“Frisch, Fromm, Fröhlich, Frei.”
The Deutscher Turnerbund and the Berg Violin Concerto

Douglas Jarman

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Abstract

Although Berg himself made public the nature of the extra-musical stimulus behind the composition of the Violin Concerto, through both his dedication “Dem Andenken eines Engels” and the article published by his biographer Willi Reich, the sketches for the work show that he originally planned to base the work on the motto of the Deutscher Turnerbund. Since the Turnerbund had strong links with the NSDAP and was banned in Austria in 1935 when the Violin Concerto was written, Berg’s intention to use the motto raises questions about his attitude toward and relationship with Nazi cultural policy and his efforts to survive as an artist in the mid-1930s.

The article proposes a possible explanation based on Berg’s consistent use of retrogrades and palindromes in his other works as symbols of denial and negation.
The early diary sketches

[1] It is well known that many of Berg's works involve, or were to some extent inspired by, extra-musical stimuli. Some of these were made public by Berg himself. The cryptographic and numerical basis of some features (but not all the personal details) of the *Chamber Concerto*, for example, were revealed in the Open Letter dedicating the work to Schoenberg which he published in 1925.\(^1\) Others, such as the ‘secret programme’ of the *Lyric Suite* and the more personal details of the *Chamber Concerto*, remained unknown until after the death of both Berg and his wife Helene.\(^2\)

In the case of the *Violin Concerto*, however, no such revelations of a ‘secret’ programme were necessary: Berg himself had dedicated the work “To the Memory of an Angel”, and Berg’s biographer Willi Reich had published an article entitled “Requiem for Manon”\(^3\) describing how Part I of the work represented the character and Part II the illness, death, and final transfiguration of the 19-year-old Manon Gropius, the daughter of Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius.

The sketches for *Concerto*, however, reveal that Berg’s original ideas about a possible extra-musical programme were somewhat different and that, remarkably, these early ideas were eventually absorbed into the later Manon programme.

What are probably the earliest ideas for the *Violin Concerto*—four sheets of jottings including, among other things, the outline of a possible formal plan of the work—appear on pages 159–162 of Berg’s diary for 1935.\(^4\) Although it is impossible to date these sketches precisely, it seems likely that they constitute some of the preparatory work about which Berg wrote to Louis Krasner on 28 March 1935.\(^5\)

When preparing to start work on a new composition, it was Berg’s habit to jot down a wide variety of ideas upon which he could draw as his conception of the piece became clearer and more concrete. Such jottings could be in either words or musical notation and could be about possible programmatic details (Berg often seems to have needed some kind of extra musical programme to stimulate his creative imagination), about the large-scale structure of a work, the general character or form of the movement, instrumental ideas, dramatic gestures, etc.

The four pages of annotations in Berg’s diary for 1935 show such a collection of preliminary ideas.\(^6\)

Among the annotations on the first page (159), stave 7 has four tempo indications—Alleg[ro], Largo, Allegretto, Rubato—later crossed out—, and the initials FFFF, added at the beginning of the stave. The meaning of the FFFF becomes clear on stave 10 of the same page, where, preceded by the annotation “The 4 movements”, the four Fs are shown to be the initial letters of the words “Frisch, Fromm, Fröhlich, Frei” (“Fresh, Devout, Happy, Free”), followed by a series of Roman numerals that reverses the order of the movements.\(^7\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Die 4 Sätze</th>
<th>Frisch</th>
<th>from[m]</th>
<th>Fröhlich</th>
<th>Frei</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
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<td>(Andante)</td>
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<td>(religio[so])</td>
<td>Ländler</td>
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A further annotation on staves 1–5 of p. 161 of the diary shows the reversed order of the four Fs motto grouped into two parts, each of which consists of two movements, as follows:
phantasier[en]d

I
A) Frei (Andante, Allegro)

II
A) Fromm (Choral) Adagio

Cadenz
B) Frisch (Rondo) Allegro[^9]

Some aspects of the formal design of the Concerto shown on staves 1–5 of this diary page reflect the structure of the completed work. Thus, in the final work, Part I consists, as in this sketch, of an Andante followed by an Allegretto (with many “fröhlich” passages marked “scherzando” or “grazioso”).

