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Biedermeier Musical Revival as Modernism in Ferruccio Busoni's *Die Brautwahl*

Ferruccio Busoni's nearly lifelong admiration of literature by E.T.A. Hoffmann contributed to his selection of *Die Brautwahl* for his first completed opera.¹ Yet while scholars have already written about Busoni's translation of Hoffmann's text into an opera libretto, and of the relationship between his aesthetic ideals and Hoffmann's, including *their* shared interest in mixing the fantastic and the realistic, there has been little consideration of Busoni's evocation of Hoffmann's Biedermeier culture through music.² His simple but contrasting treatment of the vocal lines went against both heroic Germanic and virtuosic Italian operatic singing traditions. References to instrumental dance, march, and salon-style keyboard music coupled with the songful vocal style of Lied, instead, reference the Berlin Biedermeier bourgeois culture depicted in the plot. A quotation of music by Gioachino Rossini reinforces the historical connections.

Despite references to the 1820s, the opera is not retrogressive, but rather, an expression of emerging modernist ideals in Busoni's own time. Just as a Biedermeier revival in the early 1900s evoked related ideals of simplicity, clarity, propor-

1 For more information about the relationship between Busoni and Hoffmann, see: Ferruccio Busoni: »Introduction to E.T.A. Hoffmann's ›Phantastische Geschichten‹«, in: id.: *The Essence of Music and Other Papers*, trans. by Rosamond Ley, London 1957, pp. 186–188; Michael Struck-Schloen: »*Die Brautwahl*«. *Studien zum Einfluss E.T.A. Hoffmanns auf Ästhetik und Gehalt von Ferruccio Busonis erster Oper*, [master thesis] Cologne 1986. A letter to his wife describes his fascination with Hoffmann texts from a young age: Busoni: Letter to Gerda Busoni, 14.7.1906, in: id.: *Letters to his Wife*, trans. by Rosamond Ley, London 1938, p. 97. Busoni composed several earlier pieces on texts by Hoffmann, including »Klein Zaches« from *Racconti fantastici*, op. 12. He also wrote a libretto based on *Signor Formica* for his pupil, Louis Gruenberg. Busoni was a collector of first editions of Hoffmann's texts, and he also read secondary literature about the author. 2 Numerous issues with the *Die Brautwahl* libretto, written by Busoni, have already been discussed, including Busoni's preservation of much of the dialogue. Busoni's main contributions were switching the order of scenes in Act I and adding the cathedral scene, while also changing the ending and fate of Albertine and Edmund. For scholarship about Busoni's opera, consult the following sources: Edward Dent: »Busoni and his Operas«, in: *Opera* 5, 1954, pp. 391–397; Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt: »Busonis Brautwahl«, in: *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* 102, 1962, pp. 344–351; Antony Beaumont: »Busoni and the Theatre«, in: *Opera* 37, 1986, pp. 384–391; Michael Struck-Schloen: »›Der Dichter und der Komponist‹. Wandlungen der Opernästhetik Ferruccio Busonis«, in: *Die Sprache der Musik. Festschrift Klaus Wolfgang Niemöller zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Jobst Peter Fricke, Regensburg 1989 (Kölner Beiträge zur Musikforschung. Akustische Reihe 165), pp. 561–578; Reinhard Ermen: »Ferruccio Busoni in Berlin. Ein biographischer Essay«, in: *Musica* 48, 1994, pp. 155–157; Lufan Xu: *Ferruccio Busoni's Operas: A critical and Historical Study*, Ph.D. Diss. Chinese University of Hong Kong 2019, <https://repository.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/en/item/cuhk-2327318> [20.6.2025].

tion, and order in updated ways in reaction to nineteenth-century extravagance, so Busoni made Biedermeier musical references to pioneer a simpler and more objective modernist approach toward German-language comic opera. By drawing connections between Biedermeier revivalist aesthetics in the early twentieth century and Busoni's vocal treatment, harmony, depictions of characters, orchestration, and form in *Die Brautwahl*, this article shows how the composer used historical references in a revivalist way to move beyond Romanticism. The article thus not only sheds light on Busoni's least known opera and its idiosyncratic references to Hoffmann's text, time, and culture, but also how Busoni forged a new operatic style. In the process, it not only seeks to re-center Busoni's *Die Brautwahl* within discussions about the development of early twentieth-century opera, but also enriches knowledge about post-Wagnerian German language comic opera.

Biedermeier Culture

When Busoni worked on *Die Brautwahl* from 1905–1911, he referenced Hoffmann's Berlin of the 1820s, but sought to depict the Berlin of his time, the early 1900s. *Die Brautwahl*, based on a fictional tale by Hoffmann, and a German-language libretto by Busoni, is a comic opera with three acts and an epilogue. The setting is Hoffmann's Berlin in the 1820s, and the fantastic plot revolves around different suitors vying for the hand of the bourgeois Albertine, daughter of the Commissioner Voswinkel. Some of the suitors include Edmund Lehsen (an artist), Baron Bensch (a wealthy relative of Manasse), and Thusman (a bureaucrat). Through twists and turns in the plot, along with displays of magic and fantastic situations created by power plays between Leonhard (a goldsmith), and Manasse, a necromancer, Albertine's marital fate is eventually decided by a trial involving three caskets. Edmund wins the trial and Albertine's hand in marriage, but departs for Rome to create his great masterpiece before the marriage can take place.³

Hoffmann's characters and the settings depicted in the opera reflected Biedermeier culture, which was common throughout central Europe from around 1815 to 1848, and which revolved around the middle-class and the domestic sphere.⁴ The Biedermeier style in architecture and furniture design reflected middle

3 All of the characters were modelled on historical people. Manasse was modelled after Lippold, a Jewish coiner who was suspected of using witchcraft in his profession. In 1577, he was tortured and burned at the stake in Berlin's Neuer Markt. Swiss goldsmith Leonhard was modelled on Leonhard Thurneysser zum Thurn 1531–1596, an alchemist. Edmund Lehsen is modelled after the painter Wilhelm Hensel (1794–1861) who married Fanny Hensel in 1829. **4** For more information about Biedermeier in Berlin, see: Patricia K. Calkins: *Wo das Pulver liegt. Biedermeier Berlin as Reflected in Adolf Glassbrenner's »Berliner Don Quixote«*, New York 1998 (Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature 23); *Musical Salon Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Anja Bunzel / Natasha Loges, Woodbridge 2019; Albert Boime: *Art in an Age of Civic Struggle, 1848–1871*, Chicago 2007 (A Social History of Modern Art 4), pp. 471–575 (Chapter »Biedermeier Culture and the Revolutions of 1848«).

class needs in simplicity and functionality, with rooms set up to enable leisurely pastimes, such as *Hausmusik* or artistic pursuits. Furniture displayed simple and practical forms, restrained elegance, and geometric shapes and designs with an emphasis on intricate wood grains (instead of fancy metal ornamentation).⁵ Biedermeier literature focused on middle class domesticity or country living.⁶ In the visual arts, paintings were often sentimental and presented realistic depictions of familial pastimes.

In terms of music, Biedermeier style in Hoffmann's Berlin was characterized by simple pieces performed in semi-private salons, or more informal *Hausmusik*.⁷ Genres associated with this style include piano miniature solos and duets, chamber music, and Lied, as opposed to public symphonic literature or flashy virtuosic solos. In addition, the era was known for marches and waltzes, or other dances. Indoor gatherings sometimes consisted of conversation, poetry recitations, card games, and musical performances, and these took place most frequently in the fall and winter months as well as during Carnival season. After impromptu performances, attendees sometimes ate and danced.⁸ Music was also frequently performed in garden restaurants in the afternoons and early evenings.⁹ Wealthy Jewish financier families had their own separate *Hausmusik* gatherings or semi-private salons, but, especially in Berlin, there was regular exchange between Christian and Jewish homes. And, at least in theory, people were to be respected based on character or merit, not religion, race, or rank.¹⁰ Natalia Chuprina concludes that Biedermeier was

