

# From the People to the People: The Reception of Hanns Eisler's Critical Theory of Music in Spain through the Writings of Otto Mayer-Serra

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## Abstract

Although virtually ignored by music historiography so far, the Berlin-born musicologist Otto Mayer-Serra (1904-68) holds a unique position in the intellectual landscape of twentieth-century Spain. He was the first musicologist to develop a critical theory of music in Spain based on Marxist philosophy and greatly influenced by the positions on music history, music sociology, and aesthetics of Austrian composer Hanns Eisler, to whose Berlin circle of Marxist musicians Mayer-Serra belonged in the last years of the Weimar Republic. This article examines the development of Mayer-Serra's thought from the beginning of his career as a music writer in late 1920s Berlin until the end of his exile in Spain in 1939, at the end of the Spanish Civil War. It provides detailed biographical information about Mayer-Serra's hitherto largely unknown life and work in this period, a detailed examination of his application of Marx's theory of history and society to the scholarly study of music, and a thorough assessment of Eisler's influence on his thought and work in the 1930s. The critical theory of music developed by Mayer-Serra in part of the ca. 200 articles that he wrote in Spain formed the conceptual basis from which he later developed his influential studies of Mexican music history.

We must finally resolve to regard music as an art from the people to the people, which emerges and disappears in specific social circumstances.<sup>[1]</sup>

Music, like all arts, does not exist 'by itself,' that is, in an 'absolute' way, but is addressed to the people; its aesthetic and social necessity is justified only in its relationship to the people who know how to perceive it or, more generally, who know how to consume it.<sup>[2]</sup>

# “Son of Millionaires” and Committed Marxist

[1] Even if all secondary sources mention Barcelona as Mayer-Serra’s birthplace, Otto Heinrich Michael Philipp Mayer (this is his complete name as recorded on his birth certificate) was undoubtedly born in Berlin.<sup>[3]</sup> He grew up in the typical bourgeois Jewish family of early twentieth-century Berlin: wealthy, assimilated, and with notable intellectual interests.<sup>[4]</sup> Decades later he described his childhood as that of a “son of millionaires,” educated with a love for culture and “contempt for money.”<sup>[5]</sup> After giving up his training as a pianist in 1922, he pursued studies of musicology at Friedrich Wilhelm (now Humboldt) University in Berlin.<sup>[6]</sup> With at least two of his professors—Curt Sachs (1881–1959) and Johannes Wolf (1869–1947)—he developed a friendship that lasted at least until the early 1940s.<sup>[7]</sup> He then enrolled as a PhD student at the Universities of Rostock (1926/27), Cologne (1927/28), and Greifswald (1928/29). At the last-named university he successfully defended the doctoral thesis *Die romantische Klaviersonate: Eine formal-stilistische Untersuchung* (The Romantic Piano Sonata: Formal and Stylistic Analysis) on June 10, 1929.<sup>[8]</sup> Although he always presented himself—in Berlin, Barcelona, and Mexico—as a doctor in musicology (and is mentioned as such in most secondary sources), he never officially earned that title because he failed to publish his doctoral thesis (an indispensable requirement for it in the German university system).<sup>[9]</sup> This was apparently due to the “collapse of the family fortune”<sup>[10]</sup> (on which he depended) as a result of the global financial crisis of October 1929.

From that point on, Mayer’s life changed substantially. Back in his home town, he started to conduct a worker’s choir in Buch (a suburb of Berlin)<sup>[11]</sup> and to write for *Arbeiterfunk*, the official periodical of the Arbeiter-Radio-Bund Deutschland (German Workers’ Radio Association).<sup>[12]</sup> He also promoted Soviet music by translating into German an article on Soviet proletarian music by conductor Leo Ginsburg (1901–79), most likely from Russian, which Mayer-Serra could read and speak at that time.<sup>[13]</sup> The translation was published in *Musik und Gesellschaft*, then one of the main German journals dealing with the role of music in contemporary society. For this journal Mayer-Serra also wrote an article on music in factories.<sup>[14]</sup> It is uncertain whether Mayer-Serra was a member of the German Communist Party (KPD) or visited the Soviet Union in this period.

## No One Like Hanns Eisler

Mayer-Serra might have become acquainted with Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) shortly after his return from Greifswald, or perhaps even earlier, during his period as a student. The decisive influence of Eisler’s thought on Mayer-Serra’s is evidenced by the conspicuous similarity of the ideas on music history, music sociology, and aesthetics expounded in Eisler’s writings from 1927 onwards (in particular in 1931 and 1932) and in the articles written by Mayer-Serra from 1934 on in Spain, into which I delve below.

From the late 1920s on, Eisler was the main representative in Germany of a new type of *Kampfmusik* (battle music) at the service of the labor movement and one of the most active advocates of the renewal of musicology through the application of dialectical materialism to the study of music history and music sociology.<sup>[15]</sup> The aim of such “critical exploration” (“kritische Untersuchung”) of music, Eisler wrote, was to understand the different social functions of music throughout history in order to be able to “build a new [socialist] music culture.”<sup>[16]</sup> With that aim, he lectured from 1928 onwards on music, the labor movement, and historical materialism at the Berlin Marxistische Arbeiterschule (Marxist Workers’ School). In late 1931, along with “a series of

left-wing music historians and music theorists” (“eine Reihe links gerichteter Musik-Historiker und -Theoretiker”) who had attended his talks at the school, he founded a study group which met regularly at his place in order to discuss the relationship between dialectical materialism and music.<sup>[17]</sup> Five years later, Mayer-Serra recalled his contacts with this circle as follows:

Eisler is an excellent music teacher and masters counterpoint issues like few others. No one like him knows how to analyze a Bach fugue or a Beethoven sonata, and no one like him knows how to discuss the problems of revolutionary art and the function of music within social movements. We, young musicologists, conductors of workers’ choirs, writers, and composers, meet [recte: met] regularly with him at his home in order to analyze the great problems of the historical evolution of our art through the method of historical materialism or to discuss the norms of our practical work within the cultural organizations of the proletarian movement.<sup>[18]</sup>

Among the large group of young Marxist musicians around Eisler in the early 1930s were Günther Anders (1902–92), Hans Bruck (1893–1975), Manfred Bukofzer (1910–55), Julius Goldstein (1873–1929), Ernst Hermann Meyer (1905–88), Fritz Thöne (n/a), and Stephan Wolpe (1902–72). Meyer—a composition student of Eisler at the time—was a key figure in the group. He shared with Mayer not only the same surname (differently spelled) but also an extremely similar intellectual and familial background: both were almost of the same age, both had grown up in wealthy, cultured Jewish families, both had studied musicology at the same university, both were particularly interested in the artistic potential of radio and active as conductors of workers’ choirs.<sup>[19]</sup>

The Hanns-Eisler-Archive (AdK) keeps the minutes of only two of the several meetings of Eisler’s study group, held on November 15, 1931 and on December 6, 1931 at Eisler’s home (folders 2580 and 2783). Mayer-Serra is not included amongst the few discussants at these sessions. If he attended the meetings, he did so just as auditor. An “attendance list” mentioned in the minutes, perhaps including auditing attendants, is now lost. In any case, there is documentary evidence that Mayer-Serra was personally very close at least to Eisler and Meyer in the early 1930s.<sup>[20]</sup> The reading of Eisler’s articles in *Die rote Fahne* and other German periodicals, the attendance of his lectures at the Marxistische Arbeiterschule and other venues, and, above all, the regular personal discussions with Eisler, Meyer, and other scholars of their circle seem to have been major influences on Mayer-Serra’s thinking at the time.



