

HUGO DISTLER (1908-1942):
RECONTEXTUALIZING DISTLER'S MUSIC FOR PERFORMANCE IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

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University of Washington

Abstract

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Hugo Distler has been recognized as a forerunner of the New German Church Music, an important musical movement which developed in the 1930s. Beyond his role in developing music for the worship service, Distler wrote many secular choral compositions which represent some of the most innovative and important contributions to German choral music of the twentieth century. While he achieved great popularity during his lifetime and is widely regarded as a high-quality and important composer, his music has gone in and out of popularity in the United States. While there have been various scholarly contributions, primarily initiated by Larry Palmer's book of 1967, focusing on his life and works, a need for new research on Distler remains.

The aforementioned text by Larry Palmer and an earlier document by Charles R. Anders provide extensive biographical information about Distler. However, details of his family history and early childhood are largely disregarded. A new German-language biography which provides much greater detail in this area was written by Distler's daughter, Barbara Distler-Harth, in 2008. The details of his family and early childhood help to provide great insight into Distler's developing psyche and are thus provided in the current document for the first time to an English-speaking audience. Beyond biographical information, editions of previously unreleased Distler works have been prepared in the last twenty years, and these works have not been previously addressed in any academic research.

It is the intention of this document to advocate for the study and performance of Hugo Distler's music by providing context for his music in both musical and ideological frameworks. The identification of specific stylistic characteristics is intended to breakdown the challenges of Distler's music, which will make it more accessible to choral conductors and singers. Whereas previous research has primarily focused on larger works such as the *Choralpassion* and *Eine deutsche Choralmesse* or the challenging motets of his *Geistliche Chormusik*, this document will provide information on several smaller works, including pieces from *Der Jahrkreis*, *Mörike-Chorliederbuch*, and others. It is my belief that in order for Distler's work to gain in popularity, church and school choirs must give it increased performance, rather than professional choirs giving increased performance of his most challenging works.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are certain works by Hugo Distler that have seemingly been afforded a place in the “timeless” category of music in America and which remain popular among choral musicians. Unlike in Germany, however, where many of his works are regularly performed, the list of his music performed by American choirs is somewhat limited. Further, very little has been written about Hugo Distler in the English language. A single book, the occasional article, and a handful of dissertations are the extent of resources which specifically address Distler available to the American audience. In fact, there are books on music in the 20th century which even fail to mention his name at all.¹ Among those resources which are available, many are directed toward his organ works² while others may address a specific piece of choral music³. Unfortunately, the sources which provide a more overarching review of Distler’s career and choral compositions are few in number. Those that do exist were written decades ago, and despite being comprehensive in nature, still fail to paint a complete picture.

It is therefore the objective of this document to provide a new resource for American musicians interested in the music of Hugo Distler. Subsequent to this document’s completion, it is the intention of the author to advocate for the increased performance of Distler’s music. A review of several works which are accessible to choirs facing certain challenges (e.g., small groups, unbalanced ensembles, aging voices, etc.) is included. Specifically, chapter five will examine selections from *Der Jahrkries*, op. 5, and extend the information already available in

¹ Sources with no mention of Hugo Distler include: *Twentieth-Century Music* by Elliott Antokoletz, *Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* by Joseph Auner, and *Exploring Twentieth-Century Music* by Otto Deri.

² Such as dissertations by Bergaas, Harper, and McKinney

³ *Totentanz* (Fitzgibbon) and *Eine Deutsche Choralmesse* (Place), for example

documents by Anders and Palmer. A similar approach will be taken to look at selections from *Mörke-Chorliederbuch*, op. 19. These works each represent an extensive list of smaller works which are accessible to a wide range of choral ensembles. Additional information is also provided on several other smaller works, some of which were only published posthumously. In 1998, editor Michael Töpel in coordination with the Distler Archives made several works available for the first time. A brief discussion of these pieces is included in chapter five.

Chapter four places these works into the broader context of Hugo Distler's musical language through the style characteristics of *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 12. This document identifies twelve specific characteristics of Distler's style. While they are most directly pronounced in op. 12, these techniques are used throughout his entire oeuvre. A greater understanding of these characteristics allows one to see the wide range of music and composers who so greatly influenced Distler's own compositional style. Previous research has decidedly linked Distler's music to that of Heinrich Schütz⁴, a clear link due to Distler's express discussion of Schütz's influence in the foreword to his *Choralpassion*, op. 7. A broader view of his influences, however, will lead to new possibilities for connections in programming and subsequently provide an increase in opportunities for the performance of Distler's music.

One of the major contributions of this document will be the inclusion of material from several German-language resources which are not currently available in English. Information is primarily drawn from *Hugo Distler: Lebensweg eines Frühvollendeten*, a biography written by Distler's daughter Barbara. Currently only available in German, this source was consulted to provide details and more complete context for personal events of Distler's life. Full translations

⁴ Klaus Fischer-Dieskau. "The employment of dynamics in interpreting the music of Heinrich Schütz and Hugo Distler," Trans. Clarke, M. and Decker, H.A. *The Choral Journal*, September (1973): 5-8.

are also provided for the forewords to *Der Jahrkreis* and *Mörke-Chorliederbuch*, each of which addresses specific performance practice concerns.

Finally, while the writings of Larry Palmer and Charles Anders have done a more than sufficient job of providing a comprehensive guide to the “basics” of Distler, it has been more than forty years since their publication. In that time, several new musical contributions from Distler have been made available to the public. Equally important was the recent release of the biography by Barbara Distler-Harth. Among the contributions of this text are the most comprehensive information on Distler’s mother and on his early childhood, details of an extra-marital affair, and the inclusion of a plethora of letters between Hugo, his friends, and his family. Chapter two focuses on his personal life in an effort to provide a more complete biographical sketch of Distler to frame professional details with personal context.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY

To understand the music of Hugo Distler, one must have an understanding of the context in which he lived his life, as is surely true of any composer. The untimely death of Distler and his involvement with the Nazi party (or lack thereof) are obvious points of interest. However, there are a number of other factors that had a monumental influence on his compositions. Distler's life and career have been relatively well documented previously, including in Larry Palmer's seminal work, *Hugo Distler and His Church Music*, published in 1967. While this work and those which followed generally provide sufficient biographic information to outline Distler's life, none are comprehensive and new resources published in German provide information previously unavailable to American readers. The recent biography written by Barbara Distler-Harth in particular provides an abundance of new information and insights which help create a more complete picture of how the events of Hugo Distler's life helped to shape whom he was to become as a man and as a musician.

Nürnberg

August Hugo Distler was born in Nürnberg on June 24, 1908 as the illegitimate son of Helene Distler (1881-1969) and August Louis Gotthilf Roth (1883-1959). Essentially no resource exists which can shed light on the first four years of Hugo's life, his birth certificate, baptismal certificate, and a single photograph being the only surviving documents from this time.⁵ His father was of Swabian (southwestern Germany) heritage, and accounts suggest that he was a factory owner. Helen was of Frankish heritage and worked as a dressmaker. By later

⁵ Barbara Distler-Harth, *Hugo Distler: Lebensweg eines Frühvollendete* (Mainz, Germany: Schott, 2008), 11.

accounts, his parents were described as “common people: simple, industrious and uneducated.”⁶ The departure of his mother in 1912 has been well-documented; she married Anthony Meter, an American toy-purchaser and left for Chicago. Previous accounts suggest that there is some doubt as to why she might have left Hugo in Germany with his grandparents. However, a more clear picture may be painted with more insight into her background.

Family History

Hugo’s great-grandmother, Kunigunda Beyer, left her husband, Christopher Beyer, and traveled to her hometown of Nurnberg to seek a better life for her daughter, Kunigunda Anna. Anna would eventually take a position as a maid in a wealthy home, and it was there that fate would lead her to her future husband, Matthias Distler. Matthias had worked as a “journeyman” butcher and delivered goods to the home which employed Kunigunda Anna. “Kunigunda accepted the delivery, and it is said that the two fell in love on the spot.”⁷ Matthias Distler, having earned the rank of “Master Craftsman” as a butcher, finally settled down and opened his own shop. Their children, Helene and Anna Katharina were born prior to their marriage, in 1881 and 1883 respectively. While Matthias and Kunigunda Anna eventually did marry, the effects of Kunigunda having children out of wedlock had lasting ramifications. Shortly after their marriage, Matthias died of lung disease in 1886 at the age of 30. His legacy to his daughter Helene seems to have been traits that would later be inherited by Hugo: a petite stature and a “certain shyness” around people.⁸

⁶ Jan Bender, Personal commentary on the life and work of Hugo Distler, tape recorded February 16-17, 1962, quoted in Charles R. Anders. “Hugo Distler and the New Church Music” (Master’s thesis, Indiana University, 1962), 20.

⁷ Distler-Harth, *Hugo Distler*, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

In 1889, Kunigunda Anna again found love and married Johann Michael Herz. By all accounts, Johann was an exceptionally kind and caring person, sentiments that would later be echoed by Hugo. Together Johann Michael and Kunigunda Anna continued to run the butcher shop and opened a second store in the area. They were loving parents and supported their daughters immensely, even purchasing a piano in the hopes of providing a solid musical education for Anna and Helene. Helene was described as a “girl full of sparkling ideas”, and though she did not have much interest in the piano, she was nonetheless artistic. An early apprenticeship as a milliner⁹ offered her the opportunity to express her creativity¹⁰.

Despite their unwavering support, it seems that Kunigunda Anna and Johann lacked the time to provide full attention to their daughters due to the necessity of full-time employment to support their family financially. While this seemed to have little lasting effect on Anna, it would make life challenging for a young Helene. It is said that she was quite restless and anxious¹¹ and often responded with “anarchic” behavior when things did not go her way.¹²

Helene’s Marriage and Hugo’s Birth

In 1907, Helene met August Roth and as might seem typical of her impulsive personality, appears to have found “love at first sight.”¹³ Despite their love for each other, Roth’s parents did not approve of their relationship—Helene was not “from a good family”¹⁴—and discouraged a marriage. Helene became pregnant, and while August persisted with his parents, their wishes

⁹ Or “dressmaker”

¹⁰ Distler-Harth, *Hugo Distler*, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

eventually prevailed; they offered to pay child support, but a marriage would not be permitted. Helene proudly refused the financial offering. As one might expect, she grew very angry with August, and it caused further tensions with her own parents as the situation of her own out-of-wedlock birth was brought again to the surface. Thus, the months leading up to Hugo's birth were filled with arguments and frustration.

When Hugo was born in 1908, Helene's life was far from settled, but her initial relationship with her son seemed to be strong. It is thought that "his ability for compassion, and devotion ... his 'love affair with the world'," ¹⁵ stems from these early years with his mother. Unfortunately, the nature of this relationship would quickly take a drastic turn for the worse. Upon her realization that she would never marry August Roth, she began not only to hate Roth, but also to resent young Hugo. She blamed him for her being alone and was angered at his very existence. Helene went on a desperate search to find a husband to replace the man she had "lost", and Hugo was left feeling rejected and suffering from neglect. He was often left alone for hours while Helene was out and had to hear arguing and yelling when she was home. ¹⁶

Anthony Meter was in Nürnberg for an annual Toy Fair; he was purchasing wholesale toys to send back to a department store in Chicago. He met Helene, and their relationship took off quickly. Not only did he propose marriage, but he also offered to adopt young Hugo and take them both back to Chicago. However, in the ultimate act of rejection of her son, Helene refused the adoption offer because "she wanted to start a new life in the United States without . . . 'baggage from the past.'" ¹⁷ His mother married Anthony Meter, and unable and seemingly

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

unwilling to care for her son, she departed for Chicago. Thus, Hugo was left to be raised by his grandparents.¹⁸

Hugo's Childhood

Little is known about his childhood as even with his closest friends, he rarely spoke of this period of his life.¹⁹ However, many years after his death, his friend Oskar Söhngen described Distler as having a “difficult, unloved and joyless childhood.”²⁰ One can imagine that a fear of rejection stems from this time and that this no doubt fueled the manner in which he approached his career of constantly accepting positions and overburdening himself with work. Hugo had been left in the care of Kunigunda and Johann Michael Herz, and by all accounts, they provided a very nurturing and loving home. His aunt Anna married a man named Oscar Dittrich and had two daughters, Ruth and Inge, with whom Hugo, acting almost like a “big brother,” would be very close.²¹ When the Dittrichs moved to Leipzig in 1919, Hugo stayed in close contact and wrote letters regularly. Hugo, often helping Ruth with her piano practice and other homework, would spend many of his holidays in Leipzig with his cousins.

As a child, Hugo was described as “small, thin tender, [and] lean – a small, little boy, [who was] very, very nervous.”²² This nervousness was passed down from his grandfather Matthias and unfortunately cultivated through his relationship (or lack-thereof) with his mother.

¹⁸ David Leroy McKinney. “Interpreting the organ works of Hugo Distler” (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2006), 15.

¹⁹ Charles R. Anders. “Hugo Distler and the New Church Music” (Master’s thesis, Indiana University, 1962), 19.

²⁰ Anders, *Hugo Distler*, 19-20.

²¹ Distler-Harth, *Hugo Distler*, 25.

²² Jan Bender, Personal commentary on the life and work of Hugo Distler, tape recorded February 16-17, 1962, quoted in Charles R. Anders. “Hugo Distler and the New Church Music” (Master’s thesis, Indiana University, 1962), 20.

He had few friends, but his cousins were very important to him. He also established a strong friendship with Ingeborg Heinsen, whom he met through their piano teacher Elisabeth Weidmann.

The Young Musician

With Elisabeth Weidmann as an instructor and Ingeborg Heinsen as a friend and partner, Hugo flourished in his early musical ventures. At eleven years old, he and nine-year-old Inge played Diabelli's "Rondeau Militaire" for four hand piano in a student recital.²³ The success of this performance helped propel him further in his studies and in his friendship with Inge, to whom at a later recital he would present with a bouquet of roses.²⁴ Inge would later describe him as a "sensitive pianist, with [an] elegant, light touch, polished finger technique and great expressiveness."²⁵ Hugo, seemingly enamored with Inge, gave her his "Opus 1", which he had dedicated to her. Though he had not yet had any training in composition or music theory, Ingeborg recalls that the piece was quite well written. Many years later, she requested that she be allowed to play the piece in a public concert. Hugo, ever the perfectionist, implored her not to do so:

Dear Inge, because you write something of a rondo, with which you are concerned. Please, it toss in [the] oven and even your hands with it, I am green with anger today that I had the audacity, the [illegible] ... to give ... to you. If you'd allow, that I may trade it for something else, such as the Sonatina - it is very effective - or the resulting Chaconne (if it grows), or variations on a Sarabande, or the little suite. If you wanted to turn your talent and your finger art on any of these honest little pieces - if you like one of these - so I would be happy about such luck [illegible].²⁶

²³ Distler-Harth, *Hugo Distler*, 27. Translated by the author.

²⁴ Ibid., 28.

²⁵ Ibid., 28.

²⁶ Ibid., 30.