5 For more information about Biedermeier furniture, see: Rudolf Pressler / Robin Straub: *Biedermeier Furniture*, Atglen, PA 1996. **6** Examples of Biedermeier authors include Eduard Mörike and Wilhelm Müller. **7** Musical Biedermeier culture in Vienna has been well documented, and there would have been some parallels to contemporaneous musical life in Berlin, even despite obvious differences between the cities. Vienna was, at the time, an imperial capital and cosmopolitan city, while Berlin was smaller and more provincial. Thus while many of the extravagant Viennese balls might not have taken place in Berlin, salon gatherings and Hausmusik would have occurred in both cities. See especially Alice M. Hanson: *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna*, Cambridge et al. 1985 (Cambridge Studies in Music 1). For additional information about Biedermeier culture, see: Horst Heussner: »Das Biedermeier in der Musik«, in: *Die Musikforschung* 12, 1959, pp. 422–431; Carl Dahlhaus: »Romantik und Biedermeier. Zur musikgeschichtlichen Charakteristik der Restaurationszeit«, in: *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 31, 1974, pp. 22–41; Jürgen Habermas: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger / Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, MA 1989; Anthony Newcomb: »Schumann and the Marketplace: From Butterflies to »Hausmusik«, in: *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. by R. Larry Todd, New York et al. 1990, 2. ed. ibid. 2004, pp. 258–315; Kenneth DeLong: »The Conventions of Musical Biedermeier«, in: *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music. Essays in Honor of Leonard G. Ratner*, ed. by Wye Jamison Allanbrook et al., Stuyvesant, N.Y. 1992 (Festschrift Series 10), pp. 195–223; Walburga Litschauer: »Dances of the Biedermeier«, in: *Schubert durch die Brille. Internationales Franz Schubert Institut. Mitteilungen* 21, June 1998, pp. 19–25; Ruth A. Solie: *Music in Other Words. Victorian Conversations*, Berkeley, CA et al. 2004 (California Studies in 19th-Century Music 12), pp. 118–152 (Chapter »Biedermeier Domesticity and the Schubert Circle: A Rereading«). **8** Hanson: *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna* (see note 7), p. 157. **9** By the 1830s, many salons were replaced by coffee houses. **10** Some well-known Berlin hostesses of the time included Rahel Varnhagen, Sara Levy, Amalie Beer, Lea Felicia Pauline Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Henriette Solmar. For more information about Berlin

a specific kind of musical culture that connected between elitist art and music for the masses, even though it has been primarily associated with the bourgeois.¹¹

Yet Biedermeier culture was also an important part of Busoni's Berlin at the turn of the century. Full of nostalgia for the past, numerous architects and furniture makers revived the Biedermeier style in the early 1900s.¹² However, rather than replicating the past, they tried out new materials, fabric patterns, and lines, while still seeking to follow Biedermeier ideals and values of functionality and simplicity. This Biedermeier revival was described in numerous German-language periodicals, particularly in relation to furniture, interior design, and architecture.¹³ In addition, there was a return to depictions of middle-class characters and themes in some comic theatrical works and operas in the early twentieth century.

Scholars have noted that the Biedermeier revival, largely in reaction to late Romanticism, was foundational to ushering in the sleeker, unsentimental, and simpler modernist aesthetic in the early twentieth century. William Harrod argues that »those precedents belonging to the stolid, bürgerlich idiom later known as the Biedermeier, was absolutely typical of the training of a designer of Mies' generation, and would exert a profound influence over the artistic maturation of the proponents of the international Modern Movement«. ¹⁴ If Biedermeier design had been ridiculed in the nineteenth century as unimaginative and plain, Christopher Long has documented that it was heralded in the twentieth as foundational for a modernist aesthetic.¹⁵ He claims that the clarity, proportion, order, and restraint characteristic of Biedermeier revival differentiated the approach from *Jugendstil*, Expressionism, or nineteenth-century eclectic historicism, and contributed to the sleek simple lines of twentieth-century Neoclassicism.

Similarly, in an era overshadowed by Wagnerian ideals, Busoni's *Die Brautwahl*, which through satire, parody, and caricature, as well as simple and direct dialogue, and thin textures, is distinctly different from the lengthy and emotional fairytales of Franz Schreker and Richard Strauss, the return to ancient myths (e.g.

salon life, see: Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger: *The Literary Salons of Berlin*, <https://www.slowtravelberlin.com/berlin-salons-late-18th-to-early-20th-century> [26.6.2025]. ¹¹ Nataliia Chuprina: »Phenomenon of the Biedermeier Piano Music in XIX Century«, in: *Science Review* 9 (26), November 2019, pp. 7–11, https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_sr/30112019/6814. ¹² For more information about the Biedermeier revival, consult the following sources: William Harrod: »Clarity, Proportion, Purity, and Restraint: The Biedermeier and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Modernism«, in: *Centropa. A Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts* 10, 2010, No. 2, pp. 106–127; Christopher Long: »Adolf Loos and the Biedermeier Revival in Vienna«, in: *ibid.*, pp. 128–140. ¹³ See, for instance: Adolf Loos: »Der neue Styl und die Bronze-Industrie«, in: *Neue Freie Presse*, 29.5.1898, p. 18; *id.*: »Architektur«, in: *id.*: *Trotzdem. 1900–1930*, Innsbruck 1931, pp. 95–113; Hartwig Fischel: »Das Wiener Möbel von Einst und Jetzt«, in: *Das Interieur* 1, 1900, pp. 97–104; *id.*: »Biedermeier als Vorbild«, in: *Das Interieur* 2, 1901, pp. 65–73; Joseph August Lux: »Biedermeier als Erzieher«, in: *Hohe Warte* 1, 1904/05, pp. 145–155; Ernst Wilhelm Bredt: »Bruno Paul – Biedermeier – Empire«, in: *Dekorative Kunst* 8, 1905, pp. 217–229; Alois Riegl: »Möbel und Innendekoration des Empire«, in: *id.*: *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Karl M. Swoboda, Augsburg / Wien 1929, pp. 10–27. ¹⁴ Harrod: »Clarity, Proportion, Purity, and Restraint« (see note 12), p. 106. ¹⁵ Long: »Adolf Loos and the Biedermeier Revival in Vienna« (see note 12), pp. 128–129.

Strauss), or the expressionistic realism of Arnold Schönberg or Alban Berg. Rather than retrogressively returning »to an earlier type of Romanticism«, as Lufan Xu argues, Busoni's largely misunderstood *Die Brautwahl* can thus be seen as using early romantic forms and genres from Biedermeier culture to help transition toward a new modernism in opera.¹⁶ If *Die Brautwahl* never fully achieved Busoni's ideals about a future of opera characterized by polystylism and objectivity, it nevertheless represents a departure from the romantic extravagance characteristic of both German and Italian opera of the late nineteenth century.¹⁷

Biedermeier Culture in Ferruccio Busoni's *Die Brautwahl*

When Busoni depicted Biedermeier culture in *Die Brautwahl*, he was building upon comic opera precedents that focused on the foibles of middle-class or everyday characters. While Italian comic operas often drew upon *commedia dell'arte* characters, post-Wagnerian comic German-language operas sometimes relied instead on Biedermeier characters and figures. For instance, Leo Blech's *Versiegelt* in 1908 based on a text by Richard Batka and Alexander Sigmund Pordes-Milo featured a comedic plot that was to have taken place in 1830.¹⁸ The characters include, among others, Braun, a bourgeois Bürgermeister [mayor] and his daughter, Else. However, the *music* did not correspond to Biedermeier styles or values. Blech chose to set the text with heavy Wagnerian orchestration and through-composed music not generally associated with Biedermeier Berlin. Eugen d'Albert also composed comic operas such as *Die Abreise* (1896), which features bourgeois style conversations, much like Busoni's. His comic one-act opera, *Flauto solo* (1905), similarly, is written with bourgeois characters. But they did not reference the Biedermeier music in a revivalist manner the way Busoni did.¹⁹

¹⁶ Xu: *Ferruccio Busoni's Operas* (see note 2), p. 24; Beaumont: »Busoni and the Theatre« (see note 2). See also: Susanne Fontaine: *Busonis »Doktor Faust« und die Ästhetik des Wunderbaren*, Kassel 1998; Bernd Sponheuer: »Reconstructing Ideal Types of the »German« in Music«, in: *Music and German National Identity*, ed. by Celia Applegate / Pamela Potter, Chicago / London 2002, pp. 36–58.

¹⁷ Gustav Brecher conducted the premiere not only of Busoni's *Die Brautwahl* in 1912, but also of Busoni's composition pupil, Kurt Weill (*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, 1930) and Ernst Krenek (*Jonny spielt auf*, 1926). While Busoni's piece, composed as it was in the early 1900s and during a different political culture, does not display the same transnational allusions to U.S. popular music, nor to overt political messages, but objectivity and the montage assemblages of short popular musical forms, everyday characters, and unemotional singing styles are already present. For more about Busoni's influence on Weill's theatrical writing, consult: Stephen Hinton: *Weill's Musical Theater. Stages of Reform*, Berkeley, CA et al. 2012; Erinn E. Knyt: *Ferruccio Busoni as Architect of Sound*, New York 2023. Giacomo Puccini also created montage forms around the same time. See, for instance: Andrew C. Davis: *Il Trittico, Turandot, and Puccini's Late Style*, Bloomington, IN 2010 (Musical Meaning and Interpretation). ¹⁸ Leo Blech: *Versiegelt. Komische Oper in einem Akt nach Raupach von Richard Batka und Pordes-Milo* op. 18, piano-vocal score, Berlin: Harmonie Verlag, 1909.