# The Needs of the People Instead of the Need for Luxury

[2] In his three articles for *Arbeiterfunk* (1930)—his earliest surviving writings—Mayer-Serra contrasted the elitism and decadence of the music played by professional performers at the concert hall with the much greater democratic potential of the new medium of the radio for bringing music to *all* people, regardless of their social class. However, he felt that there was a contradiction in the fact that while most broadcasted music consisted of “romantic” symphonic works composed for the “artistic delight of a very cultivated bourgeoisie” (“für das künstlerische Genußbedürfnis eines sehr kultivierten Bürgertums”) most radio listeners belonged to the working class and thus had very different “artistic expectations” (“künstlerischen Erwartungen”). Romanticism, he wrote, had turned “music into a sanctuary, to which only those who have unreservedly given their emotional experience a quasi-religious cult can enter. ... This vision of art is unsuitable for a phenomenon such as radio, which wants to reach people in their daily lives by means of music.”<sup>[21]</sup>

Mayer-Serra thus encouraged young composers to create works whose compositional technique, style, instrumentation, duration, and subject matter were specifically designed for the acoustic and sociological characteristics of radio and not for the concert hall. Such radio-music had to be “understandable” (“verständlich”) by all but also decisively distanced from the triviality and “cheap sentimentality” of “kitsch” mass entertaining music (“die kleinbürgerliche Banalität kitschig-sentimentaler Melodik”). As in the literary works of Kurt Tucholsky (1890–1935), Ludwig Renn (1889–1979), and other Marxist writers of the time, the subject matter of these radio-pieces had to be sought in current events “taken from the newspapers” (“aus der Zeitung übernommen”). What Mayer-Serra regarded as the first great achievement in the field of radio-music was *Der Lindberghflug* (1929), a *Radiolehrstück* (learning play for radio) composed collaboratively by Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), and Kurt Weill (1900–50). Mayer-Serra included this work in a broader category of modern music intended for the sociopolitical “activation” (“Aktivierung”) of young people, to which Brecht and Hindemith’s *Lehrstück* and Eisler’s “awakening choral pieces” (“aufrüttelnde Chöre”)—in likely reference to opp. 13–15 and 17—also belonged.<sup>[22]</sup>

The notion of socially useful music intended for the edification of the masses rather than transcendental aesthetic experience at the concert hall was in Mayer-Serra’s opinion the benchmark for the assessment of all contemporary music, radiophonic or not. Accordingly, he wrote an enthusiastic critique of the festival “Neue Musik Berlin 1930,” one of the first devoted to featuring modern *Gebrauchsmusik* or “utility music.” The festival featured performances of choral works for amateurs, music plays for children, *Lehrstücke* (learning plays), *Hörspiele* for radio, “electric music” (the new Trautonium was presented there), and “original works for records” (a kind of primitive *musique concrète*) by Hindemith, Paul Dessau (1894–1979), Ernst Toch (1887–1964), and others.<sup>[23]</sup> For Mayer-Serra, the modernity of these works lay in the fact that they were composed for amateur musicians (including children) and that their audience was no longer bourgeois music lovers at an exclusive concert hall but the performers themselves as well as the radio listeners. He applauded the fact that most featured works were aesthetically and technically compelling but still simple enough to be performed by non-professional musicians, a stance that “could be useful in the workers’ singing movement” (“in der Arbeitersängerbewegung fruchtbar zu verwerten sein”).<sup>[24]</sup>

This reaction against the Romantic paradigm of the elitism and autonomy of art was part of the aesthetic discourse of (mostly left-wing) artists and intellectuals linked to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (“New Objectivity”), excellently summarized in the Bauhaus motto “Volksbedarf statt Luxusbedarf” (the needs of the people instead of the need for luxury).<sup>[25]</sup> To meet these needs in the field of music, the new medium of the radio seemed then a perfect tool, yet technically it was still in its infancy. Therefore, in the last years of the Weimar period, a number of German left-wing musicians began to take an interest not only in the sociopolitical and aesthetic potential of radio but also in its technical possibilities. Mayer-Serra was one of them. No later than 1930, he met German conductor Hermann Scherchen (1891–1966)—also a committed Marxist—who created, along with him and three further “friends and pupils”—composer Gerhard Brosig (n/a), *Kapellmeister* Hellmuth Koch (1908–75), and technician Hans von Passavant (n/a)—a research team that he commissioned to conduct recording experiments at the Berlin radio studios of the Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft (German National Radio Company) and at the Rundfunkversuchsstelle of the Berlin conservatory (a laboratory specialized in technical and *aesthetical* experimentation with discs, radio, sound cinema, and electroacoustic instruments). This laboratory, in which Hindemith and Max Butting (1888–1976) taught radio and film music composition, had been the organizer of the festival “Neue Musik Berlin 1930.” Meyer was studying composition there at that time.<sup>[26]</sup>



**Figure 2: Friedrich Trautwein (1888–1956) with Paul Hindemith and his class at the Trautonium, Rundfunkversuchsstelle Berlin (photo by Bruno Müller, c. 1930); by courtesy of the [Stiftung Paul Hindemith](#)**

Between September 1931 and the summer of 1932, Scherchen’s team experimented with the recording of different musical genres, ensembles, instruments, and instrumental techniques using diverse types of discs and needles and placing the microphones and instruments in varied spots inside the different recording studios. Mayer-Serra combined this work with the study of physical and mathematical fundamentals at the Institute Heinrich Hertz for electro-acoustic

research at the Technical University in Berlin.<sup>[27]</sup> His knowledge of acoustics must have been notable, since Scherchen commissioned him to write a handbook on “applied acoustics” with definitions of concepts which had not, apparently, been sufficiently theorized yet, for instance *Sinusschwingungen* (sine waves), *Absorption des Schalles* (absorption of sound), or *Klirrfaktor* (distortion factor).<sup>[28]</sup> Although brief, the work by Scherchen’s team was instrumental in providing Mayer-Serra with a knowledge in acoustics and recording techniques far superior to the average, which he would later take advantage of in both Spain and Mexico.

## Odón Mayer Serra in Barcelona

On February 4, 1933—five days after Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) was sworn in as Chancellor of Germany—Otto Mayer obtained a Spanish diplomatic passport through the mediation of the Catalan socialist politician Manuel Serra i Moret (1884–1963). The passport was issued under the name of “Odón Mayer Serra” and was valid for one year.<sup>[29]</sup> Around two months later, Mayer and his partner Karin Gaster (1913–2007) left Berlin for good, not so much because of Mayer-Serra’s Jewish origins—as usually believed—but, given the early date of his exile, primarily due to his communist leanings. At that point, Mayer-Serra lacked any ties with Spain: he had no Sephardic ancestors<sup>[30]</sup> (which would have facilitated the granting of asylum in Spain), he knew neither Spanish nor Catalan, and he was not yet particularly interested in Spanish / Catalan music or musicology.<sup>[31]</sup> It remains unknown where and when he met Manuel Serra and whether Serra’s wife, the “folklorist” Sara Llorens (1881–1954), mediated in the encounter.<sup>[32]</sup>

[3] After settling down in Barcelona, Mayer-Serra tried to get a job as a musicologist at the music department of the Library of Catalonia—led by Catalan priest and musicologist Higiní Anglès (1888–1969), for whom Mayer-Serra brought a letter of recommendation from his former professor Wolf<sup>[33]</sup>—and at the *Obra del Cançoner Popular de Catalunya* (a regional institution for the research of Catalan folklore).<sup>[34]</sup> After both attempts failed, Mayer-Serra began to work in November 1933 as a music writer for the liberal, Catalanist, cosmopolitan weekly journal *Mirador*, one of the most important cultural periodicals in Catalonia at the time. Shortly afterwards (perhaps even from the beginning) he was appointed head of the journal’s music section.<sup>[35]</sup>

Mayer-Serra learned Catalan and Spanish and read up on Spanish / Catalan music surprisingly quickly.<sup>[36]</sup> His diligence at work and the exceptional quality of his university training as a musicologist (only Anglès then had similar qualifications in Spain) earned him an excellent reputation. He soon established contacts with most Catalan musicians and a number of musicologists and critics active in Madrid, including the musicologist José Subirá (1882–1980) and the influential music critic Adolfo Salazar (1890–1958).<sup>[37]</sup> His activity as a music writer was particularly intense in 1934 and 1935. He wrote almost one article per week for *Mirador* in this period and produced more elaborate essays every few months for renowned music journals, including *The Musical Times*, *Anbruch*, and *Revista Musical Catalana*. In 1935 he gave three series of lectures on different music topics at important Catalan institutions and started work for the prestigious publishing house Labor, revising the Spanish translation of Hugo Riemann’s *Katechismus der Phrasierung* (“Catechism of Phrasing”)<sup>[38]</sup> and writing a Spanish music dictionary along the lines of Riemann’s *Musik-Lexikon* (“Lexicon of Music”).

From early on, Mayer-Serra’s apparently strong personality—possibly also his overt anti-bourgeois disposition—caused him some trouble with part of the Barcelona musical

establishment, “those beasts that control our musical life,” as he wrote to Catalan composer Josep Valls (1904–99) on October 15, 1935.<sup>[39]</sup> A few days earlier, Mayer-Serra had been fired from *Mirador* due to pressure from some composers and performers annoyed by Mayer-Serra’s (educated and well-founded) negative critique of the compositional style and performance of three works by young Catalan composers Ricard Lamote de Grignon (1899–1962) and Joaquim Salvat (1903–38).<sup>[40]</sup> As one of the performers wrote to Valls, a refugee in Catalonia was expected to show greater deference and gratitude towards Catalan musicians.<sup>[41]</sup> Mayer-Serra then decided to create and manage his own music journal.<sup>[42]</sup> The outbreak of the war nine months later aborted this project.