While some have suggested that Hugo began piano lessons at the age of eleven²⁷, it is clear they must have started at a younger age. He would attend the Nürnberg Gymnasium for schooling as well as the Dupont Music School. Here, he studied piano with Carl Dupont and theory with Erich Rhode.²⁸ Rhode was a “Wagnerian,” and Distler was initially very drawn to this music.²⁹ Hugo obviously developed a passion and talent for music, and he applied for acceptance to the Nürnberg Conservatory. However, whatever promise he showed at the time was not sufficient as his application was rejected.³⁰ Undoubtedly this was discouraging as it would be for any young artist. Undeterred, Distler would continue to apply himself to his music, and in April of 1927, he was accepted to the Leipzig Conservatory.³¹

Leipzig

Having been accepted to the Leipzig Conservatory, Distler enrolled in classes in the fall of 1927, a move which represents a major transition in his life. His education at the conservatory introduced him to master teachers, lifelong friends, and music that would change his life forever. A more culturally and musically active city than Nuremberg, this city’s new perspective would leave an indelible mark on Distler. While a student, he would write his first compositions and earn his first publishing contract, experiences which would prepare him well for the career that lay ahead.

²⁷ Mark Jerome Bergaas. “Compositional Style in the Keyboard Works of Hugo Distler (1908-1942)” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1978), 3.

²⁸ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 16.

²⁹ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 3.

³⁰ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

Education

When Distler enrolled, it was originally his desire to study to become a *Kapellmeister* (conductor). He enrolled as a conducting major with a minor in piano. His professors, however, soon discovered his gift for composition, and he decided at their behest to change majors.³² He studied under a number of outstanding professors included Max Hochkofler (orchestral conducting and score playing), Hermann Grabner (theory and composition), Günther Ramin and Friedrich Högner³³ (organ), and Carl Adolf Martienssen (piano). Chapter three will address Distler's teachers in greater detail, but it should be noted that these mentors had an important impact on Hugo's life. They were major figures in the musical community, and several were considered to be leaders in musical movements such as the *Orgelbewegung*.³⁴ Perhaps most importantly, they introduced him to the music of earlier composers such as Schütz and Bach. His studies with Grabner in particular were focused on learning compositions in the earlier style.

City Life

Living in Leipzig, Distler was able to take advantage of an active musical community in the city. He was:

. . . enthused about the Friday motets of the Tomaner, works by Hindemith; Honegger's oratorio, *King David*; Kurt Weill's opera, *The Czar Has His Photograph Taken*; Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*; and Krenek's *Johnny spielt auf*. He was fascinated by the many performances of Bach at the Thomaskirche (thanks to Karl Straube).³⁵

³² Ibid., 18.

³³ Högner was a student of Karl Straube who was well known as a virtuoso organist. (Christopher Scott Anderson, "Reger, Straube, and the Leipzig School's Tradition of Organ Pedagogy: 1898-1948" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1999), 244.)

³⁴ Details of the *Orgelbewegung* are discussed in chapter three.

³⁵ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 20.

He spent a great deal of time listening to music at the Thomaskirche where his professor Günther Ramin was organist. There he heard music “drawn from the time of the Reformation up to Bach and from the neoclassicists such as Kurt Thomas (1904-1973), Arnold Mendelssohn (1855-1933), [and] Wolfgang Fortner (1907-1987). . .”³⁶

Works

Distler attended many concerts and performances, and accounts suggest that he found time to attend parties and other social events. It seems, however, that he generally did not “waste time” and kept mostly to himself.³⁷ It was perhaps his generally shy demeanor that allowed him to spend more of his time focusing on his studies and his own compositions. Several compositions, including *Allein zu dir Herr Jesu Christ*, *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (1928), *Ave Maria zart* (1928), *Concert Sonata for Two Pianos*, op. 1 (1930), *Herzlich lieb habe ich dich, o Herr*, op. 2 (1930), and *Nun ruhen alle Wälder* (1931) were written during his time in Leipzig. The two pieces for which opus numbers are given were both published by Breitkopf and Härtel Verlag. However, the latter, a motet for double choir, was later deemed unworthy of publication by Distler. In April 1933, he attempted to withdraw this work from publication, and in a letter to Breitkopf dated April 1, 1933, Distler wrote, “It matters a great deal to me because I am no longer artistically in the position to answer for this work, which was composed still in Leipzig as a student exercise.”³⁸

Despite a later lack of enthusiasm for these works, his early publications with Breitkopf represent an important time in Distler’s career. Surely these publications provided some

³⁶ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 6.

³⁷ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 20.

³⁸ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 16-17.

confidence for the insecure young composer. Unfortunately, in spite of his success as a young composer and promise as a student, Distler would be forced to depart prematurely from the conservatory.

Leaving Leipzig

In August, 1930, Hugo's step-grandfather Johann Herz passed away which caused an abrupt hardship for Distler.³⁹ Herz had been financing Distler's education, and his passing meant that Hugo would be unable to continue to pay for his education. He began to apply for jobs and found a particular interest in the position of organist at the St. Jakobi-Kirche in Lübeck. It was a rigorous application process, and Distler relied heavily on the recommendations of his professors to get the job. In letters to the church, Martienssen stated "I consider Mr. Distler to be the strongest talent in composition to study at the conservatory in recent times."⁴⁰ Grabner would echo these sentiments by saying ". . . a young genius suddenly emerges from whom artistic expressions speaks forth the certainty of a distinguished career, full of blessing for mankind. I had this certainty about Distler from the first instant of our work together. . .".⁴¹ Perhaps the most valuable recommendation came from Ramin, a church organist himself, who described Distler as

. . . [a man who] distinguished himself through a completely extraordinary devotion to his task and devoted industry . . . His great gift at composition should be pointed out, as well as his true inner feeling for church music, which qualifies him for independently artistic performances also in church service playing.⁴²

Armed with such high praise, Distler was eventually given the job. It was originally his intention to wait until he completed his studies at the conservatory before moving. However,

³⁹ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 20.

⁴⁰ Larry Palmer, *Hugo Distler and His Church Music* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1967), 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19.

with mounting financial pressures and insufficient funds to support further enrollment, Distler departed for Lübeck, and on January 31, 1931, he began work as the organist at St. Jakobikirche.

Lübeck

Distler's time in Lübeck might be considered the most important period of his life, both personally and professionally. It was there that he made some meaningful friendships in Bruno Grusnick and Pastor Axel Kühl, met his wife Waltraut Thienhaus, and became a father to his first two children. As a composer, he also enjoyed his most prolific time. He wrote twenty-one sacred and thirty-four secular pieces while in Lübeck. He was also fruitful at the St. Jakobikirche where he programmed thirty-eight Vespers services, an important contribution to the church which provides a great deal of insight into the inspiration for Distler's own compositions.

St. Jakobikirche

Despite his motivation for accepting the position in Lübeck, the job at the St. Jakobikirche was meaningful in ways that extended well beyond the purely pragmatic. St. Jakobikirche, having once being the home of Dietrich Buxtehude and nearly of J.S. Bach, held a rich history. The church was well-known for its two organs, and the *kleine orgel* held particular inspiration for Distler. Its unique sound leant itself well to the performance of keyboard works of early Baroque composers such as Buxtehude and Samuel Scheidt, and it was this organ that inspired him to write the partita on *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, op. 8/I, his first large-scale organ composition.⁴³ Soon after completing the work, he was able to play the partita "for Hindemith, to

⁴³ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 54.

which Hindemith reacted very excitedly, showing great interest.”⁴⁴ Motivated by positive reviews and the historic organ, he frequently played all-Bach or all-Distler themed concerts.⁴⁵

Bruno Grusnick and the *Lübeck Sing- und Spielkries*

At the time of Distler’s appointment, Bruno Grusnick was the choir director at St. Jakobi and they quickly became great friends. Grusnick served as a mentor to Distler, and his choir, the *Lübeck Sing- und Spielkries*, premiered many of Distler’s compositions.⁴⁶ Having a high quality ensemble to perform his works was most certainly one of the factors which led to such prolific output by Distler during this time period. Additionally, the music that Grusnick would program for the choir would have a great impact on Distler. They frequently performed the music of Leonhard Lechner⁴⁷, and the performance of Schütz’s *St. Matthew Passion* for the Good Friday Vespers on April 3, 1931⁴⁸ was one of the single most impactful moments of Distler’s life.

“The most absorbing impression made on my living consciousness will remain the first collaboration exercised yearly in Lübeck for the annual Good Friday performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* by Heinrich Schütz,”⁴⁹ wrote Distler in the Epilogue to his *Choralpassion*, op. 7. The performance of Schütz’s *St. Matthew Passion* would become an annual tradition at St. Jakobi for the Good Friday Vespers (St. Matthew is the appointed reading for Good Friday). Along with being the inspiration of one of his most important works, the impact of this piece is

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26

⁴⁵ Ibid., 24

⁴⁶ Todd Jere Harper, “Hugo Distler and the Renewal Movement in Nazi Germany” (DMA diss., University of Southern California, 2008), 12.

⁴⁷ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 23.

⁴⁸ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 12.

⁴⁹ Hugo Distler, *Choralpassion* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1932), 55.

frequently cited in scholarship regarding Hugo Distler. The influence of Schütz permeates much of Distler's music and can be found most specifically when comparing their treatment of the German language.

Through their collaboration, Grusnick and Distler became lifelong friends. Besides serving as a colleague and an important mentor, Grusnick was also important to Distler's monetary success. Hugo had taken the job at St. Jakobi to support himself financially. However, the organist's salary was simply not enough to make ends meet. Grusnick evidently took pity on Distler and his financial situation and resigned as cantor of the Jacobikirche. This allowed Distler to take over the position in April of 1931.⁵⁰ This not only led to increased pay, but also the furthering of responsibilities for Distler, who conjointly continued as organist and began to lead the choirs at the Jacobikirche. This extension of responsibilities would have a direct impact on the compositions that Distler wrote during this time period.

Axel Werner Kühl

The pastor at the Jakobikirche was Axel Werner Kühl. Pastor Kühl and Distler became fast friends, and their relationship was one that Distler highly valued. Kühl practiced a modern, progressive theology and liturgy. He was, in fact, an organ expert himself and participated as a member of the choir.⁵¹ His support was no doubt valuable to Distler and his ability to succeed at the church. Further, he would later preside over Distler's wedding ceremony. Kühl's involvement as a leader of the Confessing Church would eventually lead to a great deal of difficulty, and his banishment from Lübeck would weigh heavily on Distler.

⁵⁰ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 27.

⁵¹ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 22.

Choirs and Other Employment

As will later be revealed as a trend in Distler's life, he found himself extremely busy with a variety of different positions while in Lübeck. As was previously stated, in addition to his duties as organist, Distler took over as the conductor at the Jakobikirche. He directed a children's choir made of the boys from the church as well as a volunteer choir from the congregation.⁵² It was for these choirs that he wrote the chorale settings which would later turn into *Der Jahrkreis*, op. 5 (The Ecclesiastical Calendar Year). These fifty-two 3-part chorale settings, dedicated to Pastor Axel Werner Kühl, would later become his first Bärenreiter publication.

In addition to his duties at St. Jakobikirche, he conducted the German Trade Help Union Chorus⁵³, was appointed the head of the chamber music department at the Lübeck Conservatory in October 1933, and directed the Lübeck Kammerorchster.⁵⁴ With financial burdens mounting and a seemingly unceasing need to work, Distler also accepted a position at the Kirchenmusik-Schule (Church Music School) in Spandau, Berlin in October 1933. This position was for two days a week comprising twenty hours of lessons in functional harmony, counterpoint, and composition.⁵⁵ The extreme number of hours that he worked and the commute to Berlin, would later take its toll on Distler's mental state.

NSDAP

In 1933, while he was still working in Lübeck, Distler became a member of the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or National Socialists German Workers Party,

⁵² Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 27.

⁵³ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 27.

⁵⁴ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

more commonly referred to as the Nazi Party). Joining the party was more or less a requirement for musicians hoping to obtain employment in Germany at this time:

The Nazis had established layer upon layer of bureaucracy within the arts, each held together by the desire to realize party purposes and every one of them with party loyalists. Musicians were strongly encouraged to join Nazi cultural associations, and all were required to have membership in the regime's professional union for musicians, the Reichsmusikkammer, or one of its associated chambers.⁵⁶

There were those who joined the party, however, not simply because it was essentially required. Many, like Distler, hoped that the rise of the party would provide greater prominence and stability for himself or herself and his or her family.⁵⁷ Germany had suffered greatly in the aftermath of World War I, and the NSDAP offered a real sense of stability. Among the many positive changes for musicians was a willingness to secure copyright protection for composers and a direct influence with most of the nation's potential employers.⁵⁸

While there continues to be debate in modern writing about the reasons for, and the extent of, Distler's involvement in the party, it is known that some of his music was utilized for political purposes. *Wach auf, O Deutsches Land* (Awake, O German Land) was performed on November 9, 1933 at a ceremony that commemorated the Nazi victims of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.⁵⁹ The *Lied für Männer* was performed yearly to commemorate the anniversary of the commencement of Hitler's regime on January 30, 1933. It is performances of this nature that have fueled the debate regarding Distler's involvement with, or perceived sympathy for, the Nazi party.

⁵⁶ David Monod, *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 27.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7

⁵⁸ Pamela M. Potter, "Musical Life in Berlin From Weimar to Hitler," in *Music and Nazism: Art Under Tyranny, 1933-1945*, ed. Michael H. Kater and Albrecht Rietmüller (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2003), 98.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8

Personal Life

In 1931, Paul Thienhaus, an area high school teacher, attended a performance conducted by Distler. That summer, Hugo began to give organ lessons to Paul's eldest son Erich, and the two became fast friends. Hugo began to visit the Thienhaus home with increased frequency where he was often invited to play the organ, piano, or harpsichord.⁶⁰ As he spent more time in the Thienhaus home, his relationship with the family grew rapidly: Distler and Erich were of a similar age and shared many qualities, Gerhart and Peter were often heard imitating Distler's South German accent, Paul loaned Distler money when it was needed, and Maria helped Distler select text for his sacred compositions.⁶¹ Soon, however, Hugo would turn his attention to the young and attractive Waltraut.

On December 24, 1931, Hugo sent Waltraut a package, the handwritten score of his *Kleine Adventsmusik*, op. 4, which had been premiered on November 28. In the front of the score, which also included pencil drawings by Peter Thienhaus, he included a dedication in blue ink: "Fräulein Waltraut Thienhaus zugeeignet. Lübeck, Weihnacht 1931" ("Dedicated to Miss Waltraut Thienhaus. Lübeck, Christmas 1931").⁶² While Waltraut had sung as a member of the Sing- und Spielkreis and had spent time with Hugo at the Thienhaus home, this was viewed as a quite sudden declaration of his interests⁶³ as he had not previously shown any real sign of affection. Initially, Waltraut did not seem to have any real interest in Hugo romantically.

⁶⁰ Distler-Harth, 98.

⁶¹ Ibid., 101.

⁶² Ibid., 102.

⁶³ It is somewhat unclear as to whether or not Distler understood the potential repercussions of his gesture, a letter to Erich Thienhaus says "Your sister and I are both still somewhat surprised" and Bruno Grusnick also suggests that Hugo may have been a bit naïve to the situation. Distler-Harth, 104.

However, Maria saw this as an opportunity to bring Hugo into the family as a permanent fixture. After several months of family pressure, Hugo and Waltraut were engaged on March 13, 1932.⁶⁴

Shortly thereafter, Waltraut announced that she wanted to travel to England to deepen her knowledge of English, and while her parents approved, Hugo was quite disappointed. To Hugo, it seemed that as soon as they were engaged, Waltraut already wanted to be away from him.

