmaliges und Unvergleichliches’ [a nationally unique and incomparable product] — in the home, the seat of comfort, stability and renewal. As I have written elsewhere, one function fulfilled by German Romantic song, over and above the aesthetic, was to provide ‘a safe haven for intimacy, a sheltering sonic space for individual subjectivity’. In his 1933 drawing Pflegt deutsche Hausmusik [Cultivate the Music of the German Home], Bruno Voigt ironically inverts those time-honoured conventions. Although Voigt depicts four women and a man gathered in song around a piano, their ‘home’ is a brothel, the women are prostitutes and the man is their pimp. I am not suggesting that Krenek’s song cycle is music for the decadent. But I do propose this: much like the faceless figures in Edvard Munch paintings, Krenek’s Reisebuch possesses the expressive intensity it does because it negotiates something present and absent. What formerly was ‘there’ (I am punning Gertrude Stein’s ‘there is no there there’) was the immense popularity of the Lied during the nineteenth century.

4 Here I cite just one nineteenth-century assessment to document the pervasive view that the Lied was thought of as a kind of sanctuary, a review of Clara Schumann’s Sechs Lieder, Op. 13, in the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, 20 (1844), 97: ‘Die Lieder werden und wollen nicht einen geräuschvollen Triumphzug [. . .] machen, aber in stiller Klausel wird sich manch stilles empfängliches Gemüth an ihrer ungeschmückten Anmut, dem poetischen Duft, der durch sie weht, erquicken’ [These songs will not, and do not wish to stage a boisterous triumphal procession but they will refresh quiet receptive souls in peaceful retreat with their unadorned charm, their poetic scent]. I adopt the composer’s English translation of his Reisebuch given in his autobiographical ‘Self-Analysis’, The University of New Mexico Quarterly, 23 (1953), 1–57 (p. 20), but a more idiomatic English rendering of Reisebuch is perhaps ‘Travel Diary’. Krenek’s autobiographical essay originally appeared in German as Selbstdarstellung (Zurich, 1948), but as Krenek himself clarifies, the English version is ‘a considerably revised and enlarged version’ of the 1948 text (p. 5). Thus I quote only from the English version in this essay.

5 Thomas Mann, ‘Deutschland und die Deutschen’, in Gesammelte Werke, 13 vols (Frankfurt a.M., 1960 and 1974), xi, 1126–48 (p. 1142). The essay originated as an address given at the Library of Congress on 29 May 1945. The quotation relates to ‘Innerlichkeit’ [inwardness], which Mann calls ‘die vielleicht berühmteste Eigenschaft der Deutschen’ [perhaps the Germans’ most notable quality]. Claiming ‘und was die Welt dieser deutschen Innerlichkeit verdankt, kann sie selbst heute nicht vergessen’ [even today the world cannot forget what it owes to German inwardness], Mann places music at the head of the list, ‘die deutsche Musik, insonderheit das Wunder des deutschen Liedes’ [German music, especially the miracle of the German Lied] (pp. 1141–42).


8 Stein’s well-known pronouncement appears in chapter four of Everybody’s Autobiography,
1929, and even more so in 1933, when Voigt parodically evokes song’s reassuring embrace in his illustration, the centrality of the Lied as a de facto part of cultural life was no longer as secure as it had once been. Then again, by 1933, values of all sorts were becoming increasingly precarious. Both Voigt’s picture and Krenek’s song cycle (together with Stein’s comment) turn on the ‘then’ and ‘now’ of memory. A century before Krenek, in 1833, Heinrich Heine bore eloquent testimony to this topic when he wrote: ‘Das Wesen des Frühlings erkennt man erst im Winter, und hinter dem Ofen dichtet man die besten Maißieder’ [The true nature of spring is only felt in winter, and the best May songs are written close by the stove]. As this informs Krenek’s Reisebuch, the effect is to bring the past into the present, the result being that the listener finds it difficult to experience these songs as a refuge from reality. Real life intrudes. Past and present do not collude in some ahistorical Neverland but retain their status as separate spheres, the better to spur critical reflection.

Although the idea of studying a thing from this vantage point is not new, the concept’s utility for music — specifically German song — has found few takers. In many ways this is remarkable given that a great deal of music from the past two centuries operates in an ongoing present tempered by past and future. This at any rate is what the chief architects of Romanticism tell us. One of the most noteworthy, Jean Paul, frequently frames his remarks with reference to sound, a predilection that prompted the commonly-held nineteenth-century belief that music was, as Berthold Hoeckner has written, ‘the most privileged of the arts’. In his Kleine Nachschule zur ästhetischen Vorschule [Little Supplement to the Primer of Aesthetics, 1825], a gathering of afterthoughts to his Vorschule der Ästhetik [Primer of Aesthetics, 1804], Jean Paul describes music as ‘romantische Poesie durch das ohr’ [romantic poetry through the ear], a medium entirely suited to ‘das Schöne ohne Begrenzung’ [the beautiful without limitation].