¹⁹ Eugen d'Albert: *Die Abreise*, piano-vocal score, Leipzig: Max Brockhaus, 1898; id.: *Flauto Solo*, Berlin: Bote & Bock, 1905.

Premiering in 1912 in Hamburg, Busoni's *Die Brautwahl* is distinctive, not only for evocations of Biedermeier culture in the text and characterizations of the characters, but also in the music. The libretto, written by Busoni, preserves much of Hoffmann's original bourgeois dialogue, and caricatures of middle-class characters, such as the pedantic Thusman, the Commissioner Voswinkel, a stingy Philistine with no appreciation for art, and Albertine. In addition, it also draws upon Biedermeier musical culture.²⁰ Busoni's evocation of Hoffmann's Biedermeier culture through music is one of the more unusual and noteworthy aspects of the opera.²¹ His decision to write a comic opera in German that is sung throughout, yet with simple melodic vocal lines went against the grain of Wagnerian heroic, German Singspiel, and Italian virtuosic operatic singing traditions. Busoni called the piece, like Hoffmann did, a »history of Berlin«. In addition, he described it as a »musikalisch-fantastische Komödie«.²² Such an unconventional genre description draws attention to the genre mixture and to the fact that the piece not only includes historical figures, but also music that spans a broad historical period. References to instrumental dance, march, and solo keyboard music coupled with the songful vocal style of Lied reference the Biedermeier bourgeois culture depicted in the plot, but with updated instruments, vocal styles, and forms. Busoni thus evoked Hoffmann's Biedermeier musical culture but used it to transition toward a new modernist opera style through his vocal settings that could be seen as foreshadowing *Zeitopern* in the allusions to contemporary topics, the use of accessible music, the use of everyday characters, the simpler and more objective treatment of the voice, and the juxtaposition of diverse styles and short numbers to create new musical forms.

Images published in the first edition of the libretto emphasized the rootedness of the text to Biedermeier culture. For instance, the front image, painted by

20 For more information on the topic, consult the following sources: Monika Schwarz-Danuser: »Melo-dram und Sprechstimme bei Ferruccio Busoni«, in: *Bericht über den Internationalen Musikwissenschaftlichen Kongreß Bayreuth 1981*. Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, ed. by Christoph-Hellmut Mahling / Sigrid Wiesmann, Kassel 1981, <https://musicconn.qucosa.de/api/qucosa%3A37340/attachment/ATT-0> [26.6.2025], and in: *Schönberg und der Sprechgesang*, ed. by Heinz-Klaus Metzger / Rainer Rieh, Munich 2001 (Musik-Konzepte 112/113), pp. 37–45; Andrea Breimann: *Die Bedeutung des literarischen Werks E. T. A. Hoffmanns für die Opernästhetik Busonis am Beispiel des Arlecchino*, Master Thesis Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster 2016; Anne Oppermann: *Oper als Rezeptionsform von Literatur. E. T. A. Hoffmanns Erzählungen bei Offenbach, Busoni und Hindemith*, Master Thesis Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Munich 2021. The score from 1914 can be accessed here: Ferruccio Busoni: *Die Brautwahl. Musikalisch-fantastische Komödie nach E. T. A. Hoffmanns Erzählung*, Berlin: Harmonie Verlag, 1914, <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001D69D0000000> [26.6.2025]. The 1907 libretto can be accessed here: Ferruccio Busoni: *Der Mächtige Zauberer. Die Brautwahl – zwei Theaterdichtungen für Musik. Entwürfe einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, Trieste 1907, <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001AF5D00000000> [26.6.2025]; Auction records list many of the books Busoni owned, including those by Hoffmann. Max Perl: *Bibliothek Ferruccio Busoni. Werke der Weltliteratur in schönen Gesamtausgaben und Erstdrucken. Illustrierte Bücher aller Jahrhunderte. Eine hervorragende Cervantes- und E. T. A. Hoffmann-Sammlung. Bücher mit handschriftlichen Dedikationen. Ältere und neuere Literatur aus allen Wissensgebieten. Musik. Versteigerung Montag, den 30. und Dienstag, den 31. März 1925 [...]*, Berlin 1925, <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.22979#0001>. **21** Stuckenschmidt: »Busonis Brautwahl« (see note 2). **22** Busoni: *Die Brautwahl* (see note 20).



Figure 1
Albertine at the Keyboard. Image by Karl Walser from the first edition of the libretto: Ferruccio Busoni, *Die Brautwahl*, Berlin: Cassirer, 1913

Karl Walser, featured Albertine seated at a keyboard instrument in a domestic setting (see fig. 1). The deep wood grains on the instrument reflect Biedermeier taste. Albertine's dress, with a cinched waist and bell-shaped skirt reflected Biedermeier fashion norms. The second image also features the inside of a house with Albertine seated next to some flowers.²³ While it is unclear who engaged Walser to do the illustrations (possibly Cassirer, since Walser worked on multiple projects for that publisher), it should be assumed that Busoni was involved in the image design or choice in some capacity. Walser also corresponded with Busoni after the opera premiere.²⁴

But if the images are retrospective, the music is revivalist, using Biedermeier themes in modernist ways. For instance, Busoni evoked Biedermeier singing styles of Hoffmann's time, but updated them to simultaneously reflect the realism of his own age. The first vocalizations in the opera are decidedly simple, syllabic, un-

²³ Id.: *Die Brautwahl. Musikalisch-phantastische Komödie in drei Akten und einem Nachspiel nach E. T. A. Hoffmanns Erzählung* [...], Berlin 1913, <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB000242880000000> [26.6.2025]. ²⁴ See, for instance, Karl Walser: Letter to Busoni, 8.12.1912, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, estate Ferruccio Busoni, Mus.Nachl. F. Busoni B II, 5298, <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001C51C00000000> [26.6.2025].

timental, and rhythmically irregular – a stark contrast to virtuosic cavatinas or large introductory choruses common in operas at the time. He specifically avoided writing opera arias and designated the first recognizable vocal number as a Lied. Yet differing from nineteenth-century Lieder by Schumann or Schubert in frequent textural changes, irregular phrase structures, and unsentimentality, the first number for Voswinkel features Busoni's modernist approach toward an older genre. True, it features relatively simple syllabic vocal lines, but is set in a declamatory and more realistic *Sprechgesang* style. The vocal line also features plenty of stepwise motion and short irregular phrases. Moreover, it is rhythmically displaced from the orchestral part. It begins during the orchestral prelude's cadential measure on beat two, the weak beat, yet with an extended sustained tone and a fermata. Similarly, the second part of the vocal phrase begins during an orchestral cadence, thus contributing to more realistic depictions of the metric irregularity of informal conversations. The Lied also celebrates everyday activities, rather than nature or love. Following after Voswinkel's declamations about using up his last cigar, Busoni's Lied celebrates the joys of tobacco and conversation in a beer garden, not metaphysical transcendence: »Yes, nature, conversation, and the tobacco leaf are a friendly green shamrock«, the text states.²⁵ During the song, Voswinkel also expresses anti-elitist ideas about art – namely, that anyone could be an art connoisseur because everyone has eyes.

Non-traditional modernist aspects of the music go beyond the vocal lines. They also include irregularity of the phrases and the unstable metatonal treatment of the harmonies.²⁶ The orchestral part underneath the vocal lines suggests two short phrases, the first ending on a half cadence on D after five bars and the second, ending with yet another half cadence on G after seven bars. Melismatic figural passagework at the mention of »Kultur zu lange hatt'«, elongates the second phrase, even if the melisma sounds sarcastic, rather than elegant, due to the rhythmic alternation of eighth and sixteenth notes. Unexpected treatments of voice leading and harmonic progressions allow chromatic movement to unexpected areas, such as from D major to D-flat major, to C minor in measures 25–28. Plurisignificance of pitches also allows Busoni to move freely from E-flat to G seventh (as the V of C minor) using common tones to pivot to remotely related harmonic areas (see [example 1](#)).

The objective and declamatory style of singing with large leaps was neither connected to Biedermeier Lied, nor closely connected to opera traditions known to Busoni. Instead, he used values of simplicity and objectivity characteristic of Biedermeier ideals to forge a singing style more in line with emerging twentieth-century realist tendencies to emphasize text over long lyrical writing for voice.

25 »Ja, Natur, Gespräch und Tabaksblatt sind ein freundlich grünend Kleeblatt [...].« Busoni: *Die Brautwahl* (see note 20), p. 23. **26** Metatonicity is a term used by Paul Fleet to describe the use of tonality in non-traditional ways by composers in the interim period between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See: *Musics With and After Tonality. Mining the Gap*, ed. by Paul Fleet, London / New York 2022 (Ashgate Studies in Theory and Analysis of Music After 1900).

22

Lied
Allegro molto

Voswinkel

Sie ma-chen ganz mich glück-lich.