“Desperate separation anxiety seized him and helpless anger was also directed against Waltraut’s parents who strongly endorsed their daughter’s plan.”⁶⁵ Despite his objections, Waltraut left for London on June 2. Distler remained close with the Thienhaus family and wrote letters back and forth with Waltraut over the course of the next year.⁶⁶

On October 14, 1933, Distler married Waltraut. Their life together was good, and their family later expanded with daughter Barbara, born December 3, 1934, and son Andres, born May 23, 1936.⁶⁷ Another event in his personal life that was of significance was the gift of a radio at Christmas in 1935⁶⁸. It is thought that he purchased the radio not only to listen to foreign broadcasts that might have been banned in Germany (including American jazz), but also because his music was beginning to attain airplay, and he wanted to be able to listen. Of the radio, Distler said the quality was “so good that you think the music that is played would be played in the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁶ These letters are addressed specifically in chapter six of the biography by Barbara Distler-Harth.

⁶⁷ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 28.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 28.

room.”⁶⁹ Even with all of the success both professionally and personally, life was not without difficulty for Distler.

On January 19, 1934, Hugo suffered a complete nervous breakdown.⁷⁰ The specific cause for the breakdown is unknown, but it is thought that it likely relates to physical and mental fatigue from his numerous jobs. It is also suspected that much of the psychological stress came from a self-imposed desire to succeed and from a feeling that he was not “good enough,” likely stemming from his childhood. At the time, Hugo was also struggling with his general happiness in Lübeck. He had applied for a full time position in Spandau and had a great internal debate about a departure from Lübeck which weighed heavily on him.⁷¹ Though he seemed poised to depart, his breakdown and subsequent hospitalization derailed any such plans. His recovery took months.

There are two other specific events that took place during this time which in retrospect would prove as ominous as they were tragic. One of Distler’s organ students committed suicide by jumping from the balcony at the St. Jakobikirche. Hugo discovered her body.⁷² On March 15, 1936, his mother-in-law and friend Maria Thienhaus also committed suicide at the age of 49. She had been struggling with a difficult and progressive disease. In a letter to his aunt Anna, Hugo

⁶⁹ Distler-Harth, 223.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 183. Distler-Harth describes the breakdown as being “harder and scarier than all previous ones,” indicating that this was not the first event that would be described as a “nervous breakdown.”

⁷¹ Ibid., 182.

⁷² Wolfgang Herbst, “Hugo Distler and the origin of a legend,” *The American Organist*, May (2011): 46.

describes that Maria had attempted to take her own life eight days prior.⁷³ The motet *In der Welt habt ihr Angst* was composed for her funeral.⁷⁴

Works

Despite a busy professional life and an eventful personal one, the period in Lübeck proved to be the most prolific for Distler as a composer. During his time there, he wrote twenty-one sacred and thirty-four secular pieces. Among these works were the *Choralpassion*, op. 7 (1933), the first of Distler's works to receive true national recognition⁷⁵, and *Die Weihnachtsgeschichte*, op. 10 (1933). Also published was *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 12 (Sacred Choral Music) (1936). A concert given by the *Sing-und Spielkries* included performances of *Ich wollt, Das ich daheime wär*, *Totentanz*, and the premiere of *Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme*. The next day the magazine *Lied und Volk* reported:

Hugo Distler is the great hope of German church music, or more succinctly of German music. One had to carry this impression away from Kassel. Not only is he well educated, but, even more, he has greatness and a depth of spirit. With seriousness his church music penetrates the meaning of the words. Perhaps the best that one could say is this: the possibilities are placed in his hands; the maturity and completeness of his creations will depend less on the further increase of his means for expression and technical ability than on the degree of his inner maturing and the discipline with which he employs the gifts given him. For this the group with which he associates will in all probability, be a help to him.⁷⁶

Leaving Lübeck

In 1937, Distler would depart Lübeck for a new position in Stuttgart. It is difficult to understand why one might leave a situation that was so fruitful for him professionally. However, a number of components factored into his decision to leave. Among these, and most important

⁷³ Distler-Harth, 225.

⁷⁴ Herbst, 46.

⁷⁵ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 41.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

were the departure of his closest friends. Pastor Kühl was “forbidden to set foot in Lübeck”⁷⁷ and Bruno Grusnick was serving a short stint in the military. Without a strong support system, Distler felt unable to handle the burdens of such rigorous professional demands. Despite an existing offer for full-time employment in Berlin, the offer from the Hochschule in Stuttgart appealed to Distler due to the possibility of having a strong choir to conduct.⁷⁸

Stuttgart

While in Stuttgart, Distler’s compositional output was relatively small. However, developments in his personal life during this time represent major points in his life. Once again, an insatiable need to stay busy through employment was considered critical, even to the detriment of his work as a composer. His appointment to a position with the Reichsmusikkammer has been the subject of much debate for Distler historians, and yet his conflicts with the Hitler Youth while working in Stuttgart serve to emphasize the dichotomy between his stated personal goals and beliefs with his professional choices.

Work in Stuttgart

Distler left Lübeck for Stuttgart on April 1, 1937 and accepted a position at the *Württemberg Hochschule für Musik* (Württemberg College for Music). The position eventually proved as frustrating as it was rewarding. Though Distler was teaching in a secular position, his passion for sacred choral music was still quite evident through composition and programming. Unfortunately, there were a number of students at the college who were loyal to the Nazi Party and were encouraged to make life difficult for Distler. It was believed that the sacred music he promoted was not ideal for the Nazi agenda and leaders in the area scheduled meetings of the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Hitler Youth which conflicted with Distler's rehearsals and performances. This caused a great deal of stress for Hugo and eventually caused him to adjust his programming just to have enough singers to field an ensemble.⁷⁹

Reichmusikammer

With all of the difficulties Distler had encountered with the Nazi Party and his having clearly stated his lack of support for the ideology promoted by the Third Reich, it may be surprising that in 1937 Distler accepted a position as regional examiner with the *Reichmusikammer* (RMK or Reich Music Chamber). This Chamber was a division of the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* (RMVP or Reich Ministry for People's Clarification and Propaganda) headed by the Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels.⁸⁰ These regional examining boards were set up to "protect the German people against the influence of undesirable and deleterious music, such as phonograph records by Jews and Negroes, or non-Aryan printed music."⁸¹

Having had his own music in danger of being labeled "degenerate" previously⁸², one might wonder why Distler would accept such an appointment. Indeed, scholars since his death have pointed to this position as clue that perhaps Distler was himself a Nazi sympathizer. He had, after all, enrolled in the party in 1933 and "on the same day in a May Day parade in Lübeck,

⁷⁹ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 8.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

⁸² Distler's *Harpsichord Concerto*, op. 14 was "in danger" of being labeled degenerate and the Third Reich only allowed Bärenreiter to publish the score after it was agreed that the third movement would be removed. (Harper, 10.)

marched behind a flag bearing the swastika.”⁸³ This is the type of debate that most often surrounds Distler: if he hated the Nazi party, why work for it? Why not leave Germany and compose elsewhere as many of his contemporaries had? Distler friends and supporters have suggested that by accepting the position, Distler had hoped that he might be able to have an impact from within and give a break to local composers and musicians by giving them a friend within the RMK.⁸⁴ Later, Jan Bender (a friend and student of Distler) would relate this story to attempt to clarify Distler’s feelings towards the Nazi regime:

Hugo and I were walking down the street together when suddenly he vanished. Not knowing what else to do, I remained there, waiting for him to return. After about five minutes he appeared again. “Where have you been?” I asked. “Over there, in that cigar store,” he replied. “But why,” I asked, “you don’t smoke?” “Didn’t you see those people? SS-men!” he replied. “I don’t like those people.” He hated the Nazis and was afraid of them. He was a man of peace.⁸⁵

Further complicating the matter was the fact that even Distler admitted that it was impossible to not be impressed with the pomp demonstrated by the Third Reich:

. . . Who of us young ones had not grasped the greatness of the patriotic events during the past years? Happy the few who succeeded in employing this event [the Nazi seizure of the German government in 1933] of unique historical greatness in their own creation.⁸⁶

That said, “whether Distler truly hoped to offer leniency through the position [with the RMK] or whether he hoped the position might better enable him to compose music autonomously remains unclear.”⁸⁷

⁸³ Herbst, *Origin of a Legend*, 44.

⁸⁴ Henry Anthony Alviani, “Use of Cantus Firmus in Selected Choral Works of Hugo Distler and Maurice Duruflé,” Master’s thesis, California State University-Fullerton, 1980, 14.

⁸⁵ Jan Bender, Personal commentary on the life and work of Hugo Distler, tape recorded February 16-17, 1962, quoted in Charles R. Anders. “Hugo Distler and the New Church Music” (Master’s thesis, Indiana University, 1962), 29.

⁸⁶ Hugo Distler, Vom Geiste der neuen Evangelischen Kirchenmusik, Zeitschrift für Musik, CII, (December, 1935), p.1325f, quoted in Charles R. Anders. “Hugo Distler and the New Church Music” (Master’s thesis, Indiana University, 1962), 29.

Other Employment in Stuttgart

In what became typical fashion for Hugo, he was extremely busy with work while in Stuttgart. In addition to the aforementioned jobs, he also accepted positions as the conductor of the *Esslingen Singakademie* in 1938 and as a professor at the *Stuttgart Hochschule* in the same year. By May of 1940, he was made a full professor⁸⁸, an honor bestowed by the state and which was quite unusual for someone his age.⁸⁹ The position was helpful in that it helped him temporarily avoid war service and provided greater financial security (a constant worry for Distler). However, it also kept him extremely busy. He taught no less than 30 hours a week in the areas of music theory, form and analysis, and choral directing and was also in charge of the Conservatory Choir and Conservatory Cantors.⁹⁰

The result of such a heavy workload was a relatively non-prolific compositional output during this time. Many of his works during this time never saw completion. Much of this may have also related to the pressure he received from the state regarding his sacred works. No doubt feeling frustrated by these restrictions, “Distler fortunately found much support and help from the administration and his colleagues at the conservatory and elsewhere. They advised him to concentrate on writing secular compositions, which he did with much success.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Katherine Lenore Fitzgibbon, “Historicism and nationalism in the German Requiems of Brahms, Reger, and Distler” (DMA diss., Boston University. 2008), 157.

⁸⁸ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 11.

⁸⁹ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 104.

⁹⁰ McKinney, *Compositional Style*, 30-31.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

War Summons

At this time, the threat of active military service was a very real fear for Distler. In early 1940, Hugo was summoned by the military for physical examination. This no doubt weighed heavily on his mind, and in a letter to Oskar Söhnngen in April of 1940, he stated “If you would help in [this] matter . . . I will be inexpressibly grateful to you: this thing tortures me endlessly. Ask of me any service which is in my power to give you.”⁹² Though he avoided the military’s initial request, he would receive a second summons roughly six months later.⁹³ His critics have suggested that his desire to avoid military duty was not borne of ideological differences (citing his employment in the RMK) but due to fear or cowardice. On the contrary, Jan Bender suggests that “It is completely misleading to assume that Distler’s desire to escape from this suppression was due to a lack of courage. I have seldom known a man of such fearlessness and inner freedom as he.”⁹⁴ Bender goes on to reiterate Distler’s “total rejection of the Hitler regime. . .” saying “How many of our conversations rang out with the complaint, ‘Why do we not find one among us who will forfeit his life to throw this beast [Hitler] from the precipice?’”⁹⁵

Works

It was previously stated that the years in Stuttgart were not prolific for Distler. This was a result of protest from the Hitler Youth, the threat of active military service, and the probable stress from overextending himself professionally. The encouragement to focus on secular works, however, proved to be fruitful for Distler. In 1939, selections from his *Mörike-*

⁹² Anders, *Hugo Distler*, 30.

⁹³ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 11.

⁹⁴ Anders, *Hugo Distler*, 30-31.

⁹⁵ Jan Bender, Personal commentary on the life and work of Hugo Distler, tape recorded February 16-17, 1962, quoted in Charles R. Anders. “Hugo Distler and the New Church Music” (Master’s thesis, Indiana University, 1962), 30.

Chorliederbuch premiered at the *Fest der Deutschen Chormusik* in Graz.⁹⁶ This collection, which is analyzed in greater detail in chapter five, includes 48 settings of 39 poems by Eduard Mörike, 24 for mixed chorus, 12 for women's voices, and 12 for men's voices. The pieces made a great impact at the festival.⁹⁷ In fact, "Helmuth Osthoff refers to this collection as probably the most important collection of secular German choral songs of recent times."⁹⁸

People and Events

Aside from music and composition, several other important events happened during these years. In 1937, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* premiered in Frankfurt. "Distler attended the premiere and was much impressed by the newness and rhythmic vitality of the work."⁹⁹ This helps to frame a context for the type of music that Distler may have written had his life not been cut short. Though his *Totentanz* premiered three years prior to this, certain similarities can be drawn between these pieces, and this makes Distler's affinity for Orff's new composition easily understood. "Another work Distler heard during this period was Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*; always intrigued by the operas of others, Distler never finished one of his own, although various ideas for scenarios and libretti occupied him at intervals."¹⁰⁰ The clear influence of this piece can be heard in Distler's incidental music for *Ritter Blaubart* (a work only published posthumously), particularly the *War Music* of Act 1, scene 3.

⁹⁶ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 10.

⁹⁷ Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (Portland, Or.: Amadeus Press, 2002), 39.

⁹⁸ Weston Douglas Pritchard, "Creative Historicism in the Choral Music of Hugo Distler (1908-1942)" (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 1966), 193.

⁹⁹ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 57.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 57

With the wonderful instruments of the St. Jakobikirche no longer at his disposal, Distler commissioned a house organ from Paul Ott in 1938. By this time, Ott had become recognized as one of the “most interesting” organ builders in Germany and was particularly noted as a builder of Positives and other small organs.¹⁰¹ This small house organ allowed Distler to play and compose at home. Because Distler was heavily involved in the design specifications of the organ, this instrument is very helpful in understanding the sound ideal that he envisioned for both the vocal and organ works of this time.¹⁰² Because the instrument “largely lacked the power” to create any new major works, Distler turned to spiritual solo singing, and the *Drei geistliche Konzerte für hohe Singstimme und Orgel bzw. Cembalo* was one of the early works written on this instrument.¹⁰³ Documents have been written by McKinney, Bergaas, and Brock which help detail specifics of the organ.

It was during this time that Distler began writing his *Funktionelle Harmonielehre*, a textbook on harmony and composition that was published by Bärenreiter in 1941.¹⁰⁴ This book is an important representation of Hugo Distler’s impact on the musical world in which he lived. Today, most remember him as a composer, either of organ music or a cappella sacred choral music. His contributions to music extend much further as has been shown by his work as a teacher, conductor, performer, and now as an author.

Despite his professional success and productivity, demons in Distler’s personal life continued to plague him. During his time in Stuttgart, he wrote a letter to his brother-in-law

¹⁰¹ Lawrence I. Phelps, “A Short History of the Organ Revival,” *Church Music* 67.1, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967, 18.

¹⁰² McKinney, *Organ Works*, 32.

¹⁰³ Grusnick, Bruno. *Hugo Distler*. 800 Jahre Musik in Lübeck, 1982.

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 67.

Erich about his marriage to Waltraut. He recalls that they had been so young when they married and suggests that although he “cannot say that [they] married against [their] will,” that they likely would not have been married without the firm encouragement of Maria Thienhaus. (He also suggests that given his “low position,” he would not have dared to propose such a marriage to the upper class Thienhaus family.) He tells Erich that he and Waltraut had “never experienced what is called love between husband and wife” and suggests that they only had children to “make an unnatural and intolerable situation tolerable.” Distler acknowledges that his relationship with Erich and the rest of the Thienhaus family allowed him to “deceive himself” about the difficulties in his marriage. Towards the end of his letter to Erich, he says, “We stand without attorneys in connection, but Waltraut has not yet initiated the divorce.” His guilt and fear regarding the potential failure of his marriage are palpable in his words, and he closes his letter with simply “So help us”.¹⁰⁵ Needless to say, the personal demons that Hugo struggled with were not limited to professional challenges or fears surrounding the increasingly frightening political situation.