Relating this statement to another by Jean Paul allows me to give voice to a larger point; the two thoughts together provide a rear-view glance at a conceptual premise for this essay. As Jean Paul remarks in the 1804 Vorschule itself:

Es ist noch ähnlicher als ein Gleichnis, wenn man das Romantische das wogende Aussummen einer Saite oder Glocke nennt, in welchem die Tonwoge wie in immer ferneren Weiten verschwimmt und endlich sich verliert in uns selber und, obwohl außen schon still, noch immer lautet.  

first published 1937; quoted here from the 1971 edition (New York), p. 281. Stein made the remark late in life after visiting the site of her childhood home, which had undergone a complete transformation.

11 Jean Paul, Kleine Nachschule zur ästhetischen Vorschule, in Werke, ed. by Norbert Miller, 6 vols (Munich, 1963), v, 466.
James Parsons

[The approximation is even closer than that of a simile if we describe as ‘Romantic’ the undulating hum of a vibrating string or bell where the sound wave appears to recede ever further away and finally loses itself inside us, and although outwardly silent, still resounds within.]

In the 1825 work he reaffirms the contention that music is both circumscribed and endlessly free:

Keine Farbe ist so romantisch als ein Ton, schon weil man nur bei dem Sterben des letzttern, nicht der erstern gegenwärtig ist, und weil ein Ton nie allein, sondern immer dreifältig tönt, gleichsam die Romantik der Zukunft und der Vergangenheit mit der Gegenwart verschmelzend.\(^{13}\)

[No colour is as romantic as a sound, since one is only present at the dying away of a sound, not that of a colour; and because a tone never sounds alone, but always three-fold, merging, so to speak, the romantic quality of the future and the past with that of the present.]

Throughout the preceding century, music in general and German song in particular — specifically the Kunstlied — had stood at a crossroads between confinement and its opposite, in much the same way that the present is the continuing intersection of past and future. Krenek’s Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen, a cycle of twenty songs lasting some fifty-six minutes in performance, updates a familiar aesthetic gambit. Romanticism hovers over Krenek’s cycle — ‘receding ever further away’, ‘outwardly silent’ but ‘still resounding’ — while at the same time the cares of daily life everywhere encroach, a dynamic process with implications not only for past and present but also for the future. Yet for many in 1929, with World War I a recent memory and economic distress an inescapable reality, the infinite progress promised by human knowledge was running out of steam, a state of affairs compounded by mounting population mobility, urbanization and ‘seelenlose technische Apparat[e]’ [soulless machines].\(^{14}\) Romanticism’s imprint on German song is more than a little ironic. Whereas Friedrich Nietzsche could sardonically observe in 1889 that ‘Der Deutsche denkt sich selbst Gott liedersingend’ [Germans imagine even God himself singing Lieder], the fact remains that, even though the seat of German song was the home, that passion was satisfied in the ever-lengthening shadow of the industrial revolution.\(^{15}\) The paradox emerges more completely when one realizes that the poems most popular with nineteenth-century Lied composers celebrate untrammelled nature. The poet Justinus Kerner, in ‘Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend’ [Longing for the Forest, 1826], praises the ‘Wälder, hehr und wunderbar!’ [woodlands, noble and

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\(^{13}\) Jean Paul, Kleine Nachschule, in Werke, v, 466.


\(^{15}\) Friedrich Nietzsche, Götzen-Dämmerung, in Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols (Berlin, 1999), vi, 64 (Sprüche und Pfeile §33).
wonderful!] as the seat of spiritual harmony, which had until recently ‘liebend mich umfangen’ [lovingly embraced me]. Only in such an environment, with its inspiring twilight hours, were there ‘Vogelsang und Silberquell’ [bird song and silver stream] that in turn taught the poet how to sing:

Eure Wogen, eure Halle,
Euer Säuseln nimmer müd,
Eure Melodien alle
Weckten in der Brust das Lied.\[16\]

[Your surges, your echoes, your never-tiring whispering, your melodies all inspired song within my breast.]

Deprived of this setting, the poet grows ‘öd und stumm’ [desolate and mute]. By the start of the next century, Kerner’s fear had become reality. Nature itself was fast receding from the horizons of many, with most people living in urban centres such as that depicted by George Grosz in his painting Metropolis (1916–17), a canvas awash with lurid reds and teeming with unrestrained movement.\[17\] Even the air, as the signature song of a 1928 hit satirical music revue put it, was under siege: ‘Alles rennt, hetzt sich zu Tode. [. . .] | Durch die Luft geht alles drahtlos. | Und die Luft wird schon ganz ratlos: | Flugzeug, Luftschiff — alles schon!’ [Everyone’s racing about, and working themselves to death. Through the air everything moves wirelessly. And the air becomes completely helpless: aeroplane, Zeppelin, everything already!].\[18\]

Seen in the light of these developments, the fact that Krenek took up the Lied in 1929 is even more astonishing.