Ja, Na-tur, Ge-spräch und Ta-baks-blatt sind ein freund-lich grü-nend Klee-blatt, und Bar-ba-ren

ha-ben ein-mal uns ge-lehrt Et-was, das Kul-tur zu lan-ge hatt'

poco a piacere

a tempo

ent-behrt.

Dar-um steht auch der Rot-

Example 1 Ferruccio Busoni, *Die Brautwahl*, Act I, Beginning of »Ja Natur, Gespräch und Tabaksblatt«

This new vocal approach is also evident in his representations of the bourgeois Biedermeier characters. Busoni crafted a separate style of vocal writing for each, with some singing in more florid or lyrical manners reflective of nineteenth century traditions, and others singing in a simpler syllabic and unemotional style characteristic of his own time. He stated that he considered the unique vocal settings to be some of the greatest innovations in the opera. These settings considered a variety of factors, including: text, vocal inflection, rhythm, mood, melodic shape, and even form:

»I made a special point of enunciation and inflexion; not only that each character should have his own manner of speaking, but that this should also be modified according to the mood and temperament of the moment, while also affording a sense of melody. –

Since Wagner and Verdi, I don't believe that any so comprehensive a combination of character, sonority, form and melody has been achieved with such relative originality [...].«²⁷

If Edmund, the artist, is a lyric tenor, and Leonhard is a serious baritone, both of whom sing long lyrical lines, the male bourgeois Biedermeier characters display vastly different vocal characteristics. Albertine, a mezzo-soprano, usually appears in duet together with Edmund, and their music is often characterized by late romantic chromatic harmony free of dance rhythms. Albertine thus enters into Edmund's world, and her music is transformed out of the Biedermeier middle class milieu in response to his artistry. By contrast, Thusman, a buffo tenor, sings short phrases that are syllabic and declamatory, but also at times half spoken and nasal in delivery, with more emphasis on text than line, and with a minimal number of embellishments. Thusman sings in character from the banal to the absurd, and Busoni left detailed indications in the score for Thusman's manners of vocalizing, stating that it should be »naïve and pedantic, amiable, and quaintly distinguished. His voice shifts easily into a fistula [nasal] tone, and he lingers with pleasure on flourishes and fermatas.«²⁸ Thus although drawing upon »pitter-patter« comic vocal tradition models in terms of the syllabic style of writing, Busoni also envisioned a unique vocal quality characterized by a dry, nasal, and semi-spoken style that reflects a shift toward twentieth century sardonic vocal writing.²⁹ In addition, calls for laughter or sighing in the score, for instance, suggest a more realistic treatment of the voice,

27 Busoni: Letter to Robert Freund, 22.4.1912, in: Ferruccio Busoni: *Selected Letters*, trans. and ed. by Antony Beaumont, New York 1987, pp. 143–145, here p. 145. **28** »Thusmans Sprechweise, naiv und pedantisch, liebenswürdig und altfränkisch gewählt. Seine Stimme schlägt leicht in den Fistelton über und er verweilt mit Wohlgefallen bei Schnörkeln und Fermaten.« Busoni: *Die Brautwahl* (see note 20), p. 74. **29** Since Busoni began working on the opera in 1905, he was searching for new vocal styles on his own, and independently of other contemporary composers, such as Schönberg.

While Busoni's approach differs from Schönberg's »Sprechstimme« in that his singing is intended for trained opera singers and is mostly sung throughout, it is interesting that both were simultaneously experimenting with new expressive vocal styles that moved beyond late romantic opera traditions.

and simplistic harmonies reflect the text-based vocalizations. The two characters most closely associated with bourgeois values, Voswinkel, a buffo baritone, and Thusman, are also closely tied to Biedermeier culture by frequent reference to dance rhythms in their vocalizations.³⁰ As Xu has already documented, the underlying rhythmic gestures in the vocalizations of these two characters are based on simple and recognizable Biedermeier dances and marches:

»The character of Mr. Voswinkel also relies on different dance rhythmic patterns, including gavotte, polonaise, and waltz. Aside from the most trivial diatonic writings, pentatonicism of the music is exclusively reserved for him, indicating his easy satisfaction with materialism and philistine taste for art. Another character whose identity primarily rests on dance rhythmic gesture is Voswinkel's colleague Thusman because of their similar social status.«³¹

Voswinkel, for instance, declaims to the rhythms of a gavotte, a polonaise, and a waltz. Yet at the same time, Busoni writes in a new realistic speech-like montage style characterized by short phrases and frequent dialogue with rapid textural and stylistic shifts. If both of the original singers (Wilhelm Birrenkoven [Thusman] and Hermann Wiedemann [Voswinkel]) were famous interpreters of Wagnerian operatic roles, that Busoni required considerably different vocal styles was not an impediment in an era when singers were less specialized than today.³² There is little in *Die Brautwahl* to remind one of virtuosic bel canto or Wagnerian heldentenor singing, or very long melodic lines. Even so, in Busoni's piece, it is the range of contrasting non-operatic vocal approaches that is astonishing. Some of the syllabic or note-against-note singing in *Die Brautwahl* is decidedly simple, like bourgeois popular songs, or sometimes like Lieder, but in an unusually unemotional, stark, and direct manner with frequent dialogue and clear articulations. Eugene Rizzo notes that »there's nothing to remind one of an aria except perhaps the Strauss-influenced monologue by Leonardo in Act III.«³³ This piece was thus a dramatic departure from Italian opera of the time, even despite the occasional insertion of realistic vocal sounds in Verdi's middle and late period operas. Busoni, like Verdi in *Falstaff*,

30 Ferruccio Busoni: Brief an Giuseppe Verdi [1894], trans. and ed. by Friedrich Schnapp, in: *Zeitschrift für Musik* 99, 1932, p. 1057; Leonard G. Ratner: *Classic Music. Expression, Form, and Style*, New York / London 1980, p. 19; Mary Kathleen Hunter: *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna. A Poetics of Entertainment*, Princeton, NJ 1999 (Princeton Studies in Opera 5); Hermann Danuser: »The Textualization of Context. Comic Strategies in the Meta-Operas of the Eighteenth and Twentieth Century«, in: *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity. Essays*, ed. by Karol Berger / Anthony Newcomb, Cambridge, MA 2005 (Isham Library Papers 6 / Harvard Publications in Music 21), pp. 65–97; Hilda M. Brown: *E.T.A. Hoffmann and the Serapiontic Principle. Critique and Creativity*, Rochester, NY / Woodbridge 2006, p. 26. **31** Xu: *Ferruccio Busoni's Operas* (see note 2), p. 30. **32** Wiedemann appeared as Faninal in Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* around 196 times and as Beckmesser in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* around 155 times. He also performed in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. Birrenkoven, by contrast, was noted for singing the roles of Siegfried, Tristan, and Tannhäuser in Wagner's music dramas. **33** Eugene Rizzo: »Rome«, in: *Opera News* 34, No. 15 (7.2.1970).

placed numerous notes throughout the score to indicate changeable moods, affects, and vocal styles, but Busoni's comments focus on depicting realistic human reactions through text-based vocal inflections. Verdi's characters, by contrast, often sing in the most sublime and unrealistic manners with long phrases and melismas even when faced with illness, death, or other hopeless situations.

Busoni's vocal settings and music choices could be seen as reflecting not only Hoffmann's Berlin and increasing realism, but also a growing racist animosity towards Jewish people during Busoni's lifetime. Developing antisemitism in Berlin increased dramatically beginning around the 1880s and into the early twentieth century, and this led to a gradual breakdown in hospitality and goodwill that had been shown to Jewish people in Berlin during the Biedermeier period.³⁴ Busoni's own views on the topic are deeply ambiguous. He was himself part Jewish, although he might not have been aware of that, and he also supported and promoted Kurt Weill's compositional talent in the 1920s.³⁵ At the same time, he described Berlin as a »Jewish city« in a derogatory manner in a letter to his wife in 1889.³⁶ He was also culturally insensitive in his musical stereotyping and representation of Jewish characters in *Die Brautwahl* and a related song, »Grausige Historie vom Münzjuden Lippold« (1923). In particular, Busoni encoded musical »difference« and the exoticization of Jewish characters throughout the opera. Whether he was primarily representing what he was observing in early twentieth century Berlin or depicting personal views of antisemitism, or using techniques of exoticism that were common at the time, the musical representations of Jewish characters in the opera remain deeply troubling.