In April 1936 Eisler visited Spain for the first time in order to attend the Barcelona Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM). Apparently through Mayer-Serra, he became acquainted with the organizers of the anti-fascist, proletarian international Barcelona “People’s Olympiad,” planned as a protest against the official Olympic Games in Berlin. Eisler composed the Olympic hymn for them. The attempt of a group of Spanish generals on the eve of the Games’ opening ceremony (on July 18, 1936) to overthrow the Spanish government via a military coup caused the complete cancellation of the “People’s Olympiad” and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

After its foundation on July 23, 1936, Mayer-Serra established close ties with the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC), the Catalan branch of the Spanish Communist Party.<sup>[43]</sup> During the first two months of the war, he was in charge of the culture section of the PSUC’s official daily *Treball* (Work), in which he published a number of brief (unsigned) essays on music.<sup>[44]</sup> *Mirador*, which had stopped publishing after the military coup, returned to the newsstands on August 13 with no major changes in content or format. This decision upset the members of the PSUC’s central committee, who accused *Mirador* of being “anti-proletarian” and “counter-revolutionary”<sup>[45]</sup> and eventually seized the magazine. When *Mirador* was issued again two months later as a periodical in the sphere of influence of the PSUC, Mayer-Serra was reinstated as head of the music section.

From late 1936 on, Mayer-Serra worked for the Comissariat de Propaganda—the Propaganda Agency of the Catalan Government—on editions of a number of propaganda songbooks, including a set of three “International Revolutionary Songbooks” containing four battle songs by Eisler.<sup>[46]</sup> In 1937 he was appointed secretary of propaganda of the Barcelona communist cultural center Casal de la Cultura (House of Culture)<sup>[47]</sup> and became the main contact—probably the only one—between the Comissariat de Propaganda and the Union of Soviet Composers in Moscow.<sup>[48]</sup> In the summer of 1937 he attended meetings in Valencia of intellectuals evacuated from Madrid and some conferences organized in Paris on the occasion of the Universal Exposition (seemingly those on musical pedagogy and ‘radio art’). His father Robert, widowed and ruined after the “Aryanization” of the family business, and his sister Ursula, a physician, arrived that summer in Barcelona, fleeing the anti-Semitic terror in Berlin. Ursula left immediately for a blood bank at the front.<sup>[49]</sup>

In September 1937, Mayer-Serra introduced a concert of “battle songs” by German singer Ernst Busch (1900–80) at Casal de la Cultura with the lecture “Music as Weapon in Anti-Fascist Struggle.”<sup>[50]</sup> It remains uncertain whether lecturing on music and anti-fascism was a one-off or a regular activity during the war. After the publication of *Mirador* was stopped again in June 1937 (now for good), Mayer-Serra’s activity as music writer was reduced to sporadic collaborations with some important Spanish cultural magazines, including *La hora de España* and *Música*. Table 1 shows all the writings published by Mayer-Serra prior to his exile in Mexico of which I have

documentary evidence.

Year(s)	Title	Issues	Amount
<b>BERLIN</b>			
1930	<i>Arbeiterfunk</i>	2, 12, 31	3
1930	<i>Musik und Gesellschaft</i>	1	1
1931	<i>Die Musikpflege</i>	8	1
1932	<i>Die Musik</i>	2	1
<b>SPAIN / PRE-WAR PERIOD</b>			
1933–35	<i>Mirador</i>	249–52, 255–64, 266–85, 287–91, 293, 296–98, 300–15, 319–23, 325–31, 333–35, 337–42, 344–46	101
1934	<i>Revista Musical Catalana</i>	362, 372, 377, 383, 388, 390	6
1935–36	<i>Musicografía</i>	31, 34, 37	3
1933–34	<i>Anbruch</i>	1933, issue 9/10 1934, issue 4	2
1934, 1936	<i>La Revue Musical</i>	149, 163	2
1934, 1936	<i>Schweizerische Musikzeitung und Sangerblatt</i>	1934, issue 14/15 1934, issue 16/17	2
1935	<i>The Musical Times</i>	Vol. 76, Nr. 1107	1
1936	<i>Revista brasileira de musica</i>	Fasc. I, Fasc. III–IV	2
<b>SPAIN / WARTIME</b>			
1936	<i>Treball</i>	Uncertain (several dozens of unsigned articles)	
1936–37	<i>Mirador</i> (seized by PSUC)	390, 391, 394, 396, 400, 402–405, 407, 414, 416–18, 420	15
1937	<i>Nova Iberia</i>	1	1
1938	<i>La hora de Espaa</i>	13	1
1938	<i>Meridia</i>	10, 12	2
1938	<i>Musica</i>	3	1

**Table 1: Mayer-Serra’s activity as music writer in Berlin and Spain; to display the table, click the image above or follow [this link](#)**

[4] At some point before the end of the civil war—apparently out of fear of being extradited to Nazi Germany once he left Spain—Mayer was “adopted” by Manuel Serra so that he could become a Spanish citizen. From then on, Mayer-Serra recorded in every official document that he was a Spaniard born in Barcelona. His military identification card, issued on September 24, 1938, is the earliest surviving document to include this information. He maintained this information throughout his life, possibly in order to avoid being accused in Mexico of false statements in official documents; perhaps also—especially in the early 1940s—as a way to (emotionally) detach himself from Nazi Germany. In a letter to Manuel Serra from 1940, Mayer-Serra considered Catalonia his “true and definitive homeland” and emphasized his lack of “any spiritual or sentimental link” with his native country.<sup>[51]</sup> Decades later, Spanish composer Rodolfo Halffter (1900–87)—one of Mayer-Serra’s friends in Barcelona and Mexico—maintained in his interviews with Spanish scholar Emilio Casares (1943) that Mayer-Serra had been born in Barcelona.<sup>[52]</sup> Casares published this claim in *Diccionario de la Musica Espaola e Hispanoamericana*; this

source was cited in most subsequent studies regarding Mayer-Serra's origins.<sup>[53]</sup>

## Historical Materialism and Music Sociology

Mayer-Serra published what can be considered his first examination of music culture from a sociological perspective in mid-1931. This was a lengthy essay comparing music culture in the Berlin bourgeois and proletarian districts from the early twentieth century on.<sup>[54]</sup> Even if this study was contemporary to his contacts with Eisler and his circle, Mayer-Serra did not approach it from an openly Marxist or class-conscious perspective, most likely owing to the fact that he was attempting to make a name for himself as a "serious" music writer in the "bourgeois" music press, to which *Die Musikpflege*, the journal for which he wrote the essay, belonged.<sup>[55]</sup>

In Spain, the outbreak of the civil war divided Mayer-Serra's writing output into two distinct phases. Before the confrontation, he published a large number of music critiques and several articles on the work of (mostly German and Spanish) contemporary composers and musicologists, including Anglès, Béla Bartók (1881–1945), Alban Berg (1885–1935), Manuel de Falla (1876–1946), Hindemith, Ernst Krenek (1900–91), Francesc Pujol (1878–1945), Sachs, Richard Strauss (1864–1949), Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), José Subirá (1882–1980), and Johannes Wolf. He also reviewed record releases and new literature on music history, musicology, music performance, music edition, music technology, and music pedagogy. A penchant for theorizing music as a social activity is apparent in many of these writings. This interest was fully explored in a series of articles—the first one published in January 1934—in which he discussed the functions of music in society, both in the present and in the past, from a Marxist perspective.<sup>[56]</sup> Mayer-Serra regarded these essays, often subtitled "Themes on Music Sociology," as his most valuable contribution to the scholarly study of music. Like Eisler, he did not consider them to be an end in themselves, but rather saw them as a tool for understanding the role music played in societies and "dialectically" transforming that role. Consequently, in the first stage of the civil war—when the vision of a classless society seemed closer than ever in Spain and moderation in tone and content was no longer needed—he devoted most of his writings to the discussion of music history and music sociology from an openly historical-materialist and class-conscious perspective.<sup>[57]</sup> The influence of Eisler and his circle's paradigm of historical-materialist musicology is apparent in these writings.

# EN TORNO DE UNA SOCIOLOGÍA DE LA MÚSICA

por Otto Mayer

## 1. *Las características de la organización musical actual*

La música, como todas las artes, no existe «por sí misma» o sea de una manera «absoluta», sino que se dirige a los hombres y solo en su relación con el hombre, que es quien sabe percibirla o, dicho de manera más general, quien sabe *consumirla*, queda justificada su necesidad estética y social. De ello resulta que todas las modificaciones esenciales en la existencia social y espiritual del género humano, deben encontrar forzosamente su repercusión en el terreno musical y en la valorización estética y social del arte musical.