In addition to posing thought-provoking questions, Krenek revives another tradition, joining words and music in an exploration of the cultivation of the self, or Bildung. The cycle’s opening song, ‘Motiv’ [Motive; Figure 1], immediately links that larger convention with the words ‘Ich reise aus, meine Heimat zu entdecken. | So ist’s mit uns: [. . .] mit Zweifel zumeist, | irren wir hin und her, suchend uns selbst und die Heimat’ [I travel forth, to discover my homeland. That’s how it is with us: racked with doubt, we meander hither and thither seeking ourselves and our homeland].\[19\]

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18 First given in Berlin 15 May 1928 and starring, among others, a young Marlene Dietrich, the revue is Es liegt in der Luft [There’s Something in the Air], with words by Marcellus Schiffer and music by Mischa Spoliansky. The revue’s title song forms the Act I finale, repeated at the end of the concluding second act. Quoted from a typed copy of the stage manuscript, Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Archivabteilung Darstellende Kunst und Film, Berlin [Spoliansky 65].
The excursion’s locale is equally determined: from on high one sees farther not only literally but also metaphorically. Friedrich Schiller touches on just this point in his essay ‘Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung’ [On Naive and Reflective Literature, 1795–96], when he distinguishes between the modern (reflective and abstract) and naïve (natural and sensuous) poet. In so doing, he enjoins the former, ‘führe uns nicht rückwärts in unsere Kindheit, [. . .] sondern führe uns vorwärts zu unserer Mündigkeit, um uns die höhere Harmonie zu empfinden zu geben, die den Kämpfer belohnt’ [lead us not backwards to our childhood, but onwards to our maturity, that we might be given an intimation of the higher harmony that rewards the warrior]. Such a poet, precisely because s/he experiences this ‘higher harmony’, ‘[führt] den Menschen, der nun einmal nicht mehr nach Arkadien zurückkann, bis nach Elysium’ [leads humanity, which can clearly no longer go back to Arcadia, onwards to Elysium].

The significance Schiller attaches to such concord may be gauged from his earlier review of the poetry of Gottfried August Bürger, published anonymously in January 1791. The type of poetry Schiller most values is that which inspires the self-synthesizing oneness of the Enlightenment: ‘[Es] ist die Dichtkunst beinahe allein, welche die getrennten Kräfte der Seele wieder in Vereinigung bringt, welche Kopf und Herz, Scharfsinn und Witz, Vernunft und Einbildungskraft in harmonischem Bunde beschäftigt, welche gleichsam den ganzen Menschen

in the text. The title of this essay is taken from the end of this passage from Krenek’s Reisebuch.

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20 In The Classical German Elegy. 1795–1950 (Princeton, 1980), Theodore Ziolkowski cogently summarizes the generative influence mountains have exerted on the European creative imagination (see especially chapter 2, ‘The Sources. The Mountain as Image and Locus’, pp. 27–54, where Schiller is at the centre of the discussion).

Ernst Krenek’s Reisebuch

in uns wieder herstellt’ [it is poetry almost alone that brings together again the divided powers of the soul, that engages head and heart, intelligence and wit, reason and imagination in a harmonious cooperation that restores in us *human wholeness*.]

Krenek intuitively shares this belief and, I contend, seeks to probe its consequences from atop the Austrian Alps for reasons that strikingly complement those expressed by Schiller in another work, his frequently misunderstood and maligned poem, ‘An die Freude’ [To Joy, 1785].

‘Zu der Tugend steilem Hügel | leitet sie [Freude] des Duldens Bahn. | Auf des Glaubens Sonnenberge | sieht man ihre Fahnen wehn’ [To the steep hill of virtue Joy presides over the sufferer’s path. On the sunny mountains of faith, her banners can be seen fluttering].

Two lines after these, Schiller echoes ‘des Duldens Bahn’ with the admonition that it is not enough for humankind to yearn passively for a better world; to achieve such a world, mighty endurance is necessary: ‘Duldet mutig Millionen! | Duldet für die beßre Welt!’ [Endure courageously you millions! Endure for the better world!]. Schiller was by no means the first or the last German writer to insist that challenge and difficulty form a requisite part of the journey of self-formation. As Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel observes in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [Phenomenology of Spirit, 1807], for ‘Geist’, or spirit, to achieve its potential, ‘[es] hat sich durch einen langen Weg hindurchzuarbeiten’ [it has to struggle through on a long path]. One does not accomplish this from the outset ‘mit dem absoluten Wissen’ [with absolute certainty], but ‘als Stufen eines Wegs, der ausgearbeitet und geebnet ist’ [as stages of a path, laid out and levelled]. Just as such labour requires dedication, ‘die Länge dieses Wegs [ist] zu ertragen, denn jedes Moment ist notwendig’ [the length of this way is to be borne, because every moment is essential].

Krenek signals his agreement in the eighteenth song of his song cycle, ‘Entscheidung’ [Decision, Reisebuch, iv, 83 / 396]. one may yearn for life where ‘natur und Mensch eins sind und Gleichklang alles’ [Nature and humankind are one and all-encompassing], yet ‘Die Sehnsucht wird immer weiter bohren’ [the longing will continue forever].