Berlin

Berlin would mark the final stop in Hugo Distler’s travels. His time there resulted in a litany of examples of what his oeuvre might look like had his life not come to such an abrupt end and includes several major works that were never completed. Distler moved to Berlin for reasons that were familiar but once again was unable to find enough distraction in his work to bring peace and solace to his life. Hugo Distler ended his own life on November 1, 1942.

¹⁰⁵ Distler-Harth, 274-277.

Employment in Berlin

On October 1, 1940, Hugo Distler took over for Kurt Thomas at the *Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik* (State Academy College for Music) in Charlottenburg, Berlin. Here, he was charged with teaching choral conducting, counterpoint, composition, and organ performance.¹⁰⁶ His most recognizable student in Berlin was Siegfried Reda, a composer who would go on to a long, successful career. Additionally, Hugo was the conductor of the Conservatory Choir. His first major project with them was a performance of Bach's *St. John's Passion*¹⁰⁷, a performance which surely held special meaning to him.

On April 1, 1942, Distler began work as the conductor of the Berlin State and Cathedral Choir. It is said that Distler had long viewed this position as one of his highest goals,¹⁰⁸ and so it seemed that life was really going well for him in Berlin. This position allowed him an opportunity to once again deeply engage with sacred music.

Personal Life

Hoping to avoid any possible bombing in the large city of Berlin, the Distler family rented a home in Strausberg (about 35 kilometers from Berlin), from which Hugo hoped he could commute to work. However, a restriction was placed on travel due to the war, which forced Hugo to rent his own apartment near the city. He was able to see his family on the weekends.¹⁰⁹ Despite this challenge, the family grew by one when Hugo's daughter Brigitte was born in 1941.

¹⁰⁶ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁹ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 104.

He had taken up voice lessons with Paul Gümmer in October, 1940 “to learn all the possible vocal problems and methods of fixing them.”¹¹⁰ When one considers Distler’s legacy, one might expect that had he lived longer this may have greatly impacted his role as a conductor, educator, pedagogue, and composer. It is presumably his work with Gümmer that led to the creation of new works for the solo voice, including *Lied am Herde*, op. 21/I which was sung by Gümmer at the premiere on October 1, 1941¹¹¹, and *Kleine Sommerkantate* (for two sopranos and string quartet), which also stems from this time.

Despite the positive developments in Berlin, Distler’s life continued to be affected by politics beyond his control. He received a third draft notice in 1941, which he only avoided (as a state recognized Professor) because no replacement for him could be found. He continued to face persecution for his musical choices as well when the regime determined that his work with the State and Cathedral Choir was growing too powerful as a propaganda tool for the church and insisted that it limit itself to secular music. The other option was to have this choir nearly completely absorbed by the *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth), who would schedule meetings and events during his rehearsal times to effectively sabotage the choir.¹¹² His emotions were again tormented when he visited his beloved dear Lübeck in September of 1942. The city had been bombed on Palm Sunday of that year, and the destruction took an emotional toll on Distler.¹¹³

Works

Examining the works in the final segment of Distler’s career is important as it reveals a great deal about the direction of his composition. He was commissioned to write incidental

¹¹⁰ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 35.

¹¹¹ “Offizielle Homepage Hugo Distler.”

¹¹² Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 11.

¹¹³ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 105.

music for *Ritter Blaubart*¹¹⁴ (Bluebeard). *Blaubart* is an old fairy tale which has been turned into a great number of plays and operas. Distler's writing was to accompany the play written by Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853). This music, written for orchestra, sounds much different from the works one typically associates with Distler, and in this piece, one can hear the influence of Hindemith's *Mathis der Mahler*. It is probably the best example of what one might have expected from Distler in the years to come.

Equally important are the two works which Distler began in Berlin, but never completed: *Die Weltalter*¹¹⁵ and a setting of the *St. John Passion*. While one can only speculate, it is entirely conceivable that a work on the scale of the *St. John Passion* would have shown Distler at his most masterful. Whereas *Eine deutsche Chormesse* (op. 2) and *Choralpassion* (op. 7) were written relatively early in his career, it is inevitable that a new *St. John Passion* would have demonstrated many of the more mature composition techniques demonstrated in his *Geistliche Chormusik*. As he had ceased writing sacred music in the latter part of his career, perhaps it was Distler's intention that the passion work would be a grand return to this arena. One might presume that the eventual end of the reign of the Third Reich would have provided the opportunity for Distler to complete the work.

Another major work which Distler began but never completed was *Die Weltalter* (The World's Age).¹¹⁶ This was an oratorio for which Distler had written the words. Distler biographer Larry Palmer suggests that in a sense, Distler had "written his own Requiem with the

¹¹⁴ Although this music was written in 1940, it was never performed. It sat in obscurity for many years, and the manuscript was later held by the Hugo Distler Archives. In 2001, a performance edition was prepared by Michael Töpel, and the work was given a public premier in 2002.

¹¹⁵ Similarly, the work which was completed towards this project was never performed during Distler's lifetime. In 2008, a performance edition was prepared by Töpel, and five of the motets planned for *Die Weltalter* were premiered.

¹¹⁶ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 12.

Weltalter text.”¹¹⁷ He suggests that these words were not only a personal prayer, but also one for the entire German nation:

God!
Creator of all things!
From earth hast Thou created us
And to earth we return again at the end:
Dust to dust.
Only the spirit
Remains restless
And above space and time:
The spirit,
Which, triumphing over death and hell,
Springs from confinement
To touch Thy mystery,
Almighty God;
The Spirit
In which Thou, in Thine own image, hast created us.

Once again, one can only presume to know what the compositional output of Hugo Distler might have looked like had it continued. These final projects suggest that Distler had plans to write major works and to expand his writing to include more instrumental music, operas, and staged works. They also suggest a return to the sacred music which began his career.

Death

Hugo Distler’s suicide in 1942 was a tragic loss for music. His untimely death says a great deal about the demons he must have struggled with for much of his life. It is well documented that his fear of enlistment into the military weighed heavily upon him, and it is thought that this played a major role in his suicide. While many have pointed to his employment by the RMK to say that he was not as against the Nazi party as others would suggest, the

¹¹⁷ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 71.

lamentable story of his death suggests that it was simply too much for Hugo to bear. Biographer Larry Palmer recounts the tale:

On the evening of Oct. 31 he went for a long walk, came home and played his beloved house organ for the last time, selecting a Bach A Major trio on *Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr* from the Leipzig *Great Eighteen* chorale preludes as his farewell. The following day, Nov. 1, was All Saints' Day. The tormented young man ended the living horror of his life. He moved a bed into the kitchen, placed a photograph of his dear family so he could see it, took a Bible in one hand and a brass cross in the other, turn on the gas, and lay down to sleep forever. His farewell letter to his wife was almost childlike in its simplicity, "I have yet only one plea in the word: that *you* not be angry with me. Who knows more than you what a '*Lebensangst*' has been with me all my life? All that I created remained beneath this sign."¹¹⁸

Adding to the tragedy of this event is that it was only days after his death that a letter arrived which revealed Distler's inclusion on the *Fürherliste*, a list which indicated men important to the Third Reich on the home front excused them from military conscription.¹¹⁹ To some, his placement on this list only further obscures the relationship that Distler had with the Nazi party.

Certainly, when such a tragedy occurs, there is a search for answers. As documented previously, Distler struggled with a number of mental demons. Musically, he seemed to never be fully satisfied. His first passion was sacred music, an art form for which he faced constant scrutiny and persecution. While his forays into other music proved to be some of his most successful (e.g., *Mörike-Chorliederbuch*), he was unable to complete other projects that may have proven more fulfilling. In addition to *Die Weltalter*, Distler had quietly expressed an interest in jazz, music he could certainly not have written while under the oppression of the Third Reich. Professionally, Hugo had always kept himself extremely busy. One might speculate, however, that a result of such over-employment may have only provided a temporary relief from

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 71.

his personal problems. Alongside his appointment to desirable positions, he was also employed by the very regime he detested so much.

Beyond these challenges, Distler faced a number of personal problems. His busy schedule and living situation in Berlin forced him to spend most of his time away from his family. His daughter Barbara would later describe the “marital crisis” which included an extramarital affair¹²⁰ while living in Stuttgart. She also suggested that his death was not his first attempt at suicide.¹²¹ His family history and the difficult relationship with his family, no doubt played a role in his struggle for inner peace. For some, these facts only serve to further cloak Distler’s relationship with the Nazi party and suggest that his hatred of the Nazi party was not the cause of his suicide. Some maintain that he was complicit in the efforts of the Third Reich, and the tales of his resistance are little more than historical romanticism by his close friends. Whatever the case, it is clear that Hugo Distler had much more to offer the musical community. His untimely death has left many to ponder what he might have given to the world, and how history might view him as a composer given the opportunity to fully develop his musical identity.

¹²⁰ Distler had a one-night affair with Barbara Linde. Linde was a friend of the Thienhaus family and a member of the Sing- und Spielkreis. Later, in a letter to Magda Kühl (wife of A.W. Kühl), Distler describes his relationship with Waltraut as having “hazards in the diversity of [their] two natures.” Interestingly, Linde later became the Godmother to Distler’s daughter Barbara. Though the affair ultimately does not seem to have affected the marriage, its occurrence and Hugo’s subsequent description of the event speaks to the personal difficulties in the marriage.

¹²¹ Herbst, *Origin of a Legend*, 46-47.

CHAPTER 3

INFLUENCES: GERMAN CULTURE AND EDUCATION

The biographical information presented in chapter two serves to outline Distler's life and who he was as a person. This, however, only provides half the story when considering the factors that would influence him as a composer. To gain a deeper understanding of Hugo Distler and his music, one must explore the life and education of his teachers and the composers who came before him that proved to be influential both directly and indirectly. Further, it is important to have some understanding of German culture at the turn of the century. This chapter will discuss these factors and provide a greater context for the time in which Distler lived and for the various components which helped frame his life and career.

German History and Culture

A famous and oft-referenced quote states "Only the dead have seen the end of war."¹²² Indeed, war and conflict are well represented throughout all recorded history and accordingly have affected the lives of those involved, both those who choose to be involved and those for whom involvement is only the result of circumstance. Hugo Distler grew up during World War I and died during World War II. The shifting political and social landscape brought by the rise of the Third Reich is well documented. However, it is not sufficient to provide a picture of German culture during Distler's life. Understanding the effect that this regime had on the life of Distler requires contextualizing the time preceding its rise to prominence.

Musical Culture in the 1800s

While a unified Germany did not yet exist, the idea of "German identity" intruded into every discussion about a building, a concert, or an exhibition, and in every production of a new

¹²² George Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (New York: Scribner, 1924), 102.

opera or play.¹²³ With a desire to extend this pride to local productions, there was often a sense of competition within regions or cities. This included a commitment to luring the best conductors or building the best orchestra.¹²⁴ Through this competition, the quality of musical experience in the German states continued to grow. The General German Music Association was founded in 1861. This was the first national music society in Germany, and it would sponsor many annual events.

In 1867, laws regarding copyright underwent a major change. Prior to this time, copyright was considered “timeless” in Germany, and thus, the opportunity for the dissemination of older works or creation of new editions was somewhat limited.¹²⁵ The end of this law led to a veritable boom in the publication of classic historical repertoire. This allowed for new complete editions of composers’ works and a much greater availability of these works to teachers, students, and performers. Another factor contributing to an increase in musical practice was a shift in the landscape of piano manufacturing. A move from construction in small craft shops to high-yield factories led to an eightfold increase in piano production between 1870 and 1910.¹²⁶ This caused the cost of pianos to be cut in half, which resulted in the piano becoming a much more common household feature. These factors all suggest that there was a very strong musical culture in Germany at the end of the 19th century.

¹²³ Celia Applegate, “Culture and the Arts.” In *The Short Oxford History of Germany: Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. James Retallack. (New York: OUP. 2008), 107.

¹²⁴ Applegate, *Culture and the Arts*, 109.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 112.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 113.

Otto von Bismark (1815-1898)

Despite having a strong cultural identity, there was not a unified German nation. “The only representative institution linking the recently created North German Confederation with the German states south of the River Main was a customs parliament.”¹²⁷ As a consequence of Prussian provocation and French “diplomatic blunders,” the Franco-Prussian war began in July, 1870.¹²⁸ The Prussian army would defeat the French Second Empire at Sedan in early September of the same year. The German Empire was established at Versailles on January 18, 1871. The newly formed Reich was comprised by four kingdoms (Prussia, Bavaria, Württemberg, and Saxony), six grand duchies (notably, Baden and Hesse), five duchies (for example, Anhalt and Braunschweig), seven principalities (such as Lippe and Schaumburg-lippe), three free cities (Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck), and the ‘imperial territory’ of Alsace-Lorraine.¹²⁹

Germany was thus created as a nation state in the “midst of an industrial take off and population boom.”¹³⁰ Initially, the lives of ordinary Germans were somewhat “grim and insecure.” However, Otto von Bismarck helped to introduce legislation that created certain social insurances in the 1880s.¹³¹ A series of laws provided German workers with many benefits and this helped to rapidly grow the working-class population. Generally, the quality of life was on the rise for the average German citizen.

¹²⁷ Katharine Anne Lerman, “Bismarckian Germany,” in *The Short Oxford History of Germany: Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. by James Retallack (New York: OUP, 2008), 18.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹³⁰ Brett Fairbairn, “Economic and Social Developments,” in *The Short Oxford History of Germany: Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. James Retallack. New York: OUP, 2008, 62.

¹³¹ Ibid., 62, 65.

Wilhelm II (1859-1941)

Friedrich Wilhelm Viktor Albrecht von Preußen was the King of Prussia in 1888, and in 1890, he also became the German Emperor, a role he would hold until 1918. For most Germans, life did not change under Wilhelm; the shift from a rural and agricultural society to an urban and industrial one proceeded slowly.¹³² Churches remained prominent and a high level of religious observance was typical. Social policy was underpinned by the protection of civil liberties.¹³³ In 1895, the economy turned a corner and Germany would enter a “prolonged period of rising prices and more rapidly rising wages.”¹³⁴

By 1913, with the economy humming steadily and successfully, Germans found themselves with a greater amount of leisure time than was enjoyed by the previous generation. Wilhelm was a fervent defender of the arts and suggested that “art should contribute to the education of the people. Even the lower classes, after their toil and hard work, should be lifted up and inspired by ideal forces.”¹³⁵ The Germany that existed in the early years of Distler’s life must have seemed idyllic for musicians: a strong national pride, an increase in the availability of printed music and household instruments, and a strong economy all contributing to the positive conditions.

On August 1, 1914, Germany officially entered World War I when it declared war on Russia. The effects of any war have sadly become common knowledge in the human consciousness. It is sufficient to say that even for those not directly involved in combat, life

¹³² Mark Hewitson, “Wilhelmine Germany,” in *The Short Oxford History of Germany: Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. James Retallack. New York: OUP, 2008, 43.

¹³³ Ibid., 48.

¹³⁴ Fairbairn, *Economic and Social Developments*, 66.