The chief difference between the overall form outlined by the reversed FFFF motto of p. 159 and p. 161 of the diary and that of the Violin Concerto itself lies in the placing of the two halves of Part II, which, in the final work, consists of an Allegro (marked not “Frisch” but “sempre rubato, frei wie eine Kadenz”), followed by the “Fromm” set of adagio chorale variations.

The phrase “Frisch, Fromm, Fröhlich, Frei”, was part of an old and generally-known maxim which took a number of different forms[^9] and with which Berg would have been familiar.[^10] In the early nineteenth century, the maxim became part of the motto of the German and Austrian Turnerbund, a movement concerned with the setting up of gymnastic and sport clubs founded in the early nineteenth century by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), who believed that physical education was not only a cornerstone of health but the very identity of a nation. In Jahn/Eiselen’s Die Deutsche Turnkunst, the slogan appears as “Frisch, frey, fröhlich und fromm – ist des Turners Reichthum”.^[11]

The more usual form of the motto, and the form in which it appears in Berg’s sketches for the Violin Concerto—“Frisch, Fromm, Fröhlich, Frei ist die Deutsche Turnerei”—was employed by the Turnerbund from 1846 onwards.

The volume of Meyers Konversations-Lexikon in Berg’s library also has a picture of the arrangement of the four Fs of the motto devised by Johann Heinrich Felsing in 1846 that became the symbol of the Turnerbund, a sketch of which, in Berg’s hand, appears on F21 Berg 85/I, fol. 2^[12].
[2] While an element of right-wing extremism and the racial had always been part of the philosophy of the Turnerbund,[13] from 1920 onwards—in contrast to the left wing Deutscher Arbeiter-Turn- und Sportbund (later ASKÖ) and the Christlich Deutsche Turnerschaft Österreichs—the Turnerbund increasingly became an overtly nationalist movement sympathetic to the NSDAP[14] and the FFFF symbol associated with the Nazi swastika. After the July putsch of 1934, when Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß was assassinated by Austrian Nazis, the Turnerbund was banned on the grounds that many of its members were also members of the NSDAP, whose activities were forbidden in Austria. The wearing of the FFFF symbol was also banned by an ordinance of the Bundeskanzleramt on 7 August 1934, because it was used as a substitute for the insignia of the NSDAP.[15]
Berg’s financial and artistic situation 1933-1935

One can only speculate as to why Berg should initially have considered using the motto of the Turnerbund, and a slogan that had become linked with German Nationalism, as an element in the structure of the Violin Concerto. Although there is no direct evidence that Berg had any contact with the Turnerbund (his interest in sports seems to have been confined to his support for the Vienna Rapid football team) it is possible that there was some family connection through his uncle Kaspar, who owned a firm that specialised in manufacturing sports equipment, but in any event both the FFFF motto and the associated symbol were a matter of public interest and discussion in the newspapers and on the radio following the banning of the Turnerbund.