Ni una sola de las grandes épocas históricas coincide con otra en el concepto que en cada una se había formado de la música, ni mucho menos queda la misma forma de utilizar el arte musical dentro de una sociedad determinada. En pocas palabras:

«La evolución de la música está relacionada con la evolución de la vida social y dependerá de la correspondiente forma de utilización dentro del proceso de evolución de esta estructura social, es decir: dependerá de la respectiva *función social* de la música». (\*)

El músico, en general, no se da cuenta de lo que significa este factor importante no solamente para toda la vida musical de una época, sino, en primer lugar, para lo que podríamos llamar la *ideología musical*, es decir el conjunto de conceptos técnicos y estéticos que representa el pensar general de una o de varias generaciones sobre el hecho musical. El músico de hoy, en la mayoría de los casos, no sospecha que, por ejemplo, una de sus máximas aspiraciones, la de conquistar el «público» por el valor estético de una obra sinfónica o la interpretación *virtuosista* de una sonata, es una pretensión típica de una época

(\*) E. H. Meyer, *Die Vorherrschaft der Instrumentalmusik*, etc. Amsterdam, 1937.

**Figure 3: “En torno de una sociología de la música,” *Música 3* (1938): 30, one of Mayer-Serra’s most important essays; by courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional de España** Challenging the dominating historical narrative of his time, Mayer-Serra argued that the ultimate causes of all historical changes in music were to be sought not in the independent evolution of

aesthetic and intellectual ideas but in the historical transformations of socioeconomic structures. Without ever using the terms “basis” and “superstructure,” he interpreted the historical changes in both compositional styles and the “[institutional] organization of musical life” as the consequence of transformations in the prevailing modes of production. Following the classical Marxist conception of history, he periodized music history into the “primitive,” the “feudal,” and the “bourgeois” eras. In terms of social function, the music of the “feudal” and the “primitive” eras was related. As examples of primitive music, he referred to “the [contemporary] farmer, who sings during the harvest” or “the Indian, who tries to drive away demons with his endless melody.” This type of non-capitalistic music had “magical, religious, and vital” functions, responded to “the immediate interests of the community,” and lacked “its own [aesthetic] value”; its elimination, thus, “would seriously disturb the rite of life.”<sup>[58]</sup>

The music of “bourgeois” capitalist societies, in contrast, was a “purely aesthetic pleasure” which did not have “the slightest influence on the progress of the events in life.”<sup>[59]</sup> The bourgeois era began in the sixteenth century with the gradual emergence of capitalism as the economic order and the economic empowerment of the bourgeoisie as a social class. The bourgeoisie’s strong desire for intellectual and social affirmation slowly turned music into a commodity. The modern concepts of “audience” as a person who pays to listen to music, “opera house / concert hall” as “a commercialized form of musical organization,” and “virtuoso” as a highly professional performer that sells his performance to the audience were born in this era. Clearly influenced by Eisler, Mayer-Serra argued that in the eighteenth century the growing individualism of the ruling bourgeoisie and its continuous search for new forms of entertainment prompted the introduction of contrasting, “dynamic” factors in compositional techniques and styles, including “the orchestral ‘crescendo,’ the formidable momentum in the art of instrumentation, the contrasting themes in the sonata form.”<sup>[60]</sup> Purely instrumental music became then the “representative genre” and the “aesthetic symbol” of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class.<sup>[61]</sup>

[5] The nineteenth century marked the beginning of the decline of the bourgeoisie as a social class and of “bourgeois music” as progressive art. Beethoven’s “essentially popular and revolutionary”<sup>[62]</sup> music was the last instance of music composed for the progressive bourgeoisie of the French Revolution era. After him, composers advanced towards an ever greater aesthetic individuality and started to consider music a “supernatural art,” halfway between “the brute reality on Earth and metaphysical regions.” The “growing pressures” of nineteenth-century class struggles changed the “ideological content” of bourgeois music, which became an accomplice of the bourgeoisie’s escapist idealization and mystification of reality. Richard Wagner’s (1813–83) operas reflected “the Schopenhauerian pessimism” of the bourgeoisie, which felt “lost and look[ed] back at a happier and less problematic past.” Johannes Brahms’s (1833–97) music was a response to the “somewhat provincial imperturbability and complete indifference of the petty bourgeoisie to the great problems of social and political transformation” of their time. In the fin de siècle, “the decadent languor of Mahler and Schoenberg or the noisy cynicism of Richard Strauss show us this class in its dying phase, with no perspectives for renewal and no effective means to find a remedy against its progressive social and moral dissolution.” Romantic music, Mayer-Serra summed up, was an “antirealist art” whose main function was “to distract us from everyday problems and create a refuge out of the crude reality.”<sup>[63]</sup> Mayer would develop these ideas—albeit in a much more restrained tone—in the short book *El romanticismo musical*, published in 1940 in Mexico City.<sup>[64]</sup>

For Mayer-Serra, the programs of “absolute music” performed since the nineteenth century in exclusive venues by highly professional performers for “selected” audiences were a direct

reflection of the capitalist order and an instrument for its preservation. The “bourgeois” virtuoso was “the most vivid symbol of the division of labor in capitalist society,” in whom the bourgeoisie had found “the most representative producer of its musical aspirations.” No longer able to compose or improvise for themselves as in former centuries, their activity was limited to the “exhibition of an acrobatic show” for the delight of an “uneducated” bourgeois audience that paid “to have fun” and only had fun when it found “an easy way out from a problematic reality.” Unlike former aristocratic audiences, the “bourgeois” audiences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lacked real musical interests and were usually incapable of aesthetically judging music. The “applause or whistles” of more modest audiences (“the voice of the fifth floor”) were a “more authentic expression of a fair appraisal [of music] than the lukewarm reactions of the ‘high-class girls’ and their gallants in the expensive theatre boxes.”<sup>[65]</sup> The emergence of this “ignorant” but affluent audience, which needed “an accredited reference before spending money on a ticket,” prompted the figure of the music critic, from whom an assessment of the aesthetic quality of the compositions and of their performance was expected, but never “to question the proper functioning of the institutions of the capitalist order.”<sup>[66]</sup>

Both Mayer-Serra and Eisler argued that the social isolation and ever-increasing multiplicity of individual styles fostered since the nineteenth century by capitalist individualism had reached its zenith in twentieth-century society, when most bourgeois composers had turned into egocentric “aesthetes.”<sup>[67]</sup> On these grounds, both harshly condemned the ISCM in the mid-1930s. In fact, Mayer-Serra was by far the most extreme of the Spanish critics in denouncing the Barcelona Festival, albeit only after the outbreak of the civil war.<sup>[68]</sup>

## Music from Below

Mayer-Serra adopted the ideology that considered Catalonia a cultural and political entity significantly different from—or independent of—the rest of Spain (*Catalanisme*) soon after arriving in Barcelona. This ideology, together with his marked Marxist outlook, soon crystallized in an appreciation of the traditional genres of Catalan music as perfect realizations of modern *Gebrauchsmusik*.<sup>[69]</sup> From early on, he praised the instrumental / vocal *sardanas* (the “national dance” of Catalonia), the choral songs with Catalan lyrics, and the instrumental works for *cobla* (the traditional ensemble of Catalan music, see figure 4) for being excellent examples of “occasional music in the most modern sense of the concept,” for they “do not longer tend to ‘eternity’ in a vague and metaphysical sense but owe all their characteristic strength to the immediate goal they pursue,” namely “the re-establishment of direct contact between producer [performer] and consumer [audience], using a terminology of economic life.” Amongst the pieces he cited as examples of this type of functional “occasional music” (*música d’ocasió*) was his friend Pujol’s *Vent fresquet de Tramuntana* for choir and *cobla* (1931).<sup>[70]</sup>



**Figure 4: Image of a *cobla* (La Principal de Banyoles) in 1928; by courtesy of Arxiu Comarcal Alt Empordà, Biblioteca de Catalunya, No. ACAE110-45-N-15608**

Like Roberto Gerhard (1896–1970), Stravinsky, and other modernist composers in the interwar period, Mayer-Serra praised the “nasally penetrating” sound of the wind instruments in the *cobla* (i.e. far distanced from the string-laden sound of Romantic music). Unlike them, he strongly emphasized the links of the contemporary Catalan choral movement with nineteenth-century class struggles, portraying the composer Josep Anselm Clavé (1824–74), the “founder” of the choral movement, as a kind of proletarian hero.<sup>[71]</sup> Significantly, Mayer-Serra never mentioned the political conservatism and eminently bourgeois nature of most choral societies in Catalonia, in particular the Orfeó Català (to which he was closely linked, even during the war).