¹³⁵ Applegate, *Culture and the Arts*, 117.

became significantly more difficult. Falling wages and severe malnutrition were among the many problems facing the average German. When the war ended in November 1918, the birth of the German Republic was declared. Over 2 million Germans died during WWI, and over 41 million were wounded (out of a total population of about 65 million). Germany borrowed money from its citizens to finance the war and ultimately spent approximately forty billion dollars. In the Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost thirteen percent of its territory and was required to pay thirty-three billion dollars to the victors.¹³⁶ Less than forty-eight hours after the end of the war, Wilhelm would flee to exile in Holland.¹³⁷

Though Distler had been born into a thriving and happy Germany, the “rationalist, optimistic, progressive philosophy, which had been so much a part of Imperial German society, lay in ruins.”¹³⁸ Beyond the physical and monetary toll the war had taken on the country, the morale of the proud German culture was decidedly low. One young war veteran, however, was contemplating the rise of a new Germany.

The Third Reich

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) had proudly served Germany during WWI. However, his aspirations were not always political. As a child in Lambach, Austria, Adolf was a choir boy in the Junior Choral Institute.¹³⁹ He loved church music and was “intoxicated [by the] solemn splendor of brilliant church festivals.” He loved the music of Wagner and attended many Wagnerian productions while also spending much of his free time painting, composing poetry,

¹³⁶ Jeffrey Verhey, “War and Revolution,” in *The Short Oxford History of Germany: Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. James Retallack. (New York: OUP, 2008), 261.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 264.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 261.

¹³⁹ Sherree Owens Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler: A Psychological Interpretation of His Views on Architecture, Art, and Music* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 7.

and writing music. He attended performances of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tristan and Isolde*, and *Lohengrin* and also saw operas by Mozart, Beethoven, and Verdi.¹⁴⁰ His passions led him to begin the composition of an opera that was grand on a Wagnerian scale, but the work was never completed. He was determined that there should be a traveling orchestra to take to the Austrian provinces, and he kept a working list of pieces which would be suitable for such an occasion. "Hitler finally decided that the program of the traveling orchestra, which would eventually expand to ten orchestras, would have programs from the music of German composers, including Johann Sebastian Bach, Gluck, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, [and] the beloved Bruckner."¹⁴¹ Growing up at a time when German pride was high and music thrived in the home, it is easy to understand his passion for German music. Later in life, he would describe himself as one of the most musical people in the world. "When he whistled a tune incorrectly and someone pointed it out, he retorted, "It's not I who am whistling it wrong, but the composer who made a blunder here".¹⁴²

Hitler's love of music would bleed into his cultural ideals. In *Mein Kampf*, he wrote about the decline of German culture since the turn of the century. It was here that he suggested:

Art will always remain the expression and the reflection of the longings and the realities of an era. The neutral international attitude of aloofness is rapidly disappearing. Heroism is coming forward passionately and will in future shape and lead political destiny. It is the task of art to be the expression of this determining spirit of the age. Blood and race will once more become the source of artistic intuition.¹⁴³

When Hitler came into power, culture and the arts were a primary area of focus for his regime.

While the creation of new entities which would regulate and govern culture are primarily viewed

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴² Ibid., 97.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 66.

as being part of the authoritarian mind control that Hitler employed over the German people, his passion for the arts surely shows through here.

On 22 September, 1933, [Propaganda Minister] Goebbels succeeded in getting a decree passed to establish the Reich Culture Chamber, with himself as President. It contained seven designated sub-sections, also known as Chambers – literature, theatre, music, radio, film, fine arts, and the press, corresponding to the divisions already established in the ministry.¹⁴⁴

Richard Strauss would serve as the first President of the Reich Music Chamber, and this was considered a major coup for the Reich. It was the hope of the Propaganda Ministry to nurture musicians and to grow the art form throughout Germany.

While some musicians chose to flee Germany rather than be persecuted for their musical choices or dictated to regarding their musical options, for many, it was a conscious choice to remain. Following the cultural devastation resulting from WWI and the Treaty of Versailles, it is understandable that many musicians felt conflicted about the new opportunities provided by the RMK. Hugo Distler's role with the RMK was discussed in the previous chapter. Like Distler, other musicians surely found the opportunities presented to be very appealing despite disagreement with the moral standing of the Nazi Party. The difficulty for those who remained working in Germany was apparent in the presentation of the Degenerate Music Festival. "In May 1938, inspired by the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition in Munich, Hans Severus Ziegler, manager of the national theatre in Weimar, organized an exhibition of 'Degenerate Music' in Düsseldorf as part of the first Reich Music Rally."¹⁴⁵ Those composers whose music was not considered to fall in line with the Nazi ideals or who were not of German blood were in danger of their music being labeled "degenerate." This label meant an inability to work or present music throughout

¹⁴⁴ Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power 1933-1939* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 138.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 191.

Germany. While Distler's music was never officially labeled in this fashion, his desire to continue working in his home country may have motivated him to be careful in the way he constructed new compositions.

Other Cultural Movements

Beyond the ideas and laws promoted or enacted by the changing German government, several other social and musical movements impacted musicians in the early 20th-century. The

Orgelbewegung or (Organ Reform Movement)

. . . looked to return the organ to its Baroque foundations and was an artistic reaction against the romanticism of the nineteenth century organ music which attempted to create passionate music through grandeur and spectacle that middle the clarity and transparency of polyphonic organ music.¹⁴⁶

Several of Hugo Distler's mentors were deeply involved in this movement. It has been suggested that the term *Orgelbewegung* stems from a 1929 essay titled *Zur gegenwartigen Orgel-Erneuerungsbewegung in Deutschland* by Wilibald Gurlitt (1889-1963).¹⁴⁷ The movement, however, had really begun in earnest much earlier. Albert Schweitzer's pamphlet *The Art of Organ Building and Organ Playing in Germany and France* was written in 1906 and was born out of more than a decade of study and discussion with numerous organists and organ builders. The pamphlet brought up a number of points regarding the design, construction, and placement of the organ and is considered "the first basic document of the German organ reform movement."¹⁴⁸ The discussion and practices resulting from the publication of this document led to "honesty and accuracy in the performance of a heritage of literature which is indigenous to the

¹⁴⁶ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 21.

¹⁴⁷ Hildegard Holland Cox, "A Study of Two Twentieth-Century Orgelkonzerte Based on "Es Sungen Drei Engel" By Johann Nepomuk David and Hans Friedrich Micheelsen" (DMA diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1999), 8.

¹⁴⁸ David Otto Johns, "The Organ-Reform Movement: A Formative Influence Upon the Twentieth Century Church Music Composition, Practice, and Pedagogy," (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1931), 42.

organ as an instrument of real integrity.”¹⁴⁹ The *Orgelbewegung* helped lead to the Renewal Movement, of which Distler was a major proponent. In May 1933, Distler along with Oskar Söhngen and other leading proponents of the *Orgelbewegung* issued a declaration that called for the revival of Protestant Church Music. In an effort to demonstrate the true essence of German Protestantism, a primary goal was to return to liturgical musical style of Schütz and Bach.¹⁵⁰

Similarly, the *Singbewegung* called for a return to earlier forms of choral music. Early in the 20th century, there was a great deal of interest in traditional German folk music among German youth. The “real founding of the Musical Youth Movement occurred around 1917 through the guidance of Fritz Jöde, whose name is practically synonymous with the *Singbewegung* in Germany.”¹⁵¹ Jöde’s contribution to the movement included the founding of the first state-subsidized youth music school in Berlin and the advocacy for many new methods of instruction in music education.¹⁵² Much of the work of this movement was made possible by new complete editions of early composers. This passion for early music would lead Karl Vötterle, a member of the movement, to found Bärenreiter-Verlag in 1923.¹⁵³ Distler would go on to sign a contract with the new company, and the epilogue to his *Deutsche Choralmesse* states that the composition was written in part to benefit the *Singbewegung*.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵¹ Pritchard, *Creative Historicism*, 25.

¹⁵² Britta Sweers “The Power to Influence Minds: German Folk Music During the Nazi Era and After,” *Music, Power, and Politics*, ed. by Annie J. Randall (New York: Routledge, 2005), 69.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Keith Place, “Hugo Distler’s “Eine deutsche Choralmesse”: A Conductor’s Analysis for Performance” (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1998), 62.

Each of the previously discussed musical movements was aided in part by the broader *Jugendbewegung*, or German Youth Movement, which began in 1901.¹⁵⁵ The focus of this more general movement was on a return to nature, and it held a romantic association with earlier national culture. Members of the movement had an intense national pride, and through involvement with scouting and other similar organizations, they hoped to make major changes to German culture. When Hitler took power, he would use this movement as a basis for the creation of the *Hitler Jugend* or Hitler Youth. Through this organization the Third Reich hoped to indoctrinate youth into its ideals.

The Nazi regime appeared to be more supportive of youth in terms of granting autonomy from parents and allowing liberal relations with girls of their age. Unlike family, church, and school, the HJ was not weighed down by tradition and taboos and seemed to offer and exciting opportunity for young people to be respected and responsible.¹⁵⁶

There was a large musical component to the movement, and composers such as Heinrich Spitta, Wolfgang Fortner, and Carl Orff were all involved in writing music for this organization.¹⁵⁷

Distler's World

It is easy to consider Distler as a product of the time he lived in; his conflict and involvement with the Nazi Regime is a frequent area of discussion when reporting on his life. Distler lived in a time of much turmoil and change in German society, and placing his life into this broader context certainly provides insight into issues which impacted him as a man and as a musician. While a real sense of what it meant to be German had existed for centuries, an even greater sense of national pride blossomed with the unification of the German Empire in 1870. As Germany continued to develop in the industrialized world, this sense of national pride was

¹⁵⁵ Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), 7.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

manifested by an increasing fondness for German history. The various social and musical movements yearned for the folk traditions of the past and continued to search for the essence of what it meant to be German. The end of limitless copyright led to the completion of new editions of complete works by historical composers. This, combined with an increased availability of pianos and other instruments in the home, allowed for an increase in historical choral music among the people. As Wilhelm led the German people into further prominence, Distler was born into a world where music was an important and prominent feature. With this knowledge, one can begin to understand how any focus on the arts by the Third Reich would be embraced by a populous facing such great financial and cultural devastation following WWI and the Treaty of Versailles. Each of these factors helped to shape Distler and the culture in which he lived, and any study of his music should be considered incomplete if it lacks a basic understanding of the history which led to his particular circumstances.

Teachers and Education

The impact of the changing German culture at the end of the 19th century would have had a great impact on those teachers that Distler would consider mentors throughout his life. While chapter two discussed these educators briefly in as much as their relationship to Distler, here the author will provide a more extensive look at their lives and impact.

Dupont Music School

As a young man, Hugo had begun piano lessons with Elisabeth Weidmann sometime around the time he was eleven years old.¹⁵⁸ She would later marry and move away, and this left Hugo and his friend Ingeborg Heinsen to find a new teacher. They began lessons at the Dupont school. Carl Dupont was an elderly gentleman but did his best to nurture and promote the

¹⁵⁸ Distler-Harth, *Hugo Distler*, 27.

development¹⁵⁹ of young Hugo. Under Dupont, the students frequently held concert recitals, which local publications recognized both for the high quality teaching of the instructor and the talent of the students:

Rarely have I been [the reviewer] been so completely satisfied by a student concert as of the lecture evening of piano school Carl Dupont. The humble, so extraordinarily able piano teacher scored with a part of his students of the upper classes successes are indicative of quite outstanding teaching ability. [...] A student of very outspoken talent is Hugo Distler, who demonstrated great versatility this evening.¹⁶⁰

In concerts under Dupont's instruction, Distler is noted for having played works of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, which demonstrates a thorough early education in historical literature.

Later, Hugo took up lessons with Eric Rhode who would extend his musical training beyond the keyboard. Rhode instructed Distler in theory lessons and was an early advocate for his efforts in composition. "[Ursula] Hermann says that Rhode was a Wagnerian and instilled in his pupils a love for "romantic revelries in sound..."¹⁶¹ He would later rebel against this music, but one cannot rebel against what one does not know. Thus, this early exposure to music would help to shape Hugo's opinions and frame his aural landscape. Though little is known of Rhode, Hermann Grabner would later remark that he was thankful for Distler's lessons with Rhode which left him well prepared and allowed Grabner to go well beyond what is normally a "manageable workload" in his theory classes.¹⁶² Unfortunately, due to financial constraints

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶¹ Bergaas, *Compositional Style*, 3.

¹⁶² Ibid., 40.

resulting from the death of his grandmother, Distler was forced to end his lessons at the Dupont school in 1925.¹⁶³

Leipzig Conservatory

It was at the Leipzig Conservatory where Distler embarked on the formative years of his music study. His first professor at the Conservatory was Dr. Max Hochkofler with whom he studied orchestral conducting and score playing. It was originally his desire to receive a degree in conducting and become a Kappelmeister. Though he only studied with Dr. Hochkofler briefly, this would have given him an opportunity to be introduced to music by Haydn, Schumann, Schubert, and Wagner among others, each of whom Hochkofler had prepared editions of for Eulenberg. The Eulenberg publishing firm was founded in Leipzig in 1874.¹⁶⁴ As previously stated, the end to lifetime copyright had led to a great increase in new editions of older works. Many of Hochkofler's editions are still currently available and are now primarily distributed by Schott.

Distler studied piano with Carl Adolf Martienssen (1881-1955) and organ with Friedrich Högner. Martienssen, like Hochkofler, was active as an editor, having edited the complete piano sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. These editions are currently available and distributed by the (formerly) Leipzig-based C.F. Peters.¹⁶⁵ Despite his passion for the music of Schütz, Bach, and earlier influences, it is evident that Distler had the opportunity to become familiar with (and likely study) the music of a very wide range of composers. Högner, from whom Distler learned liturgical organ playing, was a major leader in the *Orgelbewegung* and an active church

¹⁶³ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁴ Edition Eulenberg, "A Brief History of the Eulenberg Edition," http://www.eulenburg.de/en_UK/verlag/index.html, accessed April 3, 2014.

¹⁶⁵ Many of these editions are also available at www.imslp.org

musician throughout Germany as both a cantor and organist.¹⁶⁶ As a composer, he wrote not only works for the organ, but also liturgical pieces that featured the choir and other instruments.

While it appears that most of these compositions were published after his direct interaction with Distler, it is probable that the impetus for their composition existed as he served as an instructor.

The two primary mentors that Distler studied with at Leipzig were Günther Ramin (1898-1956) and Hermann Grabner (1886-1969). Ramin was an organ professor who held a great interest in early North-German baroque organs. A virtuoso organist, harpsichordist, and improviser himself, he was also a leader in the *Orgelbewegung*.¹⁶⁷ As a boy, Ramin was accepted as a singer into the Thomanerchor. Here, he met Karl Straube, who would become a lifelong friend. When Straube was promoted to cantor, Ramin took over as the organist. Later, he would again succeed Straube and become the cantor at the Thomaskirche in 1940.¹⁶⁸ Being the 12th successor to Bach at the Thomaskirche, he was noted as an organist and interpreter of Bach's music, an influence he would pass on to his student Hugo Distler.

Hermann Grabner might be seen as the primary educational mentor in Hugo Distler's life. In addition to instructing Distler in counterpoint, theory and composition, he became a lifelong mentor and friend.¹⁶⁹ Also a leader in the *Orgelbewegung*, Grabner had studied composition with Max Reger and Karl Straube¹⁷⁰. His studies with Reger began with an examination of Hugo Riemann's theories of harmonic function and its symbolism. As a composer, his "style evolved directly from that of Reger, though in some works (particularly those for organ), he introduced

¹⁶⁶ Klaus L. Neumann, "Distler, Hugo," *Grove Music Online*, accessed April 4, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

¹⁶⁷ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 19.