In contrast to the playful and comic sounds of Thusman or the late romantic setting of vocal parts of Edmund and Albertine, Manasse, in particular, is exoticized through the piece.³⁷ Marks of musical »difference« are encoded even in the strikingly long prelude to Act II. Marked as an »Orchester Zwischenspiel (>Manasse)<«, the opening of Act II is subtitled »in modo giudaico« to indicate Manasse's »difference« from the other characters. This fifty-six bar, harmonically unstable orchestral interlude that occurs even before the curtain rises and the setting of Manasse's dark and dank wine cellar is revealed, starts with a droning rhythmic pattern, a reference to a Jewish synagogal chant, in low bass registers that gives way to frantic descending chromatic lines in the winds after only four bars. The two contrasting textures are superimposed after eight bars. Unlike the bourgeois characters, whose vocal lines are characterized by lively dance rhythms, Manasse's vocal lines are sinuous, winding, and characterized by chromaticism, starting initially in the dark key

34 See, for instance: Marcel Stoetzler: *The State, the Nation, & the Jews. Liberalism and the Antisemitism Dispute in Bismarck's Germany*, Lincoln, NB 2008. **35** Busoni's great grandfather, Giuseppe Weiss, was part Jewish, see: Della Couling: *Ferruccio Busoni. »A Musical Ishmael«*, Lanham, MD et al. 2005, p. 352. **36** Busoni: Letter to Gerda Busoni, 11.8.1889, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, estate Ferruccio Busoni II, N.Mus.Nachl. 4, 230. **37** For Hoffmann's views, see: Josef Quack: »Über E.T.A. Hoffmanns Verhältnis zum Judentum. Eine Lektüre der »Brautwahl«, der »Irrungen« und der »Geheimnisse«, in: *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, Neue Folge 10, 2000, pp. 281–297.

Scene 1
Alla Marcia (aus »Moses« von Rossini)
Moderato con spirito

(Die Kapelle soll im Hintergrund aufgestellt sein und nicht in nächster Nähe erklingen.)

mf Bläser

dolce *poco cresc.* *p*

Example 2 Ferruccio Busoni, *Die Brautwahl*, Act I, Quotation of the Grand March of Moses by Rossini

of F-sharp major. Manasse, a bass, displays a wide range with exaggerated vibrato, a syllabic declamatory style, and numerous chromatic inflections to »exoticize« his vocal writing.

Busoni further reinforced representations of »difference« through musical quotation. The opening quotes from Rossini's lighthearted »Hebrew's March« from his opera, *Mosè in Egitto*. The quotation stands out from surrounding musical material in its timbre and simplicity. Busoni notes that it is to sound as if performed by an open-air wind band in Berlin's Tiergarten (see exemple 2).

Premiering on March 5, 1818, and then revised in 1819, the music would have been very recently composed when Hoffmann wrote *Die Brautwahl*.³⁸ In quoting Rossini's famous march, Busoni included a style of music appreciated by the bourgeois in the 1820s. Rossini's international fame in the 1810s and 1820s led to performances of his music in major theaters and to the widespread dissemination of arrangements of his music.³⁹ The first performance of Rossini's music in Germany took place in Munich in 1816 and led to a sudden craze that spread throughout Germany and Austria. However, it is likely that Busoni selected that particular march, not only because of its historical relevance, but also because of its symbolic connections to and representations of Jewish people. Antony Beaumont concluded that the Rossini quotation was »no doubt for the benefit of the predominantly Jewish clientele at the open-air restaurant« depicted in the opera.⁴⁰

Busoni signified deep musical differences between the Jewish and non-Jewish characters by layering together simultaneous, but separate musical styles. To the Rossini quotation discussed above, Busoni added highly contrasting percussion and singing in a declamatory and unsentimental style by Voswinkel about a prosaic and everyday topic, such as using up his last cigar. Through independence of phrasing, accent, harmony, and rhythm, the dialogic singing resounds simultaneously, but separately from the tonal and metrically regular Rossini march.

³⁸ He subsequently enlarged the opera for a French audience in 1827. ³⁹ For more information about the popularity of Rossini's music in Vienna, see: Michele Leigh Clark: *The Performances and Reception of Rossini's Operas in Vienna, 1822–1825*, Ph.D. Diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 2005. ⁴⁰ Antony Beaumont: *Busoni the Composer*, Bloomington 1985, pp. 116–117.

If Busoni referenced Biedermeier culture, but reinterpreted it through his own modernist historical lens by updating older genres and vocal styles, as well as through his musical depictions of characters, he also included diegetic chamber music making and small ensembles, but with new instrumental colors and musical textures. One such moment occurs during Act II, part II, when Albertine sings while accompanying herself at the harpsichord (see [example 3](#)). On-stage ensembles and diegetic music making were not new in operas, but this direct allusion to Biedermeier style *Hausmusik* in an opera was uncommon. In addition, Busoni made the unusual choice (at the time) to feature the harpsichord (as opposed to the more historically accurate piano) after meeting Arnold Dolmetsch in 1910 and commissioning an instrument from him. Busoni casts the harpsichord part in a Classical style with Alberti bass and a simple melody. Although anachronistic for Biedermeier Berlin, the harpsichord was receiving a revival in Busoni's era and nevertheless provides a striking and intimate instrumental color that both draws attention to Albertine's private *Hausmusik*, while simultaneously evoking a drier and more unsentimental modernist sound than a modern piano would have. In a letter to his wife, he described the instrument he used at the first performance thus: »The Clavecin (the English harpsichord) is magnificent. I made capital out of it once, and first of all, brought the instrument into *Brautwahl* (when Albertine accompanies herself on it) and secondly, begged for one to be sent to Berlin.«⁴¹ This *Hausmusik* scene takes place in a room in Voswinkel's house. After an introduction featuring a viola solo and chamber orchestra, Albertine plays alone at the on-stage clavecin, and the piece features rolling arpeggios in the bass and a gently ornamented melody. Soon thereafter, the viola joins back in call and response, creating the impression of chamber music. Albertine joins in the song with a simple stepwise vocal line reminiscent of Lied, as she sings of springtime, but with short phrases and complex harmony that features enriched seventh chords and allusions to different harmonies simultaneously by means of plurisignificance between the vocal lines and the orchestral parts. Edmund eventually joins in the song as the clavecin recedes into the background and the orchestra takes over even as the music becomes increasingly intense and chromatic.

The use of the harpsichord is not the only striking aspect of the orchestration. Although written for a large ensemble, Busoni, for the most part, avoided late romantic grandeur in favor of smaller ensembles that clearly feature the sounds of in-

41 See: Busoni: Letter to Gerda Busoni, 12.4.1910, in: Busoni: *Letters to his Wife* (see note 1), p. 172; Paul Bekker: »Ferruccio Busoni: Die Brautwahl«, in: *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt*, No. 104, 15.4.1912, Abendblatt, p. 1; E.T.A. Hoffmann: »The Poet and the Composer«, in: *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. by David Charlton, trans. by Martyn Clarke, Cambridge et al. 1989, pp. 188–209; Stefano Castelvocchi: *Sentimental Opera. Questions of Genre in the Age of Bourgeois Drama*, New York 2013 (Cambridge Studies in Opera); Francien Markx: *E.T.A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, Leiden / Boston 2015 (Internationale Forschungen zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft 192), pp. 213–214.

dividual instruments. This pared down approach to orchestration, while perhaps referring back to the smaller size of early nineteenth century ensembles, simultaneously reflected a reduction in sound and orchestral forces common in much orchestral writing of the early twentieth century. Busoni compared his approach to that of a painter mixing different colors and effects with the instruments, including in Act II, where he used muted brass to create a raspy, humorous sonorous effect:

»Once I brought out my ›broad brush‹ and daubed the outer wall of the 2nd act, namely the Prelude, quite thickly. I myself am curious as to the effect. The outline of the scoring is as follows: full orchestra and fortissimo; but all the strings, the horns and full brass with mutes.«⁴²

He also included some infrequently used instruments, including harp, celesta, organ, bells, and solo cornet. Certainly the timbral sounds Busoni evoked from the large instrumental ensemble, with three of each wind instrument in the pit orchestra alone, and the varied timbral colors weaving in and out of the orchestral texture, were more of his own time than the 1820s. Throughout the opera, he frequently features the timbres of winds and the blaring rumbles of brass, sometimes in extreme registers. Some of these timbres can be heard in the bourgeois Biedermeier dances threaded throughout the score, which are defamiliarized not only by the chromatic and unstable harmonic language, but also by the instrumental colors. For instance, a swirling waltz opens Act II, but with newer treatments of register, rhythm, harmony, and instrumentation, such as raspy brass and explorations of high registers in the winds (see [example 4](#)).