Focussing on selected songs from Krenek’s Reisebuch, I shall survey the benefits of that journey for both the composer and those who would travel with him. It is helpful to know that the Reisebuch was not the fruit of Krenek’s first mountaintop sojourn. Two years earlier, in his spectacularly successful

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22 Friedrich Schiller, ‘Über Bürgers Gedichte’, in *Sämtliche Werke*, v, 970–85 (p. 971); Schiller’s emphasis.
23 I discuss this poem in some detail as a means of critical insight into the compositional processes of the choral finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in ‘“Deine Zauber binden wieder”: Beethoven, Schiller, and the Joyous Reconciliation of Opposites’, *Beethoven Forum*, 9 (2002), 1–53.
opera, Jonny spielt auf [Jonny Strikes Up, 1927], he placed two scenes adjacent to a glacier (I, i and II, iii). The parallels between the two works are striking, above all their up-to-date settings and the way in which modern technology impinges on the natural world. In opera and song cycle Krenek ponders the purpose of art in the modern world, humanity’s growing alienation from nature and technology’s triumph. In Jonny spielt auf, through the character of the composer, Max, Krenek praises the glacier as a ‘Symbol der Gestalt, der geformten Natur, des gefaßten Lebens’ [symbol of form, of ordered nature, of composed and collected life]. In his song cycle, Krenek reiterates the sentiment in the ninth song ‘Rückblick’ [Backward Glance]: ‘Wir in der Zeiten Zwiespalt haben es schwer. | Stadtgeborenen, angeschlungen dem Betrieb der Zeit, | sehnen wir da draußen in den Bergen | überall die unerreichbaren Quellen des Lebens’ [Living in days of unrest is our lot as city dwellers, carried off by the rush of time. Life as we find it in the mountains fully reveals the intangible sources of being, Reisebuch, II, 37 / 390].

The past informs the Reisebuch in a variety of ways. Voicing the desire to know self and homeland in the first song, ‘Motiv’, Krenek affirms that coming to terms with one’s homeland is to know one’s self. The operative word is Heimat, one heavy with historical and cultural significance in German and all but untranslatable. Recalling the simultaneously evanescent and enduring make-up of music sketched above, the concept pivots on the promise of never-attained possession, a quest one nevertheless perpetually must take up. Heimat has been one of the primary means by which groups of people ‘express a “feeling of belonging together” (in German, the Zusammengerhörigkeitsgefühl)’. Krenek’s music for ‘Motiv’ exudes an air of familiarity while simultaneously and subtly communicating its composer’s affinity for the ‘ordered nature’ of the mountains he praises in Jonny spielt auf, and where, through the character of Max, he affirms ‘Hier bin ich zu Haus!’ [here I am at home!]. Although the song lacks a key signature, a great deal of it is in E-flat major, the classic horn key, and one that deftly conjures the aural imagery not just of horns but specifically of Alpine horns. For the Vienna-born Krenek, E-flat probably held an additional association, for it is the key of the hugely popular 1836 Lied ‘Das Alpenhorn’, by Heinrich Proch (1809–1878), his Op. 18, scored for tenor, piano and horn (or cello). In his day Proch was a composer whose fame rivalled Schubert’s and his Lied enjoyed extended success because, as Susan Youens has discovered, an international array of nineteenth-century European composers of piano


Krenek, Jonny spielt auf, p. 6.
variations repeatedly mined its melodic potential. The steady crotchet pulse of the piano dominates Krenek’s opening song, establishing itself as a journeying figure (Ex. 1). After this, the piano’s right hand, during the initial five and a half bars, establishes a displaced pedal point in the uppermost voice in which Krenek reiterates twenty-three times the B-flat that is the dominant of E-flat, a gesture that vividly communicates the traveller’s commitment to ‘geformte Natur’. By definition, a pedal point should be in the lowest range, so Krenek’s reversal of a standard procedure forces the listener’s attention upwards. Only after the singer declaims the first line, ‘Ich reise aus, meine Heimat zu entdecken’, does the registral limit demarcated by those B-flats open up, moving in five comparatively quick beats up a fourth to E-flat and from there to the B-flat an octave higher. The sudden melodic motion and widening distance between the pianist’s hands not only gives life to the wayfarer’s resolve to undertake the journey, it also has the effect of placing, as it were, the word ‘entdecken’ [to discover] within a set of musical quotation marks.

Susan Youens, Schubert’s Late Lieder. Beyond the Song-Cycles (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 162–68. Youens sketches the fortunes of Proch’s Lied and includes the song nearly complete (pp. 169–71). On the subject of the piano variations, she affirms that ‘a cursory glance at the catalogue of the British Library turned up fourteen arrangements [...]’; further searches would doubtless add to the total’ (p. 168).
Krenek has more in mind, however. It seems clear that he intends the repeated rhythms of his *Lied* to remind the listener of the start of another song cycle of self-discovery, Schubert’s *Winterreise* [*Winter’s Journey*], the first song of which, ‘Gute Nacht’ [*Good Night*], features a similarly reiterated quaver journeying motive. In the ‘Vienna, 1928’ section of his ‘Self-Analysis’, Krenek acknowledges that during this phase of his composition career ‘Schubert’s *Winterreise* appeared to me as the unexcelled prototype of a song cycle’.\(^{31}\) Lacking a fuller context, one at first does not entirely grasp the repercussions of Krenek’s invocation of Schubert, whose cycle of twenty-four songs ends with its protagonist progressing not towards the sunny equilibrium of self-understanding, but to alienation and psychic pain. Krenek’s reliance on E-flats major at the start of his cycle, in contrast to the D minor of Schubert’s, in part dispels any thought that Krenek intends to end similarly, the difference between major and minor implying a positive rather than a tragic outcome. For the moment, however, and lacking more information than this, the listener cannot predict with certainty the journey’s outcome until travelling with Krenek to the end of his *Reisebuch*. This is not the composer’s only allusion to Schubert. The eighth song, ‘Unser Wein’ [*Our Wine; Figure 2*], bears the dedication ‘dem Andenken Franz Schuberts’ [*to the memory of Franz Schubert*].