¹⁶⁸ "Ramin, Günther," *Grove Music Online*, accessed October 22, 2013, *Oxford Music Online*.

¹⁶⁹ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ Anderson, *Reger, Straube*, 244.

more modern features.”¹⁷¹ As an instructor, he would go on to reject Riemann’s theory of harmonic dualism. However, his teaching was firmly rooted in function theory and the *strenger Satz* (strict set) method, which he would pass on to his student Distler.¹⁷² Other prominent students of Grabner’s include Kurt Thomas and Wolfgang Fortner.

¹⁷¹ “Ramin, Günther”

¹⁷² Fischer-Dieskau, *Employment of Dynamics*, 5.

CHAPTER 4

MUSICAL LANGUAGE: *GEISTLICHE CHORMUSIK*, op. 12

His life having been cut short by suicide at the age of 34, Hugo Distler has a relatively small compositional output. Despite the brevity of his career, his music represents an important change in German church music. His professors at the Leipzig Conservatory ensured that he was well versed in the technique of counterpoint and guided him to a steady listening diet of historical music. The counterpoint of Bach was the basis for this education, but Distler also specifically cites Dietrich Buxtehude and Heinrich Schütz as early influences on his composition. This respect for historical music was no doubt born from changes that occurred in the nineteenth century. As singing societies and music conservatories became more prevalent, music education and the study of historical music were more prominent than ever. This was made possible through technology which allowed for easier printing and distribution of music. Scholars were creating new collected works editions of the great composers and making them available to wider audiences. In a reaction to the perceived excesses of some 19th-century composers, movements such as the Cecilian movement in music made a call for an increase in simplicity and a cappella music in the Catholic church.¹⁷³ Distler, believing that for the church service, a cappella vocal music was the most powerful way to communicate the word of God, would heed this call. Beyond these musical influences, Distler also grew up in a time in Germany when young progressive thinkers had developed a strong sense of German national pride with a focus on German history. Thus, it is not surprising to see the influence of composers who to this day remain indicative of the archetypal German choral sound.

¹⁷³ Siegfried Gmeinwieser, "Cecilian movement," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 4, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

Each of the above influences would factor strongly into the development of Hugo Distler's musical language, but how did these ideas manifest themselves in his composition? Are there specific musical figures that are an identifiable piece of Distler's vernacular? This chapter identifies motives and compositional techniques that are representative in Distler's choral writing through an analysis of *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 12.¹⁷⁴ Specifically, the following twelve compositional techniques will be discussed:

Recurring rhythmic motives

Repetition of words in short phrases

Added chord tones in cadential material

Elision of phrases

Hocket-like vocal interaction

Breath marks given within words

Regularly changing meter

Barlines as guides, not as borders

Counterpoint and imitation

Use of chorale melodies

Melodic material in extended cadences

Frequent use of parallel fourths and fifths

Recurring Rhythmic Motives

Despite including nine separate and unique motets, *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 12 includes certain rhythmic motives that can be found throughout the opus. The most frequently used rhythmic motive is the three note phrase: dotted eighth – sixteenth – eighth (see figure below).

¹⁷⁴ Opus 12 was selected as this basis for this analysis as it is widely regarded as representative of Distler's most mature choral writing. Similar characteristics are found throughout his catalogue.

Example 1 Rhythmic Motive



This figure is found throughout Op. 12, and while it is preceded and followed by a variety of material, its consistent use makes it a unifying motive throughout the work. Beyond helping to unify the composition, this motive is often used by Distler as a cross rhythm against three straight eighth notes in a paired voice, which creates an exciting rhythmic variety.

In *Singet dem Herrn*, the first motet of Op. 12, Distler establishes this rhythmic motive as a main thematic piece of the composition. The rhythm is first introduced by basses and tenors, singing in unison and presenting the first melodic idea of the piece.

Example 2 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1, mm. 1-4

A musical score for four staves. The top two staves are for Soprano and Alto, and the bottom two are for Tenor and Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked '♩ = 104'. The lyrics are: 'Sin - get dem Herrn ein neu-es Lied'. The first measure (m1) shows the rhythmic motive (quarter note, beamed eighth notes) in the basses and tenors. The second measure (m2) shows the motive in the sopranos and altos. The third measure (m3) shows the motive in the basses and tenors. The fourth measure (m4) shows the motive in the sopranos and altos. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings like 'meno J'.

This rhythmic motive creates the unifying idea for the first musical statement of “Singet,” and the second, found first in m4. As such, this rhythmic motive can be considered the “Singet” theme. In its first statement (m1), the theme creates contrast linearly by contrasting the rhythm with the straight eighth notes preceding it and with the triplets following it. In the second statement of the motive, contrast continues linearly as it is followed by three straight eighth

notes, but the more interesting contrast is made vertically between voices. Distler does this in several ways early in the composition.

In m5, the use of imitation between the soprano and alto voices creates a juxtaposition of the rhythmic motive with the tail end of the melodic theme.

Example 3 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op 12, Nr. 1, mm. 5-7

This immediately creates an enhanced rhythmic energy which continues throughout the composition. One bar later, Distler manages this in a different way by dividing the melodic theme in half. The soprano voice repeats the “Singet” theme, while the altos have several repetitions of only the two eighth-note descending fourth of “dem Herrn” (see figure above). By placing the partial melodic idea in two separate voices, the rhythmic “Singet” motive is brought out, and this creates an exciting vertical contrast. In a third use of the rhythmic motive, Distler modifies the melody of the tenors in m8 to contrast the theme stated by basses.

- get dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem Herrn, sin -
 Herrn, dem Herrn, dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem Herrn, sin -
meno f
 Sin - get dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem Herrn, sin -
meno f
 Sin - get dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem

In the second movement of *Singet dem Herrn*, Distler begins with a more homophonic musical language. When he does move to polyphony, “Singet” does not use the same rhythmic motive. However, it has not been entirely abandoned. An augmented statement of the motive can be found attached to the word “lobet,” first found in the alto voice in m24.

22 *f*
Sin - get, rüh - met und lo -
bet, lo - bet, lo - bet, lo - bet, lo -

By setting the stage for augmentation and thus variation of the rhythmic motive, Distler foreshadows use of this motive later in the composition. It is creatively woven through *Op. 12*,

used linearly in voices offset by a beat (*nr. 2, Funfter Spruch*, mm1-3), as part of the cantus firmus (*nr. 3, O Gott in deiner Majestät*, mm1-4), in a role of providing rhythmic excitement in *pp* sections of the music (*nr. 4, Singet Frisch und wohlgemut*, mm42-44), in diminution (*nr. 5, Ich vollt, daß ich daheime wär*, mm8-9), and in cadential material (*nr. 6, Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme, II.*, mm41-44). While not every movement includes this rhythmic motive, it is still important as the absence of this rhythm becomes almost as conspicuous as its use. This is not to say that this is the only rhythmic motive employed in *op. 12*, nor that it is the only or even the most prominent motive utilized in Hugo Distler's choral output. Rather, it suggests that Hugo Distler employed rhythmic motives as a compositional technique and that identifying rhythmic motives in his works provides an access point for score study and preparation by a conductor and choir. It is these motives which often help contribute to the frenetic and "nervous" rhythmic energy for which Distler is so well known.

Repetition of Words in Short Phrases

Hugo Distler often repeats sections of text in his compositions. This is due in no small part to his desire to allow the word to reign supreme in his choral writing, his belief being that the word of God had often been obscured in the choral writing of the 19th century. With a need to still utilize exciting counterpoint and interesting vocal texture, the repetition of text allows for the language to be clearly understood. Beyond simply repeating full phrases, Distler also fragmented sections of text and repeated one or two word phrases in short rhythmic bursts while indicating a breath between each repetition. These repetitions almost exclusively use a single repeated rhythmic pattern and often utilize either the same pitch or a repeated melodic phrase.

In *Singet dem Herrn* it has already been demonstrated that "Singet" is repeated regularly and that it corresponds to a rhythmic motive which is found throughout *Opus 12*. The second

part of the text (“dem Herrn”) is also fragmented and repeated early in the piece. Here, Distler takes a melodic descending fourth and uses repeated eighth-note pairs to highlight “dem Herrn”.

Example 6 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1, mm. 6-8

The musical score for Example 6 shows three staves of music. The top staff has lyrics: "get dem Herrn, sin - - get, sin - - get, sin -". The middle staff has lyrics: "Herrn dem Herrn, dem Herrn, dem Herrn, dem Herrn, dem". The bottom staff has lyrics: "Herrn, dem Herrn, dem Herrn, dem". The music features a descending fourth interval and repeated eighth-note pairs. The tempo is marked "meno f".

This provides a counter-idea to the *Singet* theme, which is being sung concurrently by the soprano. It also serves as a truncated version of the full melodic idea presented in mm4-5. In this place, the repetition of text allows Distler to set different text fragments in each voice while still allowing the listener to discern the words.

In other sections of *Singet dem Herrn*, Distler sets sections of repetition utilizing the same text in all four voices. In these sections (ex.mm15-18), the repetition is done in a way which does not aid text comprehension (for all the voices are singing the same words). Rather, by offsetting voices two against two, or three against one, the texture is modified and thickened despite the prevailing homorhythm.

Example 7 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1/II, mm. 41-44



In the figure above, the rhythm is a very straightforward quarter note pulse in all voices.

However, the offset consonants of the “t” and “s” along with the offset breaths create something that sounds significantly more involved and exciting.

In a third example of text repetition, Distler actually uses the repeated text to act as an onomatopoetic representation of the text. Beginning in m12, the text “. . . und mit Trompeten” (“and with trumpets”) begins. The trumpet-sound is established immediately through the rhythmic language. However the trumpets here are individual and almost sporadic. In m18, Distler begins to build the choir of trumpets, and through quick (homophonic) repetition of the text, the words begin to mimic the sound of the trumpets.

Example 8 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1/III, mm. 16-28

mit Trom - pe - ten,
pe - ten,
und mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom -
ten, und mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom -

20
mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, Trom - pe - ten, Trom - pe - ten, Trom - pe - ten, Trom -
pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, Trom - pe - ten, Trom - pe - ten, Trom -
pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, Trom - pe - ten, Trom - pe - ten, Trom -
pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten, mit Trom - pe - ten

26 Verbreitern | Etwas mäßiger im Zeitmaß, doch äußerst bewegt und drängend. Oberstimmen fast gesprochen
♩ = 152
pe - ten und Po - sau - nen! Das Meer er - brau -
pe - ten und Po - sau - nen! Das Meer er - brau -
pe - ten und Po - sau - nen! Das Meer er - brau - se, und was dar -
und mit Po - sau - nen! Das Meer er - brau - se, und was dar -

This is the third type of text repetition that Distler has utilized in this piece. It is true to say that Distler repeats text in other ways and much more often than in the examples shown above. However, it is the use of the very brief text fragments in regular repetition which is the most interesting and most representative of the compositional technique.

In *nr. 2 Neunter Spruch*, Distler combines the two later text repetition examples for the text “schaut man” (“one looks”). While the text is only briefly repeated, it is clear to see that it uses both onomatopoeia and offset entrances to create texture and rhythmic diversity.

Example 9 Hugo Distler, *Totentanz: Neunter Spruch*, Op. 12, Nr. 2, mm. 4-6

The “looking” is emphasized by both the repetition of the text and by the fact that it occurs at two different places rhythmically. Thus, he uses this technique to accomplish two goals in this instance. Further word repetition can be seen throughout *op. 12*, to highlight word meaning (*nr. 12, Elfter Spruch*, mm1-5), provide rhythmic counterpoint (*nr. 3 O Gott, no. 2*, mm43-48), provide emphasis in a cadence (*nr. 4, Singet Frisch*, mm114-124), or even to create an entire sound ideal for a piece (*nr. 6 Wachet auf*, mm1-17).

Added Chord Tones in Cadential Material

The motets of opus 12 are considered by most listeners to be very tonal, and some might even suggest that they are not particularly adventurous harmonically. Proponents of Distler’s music might agree but rather than look for obvious diversion from the basics, point to the subtleties which help to elevate the music. One of these subtle techniques is the inclusion of non-chord tones in cadential material. The final cadence of *nr. 6, Wachet Auf, II*. comes to rest on a

C-major chord. However, rather than simply finishing with a confident major chord, Distler has the soprano soloists sing a B and an F#.

Example 10 Hugo Distler, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, Op. 12, Nr.6/II, mm. 41-43

The image shows a musical score for Example 10, Hugo Distler's *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, Op. 12, Nr. 6/II, measures 41-43. The score is written for a soprano soloist and a vocal ensemble. The soprano part has a melodic line with a final note on a whole note. The vocal ensemble has a homophonic accompaniment. The lyrics "A - bend - mahl" are written under the vocal lines. The music is in C major and 4/4 time.

Harmonically, these pitches represent the 27th and 45th partial of C. These tones ring with a shimmery brightness in proportional harmony. Beyond that, these are not the pitches we are accustomed to hearing as added chord tones. An added 9th or 6th might be more predictable. Adding a raised fourth and a major seventh that are sung by soloists is a subtle variance that adds brilliance to the music.

Similarly, a transitional cadence in *nr. 4, Singet frisch*, finishes with an F-major chord. The altos could easily resolve up to the tonic in m61. However, they carry over the E, which once again creates an added complexity within the music.

Example 11 Hugo Distler, *Singet Frisch und wohlgemut*, Op. 12, Nr. 4, mm. 60-61



These moments can be found throughout Distler's music and are once again established in the first motet of *op. 12*, (*Singet*, m36). The use of non-chord tones creates an added layer of complexity in these compositions and determining how to interpret them harmonically (and how to deal with this as a choir) can thus provide an extra set of challenges particularly to those who may dismiss Distler for having a harmonic language which is too "simple."

Elision of Phrases

One way in which Distler handles the transition to new texts or new musical ideas within a composition is the elision of phrases. The listener is set up to believe that the arrival of a cadence means an ending, but rather than allowing the music to come to any sense of finality, Distler elides phrases to create an ever-present sense of motion. Consider *nr. 8*, *Das ist je gewißlich wahr*, mm22-24.

Example 12 Hugo Distler, *Das ist je gewißlich wahr*, Op. 12, Nr. 8, mm. 22-24

While there is a strong cadence in m22, Distler uses extended information in the alto voice to carry the initial section of text into the next phrase. Before the alto has finished, the other voices have all entered with new text. This can also be seen in an even more subtle fashion in *nr. 5, Ich wollt*.

Example 13 Hugo Distler, *Ich wollt daß ich daheim wär*, Op. 12, Nr. 5, mm. 26-28

Here, the overlap between phrases is brief, and only exists in the soprano voice. Distler utilizes a caesura to indicate that there is indeed a clear division between the two sections of music, however he allows the soprano to spill over into the next phrase. He also requires that this transition must be done without haste (“Übergang ohne Hast!”). While he could have just as easily included the words “noch reut” two eighth notes sooner, Distler deliberately creates this

Hockett-like Vocal Interaction

Three examples of how Distler differentially utilizes this technique can be seen below. In the first, Distler creates his hocket-like effect by simply allowing for an interchange between paired voices in which one pair sings as the other rests.