Mayer-Serra was one of the few musicologists in Spain at that time to write affirmatively (even if never too often or extensively) about what he called “jazz” and “light music” (“foxtrots,” “rumbas,” “blues,” “tangos,” and the like). He regretted that a history of jazz had not yet been written and considered some pieces of popular music “true little masterpieces” from which “more than one composer of ‘serious’ music” could learn counterpoint or instrumentation.<sup>[72]</sup> Moreover, he devoted one of the six lessons on modern music that he gave at the proletarian cultural center Ateneum Polytechnicum in Barcelona to a discussion of the influence of jazz on contemporary art music. In that lecture—which was apparently attended by a number of young Catalan composers—Mayer-Serra played and discussed recordings of *Tiger Rag* (1917), Duke Ellington’s (1899–1974) *Rude Interlude* (1933), Eisler’s (undetermined) “political music,” and Weill’s *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928).<sup>[73]</sup>

[6] While Mayer-Serra shared with Eisler an anti-capitalist (or Marxist) criticism of the “vulgarity and sentimentality” of commercial jazz, his stance towards jazz was in general less negative than Eisler’s.<sup>[74]</sup> For Mayer-Serra, jazz had been a kind of “blood transfusion” through which composers such as Hindemith, Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Krenek, Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), Stravinsky, and Weill had been able to “rejuvenate” their music after the decadence of

Romanticism.<sup>[75]</sup> Moreover, he felt—unlike Eisler—that the jazz orchestra was “the musical symbol of a democratic institution” in which musicians were not organized hierarchically but could freely decide for themselves when to play as a soloist and when to “subordinate themselves” to their fellow musicians.<sup>[76]</sup> In contrast, the symphonic orchestra was necessarily “subordinate[d] to the baton of a dictatorial conductor.”<sup>[77]</sup> Jazz musicians were for Mayer “truly artisans of music,” with a “solid technique and personal fantasy,” while the “virtuoso of the concert hall” often based their performance on empty “suggestions” rather than true musicality.<sup>[78]</sup> These thoughts on jazz seem to have been influenced to a certain extent by Weill’s and, in particular, Bukofzer’s positions on the topic.<sup>[79]</sup>

In the field of art music, Hindemith was for Mayer-Serra the most significant contemporary composer for two reasons: his in-depth knowledge of the music for radio, “electric instruments,” and cinema and his particular ability to express “the social concerns of our time” through music.<sup>[80]</sup> Indeed, Mayer-Serra was the scholar that more extensively, and in a more knowing way, wrote about Hindemith’s output in 1930s Spain.<sup>[81]</sup> Against Hindemith’s music, Mayer-Serra contrasted the “sterility” and “suffocating epigonism”<sup>[82]</sup> of most modernist composers, particularly those in the sphere of influence of Arnold Schoenberg, a composer who suffered from an “individualist isolation,” a “selfish intellectualism,” and a lack of “social responsibility.”<sup>[83]</sup> From Schoenberg’s school, Mayer-Serra only appreciated the music of Berg, in particular *Wozzeck* (1925) and the *Lyric Suite* (1926), which he considered masterpieces of the preceding decade. (While the positive appraisal of *Wozzeck* may have been prompted—to a certain extent—by the social critique implicit in its libretto, that of the *Lyric Suite* seems more paradoxical, as few works of the interwar period seem to fit better than this one into the categories of “absolute music” and intellectual “isolation” that Mayer-Serra so harshly condemned in Schoenberg’s music.)

Halfway between Hindemith’s socially committed and Schoenberg’s socially detached music, Mayer-Serra appreciated a series of modernist works, which, even if not intended for performance by amateur musicians and lacking any socio-pedagogical tendency along the lines of German *Gebrauchsmusik*, were still decisively distanced from the transcendentalism of romantic / expressionist music or the “preciosim” of impressionism. These included Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du Soldat* (1918), Honegger’s *Le Roi David* (1921), Falla’s *El retablo de Maese Pedro* (1923), Ernesto Halffter’s (1905–89) *Sinfonietta* (1925), Hindemith’s symphony *Matthis der Maler* (1934), and in particular Valls’s *Concert for String Quartet and Orchestra* (1933).

In the critique that cost him his job at *Mirador*, Mayer-Serra praised the last-named work (today utterly forgotten and not yet recorded) as a “sensational revelation” and censured Lamote and Salvat for practicing a “stilo antico” that had Edvard Grieg’s (1843–1907), Giacomo Puccini’s (1858–1924), and Claude Debussy’s (1862–1918) music as its main aesthetic references. He ended his article doubting “whether the form of the concerto is the most appropriate for featuring works by young composers.”<sup>[84]</sup> This was one of his regular critiques of “bourgeois” music institutions, which included not only the “select” venues, audiences, and performers but also the “bourgeois” classical and Romantic repertoire, especially harmful—he pointed out—when addressed specifically (in popular concerts) to the workers, since they “fully conform [through it] to the taste of the bourgeois public.”<sup>[85]</sup> On similar grounds, Mayer-Serra often stressed the pedagogical potential of radio and recordings and argued for turning the too business-oriented Spanish radio into an artistic “patron” of modern music.<sup>[86]</sup>

Given his far above-average knowledge of and interest in recordings, it might seem surprising that Mayer-Serra did not join *Discòfils* (disc lovers), a club—open to anyone who paid the

membership fee—founded in early 1935 by former Schoenberg student Gerhard, the (wealthy) engineer Ricard Gomis (1910–33), and other composers, performers, musicologists, and music lovers from Barcelona, including Anglès and artist Joan Miró (1893–1983). The club’s members—none from the working class—met regularly at the Hotel Majestic (one of the most luxurious in Barcelona) or at the bookshop Catalònia in order to listen to records of early, classical, and modern music preceded by lectures given by renowned music scholars (including Gerhard, Anglès, and Salazar). Unlike other critics, Mayer-Serra neither signed the club’s manifesto, nor did he promote its activities in *Mirador*. My hypothesis is that he found this club too elitist to take part in it and organized the aforementioned lectures at the workers’ cultural association Atheneum Polytechnicum (with a similar format to the *Discòfils* sessions) as a non-elitist response to this club. Indeed, Mayer-Serra was likely referring to *Discòfils* and other similar clubs of bourgeois music lovers when—three years later, in the midst of the civil war—he denounced “the social and aesthetic exclusivism so common in the old musical associations,” which “no longer had the right to life” in revolutionary society.<sup>[87]</sup>

## Music for the Classless Society

Mayer-Serra’s requests of 1933 to 1935 for a more egalitarian music culture were expanded and re-defined during the civil war with demands of a more revolutionary nature. In the first phase of the collectivization of industries—during the so-called “summer of anarchy”—he required the establishment of a cooperative that included all Barcelona concert halls and opera houses and the organization of symphonic concerts at proletarian workplaces, including factories, workshops, military barracks, and the front.<sup>[88]</sup> In January 1937, he enthusiastically reviewed the so-called “miting concert” (a concert preceded by a brief lecture on the works by the conductor) given by the proletarian amateur symphonic orchestra Instituto Orquestal at the collectivized thread factory Fabra i Coats in Barcelona. This orchestra was made up of around seventy manual workers (shoemakers, barbers, carpenters, tailors, waiters, and so on). The concert audience consisted solely of the factory workers and their families, who used cotton bundles as seats. That first performance in a factory—the orchestra had only played before in theatres, cinemas, *ateneos*, and the like—was in Mayer-Serra’s view “a success of historical significance.”<sup>[89]</sup>



**Figure 5: Outside view of the factory Fabra i Coats in Barcelona, where the workers'**

**concert might have taken place; by courtesy of Thomas Lefebvre**  
**([www.thomaslefebvre.net](http://www.thomaslefebvre.net))**

[7] While Mayer-Serra did not feel that the (“bourgeois”) musical canon of the common practice period should be eliminated in revolutionary society, he thought it crucial that workers be able to understand how music had served the interests of the ruling classes in former eras. Such an instruction would be the main task of music critics and scholars in the new society.<sup>[90]</sup> Regarding the composition of new music, Mayer-Serra asked composers not only to address “current and revolutionary subject matters” but also to find new compositional styles that were in accordance with the new social order. While he was clear about which styles were *not* suitable for “revolutionary music,” he was less specific about which ones were. Examples of “revolutionary music,” he wrote in late 1936, were neither “the essays of the post-revolutionary Soviet composers,” who, for some time, had “indulged in writing large symphonic poems à la Wagner and à la Strauss with popular and revolutionary melodies” nor the “eclecticism of Shostakovich, a very gifted young composer,” who hesitated between a “Debussian sensibility, a Straussian pathos, and the rhythmic orgies of Stravinsky,” and who had been “discredited lately in the Soviet Union.” The new revolutionary style had to take as a point of departure the compositional achievements of modernist composers—he cites Schoenberg, Hindemith, Bartók, and Falla—and “infiltrate” them “with a new element, a stylistic element” that was still unknown, since its creation was “in the hands of the creative musicians.”<sup>[91]</sup>

## Conclusion: Pioneers of a Critical Theory of Music

Mayer-Serra crossed the French frontier in early February 1939, shortly after the fall of Barcelona. If he was indeed interned in the refugee camp of Argelès-sur-Mer—as Rodolfo Halffter told Casares—it was for a few weeks. In mid-April he arrived in New York and from then went to Mexico City, where he would remain until the end of his life.<sup>[92]</sup> In Mexico City he met Eisler, who was also seeking political asylum. In June 1939, Mayer-Serra published at least one article promoting Eisler’s activities in the country.<sup>[93]</sup>

In Franco’s Spain, Mayer-Serra’s ideas on music and sociology—a compendium of the worst of the “red cause”—would quickly pass into oblivion, although not completely. In 1954, Anglès published *Diccionario de la música Labor*, presenting it as a project started in 1940 by the recently deceased Catalan musicologist Joaquim Pena (1873–1944). However, the style and content of a number of (anonymous) articles clearly reveal that Pena or Anglès used part of the materials left behind by Mayer-Serra (most likely after purging them of any inconvenient content). In “German and Austrian Music,” for instance, the author explains that modern Austrian and German composers “try to get rid of the triviality and exaggeration of the *Neudeutsche Schule*” and highlights the work of Berg, Krenek, Franz Schrecker (1878–1934), Weill, and particularly Hindemith, “perhaps the most outstanding [German] talent.”<sup>[94]</sup> Published in the heyday of integral serialism, the article mentions neither Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique nor Anton Webern’s (1883–1945) music. So deficient in many areas, the dictionary stands out for the large number and high quality of articles related to recording and broadcasting techniques.