Busoni not only alluded to Biedermeier simplicity and realism in his choice of genre, character, vocal style, and instrumentation, but also in his idiosyncratic formal structures. In particular, he wrote scene complexes, many of them montage assemblages of instrumental forms, such as the Biedermeier style marches and dances, and this foreshadowed the montage approach in future operas, such as the *Zeitopern* of Kurt Weill and Ernst Krenek. If *Die Brautwahl* is mainly tonal, the opera nevertheless departed from most contemporaneous comic-opera traditions in structure. Busoni's immediate models were Wagner's late romantic through-composed *Die Meistersinger* and Verdi's *Falstaff*, which was deeply rooted in Italian buffo traditions, even if it featured more extended scene complexes. The closest comparable contemporary German-language opera might be Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, which like *Die Brautwahl*, conveyed different musical eras of a single city and contained a range of character types. However, Strauss's piece more closely aligns with opera traditions and operatic treatments of the voice. Busoni stated in a letter to Edward Dent that he considered historical predecessors, such as Mozart, Berlioz, and Liszt, and not contemporaries, as his most important exam-

⁴² Busoni: Letter to Egon Petri, 16.7.1911, in: Busoni: *Selected Letters* (see note 27), pp. 130–131, here p. 130.

Vorspiel (Spuk- und Wirbelwalzer)

Example 4 Ferruccio Busoni, *Die Brautwahl*, Act II, Vorspiel, mm. 1–10

ples for *Die Brautwahl*. The number opera framework was patterned after Mozart, but the alternation of instrumental numbers was modeled after Berlioz:⁴³ »None of the Berlin critics understood that which you correctly call ›the Mozartian framework‹, nor did they understand its clearly defined heredity from Liszt, nor did they discover its origin in L'Enfance du Christ.«⁴⁴ Berlioz's episodic oratorio with numerous interpolated instrumental marches and a simpler singing style and a comic number opera by Mozart thus served as examples for Busoni, even if his approach was unique. Ties between Liszt's tone poems or *Faust* symphony and Busoni's orchestrations and choral writing could also be made, but were not as relevant for the formal approach.⁴⁵

Yet if Busoni looked back to Mozart, Berlioz, and Liszt, the montage approach was ultimately new. Busoni created scene complexes with nearly continuous music comprised of easily recognizable sections that could be seen as resembling those in Verdi's *Falstaff*. However, *Die Brautwahl* contains no operatic vocal arias. Instead Busoni juxtaposes symphonic or instrumental numbers with simple vocal numbers, many drawn from Biedermeier traditions. Throughout the opera, there are only three identifiable and self-contained solo vocal numbers, and two are labelled »Lied«, thereby signifying to connections to Biedermeier: Voswinkel's Lied in praise of tobacco, the duet between Albertine and Edmund, and Leonhard's Lied about

⁴³ Edgar Istel: »German Opera Since Richard Wagner«, trans. by Janet Wylie, in: *The Musical Quarterly* 1, 1915, pp. 260–290. ⁴⁴ Busoni: Letter to Edward J. Dent, 10.5.1911, in: Busoni: *Selected Letters* (see note 27), p. 123. ⁴⁵ For more information about Busoni's indebtedness to Liszt, see: Erinn E. Knyt: »Franz Liszt's Heir: Ferruccio Busoni and Weimar«, in: *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 17, 2020, pp. 35–67.

Lippold.⁴⁶ He, for instance, stated that he envisioned the final act primarily as a combination of preludes, scherzos, and variations:

»Formally speaking, everything has really turned out for the best and in my maturest vein.

It happened *unintentionally* that the ›commencement of the ceremony‹ and the three caskets formed a theme and three variations. I myself only noticed it subsequently and found it the correct reaction. Naturally: variations in the fantastic sense. – I reworked the quartet-scherzo three times until it became crystal clear; just as I have indeed been continually revising (with a view to conciseness rather than breadth).«⁴⁷

Most of the parts are combinations of vocal and instrumental forms that are linked together through transitional sections. Act I part I, for instance, is a montage of different sections, styles, and textures that include a march, a minuet, a free fantasia, a scherzo, a Lied and a duet:

Alla marcia (Rossini Moses march), rehearsal (10)⁴⁸

Lied (in praise of tobacco), rehearsal (22)

Tempo di menuetto vivo (Mozart, German dances, K. 600), rehearsal (31)

Duett-Lied (Fouquet's poem), rehearsal (43)

Allegretto quasi marziale (reprise of no. 1), rehearsal (53)

Free fantasia, rehearsal (56)

Scherzo, rehearsal (69)

Erscheinung music, rehearsal (83)

Part one of Act II similarly, combines marches and waltzes into an extended scene underlying the vocalizations:

Spuk- und Wirbelwalzer, rehearsal (1)

March (quasi marcia brandenburghese), rehearsal (10)

March-waltz-march, rehearsal (24)

Kaiser hymn, rehearsal (73)

Wirbel Walzer, rehearsal (81)

46 Rudolf Cahn-Speyer: »Busoni's ›Brautwahl‹ in ihrem stilistischen Verhältnis zur modernen Opernproduktion«, in: *Die Musik* 11, 3. Qu., 1911/12, pp. 246–251; Leopold Schmidt: »Busonis Oper ›Die Brautwahl‹, in: *Berliner Tageblatt*, 15.4.1912; Carl Müller-Rastatt: »Ferruccio Busonis ›Brautwahl‹«, in: *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, 16.4.1912; August Spanuth: »Die Brautwahl«, in: *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 70, 1912, pp. 527–532; Oskar Bie: *Die Oper*, Berlin 1913, new ed. Munich et al. 1988, p. 518; Scott L. Balthazar: »The Forms of Set Pieces«, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. by Scott L. Balthazar, Cambridge et al. 2004 (Cambridge Companions to Music), pp. 49–68.

47 Busoni: Letter to Egon Petri, 9.6.1911, in: Busoni: *Selected Letters* (see note 27), pp. 126–127, here p. 127. **48** The rehearsal numbers come from the piano-vocal score: Ferruccio Busoni: *Die Brautwahl. Musikalisch-Fantastische Komödie nach E. T. A. Hoffmann's Erzählung*, piano reduction by Egon Petri, Berlin: Harmonie Verlag, 1914.

He thus creates mixed genre montage-like structures foreshadowing those used in some *Zeitopern*. The end of the opera is the most esoteric, and perhaps the farthest from operatic form with variations, an invisible chorus, and mystical symphonic writing that includes remotely related harmonies and chiaroscuro.

Busoni's approach toward musical structure that he continued to perfect in subsequent operas, such as *Arlecchino* and *Doktor Faust*, led Weill, who studied with Busoni in his Berlin composition master class beginning in 1921, to also adopt an interest in multi-sectional montage structures that display textural and timbral layering in response to the plots and genre mixture.⁴⁹ If it was Busoni's later operas that primarily served as models for Weill, Busoni was already trying out some of these formal ideas in *Die Brautwahl*.

Conclusions

The cosmopolitan Berlin that Busoni knew from 1894 to 1924 was vastly different from Hoffmann's more provincial Berlin, due, in part, to the sheer number of people. If there were about 220,000 residents in 1825, by 1910 there were about two million. If Berlin of the 1820s was filled with intimate *Hausmusik* and salon music, Berlin of the 1910s was also teeming with public concerts and experimentalist ideas. Busoni became a teacher in Berlin to Edgard Varèse and a mentor to Arnold Schönberg in the 1910s.⁵⁰ Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire* was given a private performance in Busoni's Berlin home not long after the premiere of *Die Brautwahl* in Hamburg. In an article for the *Neues Wiener Journal*, dated Sept. 7, 1913, in which Busoni described his experiences in Berlin, he related, unsurprisingly, that he liked the city for its musical life, which was characterized by experimentation with instruments, tonality, and form.⁵¹

But these experimentalist approaches and the expressionism and atonality of Schönberg were only part of the modernist *Zeitgeist*. The turn of the century also brought about a sense of nostalgia for the past that resulted not only in a revival of Biedermeier ideals, but also in a return to interest in simplicity and functionality. Biedermeier revivalist approaches were thus important in forging unsentimental and simple reflections of ideals of past times in reaction to expressionism. They preceded German strands of new classical ideals (i.e. *Neue Sachlichkeit* and *Junge Klassizität*) that emerged in the 1920s. Busoni, in particular, was already thinking about and formulating a return to counterpoint, solid forms and objectivity in the

⁴⁹ For more information, see: Knyt: *Ferruccio Busoni as Architect of Sound* (see note 17). ⁵⁰ For more information, see: Erinn E. Knyt: *Ferruccio Busoni and his Legacy*, Bloomington, IN 2017.

⁵¹ »Dadurch wird Berlin immer musikalischer, wie ich denn überhaupt der Ansicht bin, daß sich das Musikinteresse und das Musikverständnis der Menschheit täglich vertieft.« Anon.: »Ein Gespräch mit Professor Busoni«, in: *Neues Wiener Journal*, 7.9.1913, p. 4.