- - get dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem Herrn, sin -
 Herrn, dem Herrn, dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem Herrn, sin -
meno f Sin - get dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem Herrn, sin -
meno f Sin - get dem Herrn, dem Herrn, sin - get dem

65

Example 15 Hugo Distler, *O Gott in Deiner Majestät*, Op. 12, Nr. 3, mm. 20-24

20 Ein klein wenig

det, ver-kün - det, ver-kün - det uns den hel - len

kün - det, ver - kün - det, kün - det uns, kün - det uns, kün - det uns den hel - len

The technique is extended in the introduction to *Wachet auf* where Distler seamlessly intertwines two voices so that they sound as one. By setting essentially the same musical material between the two voices, he allows a longer phrase to sound as if it is being done in one breath.

Example 16 Hugo Distler, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, Op. 12, Nr. 6, mm. 1-10

1. Sopran

2. Sopran

Alt

Tenor

Baß

Wa-chet auf! Wa-chet auf!

Wa-chet auf, wa-chet auf!

Wa-chet auf! Wa-chet auf!

Wa-chet auf, wa-chet auf!

6 A (Im Zeitmaß)

Wa-chet auf! Wa-chet auf!

Wa-chet auf, wa-chet auf!

While the idea of hocket as employed by Distler is not utilized in the same manner as it may have been by those who helped to define the term, it is an effective tool for creating rhythmic energy, which is how it is employed throughout op. 12.

Breath Marks Given Within Words

As demonstrated above, Hugo Distler is often very liberal and always very specific with his inclusion of breath marks in his music. Sometimes, as above, these breaths come between words or phrases and allow for for hocket-like rhythmic devices. Interestingly, Distler often chose to place breath marks *within* words. This is most often done in longer melismatic passages. Generally, this takes on two forms: 1) when most voices are singing a chord, and one voice is decorating the passage with melismatic material, but also 2) sometimes when only one voice is singing. In the former, the breath may not be as audible as the underlying harmony allows for the experience of continuous sound. In the latter, however, the breaths are blatant and easily audible to the listener. In this case, the inclusion of the breath is both functional, allowing the singer to achieve the long melisma, and intentional, creating a specific rhythmic component to the vocal line.

An example of this first form is found in *Erster Spruch*. Here, we see alto and tenor holding the word “kömmst” as the sopranos delve into a new section of text. As the underlying harmony is held out, the sopranos embark on a lengthy and florid melismatic line which includes two breaths in the middle of the word.

Example 17 Hugo Distler, *Totentanz: Erster Spruch*, Op. 12, Nr. 2/I, mm. 18-20

The second form of this technique is seen in *Wachet auf* where the first soprano and alto sing together (paired at the octave). This line utilizes a repeated melodic motive that places a breath in the center of a word.

Example 18 Hugo Distler, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, op. 12, Nr. 6, mm. 74-77

Given Distler's belief in the extreme value of "the word" it might seem odd that he chooses to break up a word in this manner. However, the repetition of text still allows the words to be clearly communicated while adding heightened musical interest.

Regularly Changing Meter

One choice that is seemingly characteristic of nearly all of Hugo Distler's output is the use of a frequently changing meter. This is immediately evident in *op. 12* as the first four bars of *Singet dem Herrn* each change to a new meter. This certainly provides challenges to the conductor and likely is one of the reasons that Distler's music is not performed more often. In fact, when reviewing *op. 12*, the only movements of any of the nine motets which do not include multiple meters are the second movement of *nr. 6* and the chorales included at the end of *nrs. 8* and *9*.

Example 19 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1, mm.1-4

Barlines as Guidelines, Not Borders

Further confounding to some is the fact that even when Distler maintains or establishes meter for any length of time, he does not treat meter in entirely conventional ways. In some pieces of music, the regular pulse of the music corresponds well to the placement of barlines. Most commonly, one might expect to find musical phrases start on beat one in a given bar and feature strong downbeats in subsequent measures. Even in the dance music of the Baroque, which often carries the phrase over the barline, there is generally a recurring structure within the music for the conductor and singers to cling to as a marker for “where they are in the music.” Distler frequently evades these conventions or uses them in combination with a much less

structured approach to barlines. That he does not treat barlines in a traditional matter is often one of the first things one might notice when picking up a Distler score. Although singers are used to seeing barlines that go through the staff, Distler never provides this. Instead, he only places these indications between staves within a system.

This discovery surely begs the question: why? Anecdotally, in previous preparations of Distler's music, the author has had to field this question, particularly from younger singers who cannot fathom how this might actually *help* them to be more musical. Thus, as one approaches these scores, it is incumbent upon the conductor to understand why Distler has made this choice and how it impacts interpretation of the music for the singer.

While the lack of traditional bar lines can be seen throughout any Distler composition, an example below is provided to show ways in which he uses traditional and non-traditional rhythmic accents within the same section of a piece:

Example 20 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1/II, mm. 45-54

50 (Im Zeitmaß bis Schluß)

Here, the alto and soprano voices move across the bar lines with breaths marked in various places throughout their melody. The basses and tenors employ a more traditional rhythm with breaths immediately preceding the bar line and heavy accents on beat one.

Counterpoint and Imitation

Distler often uses counterpoint and imitation to craft his musical ideas. The imitation is often between two or three voices and is frequently paired with voices acting in a more homophonic fashion. In *Singet dem Herrn*, Distler uses points of imitation between statements of the main thematic idea to move from the second to the third key area. The sopranos first state the theme (m19) and are followed one bar later by the altos imitating a perfect fourth below. The tenors enter in m22 an octave below the original soprano statement. This entrance is made more interesting, however, by beginning on the ‘and’ of beat two rather than the ‘and’ of beat one. The basses finally enter in m23 a fourth below the tenors. The statement of the theme by the basses provides the shift into the new tonal center.

Example 21 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1, mm. 19-25

The musical score for Example 21 shows five vocal parts. The Soprano part begins with a melodic line in measure 19, marked 'meno f'. The Alto part enters in measure 20, imitating the Soprano a perfect fourth below. The Tenor part enters in measure 22, an octave below the Soprano. The Bass part enters in measure 23, a fourth below the Tenors. The lower voice part (likely Bass or Tenor) enters in measure 24, a fourth below the Tenors. The score includes various musical markings such as 'meno f' and 'f'.

In *Wachet auf*, Distler uses imitation and inversion to create the sonic world which will serve as the ideal upon which the piece is built. The alto and second soprano begin with an exchange of ascending fourths and minor thirds. In m10-14, the second sopranos sing the inversion of the original theme, and it is mirrored over the axis of F# (i.e., the original ascending fourth C-F is imitated as a descending C-G, and the minor third C-Eb is inverted to form the

descending Bb-G). The first sopranos also sing an exact inversion of the alto material, a descending fourth from F-C. Finally, the altos use the Eb initially sung in m5 to shift the motive to an ascending Eb-Ab.

Example 22 Hugo Distler, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, Op. 12, Nr. 6, mm. 1-13

The image displays a musical score for Hugo Distler's 'Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme', Op. 12, Nr. 6, measures 1-13. The score is written for five voices: 1. Sopran, 2. Sopran, Alt, Tenor, and Baß. The first system (measures 1-5) shows the initial vocal entries. The 1. and 2. Sopran parts enter with a descending fourth (F-C), while the Alt part enters with a descending Bb-G. The Tenor and Baß parts enter with a descending Bb-G. The lyrics 'Wa-chet auf' are written under the notes. The second system (measures 6-10) shows the voices continuing the melody. The 1. and 2. Sopran parts enter with a descending fourth (F-C), while the Alt part enters with a descending Bb-G. The Tenor and Baß parts enter with a descending Bb-G. The lyrics 'Wa-chet auf' are written under the notes. The third system (measures 11-13) shows the voices continuing the melody. The 1. and 2. Sopran parts enter with a descending fourth (F-C), while the Alt part enters with a descending Bb-G. The Tenor and Baß parts enter with a descending Bb-G. The lyrics 'Wa-chet auf' are written under the notes.

Use of Chorale Melodies

As might be expected in the tradition of German church music, Distler often used chorale melodies as the basis for his compositions. It should be restated that Distler believed the function

of these compositions was to bring the Word of God to the people of God and believed a *cappella* choral music to be the best avenue for this endeavor. While it has already been shown that several of Distler's choices were done to make the words intelligible (lack of instrumentation, repetition of words, etc.), the use of chorale melodies would also have served a function of clarity for the listeners or congregation. By basing compositions around a familiar melody, Distler was able to intensify the complexity of a composition without it losing the ability to clearly communicate to his listeners.

In *Wachet auf*, Distler gives the chorale melody¹⁷⁵ to the bass section. It enters in a stunning fashion after the other voices have helped to create a soundscape which is not particularly related to the melody. From this sonic world, the chorale emerges, drawing the listener into the piece with a strong sense of familiarity.

¹⁷⁵ This chorale melody was written by Philipp Nicolai and first published in 1599. It has become a favorite among Protestant composers including Bach and Buxtehude and with more modern composers such as Zimmermann.

Example 23 Hugo Distler, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, Op. 12, Nr. 6, mm. 11-17

11

mf

Wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf,

wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf,

auf, wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf,

Wa - chet auf, wa - chet

wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf,

wa - chet auf, ruft uns die

wa - chet auf, ruft uns die Stim -

auf, wa - chet auf, wa - chet auf

poco f

Wa - chet auf, ruft

Melodic Material in Extended Cadences

Distler's choices of cadential material frequently included non-chord tones, providing a subtle depth and complexity to the aural experience. However, Distler also frequently included melodic material in extended cadences. This can be viewed as serving multiple functions. Often, several of the voices may come to rest on their final chord while another voice (generally the soprano) provides a final statement of melody. In this way, Distler is able to provide a sense of emphasis and clarity to the listener.

Example 24 Hugo Distler, *Totentanz: Zweiter Spruch*, Op. 12, Nr. 2/II, mm. 15-18



This technique is also applied by having one or more voices acting more as ornamentation to the final chord. These vocal flourishes often bounce through the harmony almost as if they are highlighting different overtones and primarily serve as a decoration or embellishment to the piece.

Example 25 Hugo Distler, *Totentanz: Vierzehnter Spruch*, op. 12, Nr. 2/XIV, mm. 33-38

While it may seem out of character for Distler to be overly ornamental in his music, these portions of florid adornment should be viewed less as a self-indulgent display of technique and more as a reflection of the humble and honest awe that Distler felt as the composer of music which was to serve as a vessel for the word of God.

Frequent Use of Parallel Fourths and Fifths

It was previously stated that Distler was influenced by the music of Buxtehude and Schütz, but he also had a great affinity for composers of the Ars Nova such as Dufay and

Machaut. This influence is manifested in Distler's use of hocket-like material. One can also see this influence clearly in Distler's frequent use of parallel fourths and fifths. These intervals are often used in repetition within one voice as part of the melodic idea (such as the descending fourths in *Singet dem Herrn* and the ascending opening fourth in *Wachet auf*). Distler then takes this a step further by pairing voices so that each voice is singing the linear interval of a fourth while being harmonically a fourth apart from each other (parallel, descending fourths).

Example 26 Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Op. 12, Nr. 1, mm. 8-9



These open intervals help to create a sound which is at once both familiar and new. Being a part of the “new German church music”, the many connections to historical music within Distler's compositions provide the listener with a feeling that the music extends beyond the present.

Distler masterfully weaves in musical techniques from his predecessors which creates a sense of understanding of the past with an eager optimism for the future, both musically and spiritually.

Beyond Opus 12

Very little research on the music of Hugo Distler has been published in English. Larry Palmer's seminal dissertation (1967) remains the authority for non-German researchers. This, combined with perceived musical challenges, has likely contributed to fewer performances of Distler's music. Further, most of the writing which has been done is focused on major or more difficult works, and there is seemingly a complete void of information when it comes to Distler's secular music. The choral community would be well served by future publications illuminating Distler's secular works as well as the most accessible sacred choral works. It is likely that few, if

any, high school singers in the USA ever get the chance to sing the music of Hugo Distler simply due to a lack of awareness of his approachable music.

It may also serve the music of Distler to see an increase in good English translations of his church music. While this may not be the ideal for concert performances, it would allow for an increase in its use in church services throughout the United States. As Distler specifically composed in a manner which would allow the word of God to be delivered to the congregation, it is highly likely that he would support the translation of his music so that non-German speaking congregations would be able to enjoy the message as much as the music.

Finally, a deeper analysis of all of Distler's work is warranted to help more accurately identify the musical manifestation of his influences as well as to more accurately define his own musical language. Both would help create a greater sense of accessibility when approaching this music. While previous research has analyzed Distler's work, it is generally about a specific piece (thus lacking generalizability) or only deals with the influence of specific predecessor's influence (most often that of Schütz), which diminishes one's understanding of the varied compositional techniques Distler used. The music would be well served by the exposition of these elements.

CHAPTER 5

DER JAHRKREIS, MÖRIKE-CHORLIEDERBUCH, AND OTHER SMALL CHORAL WORKS

The performance of Hugo Distler's music by church and school choirs is an area of opportunity for growth in the USA. Although the music of *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 12 is popular among collegiate and professional groups, it is beyond the grasp of the typical amateur choir. The music of op. 12 was written specifically for performance by the *Sing- und Spielkries*, a group with the ability to perform high-level repertoire, under the direction of Bruno Grusnick. However, Distler frequently wrote music with amateur church and school ensembles in mind, and this is immediately apparent in works such as *Der Jahrkreis*, op. 5 and *Mörrike-Chorliederbuch*, op. 19. This chapter will examine these collections as well as several other small choral works and provide examples and suggestions for a conductor's approach to preparing this music.

Der Jahrkreis, op. 5

While the intention to extend his op. 12 to include fifty-two motets (one for each Sunday of the church year) was never realized, he had already completed this initiative on a somewhat smaller albeit equally impressive scale with *Der Jahrkreis*, op. 5. This collection of fifty-two small motets was written specifically for the amateur volunteer choirs at the St. Jakobikirche. In a letter to Hermann Grabner on April 17, 1931 Distler says:

I have two choirs (a volunteer church choir and a boy choir) for which I compose everything myself. I already have a beautiful collection of this type of easy sacred music and hope that an entire year's repertoire will come into being from this. The children as well as the adults sing these easy polyphonic pieces with joy and ease.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 113.

In his *Nachwort* (Afterword) to this collection, Distler describes several ways in which the pieces can be made more accessible to the average choir.¹⁷⁷ He points out that the underlay of the text and the classification of the hymns is only a “personal suggestion of the composer, and it is of course possible to also have other texts than those ... specified, provided they do not contradict the character of the respective set.”¹⁷⁸ Further, “it is not necessary in each case that the whole motet texts and all their verses be performed.”¹⁷⁹ Just as would have been the case for the composers of the Renaissance by whom he was inspired, Distler suggests that any of the vocal lines could also be supported by appropriate instrumentation or that some lines could be replaced by instruments altogether. It is likely that when children’s choir sang his music, Distler had the children perform the upper two lines while he sang the lower part himself.¹⁸⁰ By also suggesting transposition or rearrangement from mixed- to male-choir music, Distler provides a seemingly endless array of performance options for this music. As a result, one finds a set of fifty-two pieces that could be performed by even the most amateur church choir, certainly including those facing challenges of small size, short rehearsal time, or ranges limited by the aging voice. Even for those choirs for whom the German language would be considered an insurmountable obstacle, Distler’s allowances for text modification suggest that even translation is a viable option. While it has been suggested that Distler’s intimate connection between text and music

¹⁷⁷ The entire Afterword is reprinted, with translation, in Appendix B.