The publication of the *Reisebuch* in four horizontal, landscape-format volumes discloses another point of contact with Schubert, given that the composer’s song cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* [*The Lovely Maid of the Mill*] and *Winterreise* had been reissued in facsimile in the same format the year before (1928), to mark the centenary of his death. ‘Rückblick’ provides one more, as Krenek adopts the same title as the eighth song of Schubert’s *Winterreise*.

The dedication is not the only way Krenek evokes Schubert in ‘Unser Wein’, since he also brings back E-flat here, a key centre not encountered since the first *Lied*. The cycle’s musical and poetic past come into play and, if Jean Paul is right, economically blend ‘the future and the past with the present’. On the surface a tribute to the numerous vineyards spread across the Austrian countryside, ‘Unser Wein’ provides Krenek with the opportunity to comment on Schubert’s commercial image during the late 1920s. The music’s easy-going nature makes it tempting to conclude that it is a tribute to Austrian geniality, but there is more to it than this. While Krenek’s song appears strophic, its far-flung harmonies supporting the continuous return of the opening phrase are just as steadily forsaking E-flat major. The strategy culminates at the words ‘Zumeist verachtet von den Fremden wie das Meiste, | das wir haben, | weil zu anspruchslos im Äußern ist die Gabe’ [*Like most of what we have, strangers despise our wine because it is too humble in appearance*]. With this, the music moves to the remote key of A major. The text continues: ‘köstlich [ist] unser Wein | nur dem, der ihn zu finden weiß’ [*our wine is delicious only to those who take the pains to seek it out, Reisebuch, 11, 33 / 389–90*], and Krenek’s harmonies spin in

\(^{31}\) Krenek, ‘Self-Analysis’, p. 22.
searching uncertainty (Ex. 2). Wine is a double metaphor for Austrian culture and for Schubert, who, during Krenek’s day, enjoyed a reputation for sociability. In fact, beginning with Heinrich Kreißle von Hellborn’s 1865 biography of Schubert, it had become commonplace to comment on ‘sein kindlich naiver Sinn’ [his childlike naiveté] as well as ‘seine Freude an fröhlicher Gesellschaft und einem guten Glas Wein’ [his joy in convivial company and a good glass of wine].

Krenek questions both stereotypes, insisting that to understand either Schubert or Austria one must eschew the superficial. Many have claimed that allusions such as these provide Krenek with the means to exploit the Schubert mania then gripping Austria. Together with other works by him that date from the period of his *Reisebuch*, at least one critic found the song-cycle to be ‘vollendeter Hochverrat’ [consummate high treason] which ‘[er] bezahlt mit dem letzten Rest der revolutionären Musikgesinnung, mit der er einst auszog’ [he paid for with the last residue of the revolutionary musical sensibility with which he once set off]. Both assessments miss as much as they illuminate. Krenek revisits the past to learn its lessons and make ready for the future. As he admitted a quarter-century later, his Alpine cycle ‘contained just enough dynamite in the form of scepticism, critical innuendo, and unexpected dissonance to make the keepers of the traditional *Gemütlichkeit* feel uncomfortable’.

The reference to *Gemütlichkeit* is the clue that Krenek does not intend his bows to the past to be self-indulgently cosy but rather to rouse. As has been seen, a key tenet of the Enlightenment, explained by Schiller in his 1791 essay-review of Bürger, is the conviction that art plays a central role in the process of self-synthesis, reuniting the ‘separated powers of the soul’ and restoring ‘human wholeness’. This Krenek achieves by drawing together multifarious musical styles. After the lyrically infused Schubertian ‘Motiv’, ‘Verkehr’ [Travel; Figure 3] follows with biting dissonance and percussive rhythms. The latter are not gratuitous but provide the second song with ‘critical innuendo’, as Krenek puts it in his ‘Self-Analysis’.

Furthermore, given that ‘Verkehr’ ends with the protagonist gazing out of a window, attempting to grasp the immeasurability of the mountains towering over the horizon, the successive arrival of a train, a motor car and finally a bus bulging with locals brings the sounds of the outside world into collision with the reverie of interior musings. Having transferred from train to bus midway through ‘Verkehr’, Krenek inserts a parody of ragtime music, complete with a stride bass in the piano’s left hand and ragtime’s characteristically syncopated rhythms in the right, once it becomes clear the bus will surmount the incline.

35 Krenek, ‘Self-Analysis’, p. 23. Krenek retains the German word in this source.
36 Ibid.
The incursion of all of this into the seemingly starched traditions of the Lied — the province of which is traditionally felt to be ‘in stiller Klause’ — is deliberately jarring (Ex. 3).