Although *Diccionario de la música Labor* was the most important music dictionary in Spain until the publication of *Diccionario de la Música Española e Hispanoamericana* in the late 1990s, the significance of Mayer-Serra in Spanish musicology does not lie, evidently, in his contribution to that work but in the fact that he was the first musicologist in Spain to develop a critical theory of

music that had the Marxist theory of society and history as its theoretical foundation and proletarian self-emancipation as its political program. Proceeding primarily from Eisler's positions on aesthetics, music sociology, and music history, Mayer-Serra expounded a paradigm of historical-materialist musicology that placed the notion of social function at the core, denounced the commodified character of music in late capitalism, and aimed at a socialist renewal of music culture. Even if Mayer-Serra adhered (like Eisler and most music historians at the time) to a historical narrative that understood music history primarily as evolutionary progression and focused on the achievements of "great composers," his theory of music decisively challenged the widespread conviction that musical works are timeless masterpieces and that imbuing music with any immediate political or social function would only undermine its artistic value.

Like Eisler's, Mayer-Serra's aesthetic theory was utterly affirmative in its relationship to musical modernism. In contrast to the official discourse in the Soviet Union at the time (of which Mayer-Serra was apparently well informed), he never concluded that politically conservative composers—for instance Schoenberg or Stravinsky—could not be progressive in purely musical terms. Indeed, his overt preference for post-tonal modernism over neo-romantic symphonism as the basis for the creation of the new "revolutionary style" stood in stark contrast to the official Soviet doctrine of socialist realism. Tellingly, Mayer-Serra discussed Soviet music very rarely; the only three composers to which he devoted an article during the civil war—Eisler, Alan Bush (1900–95), and the German émigré Konrad Bernhard (1900–n/a)—were all communists, and none was a Soviet.<sup>[95]</sup>

The significance of Mayer-Serra's critical work in Spain rests on two factors. On the one hand, his writings and lectures were the main channel through which the critical theory of music developed by Eisler and his circle in the last years of the Weimar Republic entered the country in one of the most turbulent moments of its recent history. Mayer-Serra's hitherto ignored critical work is thus key to re-mapping the still quite tangled ideological positions within left-wing music criticism and music historiography in Republican Spain (1931–39). On the other hand, the ideas developed by Mayer-Serra in Germany and especially in Spain formed the basis of his influential studies of Mexican music history, in particular *Panorama de la música mexicana*, the foundational work of modern Mexican music historiography<sup>[96]</sup>—a study that, according to his own account, he attempted to approach "sociologically in its entirety."<sup>[97]</sup>

The efforts in the interwar period of Mayer-Serra, Eisler, and other Marxist scholars of their circle to theorize music as a social activity rather than autonomous art were the direct antecedents of the work of musicologists in the Eastern bloc after World War II (most prominently in the German Democratic Republic)<sup>[98]</sup> and pioneered the calls made in the West from 1980 onwards—primarily in the context of the "New Musicology"—for placing a greater emphasis upon the cultural study and hermeneutics of music. This article is part of the recent attempts to challenge the quasi-mythical image of the Madrid critic Adolfo Salazar as virtually the only representative of left-wing musical criticism in pre-Francoist Spain.<sup>[99]</sup> It asserts the exceptionality and significance of Otto Mayer-Serra's thought and work within twentieth-century Spanish and Mexican musicology.

## References

1. Hanns Eisler, "Zur Krise der bürgerlichen Musik," [1932] in *Hanns Eisler: Gesammelte Schriften, 1921–1935*, ed. Tobias Fasshauer and Günter Mayer (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2007), 170. Original

wording: “Man muss sich endlich dazu entschliessen, Musik als eine von den Menschen, für die Menschen in bestimmten konkreten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen entstehende und vergehende Kunst anzusehen.” All translations in this article are by the author. ↑

2. [Otto Mayer, “En torno de una sociología de la música,” \*Música\* 3 \(1938\): 30.](#) Mayer-Serra’s emphasis. ↑
3. See the birth certificate issued by the register office in Berlin-Mitte on June 19, 1904 (Landesarchiv Berlin, folder P-Rep-521, No. 817) and a second birth certificate issued (apparently on Mayer-Serra’s request) on June 27, 1957 by the register office in East Berlin (today at the Family archive). Except in the bibliography entries of writings that he signed as “Mayer,” I use “Mayer-Serra” throughout this article, the surname he adopted in the late 1930s, and by which he is internationally known today. ↑
4. Documents relating to Mayer’s ancestors are kept at the Archive of the Jewish Museum, Berlin (Sammlung Gabriel-Salomonis, K1034, Mp. 5). ↑
5. Letter from Otto Mayer-Serra to his daughter Isabel Olmsted, Mexico City, February 25, 1962 (Family archive). ↑
6. Enrollment certificate (No. 3561/112) and “Abgangzeugnis” (No. 3699), Archive of Humboldt University, Berlin. ↑
7. See the letter from Otto Mayer to Manuel Serra i Moret, April 23, 1939; Biblioteca del Pavelló de la República, University of Barcelona, number XV. ↑
8. Enrollment certificate at University of Rostock, [accessible online](#); enrollment certificate at University of Cologne (No. 762), April 24, 1928 (Archive of the University of Cologne); *Matrikelbuch* (No. 1050) and *Promotionsbuch* (No. 44) of the Philosophischen Fakultät Greifswald (Archive of the University of Greifswald). ↑
9. The archive of the University of Greifswald keeps an undated list of “PhD students not yet in possession of a doctorate” which includes Otto Mayer’s name. The manuscript of Mayer’s thesis is apparently lost. ↑
10. Letter from Otto Mayer to Isabel Olmsted, Mexico City, July 20, 1963 (Family archive). ↑
11. Letter from Otto Mayer to Ernst Hermann Meyer of July 27, 1933 (Ernst-Hermann-Meyer-Archive at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin [thereafter AdK]; no catalogue number). ↑
12. The history of *Arbeiterfunk* is discussed in Peter Dahl, *Arbeitersender und Volksempfänger: Proletarische Radio-Bewegung und bürgerlicher Rundfunk bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndicat, 1978), 41–86. ↑
13. Leo Ginsburg, “Laienmusik im neuen Rußland,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 1, no. 4 (1930): 126–27 (transl. Otto Mayer). ↑
14. Otto Mayer, “‘Musik und Fabrikarbeit’ als Gegenstand einer historischen Theorie,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 1, no. 5 (1930): 144–45. Dorothea Kolland examines the history of *Musik und Gesellschaft* in the preface to the journal’s re-print *Musik und Gesellschaft* (Berlin, Das europäische Buch, 1978), vii–xxx. ↑
15. Eisler called for a renewal of musicology in Hanns Eisler, “Zur Situation der modernen Musik,” [1927] in Fasshauer and Mayer, *Eisler Schriften*, 39; and “Die Kunst als Lehrmeisterin im Klassenkampf,” [1931] in *ibid.*, 123–31. ↑
16. Hanns Eisler, “Die Erbauer einer neuen Musikkultur,” [1931] in *ibid.*, 132. ↑
17. Hanns Eisler, “Die Fortschritte in der Arbeitermusikbewegung,” in *ibid.*, 109. On the Berlin Marxist Workers’ School, see Gabriele Gerhard-Sonnenberg, *Marxistische Arbeiterbildung in der Weimarer Zeit* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1976). Günter Mayer has thoroughly examined Eisler’s thought in the 1930s in *Weltbild—Notenbild: Zur Dialektik des musikalischen Materials* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1978). Cf. Tobias Fasshauer and Günter Mayer, preface to *Eisler Schriften*, xvii–xxiv. ↑
18. [Otto Mayer, “Hanns Eisler: Un gran músic revolucionari,” \*Mirador\* 400 \(December 24, 1936\): 7.](#) Following

the editorial rules of *Musicologica Austriaca*, the author provides the original wording of all quotes written initially in German. The rest of the languages (Catalan, Spanish, and French) has been translated in order to facilitate utmost fluency of the reading. In most cases, the original sources are easily accessible through the provided links. ↑