1910s. While nearing completion of his work on *Die Brautwahl*, Busoni was formulating a type of modernist counterpoint in which harmonies result freely from the intersections of independent melodic lines, and some of this can be observed in *Die Brautwahl*.⁵² Especially after learning of the work of Wilhelm Middelschulte and Bernhard Ziehn in Chicago, Busoni began actively to consider how to compose in a new Gothic style based on Bachian models.⁵³ Probably more relevant to *Die Brautwahl*, however, was Busoni's somewhat earlier contemplation about how to create new and unique forms that nevertheless displayed more structure than much late-romantic through-composed writing. Busoni frequently looked back to Mozart as a model for form, describing Mozart's approach to form as »supernatural« in his aphorisms about Mozart in 1906.⁵⁴ In his *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* (1907), he specifically called for new structures, as well as new scales and new musical sounds.⁵⁵ *Die Brautwahl* can be seen as representing his attempts to work out some of these modernist experiments in the genre of opera. Although Busoni would not fully articulate his modernist theories of *Young Classicality* until the 1920s, he was thus already thinking about ways to create solid and concise musical structures in the early 1900s. That he communicated these ideals to his composition pupils, some of which were involved with the *Novembergruppe* and the emergence of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, has doubtless contributed to these historical stylistic developments.⁵⁶

Busoni's *Die Brautwahl*, thus although reflecting on and musically representing Hoffmann's Biedermeier Berlin, can be understood and contextualized in relation to recent scholarship that has expanded notions of musical modernism beyond an experimental treatment of the tonal language and ruptures with the past.⁵⁷ Increasingly, scholars have described the period as characterized by a nexus of modernisms. Julian Johnson, for instance, has noted that hard divisions between »conservative and progressive camps« are not usually accurate.⁵⁸ Jenny Doctor has also shown that music of the era can sometimes include »modifying« traditions, not just »overturning« them.⁵⁹ Walter Frisch, one of the few to consider Busoni in relation to modernism, has coined a concept of »historicist modernism« that could

52 See, for instance: Ferruccio Busoni: »Melody of the Future« [1911/12], in: id.: *The Essence of Music and Other Papers* (see note 1), pp. 31–32. **53** For more information, see: Knyt: *Ferruccio Busoni as Architect of Sound* (see note 17). **54** Ferruccio Busoni: »Mozart: Aphorisms« [1906], in: id.: *The Essence of Music and Other Papers* (see note 1), pp. 104–106, here p. 104. **55** Id.: *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*, trans. by Th. Baker, New York 1911. **56** Examples include Philipp Jarnach and Kurt Weill. For more information, see: Tamara Levitz: *Teaching New Classicality. Ferruccio Busoni's Master Class in Composition*, Frankfurt a. M. et al. 1996 (Europäische Hochschulschriften Reihe 36; 152). **57** For a survey of uses of the term »modernism«, see: Susan Stanford Friedman: »Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern / Modernity / Modernism«, in: *Modernism / Modernity* 8, 2001, pp. 493–513. See also: Matthew Riley: »Introduction«, in: *British Music and Modernism*, 1895–1960, ed. by id., Farnham / Burlington, VT 2010, pp. 1–11. **58** Julian Johnson: *Out of Time. Music and the Making of Modernity*, Oxford et al. 2015, pp. 7–8. For more scholarship about the topic, see also: Karol Berger: *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow. An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity*, Berkeley, CA et al. 2007; *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (see note 30). **59** Jenny Doctor: »The Parataxis of »British Musical Modernism«, in: *The Musical Quarterly* 91, 2008, pp. 89–115.

be applied to Busoni's approach in *Die Brautwahl*.⁶⁰ This »historicist modernism« allows the past to be part of the present in a continuous way, and without a sense of rupture.⁶¹ Yet if Frisch focused on new treatments of Bachian writing by Busoni and Max Reger through allusions to and quotations of Bach, the principle nevertheless is similar in *Die Brautwahl*, which looks back to earlier times as a way to create distance from the sentimentality and emotionalism of late romanticism.

Just how different Busoni's *Die Brautwahl* was from other German-language operas is evident through a comparison to contemporaneous works. In their comprehensive survey of German-language opera after Wagner, Edgar Istel and Janet Wylie note that many contemporaneous operas were composed in an emotional and vast Wagnerian manner with through-composed music, leitmotifs, thick orchestration, and heroic singing styles. One example is Alexander Ritter's *Der faule Hans*. Hans Pfitzner was another Wagnerian imitator in *Die Rose vom Liebesgarten*. In terms of comic operas, a few exhibited Biedermeier style references. As mentioned earlier, d'Albert and Blech composed comic operas with Biedermeier characters, but late romantic music. Some comic operas returned to spoken dialogue in the manner of *Singspiel*, such as Humperdinck's *Die Heirat wider Willen* or Max Schillings' *Pfeifertag*.⁶²

As a German-language comic opera, Busoni's *Die Brautwahl* stands out in its reaction to Wagnerianism as exemplified in the simple and direct vocal styles, in its assemblages of short marches or dances, and in its relatively thin textures. It also remains outside most opera conventions of the time – especially in terms of its objective and unsentimental approach and its treatment of everyday topics and characters. There are no fully developed love duets and few gripping emotional moments. In his essay, »The Future of Opera«, written shortly after the disappointing premiere of *Die Brautwahl*, Busoni wrote that the public was the largest obstacle to forging a new style in opera because of their expectation for depictions of deep human emotions: »In my view the public has a thoroughly criminal attitude to the theatre for most people demand a strong human experience from the stage, no doubt, because such experiences do not come into ordinary lives.«⁶³ He adamant-

60 Walter Frisch: »Reger's Bach and Historicist Modernism«, in: *19th-Century Music* 25, 2001/02, pp. 296–312; id.: *German Modernism. Music and the Arts*, Berkeley, CA et al. 2005 (California Studies in 20th-Century Music 3), p. 139. **61** Id.: »Reger's Bach and Historicist Modernism« (see note 60), p. 312. **62** Carl Dahlhaus: *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. by Mary Whittall, Cambridge et al. 1985, pp. 10–11; id.: »The Dramaturgy of Italian Opera«, in: *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth*, ed. by Lorenzo Bianconi / Giorgio Pestelli, trans. by Kenneth Chalmers / Mary Whittall, Chicago 2003 (The History of Italian Opera 6, 2), pp. 73–150, here p. 78; Adrian Daub: *Tristan's Shadow. Sexuality and the Total Work of Art after Wagner*, Chicago / London 2014; Bryan Gilliam: *Rounding Wagner's Mountain. Richard Strauss and Modern German Opera*, Cambridge 2014 (Cambridge Studies in Opera). **63** Ferruccio Busoni: »The Future of Opera« [1913], in: id.: *The Essence of Music and Other Papers* (see note 1), pp. 39–41, here p. 41; id.: »Von der Zukunft der Oper«, in: id.: *Von der Einheit der Musik. Von Dritteltönen und junger Klassizität. Von Bühnen und Bauten und anschließenden Bezirken. Verstreute Aufzeichnungen*, Berlin 1922 (Max Hesses Handbücher 76), pp. 189–192, here pp. 191–192: »Es ist, wie mich dünkt, angesichts des Theaters durchaus kriminell veranlagt, und man

ly disliked and felt overt expressions of love on stage were out of character with the nature of music itself, which he considered abstract: »A love duet on the public stage is not only shameless but absolutely untrue, not untrue in the beautiful and right feeling of artistic transmission, but altogether wrong and fictitious besides being ridiculous [...] Eroticism is no subject for art but a concern of life.«⁶⁴ If *Die Brautwahl* deals with the topic of marriage, it does so primarily in a comic manner. There are mainly dialogues, and magic tricks, as well as comedic and fantastic situations. These are represented musically with marches, waltzes and other popular Biedermeier forms of musical entertainment. If it is still mainly tonal, and thus conservative when compared to roughly contemporary atonal or experimental pieces like Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire* or Strauss' *Elektra*, even despite non-traditional metatonal harmonic progressions, it nevertheless pioneered a more objective modernist affect. And if it drew upon some contemporary theatrical traditions, such as realist and illusionist theater, which were at their peak from the 1880s through the early twentieth century, it was still primarily sung throughout, yet in a unembellished and non-operatic manner.⁶⁵