With few performances of his music in either Germany or Austria after the NSDAP had come to power in January 1933 (the première of the Symphonic Pieces from Lulu in Berlin on 30 November 1934 would be the last time his music was played in Germany for more than a decade), an almost completed new opera that could only be performed abroad—Furtwängler had warned in May 1934 that, given public sentiment in Germany at the time, the text of Lulu was “completely impossible”—and with his publishers affected by the loss of royalties (his monthly stipend from U.E. was reduced in June 1933 from 1000 to 700, and later 500 schillings) Berg was in dire financial straits. In a letter written to Reich in autumn 1933, Berg had already broached the possibility of asking Werner Reinhart or Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge for money in exchange for the dedication of Lulu, and he again enquired to Schoenberg about the chances of approaching an American manuscript collector on 6 December 1933. The score of Wozzeck had been sold to the Library of Congress in June 1934, and on 19 February 1935 Berg wrote to Th. W. Adorno and later, on 7 March, to Rudolf Kolisch to ask for help in finding either an English or an American buyer for the score of the Lyric Suite or Der Wein. Writing on 14 February 1935, on the back of the programme for the concert that the Vienna section of the I.S.C.M. had arranged to celebrate his 50th birthday on 9 February, Berg told Julius Schloß that he had to interrupt the instrumentation of Lulu because “I must provide a violin concerto in order to carry on existing”. He had already written in similar terms in his letter of 7 March 1935 to Kolisch, saying, “As a consequence of the dreadful situation in Europe—and in spite of the concessions of U.E. and various ‘prospects’, I have a great worries about making a living. I can’t decide to give up the Waldhaus (at a loss) but if I keep it I can’t live on 400 schillings a month.”

Given Berg’s financial situation, it is of course possible that there was an element of self-protection, even opportunism, involved in his considering using the FFFF motto. As early as the mid-1920s, Berg had been willing to protest his Aryan credentials (Christopher Hailey cites a letter written to Wilhelm Wymetal in 1925), and he continued to write letters, not only protesting but providing genealogical evidence of his racial descent, in the 1930s to critics who suggested that he was of Jewish extraction. Similarly, while the term “Saujud”, which the journalist directs at the Jewish Banker in Ensemble III of Act III, sc.1 of Lulu, appears in the original Wedekind play, the phrase “Gott der Gerechte” and the directions “mauscheln” and “immer mehr ins Jüdeln verfallend” were Berg’s own additions. Thomas Ertelt has pointed out that these directions are “not part of the main body of the text” (and appear at some points only in association with the instrumental parts) but are “interpretative-descriptive annotations by the author.”

Studying the Particell and libretto of Lulu after Berg’s death, Schoenberg regarded these additions as attempts to find favour with the Nazis. Friedrich Cerha, on the other hand, has
argued that the journalist’s use of the “vituperative expression Saujud” has an anti-Aryan rather than an anti-Semitic bias, saying that “such a critical Jew as Karl Kraus took no offence” at the term, since “a typical attitude of non-Jew to Jew is shown here”, and regarded Berg’s own additions as characteristic of his “heightening of the level of dramatic verisimilitude”. George Perle likewise appealed to the esteem in which Berg held Kraus, citing Igger’s 1967 book on Kraus, in which she says that “to Kraus nothing was more repulsive than the least trace of Jewish linguistic usage in a German sentence [...] Kraus called that manner of speaking ‘mauscheln’ or, when in a good humour, merely ‘jüdeln’. To Perle, Berg’s addition of the phrase ‘Gott der Gerechte’ is ‘a satirical touch worthy of Kraus’. Erwin Stein, replying to Schoenberg’s letter of 9 and 11 March 1936, simply said “I am absolutely sure [...] that it was only thoughtlessness on the part of Berg”.