There is little doubt this is Krenek’s intention, the musical equivalent of what Voigt achieves in his 1933 drawing when he juxtaposes the familiar with its unsettling converse. Krenek lays the cornerstone for such an argument when he comments on the cycle’s significance for his artistic development in his autobiographical reflection. He reveals that, at the time he composed his Reisebuch, Jonny spielt auf gave him the financial freedom, at least for a while, to live ‘in splendid isolation’. In doing so he admits that ‘I receded further into a seemingly old-fashioned romanticism, which to many appeared as either an amiably or annoying caprice’.

While Hindemith was supplying German youth with practical music for their enjoyment and enlightenment, and Kurt Weill interpreted musically the acid social critique of Bertolt Brecht, I wrote in twenty days the twenty songs of the ‘Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen’, [. . .] in the style of Schubert’s ‘Winterreise’ — sentimental, ironical, and philosophical sketches extolling the beauties of my homeland and discussing its problems.

37 See note 4.
Far from admitting second-class standing for his *Reisebuch* when compared to the music of his contemporaries Paul Hindemith and Kurt Weill, the placement of Krenek’s work alongside theirs highlights shared concerns. It also underscores the need to reconsider with greater nuance the calculated simplicity and directness of appeal that characterizes his compositional style immediately after *Jonny spielt auf* — above all his *Reisebuch*, which Krenek, again in his ‘Self-Analysis’, describes as one of ‘my “popular” (folksy) works’.39

In 1920s Germany a pressing question was art’s purpose in modern society, a subject Krenek addressed in the essay ‘Musik in der Gegenwart’ [Music Today, 1925]. Bearing in mind this earlier statement, it is possible to see how the ‘sentimental, ironical, and philosophical’ stance to which he admits in ‘Self-Analysis’ is itself paradoxical. What emerges in all three works — the essay, *Jonny spielt auf* and the *Reisebuch* — is that Krenek then was urgently in search of a musical voice that would allow him to engage with a broad-based public. In the essay, first given as an address in October 1925 to the Congress of Music Aesthetics, Krenek laments the fact that ‘Die […] Musik der Gegenwart […] ist zu einem Spiel geworden, das für jene interessant ist, die die Spielregeln kennen’ [the music of today has become a game interesting only to those who know the rules], and which ‘hat weder Fähigkeit noch Tendenz, sich an eine unvoreingenommene Gemeinschaft zu wenden’ [has neither the ability nor the inclination to appeal to an impartial community]. The twenty-five-year-old Krenek continues with scorching fervour. Such music ‘wird in konsequenter Entwicklung zur Selbstbefriedigung eines Mannes, der in seiner Kammer sitzt und Gesetze erfindet, nach welchen er hernach Figuren legt’ [taken to its conclusion will become the self-gratification of a man who sits in his room inventing rules, according to which he then lays out graphs].40

The target of this characterization was Arnold Schoenberg — whose twelve-tone technique made him, in the minds of many, the living example of the composer in Ivory Tower withdrawal — and he lost little time in mounting a counteroffensive. Also in 1926, in the forward to his *Drei Satiren* [Three Satires], Op. 28, a three-movement work for mixed chorus, Schoenberg, explicitly referring to ‘Musik in der Gegenwart’, puns the younger composer’s name with the phrase ‘wie der Medio kreneckisch sagt’ [as the mediocre man jokingly says] and lambasts Krenek’s commitment to the comforts of the musical middle

39 Ibid., p. 23. Here it is helpful to turn to the original German of Krenek’s *Selbstdarstellung*, where he uses the phrase ‘meine “volkstümlichen” Werke’ (p. 31). For more on what Krenek calls the ‘volkstümlich’ style, and the difficulty of categorizing music as belonging to the folk tradition, see for example Matthew Gelbart’s *The Invention of ‘Folk Music’ and ‘Art Music’. Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge, 2007) and *Echoes from Austria — Musik als Heimat. Ernst Krenek und das österreichische Volkslied im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Matthias Schmidt (Schliengen, 2007).

Krenek returned the favour (and the verbal jousting) in *Jonny spielt auf*, when, in the first words of the opera, his fictional composer Max sings ‘Du schöner Berg! der mich anzieht, der mich antreibt, zu gehn fort von der Heimat, fort von der Arbeit’ [Lovely mountain! You attract me, you urge me to leave my native land, my work]. As the opera unfolds, Krenek pits the African-American jazz musician Jonny (who, lacking inhibition, is a figure of cultural renewal) against the ‘highly autobiographical’ Max, ‘self-conscious, brooding, introspective, Central European intellectual’, as Krenek describes him in his ‘Self-Analysis’.

Comparing Krenek’s two mountain trips from the late 1920s, the first in *Jonny spielt auf*, the second in the *Reisebuch*, is illuminating. In the latter composition the trek terminates in the nineteenth song, ‘Heimkehr’ [Homecoming]. The three-note figure on which the composer had relied in the opening song for the word ‘Vaterland’ [Fatherland] now returns in tandem with the key of E-flat major. Yet Krenek’s *Reisebuch* does not end here, for there follows an ‘Epilog’ [Epilogue; Figures 4, 5] that poses new questions.