It is not surprising, that this unique opera was largely misunderstood by the public, with some critics astounded by the lack of virtuosic singing, and others surprised by the pervasive use of (extended) tonality.⁶⁶ If the first two performances in Hamburg and Mannheim received tepid responses, it would fall into oblivion after a performance in Berlin in 1926 (see [table 1](#)). There was also a recording made in Frankfurt in 1930 of the »Duet-Lied«. Its reappearance in Italy near and around the centenary of Busoni's birth had more to do with the admiration of conductor Fernando Previtali for Busoni's works (see [table 1](#)). If it was recorded live but with numerous cuts in 1993 at the Berlin Staatsoper with Daniel Barenboim conducting,

kann vermuten, daß die meisten von der Bühne ein starkes menschliches Erlebnis wohl deshalb fordern, weil ein solches ihren Durchschnittsexistenzen fehlt [...].« **64** Ferruccio Busoni: »The Essence and Oneness of Music« [1921], in: id.: *The Essence of Music and Other Papers* (see note 1), pp. 10–11; id.: »Entwurf eines Vorwortes zur Partitur des »Doktor Faust« enthaltend einige Betrachtungen über die Möglichkeiten der Oper«, in: id.: *Von der Einheit der Musik* (see note 63), pp. 309–333, here pp. 324–325: »Ein Liebesduett auf offener Bühne ist nicht allein schamlos, sondern durchaus unwahr; nicht unwahr im schönen und richtigen Sinne der künstlerischen Übertragung, vielmehr völlig falsch und verlogen, und überdies lächerlich. [...] Überhaupt ist Erotik kein Vorwurf für die Kunst, sondern eine Angelegenheit des Lebens.« **65** For more information about realist, naturalist, and illusionist theater, consult the following sources: Heinrich Braulich: *Max Reinhardt. Theater zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit*, Berlin 1966; Christopher Innes: *Edward Gordon Craig. A Vision of the Theatre*, Amsterdam 1998 (Contemporary Theatre Studies 28); David Allen Harvey: »Elite Magic in the Nineteenth Century«, in: *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West. From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by David J. Collins, New York, NY 2015, pp. 547–575. **66** Consult the following sources for reviews of the first performances: Ferdinand Pfohl: »Kritik. Oper. [...] Hamburg«, in: *Die Musik* 11, 3. Qu., 1911/12, pp. 312–313; Arthur M. Abell: »Busoni's Opera »Die Brautwahl«. An Account of the Premiere at the Hamburg Opera House«, in: *Musical Courier* 33, Vol. 64, 1912, No. 19, pp. 5–6; Hermann Wilhelm Draber: »Ferruccio Busoni: »Die Brautwahl« [...], in: *Neue Musik-Zeitung* 33, 1912, pp. 323–324; Karl Eschmann: »Kritik. Oper [...] Mannheim«, in: *Die Musik* 12, 3. Qu., 1912/13, p. 373; Spanuth: »Die Brautwahl« (see note 46).

Date	Location	Conductor
13.4.1912	Hamburg, Hamburger Stadt-Theater	Gustav Brecher
24.5.1913	Mannheim, Großherzogliches Hof-und Nationaltheater	Artur Bodansky
7.1.1926	Berlin, Städtische Oper	Fritz Zweig
17.5.1938	Frankfurt a. M., Radio Frankfurt. Recording only of Edmund and Albertine's »Duett-Lied«	Reinhold Merten
3.2.1957	Rome, Auditorium RAI	Fernando Previtali
25.2.1962	Darmstadt, Landestheater	Helmut Franz
21.5.1966	Florence, Teatro della Pergola	Aldo Ceccato
11.12.1966	Rom, Auditorium RAI	Fernando Previtali
7.12.1968	Trieste, Teatro Verdi	Fernando Previtali
3.12.1969	Rome, Teatro dell'Opera	Francesco Cristofoli
17.1.1975	Turin, Auditorium RAI	Fernando Previtali
17.4.1975	Turin, RAI. Live recording, Voce-10 (3 LPs), 1980	Fernando Previtali
17.11.1993	Berlin, Staatsoper Unter den Linden	Daniel Barenboim

Table 1 Performances of Busoni's *Die Brautwahl*

there is still no extant video recording of the opera. Today, concerns remain about the length and the exoticized treatment of the Jewish characters.⁶⁷

Yet if it stood outside of Italian and German opera traditions, it was hardly retrogressive.⁶⁸ This paper has shown a reconsideration of the opera as reviving Biedermeier values through a modernist lens. Busoni positions *Die Brautwahl* as a transitional piece in the development of a modernist opera aesthetic. He uses references to Berlin and music of the 1820s as a means to achieve a new modernist operatic approach like others of his generation seeking to revive Biedermeier values as a way to move beyond romantic excess. As Beaumont notes, although Busoni admired and identified with Hoffmann, the opera is ultimately autobiographical.⁶⁹ It thus represents his own age and ideals more than Hoffmann's. Busoni sought to do this through a new and more objective singing style coupled with and exploration of wind and brass sonorities and new formal structures in which vocal and instrumental numbers alternate. It is a creative attempt to move beyond Wagner and Verdi to create a new type of work that was neither retrogressive nor avant-garde; that was neither German, nor French, nor Italian. And although it combined aspects of realist and illusionist theatrical traditions, it ascribed to neither fully. Finally, it was more objective in the sense that it was not filled with gripping human

⁶⁷ The 1993 Berlin performance was abbreviated. ⁶⁸ For more about *Zeitopern*, see: Susan C. Cook: *Opera for a New Republic. The Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith*, Ann Arbor, MI / London 1988 (Studies in Musicology 96). For Busoni's influence on Weill, see: Knyt: *Ferruccio Busoni as Architect of Sound* (see note 17). ⁶⁹ Beaumont: *Busoni the Composer* (see note 40), p. 122

drama. Moreover, his ideas about vocal setting, instrumentation, form, timbre, and genre blending still foreshadowed much of what was to come. Busoni embraced a spectrum of musical possibilities, which he sometimes referred to as the »oneness of music«, and in the process tried out a new approach that he would more fully realize in his later works for stage, such as *Arlecchino* and *Doktor Faust*.

Abstract

Biedermeier Musical Revival as Modernism in Ferruccio Busoni's »Die Brautwahl«

Ferruccio Busoni's admiration of literature by E. T. A. Hoffmann contributed to his selection of *Die Brautwahl* for his first completed opera. Yet while scholars have already written about Busoni's adaptation of Hoffmann's text into an opera libretto and of the relationship between his aesthetic ideals and Hoffmann's, there has been little consideration of Busoni's evocation of Hoffmann's Biedermeier culture through the music. References to dance, march, and salon-style chamber music coupled with the songful vocal style of Lied, instead, reference the Berlin Biedermeier bourgeois culture depicted in the plot.

Despite references to the 1820s, the opera is not retrogressive, but rather, an expression of emerging modernist ideals in Busoni's own time. Just as a Biedermeier revival in Berlin in the early 1900s evoked related ideals of simplicity, clarity, proportion, and order in updated ways in reaction to nineteenth-century extravagance, so Busoni made Biedermeier musical references to pioneer a simpler and more objective modernist approach toward German-language comic opera. By drawing connections between Biedermeier revivalist aesthetics in the early twentieth century and Busoni's vocal treatment, harmony, depictions of characters, orchestration, and form in *Die Brautwahl*, this article shows how the composer used historical references in a revivalist way to move beyond Romanticism. The article sheds light on Busoni's least known opera and seeks to re-center it within discussions about the development of early twentieth-century opera.

Musikalisches Wiederaufleben des Biedermeier als Modernismus in Ferruccio Busonis »Die Brautwahl«

Ferruccio Busonis Bewunderung für das literarische Werk E. T. A. Hoffmanns trug dazu bei, dass er *Die Brautwahl* für seine erste vollendete Oper auswählte. Doch während sich die Wissenschaft bereits mit Busonis Adaption von Hoffmanns Text in ein Opernlibretto und mit der Beziehung zwischen seinen ästhetischen Idealen und denen Hoffmanns befasst hat, wurde seine Evokation der biedermeierlichen Kultur Hoffmanns durch die Musik kaum berücksichtigt. In Verbindung mit dem liedhaften Gesangsstil verweist der Rückgriff auf Tanz, Marsch und salonartige Kammermusik stattdessen auf die in der Handlung dargestellte bürgerliche Kultur des Berliner Biedermeier.

Trotz Bezugnahme auf die 1820er Jahre ist die Oper nicht rückwärtsgewandt, sondern vielmehr Ausdruck der aufkommenden Ideale der Moderne in Busonis eigener Zeit. Genauso wie die Wiederbelebung des Biedermeier im Berlin der frühen 1900er Jahre die damit verbundenen Ideale der Einfachheit, Klarheit, Proportion und Ordnung auf neue Art und Weise als Reaktion auf die Extravaganz des 19. Jahrhunderts beschwor, nutzte Busoni die musikalischen Bezüge zum Biedermeier, um einen einfacheren und objektiveren modernistischen Ansatz für die deutschsprachige komische Oper zu entwickeln. Indem Verbindungen zwischen der Rückbesinnung auf die Biedermeier-Ästhetik im frühen 20. Jahrhundert und Busonis Stimmbehandlung, Harmonik, Charakterdarstellung, Orchestrierung und

Form in *Die Brautwahl* hergestellt werden, zeigt dieser Artikel, wie der Komponist historische Bezüge auf revivalistische Weise nutzte, um über die Romantik hinauszugehen. Der Artikel beleuchtet Busonis am wenigsten bekannte Oper und versucht, diese wieder in den Mittelpunkt der Diskussionen über die Entwicklung der Oper des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts zu stellen.

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