Yet we have it from Adorno that Berg “rejected the anti-Semitism to which his Viennese surroundings could easily have tempted him, but not out of acquired insight; it was quite simply impossible for him. Berg considered himself entirely within the tradition of German music, but he included Mahler and Schoenberg as a matter of course.” Berg had already, in May 1933, been forced to resign from the committee of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein, because he was “the exponent of an artistic direction which the German National movement will fight fiercely”. When, in the “Hindemith affair” of 1934, Goebbels justified the prohibition of Hindemith’s music because of his “association with Jews” and Furtwängler attempted to defend the composer on the grounds that Hindemith was entirely Aryan, Goebbels responded in a speech in which, according to a report in the Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger of 7 December 1934, he declared that Hindemith remained an “atonal noisemaker” and “the fact that his history is of pure Germanic blood is more dramatic evidence of the festering depths to which this Jewish intellectual infection has already penetrated the body of our Volk”. Given such events, Berg could hardly have been unaware that it was less his racial credentials than his musical language itself that made his work politically unacceptable and placed it in the category of “degenerate art”; that, as Alfred Rosenberg would write in 1936, “the whole atonal movement in music is contradictory to the rhythm and blood of the German nation” — yet not only is the Violin Concerto a twelve-note work but it presents, on the solo violin at the very outset of Part I (bb. 15–27), one of the clearest and least ambiguous statements of the twelve-note row and its inversion in any of Berg’s compositions. Indeed, writing to Reich on 30 September 1935 about a new version of his Violin Concerto article that was to appear in Anbruch, Berg asked Reich to draw attention to the links with tonality and the whole-tone scale, and as a consequence to the fact that the Concerto was based on a twelve-note row:
The article about the *Concerto* can go in as it is. Perhaps when you talk about the start of the chorale you could say even more clearly that the four syllables of “Es ist genug” are on the notes A, B, C#, D#, and (earlier) that I had chosen the note row (based on the open strings and with an allusion to G minor) that simply replaces D major: the key of the famous violin concertos. This is to say that now, as there is no key signature any more, it was natural to choose such a row for a violin concerto.”

Although Austria was still an independent country in the early 1930s, Austrian culture and artistic life was, inevitably, deeply influenced by the new political atmosphere in Germany from 1933 onwards, and Berg himself was closely associated with a number of people who were attempting to fight the political, racial, and artistic aspects of this influence, including the suggestion that atonality was a mark of the “Jewish infection” of German music.

January 1932 saw the publication of the first edition of the periodical *23. Eine Wiener Musikzeitschrift*, a periodical encouraged and supported by Berg (who had suggested the title) and edited by Berg’s pupil Willi Reich, with contributions from Ernst Krenek, Berg’s friend Rudolf Ploderer, and (under the pseudonym Hektor Rottweiler) Th. W. Adorno. In November 1933, 23 published an article by Reich entitled “Which Camp is Austria in?” (“In welchem Lager ist Oesterreich?”). A few months earlier it had published a denunciation by Ploderer of Richard Eichenauer’s new book *Music and Race (Musik und Rasse)* and, in June 1933, a heroic attack by Krenek on Nazi policy to the arts entitled “On Some Propositions of Dr. Goebbels” (“Zu einigen Thesen des Herrn Dr. Goebbels”). In 1934, 23 also published an article by Krenek criticising a RAVAG festival of new Austrian Music which included nothing by Schoenberg, Berg, or Webern and drew attention to the newly published *Kunst in Österreich: Österreichischer Almanach und Künstler-Adressbuch 1934*, which included an article by Dr. Friedrich Bayer stating that “[a]tonality, rootless and alien to the land and the people, stands in the sharpest contrast to native Austrian music.”

[4] Given the fact that, from the outset, Berg immediately reverses the order of the four words of the FFFF motto to produce the sequence Frei, Fröhlich, Fromm, Frisch, it is, I suggest, possible to interpret Berg’s decision to use the Turnerbund’s FFFF motto as one of the structural elements of the *Violin Concerto* not as a naive, self-seeking gesture—Berg could hardly have imagined that, by basing a work on an undisclosed nationalist motto (and a motto the text of which he immediately reversed), he would find favour with the National Socialist Party or enhance the chances of the *Violin Concerto* being performed in the Germany of the Third Reich—but as a gesture of defiance. In Berg’s music, such reversals—whether in the form of retrogrades that are separated in time by a different section, as are the two parts of the allegro misterioso of the *Lyric Suite* and the retrograde of the opening prelude that closes the first scene of *Wozzeck*, or as palindromes, as in the adagio of the *Kammerkonzert*, in *Der Wein*, and the film music of *Lulu*—are consistently associated with negation or denial. The second half of the palindromic Ostinato interlude of Act II of *Lulu* accompanies a reversal on film of the events of the first half; in the annotated score of the *Lyric Suite*, the beginning of the retrograde of the Allegro misterioso bears above it the words “Vergessen Sie es” – “Forget it”. The significance of the palindrome at the
centre of Der Wein is made clear by Berg himself in his letter of 4 December 1929 to Hanna Fuchs: “When I sang of wine, as I did this past summer, whom else does it concern but you Hanna, when I say (in ‘the Wine of Lovers’): ‘Come sister, laid breast to breast, let us flee without rest or stand, to my dreams’ Elysian land’ and these words die away in the softest accord of B and F major! What follows after that can only be the song of ‘The Wine of the Solitary.’ Aye, that I am and that I remain.” In every case the music runs backwards to its starting point—it symbolically wipes itself out, as though it had never been, and restores the status ante quo.