Those inquiries take proper shape only if one has already followed Krenek on his first excursion to the mountains in his 1926 opera. There, Max’s fascination with the glacier as a ‘Symbol der Gestalt, der geformten natur’ represents a character flaw. As Krenek commented in an essay written in 1930, the opera revolves around die Antithese von vitaler und spiritueller Daseinsform des Menschen, inkarniert in den diametral entgegengesetzten Gestalten Jonny und Max. Jonny ist in diesem Sinn geradezu ein Teil dieser technisch-mechanischen Weltseite, er reagiert ebenso leicht, erfreulich exakt und amoralisch wie eine dieser wohlkonstruierten Maschinen. Sein Reich ist von dieser Welt, und ganz konsequent fällt ihm auch die Herrschaft über das diesseitige Leben, über die sichtbare Erdkugel zu. Ihm gegenüber steht Max, der, von der Spiritualität herkommend, mit den Problemen, die ihm das in der Gegenwart besonders auf Vitalität eingestellte äußere Leben stellt, nicht fertig wird. Erst in der Minute der letzten Not entschließt er sich zur Lebensbejahung, aber in diesem Augenblick endet das Stück.

[the antithesis between man as a ‘vital’ animal, and man as a ‘spiritual’ animal as incarnated in the diametrically opposed figures of Jonny and Max. In this sense Jonny is actually a part of the technical-mechanical side of this world; he reacts as easily as a well-constructed machine, and is as gratifyingly exact and amoral. His kingdom is of this world, and as a matter of course he is the one who gains mastery over earthly life, over the visible globe. He is in direct contrast to Max, who, taking spirituality as his starting-point, never comes to terms with the problems he is set by external life, which is so attuned to the vitality of today. Only at the moment of

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41 Arnold Schoenberg, *Drei Satiren für gemischten Chor* (Vienna, 1926), forward.
42 Krenek, *Jonny spielt auf*, p. 7; my emphasis.
Ernst Krenek’s Reisebuch

20. Epilog

Andante sostenuto, lugubre (stiller, erhöht)

Die Söhne des neuen Pöder, 3

neue Pfl.k.

Figs 4, 5. Krenek, Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen, 
‘Epilog’ (Song 20), bars 1–20
greatest peril does he decide to assent to life — but at this moment the opera ends."

Is it possible that Krenek’s *Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen* resolves the conflict that *Jonny spielt auf* leaves hanging? In the earlier work, again through the character of Max, Krenek, following his initial greeting of the inspiring yet intimidating mountain, continues by once again directly addressing the lofty realm: ‘Jetzt dir entgegen nach kurzer Rast! Heut noch bezwing’ ich dich, du schöner Berg!’ [After a brief rest, now to meet you! Still today I shall conquer you, beautiful mountain!]. How one responds to this question turns on a number of issues, the most obvious being whether it is prudent to read one Krenek work in terms of another and, more importantly, the desirability of interpreting either composition via Krenek’s biography and the shaping of that existence by culture at large, especially German philosophy. Krenek himself invites the approach I have pursued in this study, in which music and life meet on the playing field of life. As Krenek observed, not only did he regard his *Reisebuch* as a succession of ‘sentimental, ironical, and philosophical sketches’, he also saw the work as ‘a turning point’, one in which he treated ‘the beauties of my homeland’ while ‘discussing its problems’. The ‘kurzer Rast’ Krenek mentions in *Jonny spielt auf*, in conjunction with Max’s desire to move on and triumph over the mountain, reminds one of ‘die höhere Harmonie’ of self-cultivation that Schiller, in ‘Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung’, insists is never completely concluded. ‘Strebe nach Einheit, aber suche sie nicht in der Einförmigkeit’, Schiller advises, ‘streb nach Ruhe, aber durch das Gleichgewicht, nicht durch den Stillstand deiner Tätigkeit [strive for unity, but seek it not in uniformity; strive for tranquillity, but by means of equipoise, not by the cessation of your activity]. Thus it makes sense, if it is appropriate to read Krenek’s song cycle as a musical *Bildungsroman*, that, following an initial attempt in *Jonny*, he would undertake such a journey anew in the *Reisebuch*.

However, the outcome in *Reisebuch* is different from what it had been in *Jonny spielt auf*. After a song cycle fixed on discernible tonal centres but peppered with atonality, and employing a largely listener-friendly neo-romantic idiom, the stylistic change Krenek adopts in the concluding song is provocative. At the start of ‘Epilog’ [Epilogue], he leaves the genial lyricism of the previous *Lieder* in favour of a bracing new sound world (Ex. 4). The song begins with the piano’s left hand rumbling alone in syncopated unpredictability in its lowest register. When the voice enters the piano falls silent, a pattern Krenek continues for the next two vocal phrases. Momentarily cleaving voice and piano apart, Krenek sends the message that something is afoot, as indeed there is: it is his first tentative adumbration of Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method of composition. The first vocal phrase, consisting of nineteen notes, two of