19. On Eisler's circle in Berlin, see Ernst Hermann Meyer, unpublished typewritten text "Meine Erlebnisse mit Hanns Eisler" (October 4, 1968), Ernst-Hermann-Meyer-Archive (AdK), folders 156 and 161; and his book *Kontraste-Konflikte: Erinnerungen, Gespräche, Kommentare* (Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 1979), 83–85. Cf. Günther Anders, *Musikphilosophische Schriften: Texte und Dokumente*, ed. Reinhard Ellensohn (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2017), 336–80. ↑
20. See letter from Otto Mayer to Hanns Eisler, July 4, 1940 (Hanns-Eisler-Archive, AdK, folder 4145), and the letters from Otto Mayer to Ernst Hermann Meyer from the period 1933–38, kept at the Ernst-Hermann-Meyer-Archive (AdK), no catalogue number. ↑
21. Otto Mayer, "Musik und Musikpflege im Rundfunk," in *Arbeiterfunk* 5, no. 2 (1930): 18. Original wording: "sie macht aus der Musik ein Heiligtum, in dessen Bezirk nur derjenige Zutritt erlangt, der sich ihrem Gefühlserlebnis vorbehaltlos einen fast religiösen Kult – [sic] ... Diese Kunstauffassung ist wenig geeignet für eine Veranstaltung wie den Rundfunk, der ja gerade den Menschen in der Alltäglichkeit seiner Existenz mit Musik erreichen will." ↑
22. Mayer, "Musik und Musikpflege," 18. ↑
23. The festival "Neue Musik in Berlin 1930" is discussed in Dietmar Schenk, *Die Hochschule für Musik zu Berlin: Preußens Konservatorium zwischen romantischem Klassizismus und Neuer Musik, 1869–1932/33*, Pallas Athene 8 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004), 228–29; and Luitgard Schader, *Paul Hindemith: Sämtliche Werke*, vol. VIII/2 (Mainz: Schott, 2008), xvii–xxvi. ↑
24. Otto Mayer, "Neue Musik Berlin 1930," *Arbeiterfunk* 5, no. 31 (1930): 337. ↑
25. On *Neue Sachlichkeit* and music, see Nils Grosch, *Die Musik der Neuen Sachlichkeit* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999). ↑
26. The Hermann-Scherchen-Archive (AdK) keeps a large collection of documents related to this team (folders 332, 339, 340, 342, 345, 358, and 362). On Scherchen's promotion of acoustic experimentation in the 1930s, see Mechthild Kreikle, "Der Dirigent Hermann Scherchen als Pionier der Musik im Rundfunk, 1924–1932" (PhD diss., Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, 1993), 137–91; and Martha Brech, "Der lange Weg zum natürlichen Klangbild: Die Beiträge Hermann Scherchens und seiner Mitarbeiter zur Verbesserung der Musikübertragung im Rundfunk der Weimarer Republik," in *Impulse und Antworten: Festschrift für Manfred Krause*, ed. Bernhard Feiten (Berlin: Wissenschaft & Technik, 1999), 25–34. The history of the "Rundfunkversuchsstelle" is discussed in Schenk, *Die Hochschule*, 257–72. ↑
27. Hermann-Scherchen-Archive (AdK), folder 342, 15. ↑
28. Hermann-Scherchen-Archive (AdK), folder 345. Documents related to Mayer's handbook are not kept. ↑
29. Passport No. F694, issued in Figueres on February 4, 1934 (Family archive). ↑
30. Isabel Olmsted, email to the author, February 17, 2019. ↑
31. On Mayer-Serra's lack of knowledge of Spanish musicology in mid-1933, see [Otto Mayer, "Mossèn Higiní Anglès: Un gran musicòleg català," \*Mirador\* 249 \(November 9, 1933\): 8.](#) ↑
32. Serra's biographers have not documented any special links or stays by the politician in Germany. Cf. Miquel-Àngel Velasco Martín, *Manuel Serra i Moret* (Vic: Patronat d'Estudis Ausonencs, 2009). ↑
33. Handwritten note from Johannes Wolf to Higiní Anglès (Berlin, April 12, 1933), Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fons Anglès, M7084/892. ↑
34. Letter from Otto Mayer to Francesc Pujol (Barcelona, July 6, 1933), Barcelona, Centro de Documentación

del Orfeó Catalan, folder R1305. ↑

35. See Otto Mayer's info card, October 1935, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fons Barberà, JBH 258. On the history and significance of *Mirador*, see Josep M. Huertas and Carles Geli, *'Mirador,' la Catalunya impossible* (Barcelona: Proa, 2000). ↑
36. An early, detailed discussion of Catalan music is Otto Mayer, "Musik in Katalonien," *Anbruch* 15, no. 9–10 (November / December 1933): 154–56. ↑
37. Otto Mayer, "Un processat il·lustre," *Mirador* 263 (February 15, 1934): 8. ↑
38. Hugo Riemann, *Fraseo musical*, trans. Otto Mayer (Barcelona: Labor, 1936). ↑
39. Letter from Mayer-Serra to Josep Valls, October 15, 1935, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fons Josep Valls, folder JvA 1250. ↑
40. Otto Mayer, "La situació de la jove generació," *Mirador* 329 (June 6, 1935): 8. ↑
41. Letter from Joan Farrarons to Josep Valls, November 4, 1935, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fons Valls 941. ↑
42. Letter from Mayer-Serra to Josep Valls, undated (ca. May 1936), Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fons Valls, folder JvA 1250. ↑
43. The early history of the PSUC is discussed in Josep Puigsech Farràs, *Nosaltres, els comunistes catalans: El PSUC i la Internacional Comunista durant la Guerra Civil* (Vic: Eumo, 1999). ↑
44. Mayer-Serra's membership card of the trade union UGT as journalist of *Treball* (issued on August 13 in Barcelona) is kept at Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica (Salamanca), folder PS-Barcelona 938, folio 168. The style, wording, and subject matter of a number of these anonymous essays point to Mayer-Serra's authorship; see, for instance, "Problemas de sociología musical: Música viva y música 'museal'," published in two parts in *Treball* (September 15, 1936): 9 and (September 16, 1936): 5. ↑
45. Ramón Fuster, "No es hora de posiciones equivoques," *Treball* (August 16, 1936): 2. ↑
46. Otto Mayer, *Cançoners Revolucionari Internacional*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Comissariat de Propaganda, 1937). The third volume was not published. ↑
47. Otto Mayer, "La constitució de la secció 'Música' al Casal de Cultura," *Mirador* 418 (April 29, 1937): 8. ↑
48. Anonymous, "Els músics soviètics donen l'exemple," *Mirador* 411 (March 12, 1937): 9. ↑
49. Letter from Sara Llorens to Joan J. Llorens and Sara Planas from August 26, 1936, reproduced in *Sara Llorens: Epistolari (1901–1954)*, ed. Joan Pujadas (Barcelona: Fundació Pere Coromines, 2004), 101–102. On the "Aryanization" of Robert Mayer's business, see Sammlung Gabriel / Salomonis, K 1034–Mp. 5, at Archive of the Jewish Museum Berlin. ↑
50. *Casal de la cultura's* information flyer, September 15, 1937 (The author's personal archive). ↑
51. Letter from Otto Mayer to Manuel Serra, September 2, 1940, Biblioteca del Pavelló de la República, University of Barcelona, folder XV. ↑
52. Emilio Casares, email to the author, June 14, 2018. ↑
53. Emilio Casares, "Mayer-Serra, Otto," in *Diccionario de la Música Española e Hispanoamericana*, ed. Emilio Casares (Madrid: SGAE, 1999), 7:379. ↑
54. Otto Mayer, "Berliner städtische Musikpflege," *Die Musikpflege* 2, no. 8 (August 1931): 215–24. ↑
55. On *Die Musikpflege's* tenets, see Fabian R. Lovisa, *Musikkritik im Nationalsozialismus: Die Rolle deutschsprachiger Musikzeitschriften, 1920–1945* (Laaber: Laaber, 1993), 236–46. ↑
56. Otto Mayer, "Música i economia: La crisi de la vida musical," *Mirador* 260 (January 25, 1934): 8; "L'artista i el públic: Temes de sociologia musical," *Mirador* 334 (July 11, 1935): 8 (published in Spanish in *Musicografía* 31 [1935]: 235–37); "Sectors de la vida musical: Temes de sociologia musical," *Mirador*