Such symbolism is attached to even the smallest retrogrades in Berg’s music: thus, at mm. 680–681 of Act I sc. 2 of Lulu, the negation implicit in Dr. Schön’s sentence, “Ich komme nicht hierher, um Skandal zu machen. Ich komme, um Dich vor dem Skandal zu retten”, is expressed musically by the second half of the sentence being set as a retrograde of the first.

Berg’s reversal of the Turnerbund’s “Frisch, Fromm, Fröhlich, Frei” to “Frei, Fröhlich, Fromm, Frisch” may have a similar symbolic and metaphoric significance: a rejection, by a composer whose works were no longer regarded as being a part of German music, of the narrow nationalism that denied him and others their place in that tradition, of which, in Adorno’s words, they “felt entirely part”.

An early abandoned sketch for the opening of Part II of the Violin Concerto shows mm. 14–21 leading straight into the Bach chorale “Es ist genug”, which is to say that even after Berg had decided on the Bach funeral chorale that he intended to use in the work itself—and thus, presumably, had already decided on the “Manon” programme—he still wanted the “Fromm” – “Devout” – movement to be the third rather than the last movement of the completed work. It may be that the symbolic significance of the reversed FFFF motto made him anxious to keep the “Fromm” movement in its original position.

In any case it is clear that Berg, the “incorrigible Romantic”, with his equally incorrigible fascination with numerology, ciphers, and arcane symbolism, was peculiarly interested in—and perhaps peculiarly dependent on—the creative stimulus provided by extra-musical programmes. What is perhaps most remarkable is that in the end the Violin Concerto brings together and reconciles many extra-musical stimuli. The ideas of having one movement based on a chorale and also including a Ländler were both there in the earliest diary sketches and inherent in Berg’s interpretation of the Fromm and Fröhlich parts of the Turnerbund motto. Perhaps both were also intended as signals of his identity as an Austrian or Austro-German composer. At the same time, as we have seen, the Violin Concerto announces its identity as a twelve-note composition from the outset and in the clearest possible way. The Manon programme, with which we are all familiar, simply adds another layer to an already existing one.

References


7. They are also crossed out.


9. The Historische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften website of ÖNB gives about 400 examples of the phrase being used in German and Austrian newspapers in the 50 years between 1885 and 1935, including an article about the provenance of the phrase. (ANNO, accessed 20 February 2017, http://anno.onb.ac.at/anno-suche/#searchMode=complex&text=%22frisch+fromm+fr...)

10. Had Berg consulted two of the reference works in his own library – Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon. Ein Hausschatz für das deutsche Volk, ed. Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, Erster Band. A bis Gothen (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1867), and Meyers Konversations-Lexikon. Ein Nachschlagewerk des allgemeinen Wissens. Fünfte, gänzlich neubearbeitete Auflage, Neuer Abdruck. Sechster Band. Ethik bis Gaimersheim (Leipzig and Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, 1895), he would have found a number of such variants. Wander, for example, gives two forms: “Frisch, fromm fröhlich und frei ist aller Studenten Geschrei” (giving the sources as the Grimm Brothers’ Deutsches Wörterbuch (Leipzig 1852, vol. 4)), and “Frisch, frölich, from vnd frey, das ander Gott befohlen sey” from J. Eiselein’s Die Sprichwörter und Sinnreden des deutschen Volks (Freiburg, 1840), Georg Henisch’s Teutsche Sprach und Weisheit (Augsburg, 1616), and M. Fridericum Petri’s Der Teutschen Weissheit (Hamburg, 1605).