45 Krenek, *Jonny spielt auf*, p. 5.
which are enharmonic equivalents of previously stated notes, overshoots the ostensible goal of twelve. The second phrase moves in the opposite direction, with twelve notes that repeat three previous tones. Only in the third vocal phrase does Krenek oblige with a total of twelve tones, each a different note of the chromatic scale. Although Krenek does not use the twelve notes as a fixed point of compositional orientation, one wonders whether this can be seen as an acceptance of the twelve-tone method. And if so, is it legitimate to interpret it as the means by which Krenek realizes the ‘higher harmony’ of the Enlightenment, the literal and metaphorical lesson he learned from travelling on high to the Austrian Alps?48

Perhaps Krenek’s dodecaphonic swerve is escapist, a response to the text of ‘Epilog’ and its maze of metaphysical questions. This would be to neglect Krenek’s second mountaintop encounter. The twelve-tone method lies at the heart of that undertaking, not as a means of matching the words ‘Ich lebe, und weiß nicht, wie lang’ [I am alive, and know not for how long, Reisebuch, iv, 91 / 398], but as a demonstration of the dialectical way music can, by a process of sonic disjunction, supplement and enliven the verbal element. Evidence for this comes not only from the last song but also from the ninth, ‘Rückblick’, where Krenek, as we have seen, insists ‘Wir in der Zeiten Zwiespalt haben es schwer. Stadtgeboren, angehängt dem Betrieb der Zeit’. Following this, the music breaks into knotty canon — in music the strictest form of imitative counterpoint — an inventive response to the suggestion of circumscription and rote-like repetition, should one find oneself unthinkingly caught up in city life. The words next proclaim that ‘[wir] seh’n [...] da draußen in den Bergen überall die unerreichbaren Quellen des Lebens’ [Life as we find it in the mountains fully reveals the intangible sources of being, Reisebuch, ii, 37 / 390], at which point Krenek restores homophonic clarity. The question of how one should live in an age of constant motion is one Krenek first asks at a crucial moment in Jonny spielt auf when he asserts that the key to modern living is to welcome every moment of endless movement yet not lose one’s self.49 What has gone unasked is how such changes influenced the Lied, a repertory that, harking back to the nineteenth century, is the saga of music and words meeting at the

48 As Schoenberg explains in an essay written in 1936, he devised the twelve-tone method in 1921 and privately disclosed it to a number of his students in 1923; see further Arnold Schoenberg, ‘Schoenberg’s Tone Rows’, in Style and Idea. Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg, ed. by Leonard Stein, trans. by Leo Black (Berkeley, CA, 1975), p. 213. Krenek’s first completely twelve-tone work is his opera Karl V, begun in 1930 and published in 1933.
49 Krenek, Jonny spielt auf, p. 31, Anita to Max: ‘Das Leben, das du nicht verstehst, es ist Bewegung, und darin ist das Glück. Darin du selbst sein, das ist alles! In jedem Augenblick du selbst sein, in jedem Augenblick es ganz sein, und jeden Augenblick leben, als ob kein anderer käme weder vorher, noch nachher, und sich doch nicht verlieren’ [The life that you don’t understand is movement, and in that respect it is happiness. To be yourself within it, that’s everything! To be yourself in every moment, to be that wholly, in every moment, and yet never to surrender yourself.]
intersection of nature, however idealized. For the poet and Lied composer, nature provided a vast wellspring of symbolic meanings with potential for subjective significance. One begins to understand that for some twentieth-century composers mountains were nature’s last refuge.

Writing later in life about his friend the composer (and illustrious student of Schoenberg) Anton Webern, Krenek observes that ‘if a listener is inclined towards associative ideas, he might easily find that Webern’s music evokes the clear, thin air and the formidable, tense silence of the very high mountain summits’. These words easily could describe Krenek’s Reisebuch. Just as the Alps impel one to break with ordinary experience while offering a glimpse of infinity, Krenek’s prefiguration of the twelve-tone system in his Reisebuch, despite his previous rejection, suggests he had had second thoughts and had concluded that it represented a higher experience, with musical and intellectual repercussions. Dodecaphony permitted him to free himself not only from tonality’s gravitational pull but also to take a decisive stand on issues he had left unresolved in Jonny spielt auf — the place and purpose of art in the modern world. And yet it is possible to go further. Mindful of Jean Paul’s ‘three-fold blending’ of past and future in the present, Krenek, in his song cycle, achieves something similar. Most obviously, he turns to a musical genre with clear ties to the past, the Lied — replete with allusions to German song’s acknowledged master, Schubert. In the concluding number he unexpectedly takes up what most people at the time would have viewed as the sounding symbol of music of the future, a surprising move given what Krenek had written in ‘Die Musik in der Gegenwart’, yet a move that allows him to satisfy Jean Paul’s ‘three-fold blending’. In a different context, George Steiner has observed that ‘Song leads us home to where we have not yet been’. In Krenek’s case, one might rephrase Steiner’s statement: having travelled musically to the Austrian Alps a second time, he discovered a home he had not previously known he was searching for. Refining and refurbishing that habitat over the rest of his long life, the twelve-tone method thereafter would form the basis of his musical style.

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George Steiner, Errata. An Examined Life (New Haven, CT, 1997), p. 75.