- 340 (August 22, 1935): 8 (published in Spanish in *Musicograpfia* 34 [1936]: 19–21). ↑
57. Anonymous [Mayer-Serra], “Problemas”; Otto Mayer, “Què és música ‘selecta’?” *Mirador* 404 (January 21, 1937): 7; “En torno,” 30–38. ↑
58. Mayer, “En torno,” 31. The same periodization into primitive, feudal, and bourgeois eras is found in Eisler, “Die Kunst,” 123–31. ↑
59. Mayer, “En torno,” 31–32. ↑
60. *Ibid.*, 34. Eisler expounded similar ideas in “Die Erbauer,” 142. ↑
61. Mayer, “En torno,” 34. ↑
62. Otto Mayer, “Beethoven,” *Mirador* 414 (April 1, 1937): 4. ↑
63. Mayer, “Problemas I.” Eisler expressed similar positions on nineteenth-century music in a number of writings of the 1930s; see, for instance, “Einiges über das Verhalten der Arbeiter-Sänger und -Musiker in Deutschland” [1935], in Fasshauer and Mayer, *Eisler Schriften*, 217; and “Lectures on the Social History of Music” [1938/39], Hanns-Eisler-Archive (AdK), folders 2452 and 2727 (unpublished), quoted from Tobias Fasshauer’s (unpublished) edition for the Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe. ↑
64. Otto Mayer-Serra, *El romanticismo musical* (Mexico City: Nuestro Tiempo, 1940). ↑
65. Mayer, “En torno,” 35–38. ↑
66. Otto Mayer, “El crític musical en la societat capitalista,” *Mirador* 416 (April 15, 1937): 9. Eisler expounded related ideas on bourgeois audiences and critics in “Zeitungskritik” [1929], in Fasshauer and Mayer, *Eisler Schriften*, 92–97; and “Arbeiter-Sänger,” 214–33. ↑
67. Related ideas about music in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries are expressed in Hanns Eisler, “Über moderne Musik,” [1927], in Fasshauer and Mayer, *Eisler Schriften*, 46–48; see also his “Die Erbauer.” ↑
68. Otto Mayer, “Vicissituds de la música moderna: El fracàs de la SIMC,” *Mirador* 396 (November 26, 1936): 6. On Eisler’s relationship to the ISMC, see Anton Haefeli, “Hanns Eisler und die Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Musik,” *Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft* 23, no. 2 (1981): 104–13. ↑
69. Otto Mayer, “Chorwesen in Katalonien II,” *Schweizerische Musikzeitung und Sängerbblatt* 16–17 (1934): 548. ↑
70. Otto Mayer, “El mestre Francesc Pujol, compositor, pedagog i folklorista,” *Mirador* 293 (September 13, 1934): 8. Cf. “Chorwesen.” ↑
71. Mayer, “Chorwesen,” 546–50. Stravinsky’s alleged opinions on the *cobla* are reproduced in Joan Salvat, “Stravinsky a Barcelona,” *Revista Musical Catalana* 21 (1924): 85–88. ↑
72. Otto Mayer, “Diversions nadalenques,” *Mirador* 307 (December 29, 1934): 8. ↑
73. Anonymous, “Notas varias,” *La Vanguardia* (March 28, 1935): 9; Anonymous, “Ateneu Polytechnicum: El Jazz en la música moderna i l’Opera de Quat’Sous,” *La Publicitat* (April 4, 1935): 7. On the attendance of young composers at Mayer-Serra’s lectures, see Ricard Lamote de Grignon’s open letter in *Mirador* 331 (June 20, 1935): 8. ↑
74. Eisler rejected the inclusion of jazz elements in concert music in “Zur Situation der moderne Musik” [ca. 1927], in Fasshauer and Mayer, *Eisler Schriften*, 40. Instances of Eisler’s censure of commercial jazz are Hanns Eisler, “Anmerkungen zu *Die Massnahme*,” [1930], in *ibid.*, 118; and “Situation der Musik in der Sowjet-Union” [1931], in *ibid.*, 111. ↑
75. Otto Mayer, “El triomf del virtuosisme: Paul Whiteman,” *Mirador* 283 (July 5, 1934): 8. Cf. Anonymous, “Ateneu Polytechnicum.” ↑
76. Mayer, “El triomf.” ↑

77. [Anonymous](#), “Ateneu Polytechnicum.” The history of the notion of the conductor as musical dictator is discussed in Norman Lebrecht, *The Maestro Myth: Great Conductors in Pursuit of Power* (New York: Kensington, 2001), 66–130. ↑
78. [Mayer](#), “El triomf.” ↑
79. See the similar ideas expounded, for instance, in Kurt Weill, “Notiz zum Jazz,” *Anbruch* 11, no. 3 (March 1929): 138; and [Manfred Bukofzer](#), “Soziologie des Jazz,” *Melos* 8 (1929): 387–91. ↑
80. [Otto Mayer](#), “Paul Hindemith,” *Mirador* 274 (May 3, 1934): 8. ↑
81. On the reception of Hindemith’s music in Spain, see Germán Gan, “Germanic Fogs and Mediterranean Clarity in an Aesthetic Struggle: Spanish Music Criticism Facing Paul Hindemith’s Music (1921–1936),” in *Music Criticism, 1900–1950*, ed. Jordi Ballester and Germán Gan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 245–82. ↑
82. [Mayer](#), “Hindemith.” ↑
83. [Otto Mayer](#), “Alban Berg: Suite Lírica,” *Mirador* 304 (December 8, 1934): 8. ↑
84. [Mayer](#), “La situació.” ↑
85. Mayer, “Musik in Katalonien.” Cf. [Mayer](#), “Música i economia.” ↑
86. [Otto Mayer](#), “El B.B.C. Year Book,” *Mirador* 271 (April 12, 1934): 8. Cf. Mayer, “Musik in Katalonien.” On 1930s Spanish radio, see Julio Arce, *Música y radiodifusión: Los primeros años (1923–1936)*, Música Hispana: Textos; Estudios 10 (Madrid: ICCMU, 2008). ↑
87. [Otto Mayer](#), “La música y el Front Nacional,” *Meridiá* 10 (March 18, 1938): 7. ↑
88. Anonymous [Mayer-Serra], “La nova estructuració dels espectacles públics,” *Treball* (August 12, 1936): 3; “La colectivización del público,” *Treball* (August 13, 1936): 3; “Perspectives,” *Mirador* 390 (October 9, 1936): 7. Cf. [Otto Mayer](#), “La renovació de la vida musical,” *Mirador* 402 (January 7, 1937): 7. ↑
89. [Otto Mayer](#), “Noves formes de divulgació musical: Concert a la fàbrica Filatures Fabra i Coats,” *Mirador* 405 (January 29, 1937): 10. On the “Institut orquestal,” see Francesc Carrau, *L’Associació obrera de concerts* (Barcelona: Fundació Pau Casals, 1977), 77–90. ↑
90. Mayer, “Problemas.” Similar ideas are expressed in Mayer “El crític,” “En torno,” and “Què és música ‘selecta’?” Eisler discusses related ideas in “Arbeiter-Sänger.” ↑
91. [Otto Mayer](#), “Qué és música revolucionària?” *Mirador* 391 (October 15, 1936): 7. ↑
92. Archive of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee AR 7196, bulk 1933–47, 462–65 (Leo Baeck Institute, Center for Jewish History). ↑
93. Odón Mayer-Serra, “Hanns Eisler,” *El Nacional* (June 18, 1939): 7. Cf. Fernando Beyer, “Hanns Eisler in Mexico City,” *Eisler Mitteilungen* 66 (2018): 4–11. ↑
94. Higini Anglès, ed., *Diccionario de la música Labor* (Barcelona: Labor, 1954), 41. ↑
95. [Otto Mayer](#), “Alan Bush,” *Mirador* 406 (1937): 9; “Una conversa interessant amb el mestre Bernat,” *Mirador* 407 (1937): 8; and “Hanns Eisler.” ↑
96. [Otto Mayer-Serra](#), *Panorama de la música mexicana desde la Independencia hasta la actualidad* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1941). ↑
97. Letter from Otto Mayer to Hanns Eisler, July 4, 1940 (Hanns-Eisler-Archive, AdK, folder 4145). ↑
98. Anne C. Shreffler, “Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus, Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History,” in *The Journal of Musicology* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 498–525; and *Musikwissenschaft und Kalter Krieg: Das Beispiel DDR*, ed. Nina Noeske and Matthias Tischer, KlangZeiten: Musik, Politik, Gesellschaft 7 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010). ↑
99. María Cáceres, *El hombre del rincón: José Subirá y la historia cultural e intelectual de la musicología en*

*España*, De Música 20 (Kassel: Reichenberger, 2018); and Eva Moreda, "Spanish Music Criticism in the Twentieth Century: Writing Music History in Real Time," in *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism*, ed. Christopher Dingle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 331-43. ↑