Mario Leis has noted that “In April 1933, only a few months after the NS came to power, the Deutsche Turnerschaft hastily incorporated a pro-Aryan paragraph into its constitution”. See Mario Leis, Sport in der Literatur. Aspekte ausgewählter Sportmotive im 20. Jahrhundert (Siegen: Diss. Gesamthochschule Siegen, 1998), chapter 3: „Turnen – „Frisch, frey, fröhlich und fromm“” (PDF available at http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/dissts/Siegen/Leis..., accessed 12 November 2015).

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Alban Berg to Willi Reich, 17/18 October 1933. See also Berg to Reich, 17 July 1933, quoted in part in Ertelt, Lulu, Particell des III. Aktes, Kommentar, 2, footnote 8, and Berg to Reich, 6 October 1933: “Should you see Reinhart you can tell him how very badly I too have been damaged by the Nazi regime”. [Library of Congress (Washington, DC), Music Division, Alban Berg / Willi Reich Collection, 1/1933 (transcription).]


Alban Berg to Rudolf Kolisch, 7 March 1935. [Harvard University (Cambridge, MA), Houghton Library, Rudolf Kolisch papers, Ms Mus 195 (62)]

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Ana 500, B, Schloß, Julius I, 137.

Pat Hall has pointed out that Berg’s financial problems were exacerbated by the fact that he was also giving his sister 100 öS a month and paying 200 öS a month towards the upkeep of Helene’s mentally ill brother Frank Nahowski. See Hall, “Alban Berg’s ‘Guilt’ by Association.”

(Tafel I, 46); also accessible via Google books (accessed 17 February 2017, https://books.google.com/books?id=3j-3BgAAQBAJ).


26. Ibid., 31, m. 255–6; 68, m. 575, and Berg’s Libretto of Lulu (typescript, carbon copy), 44 (F21 Berg 133/l, fol. 47). ↑

27. Ibid., 68,m. 575, and 72, m. 611f. ↑


32. Erwin Stein to Arnold Schoenberg, 30 April 1936, p. 1, quoted in Perle, ibid., 286. ↑

33. Ertelt, Lulu, Particell des III. Aktes, Kommentar, 57. ↑


36. Ian Kemp, “Hindemith,” in The New Grove, “Modern Masters” (London: Macmillan, 1980), 235. Hindemith was married to a Jewish woman, continued to play with Jewish artists (he played viola in a trio, the other members of which were Szymon Goldberg and Emanuel Feuermann), and collaborated with the Jewish Kulturbund in a performance of his children’s opera Wir bauen eine Stadt. ↑


38. Wulf, Musik im Dritten Reich, 376–378. ↑


41. Alban Berg to Willi Reich, 30 September 1935. [Library of Congress (Washington, DC), Music Division, Alban Berg / Willi Reich Collection, 1/1935 (transcription)]. The last sentence says in the German original: “Ich möchte damit sagen, daß heute, wo es eben keine Tonartsvorzeichnung mehr gibt, es
nahelag, eben eine solche Reihe für ein Violinkonzert zu wählen.”


43. 23, no.13 (1 November, 1933): 10–12.

44. Ibid., no. 8/9 (23 February, 1933), 19–28.

45. Ibid., no. 11/12 (appearing on 1 July 1933): 1-5.


51. Jonas Pfohl, the editor of Act I of the forthcoming *Alban Berg, Sämtliche Werke* volume of *Lulu* has informed me that Berg draws attention to this symmetry in the Particell (F21 Berg 29/l, fol. 45’) by writing above these two bars “KL. A. diese beiden Takte in 1 Zeile!”. (“Piano score[:] these two bars in 1 system!”, [http://data.onb.ac.at/dtl/4928714](http://data.onb.ac.at/dtl/4928714), scan no. 198, accessed 17 February 2017)