¹⁷⁸ Hugo Distler, *Der Jahrkreis – Die Sätze für dresimmigen gemischten Chor*. Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1933.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

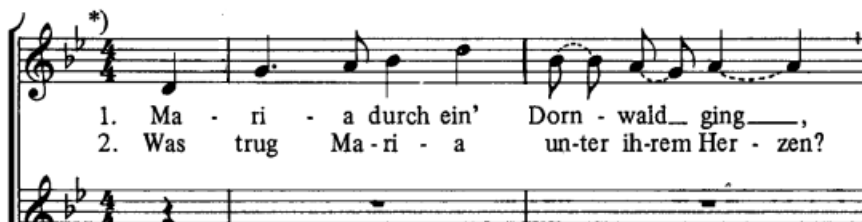
¹⁸⁰ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 113.

means that “performance in the original language is the only artistic choice,”¹⁸¹ one must remember that the music of *Der Jahrkreis* was not really written for performance, but rather was intended specifically for worship. In this context, a translation of the text to English would certainly be considered appropriate so as to effectively convey the meaning of the text to the congregation or audience. The following section will explore several of the works of op. 5 in detail, highlighting Distler’s prevailing style characteristics and providing details intended to guide conductors’ score preparation.¹⁸²

Maria durch ein’ Dornwald ging

Maria durch ein’ Dornwald ging is typical of the motets of op. 5 which are based on pre-existing material and exemplify many of the musical characteristics which are put forth in Chapter 4. The rhythmic motive so prevalent in op. 12 is found here immediately in the first measure of the soprano melody.

Example 27 Hugo Distler, *Der Jahrkreis: Maria durch ein Dornwald ging*, mm. 1-3



Mixed meter is also present, but the challenges of the rhythms are somewhat mitigated in the homophonic sections of the music. The existing melody is a traditional German song for Advent which dates at least as far back as the early 17th century. The text of the first verse is taken from

¹⁸¹ David L. Deffer “A Study of Two Motets based on Psalm 98: “Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied” Heinrich Schütz – Hugo Distler.” (Doctoral diss., Northwestern University, 1991), 33.

¹⁸² Other movements of *Der Jahrkries* are discussed in sources by Palmer (briefly, Nos. 1, 16, 35, 33) and Anders (Nos. 10, 14, 33, 39).

Luke 1:39-56. While the text is clearly most well suited for the church setting, the popularity of the melody and its use in a variety of settings make it ideal for concert programming. School or professional directors might consider pairing the work by Distler with another more modern setting, such as that by the King's Singers.

Because the soprano carries the traditional melody throughout, this piece is representative of those for which instruments would be well suited to replace one or two voice parts. A viola and cello could easily substitute in for the alto and baritone part without detracting from the delicate beauty of the melodic line. Further, if a choir had a small number of female singers who did not have the range to sing up to F5, the piece could be transposed down up to two whole steps and still be sung by most women. This also maintains a comfortable range for baritones.

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

This chorale tune was surely a favorite of Distler's. The melody originates from the hymn *Veni redemptor gentium* by Ambrose (386) which was then set with German text by Martin Luther in 1524.¹⁸³ In addition to this setting, the chorale was the basis for the organ partita Op. 8, nr. 1. Further, this particular setting was the basis of *Kleine Adventmusik*, op. 4, in which it provided the musical material for the first and final movements of that work. In *Der Jahrkreis*, Distler sets five verses of the text with the cantus firmus given to the sopranos.

The slow, homophonic pairing of the soprano and male vocal lines is the framework upon which the more active alto line is built. While the outer voices sing primarily half notes, the altos are given both a melodically and harmonically relatively active line. The motion, however, is generally stepwise which makes the sometimes challenging harmony feel much more accessible.

¹⁸³ Distler, *Der Jahrkreis*.

Of particular interest is the alto voice in m8, which features a familiar rhythmic motive and also includes a brief extended melody through this interior cadence.

Example 28 Hugo Distler, *Der Jahrkreis: Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland*, mm. 7-9

Kind er - kannt.
Saal so rein,
neu Licht dar.

Des sich
Gott von
Dun - kel

Kind er - kannt.
Saal so rein,
neu Licht dar.

Des sich
Gott von
Dun - kel

er - kannt.
so rein,
Licht dar.

Des sich
Gott von
Dun - kel

This work is ideal for the smaller church choir for performance in Advent, especially on the first Sunday (*Kleine Adventmusik* premiered on the first Sunday in Advent in 1931).¹⁸⁴ Bach wrote several works with this melody, each intended for use on this date (BWV 36, 61, & 62)¹⁸⁵, of which Distler was undoubtedly familiar. With these as well as the other settings by Distler in mind, one can easily envision a concert or service which makes use of several variations of this melody.

Herr Gott, dich loben wir [Tedeum]

The small motet *Herr Gott, dich loben wir* is one of the less straight-forward settings included in op. 5. Rather than setting the entire text for all voices, the music alternates between a

¹⁸⁴ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 113.

¹⁸⁵ John Elliot Gardner, Liner Notes, *Bach Cantatas Vol. 13*, accessed April 3, 2014, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Pic-Rec-BIG/Gardiner-P13c%5BSDG162-BL%5D.pdf>.

soloist (or unison section) and the regular three-voices. The solo lines show the influence of Schütz and the declamatory style Distler utilized in the *Choralpassion*.

Example 29 Hugo Distler, *Der Jahrkreis: Herr Gott, dich loben wir* [*Tedeum*], mm. 1-3

Frei im Zeitmaß

Herr Gott, dich lo - ben wir_____.

Breite Viertel, doch nicht langsam

Herr Gott, wir dan - ken dir.

Herr Gott, wir dan - ken_____ dir.

Herr Gott_____, wir dan-ken dir.

While Distler provides note values, he indicates that the lines be performed “Frei im Zeitmaß” (“free in tempo”). Rather than controlling strict rhythm, the note values are thus in place to help show the melody in a chant-like fashion and to suggest appropriate text emphasis.

The melody of the solo lines ends on an A with each iteration but the last, where it falls to a G. The choir then completes the piece with an A-major final cadence in which the upper-voice melody essentially is a modification of the first line of solo.

Example 30 Hugo Distler, *Der Jahrkreis: Herr Gott, dich loben wir* [*Tedeum*], mm. 13-17

Hei - lig, hei - lig, hei - lig ist un - - - ser Gott!

Hei - - - lig ist un - - - ser Gott!

Hei - - - lig ist un - - - ser Gott!

Hei - lig ist un - - - ser Gott!

It is interesting that the consistency of the solo line is in contrast to the choir, which cadences differently in each line. The rhyming lines of text would have been particularly well suited to the younger choir at the St. Jakobikirche, and it is entirely possible that these solo lines would have been performed by Distler himself. A modern conductor could use this piece to feature a single deserving soloist but could also give each small solo to a different performer. The call and response between soloist and choir would also lend itself well to an antiphonal setting, which provides an added layer of interest for the audience.

Mörike-Chorliederbuch, op. 19

Although Hugo Distler had demonstrated a passion for sacred music, his attitude towards the Protestant Church shifted in the mid-1930s as a result of several crises in his life (a personal nervous breakdown among them).¹⁸⁶ As a result, Distler would begin to turn his attention to secular music. Through communication with his publisher, Distler came in contact with Heinz Grunow, with whom he would collaborate to write the *Neues Chorliederbuch*, op. 16. His correspondence with Grunow also revealed his desire to write an opera in the “spirit of classical Singspiel, the old impromptu comedy, opera buffa.”¹⁸⁷ Although an opera was never written, an increased attention to secular choral music would prove to be an important component to the remainder of Distler’s career.

Among the most enduring and important musical contributions of Hugo Distler are the 48 motets of the *Mörike-Chorliederbuch*.¹⁸⁸ These secular works remain highly popular in Germany to this day and for American choral conductors, represent a plethora of under-performed but

¹⁸⁶ Distler-Harth, 218

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 219.

¹⁸⁸ The works of the *Mörike-Chorliederbuch* were previously examined in a 1966 dissertation by George Edward Dampo titled “The Achievement of Hugo Distler (1908-1942) with emphasis upon the *Mörike-Chorliederbuch*”.

wonderful pieces. The music of this set includes pieces for male, female, and mixed choirs with everything from unison to eight-part voicing, and the collection has been referred to as “his most beautiful and liberated work.”¹⁸⁹ Pieces such as *Wanderlied* sound similar to the English madrigals of the late sixteenth century which seem to already be a favorite among music educators, and it is precisely this sort of rhythmic movement within the text and its connections to German folk music which drew Distler to the poetry of Eduard Mörike:

As a choral composer, what attracted me to Mörike, is that he was the first within the 19th century, and in modern times is the only one to use such unexampled rhythmic power and freedom of movement, and . . . the old German folk song . . . [which] can combine well with the intimate subjectivity and full character imprint in each case.¹⁹⁰

The poetry of Eduard Mörike is a crucial component to the success of these works, but it is also Distler’s linear compositional technique and approach to harmony which helps to set these pieces apart from the other secular work in his catalogue. In general, the harmony is determined not by chord progressions, but rather through linear interval combinations. Dissonance is always created by, and subordinate to, the consonance which precedes it. As a result, the music is tonal, but “not in the sense of traditional functional harmony.”¹⁹¹ “Cadential clauses” of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are used regularly.¹⁹² From a structural standpoint, the collection includes polychoral work in addition to music for unison choir and solo singers.

¹⁸⁹ George Edward Damp, “The Achievement of Hugo Distler (1908-1942) with Emphasis Upon the *Mörike-Chorliederbuch*” (Master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1966), 7.

¹⁹⁰ Hugo Distler, *Mörike-Chorliederbuch – Erster Teil: für gemischten Chor*, Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1961.

¹⁹¹ Stefan Pontz, “Hugo Distlers weltliches Vokalwerk mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des “Mörike-Chorliederbuches”” in *Komponisten In Bayern: Dokumente Musikalischen Schaffens Im 20. Jahrhundert. Bd. 20: Hugo Distler*, ed. Alexander L. Suder (Tutzing, Germany: Hans Schneider, 1990), 87.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 86.

Der Gärtner (The Gardner)

One major point of appeal to the works of op. 19 is the huge variety within the collection. Not only is there a great musical variety which allows for a vast array of moods and sounds, but there are also opportunities for ensembles of nearly any size and experience level. Conductors often find themselves in a position where they have choirs that are imbalanced, of low experience, or simply quite small in number. The difficulty for these teachers is to find music suitable for their ensemble while maintaining high musical integrity and challenging their singers. *Der Gärtner* is one of the many unison pieces included in op. 19. Its brevity allows for it to be shown here in its entirety:

Example 31 Hugo Distler, *Mörke-Chorliederbuch: Der Gärtner*

Der Gärtner
für gemischten Chor (1. Fassung)

Hugo Distler
aus opus 19

Gemächliche ♩ .

Der Sopran beginnt, es antworten der Alt im Kanon im Einklang, Tenor in der Oktave, Baß in der Oktave. Jede Stimme singt einmal alle Strophen durch.

(8) 1. Auf ih - rem Leib - röß - lein, so weiß wie der

(8) Schnee, die schön - ste Prin - zes - sin reit't durch die Al - lee.

2. Der Weg, den das Rößlein
hintanzet so hold,
der Sand, den ich streute,
er blinket wie Gold.

3. Du rosenfarbs Hütlein,
wohl auf und wohl ab,
o wirf eine Feder
verstohlen herab!

4. Und willst du dagegen
eine Blüte von mir,
nimm tausend für eine,
nimm alle dafür!

The music here, only encompassing the range of an octave, is quite simple. In typical Distler fashion, barlines do not go through the staff and so do not obscure the poetic and musical intention. In this way, this small piece can serve as a good introduction to reading Distler's

music. The instructions indicate that piece be sung as a canon, and because of this, it can be a nice introduction to harmony for younger singers. While the description indicates that the canon is sung by soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voices, Distler includes several caveats in the foreword to the work which allow for varied interpretation. For example, he suggests that transposition of the pieces is possible when necessary (although does state that it should only be used in “exceptional cases” so as not to effect the character of the piece).¹⁹³ He also suggests that in most cases equal voice parts can be used rather than those indicated.¹⁹⁴ The simple pastoral poetry of *Der Gartner* is well suited to singers of any age, and while the additional challenge of singing in a foreign language may be daunting to some singers, the piece’s straight-forward nature makes it quite accessible. It should be further noted that despite its simplicity, the beauty of the melody makes this a nice inclusion for choirs of advanced skill levels as well. Several other similar unison pieces are featured in the collection, including *Auf dem Spaziergang (On the Walk)* and *Suschens Vogel (Darling Bird)*.

Wanderlied (Wandering Song)

The work of the madrigalists of the Renaissance has become standard repertoire for choirs in America. In fact, many high schools even feature madrigal ensembles of which this music is their hallmark. Conductors seem to be drawn to the simple harmonies and basic polyphony that these pieces offer. “Fa-la-la” sections present fun, rhythmic music that students seem to greatly enjoy. *Wanderlied* appears to be Distler’s ode to this style of music.

This piece is written for three voices, SAB. The tessitura for the sopranos and altos lies comfortably within their range with the altos never lower than middle C and the sopranos never

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

higher than the staff. The baritone range extends from C3 to D4. The text is set as two verses, each followed by a section of “fa-la-la,” a short “chorus,” and a final “fa-la-la” section. The opening to the verses is set homophonically and primarily in 2/2. The basic outlining of the Bb major tonality is quite straightforward.

Example 32 Hugo Distler, *Mörike-Chorliederbuch: Wanderlied*, mm. 1-5

Straffe, nicht schnelle 

Typical of Distler are the meter changes throughout, including bars of 3/2 within the verse and a move to 3/4 for the chorus section. This provides added challenge for the singers but is not dissimilar to a changing tactus in pieces of the Renaissance (such as in “Fair Phyllis” by John Farmer). The intervals of the “fa-la-la” sections are made simpler by having the female voices simply outline F major, and the baritones similarly either outline this chord or move in simple stepwise motion.

Example 33 Hugo Distler, *Mörke-Chorliederbuch: Wanderlied*, mm. 44-50

bis der Mor - - gen wie - der graut. Fa - la - la, fa - la - la, fa - la - la, fa - la - la!

fa - la - la, fa - la - la - la - la - la, fa - la - la, fa - la - la!

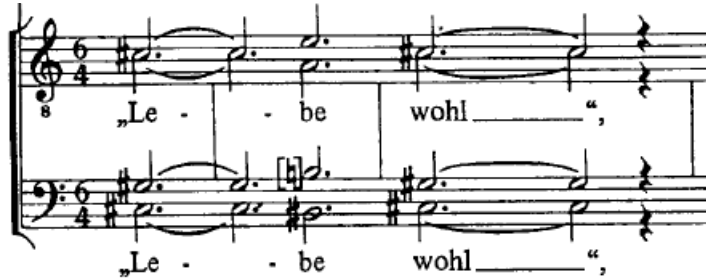
The simplicity of the piece makes it readily accessible to middle school choirs or to those high school choirs struggling with a small men's section and balance challenges. The challenge of learning a new language is mitigated by Distler's treatment of the text. As in all of his work, the close relationship between text and music is ever present, and the language is set such that important words or syllables naturally fall on stressed beats or longer note values. It has been suggested that this is a "direct result of word-painting,"¹⁹⁵ a reflection of the Renaissance influence. Its clear relation to madrigals makes for simple programming as it would pair well with many similar sounding pieces.

¹⁹⁵ John M. Cantanzaro, "A Study of the Schütz *Saint Matthew Passion* and the Distler *Choral Passion*," Master's thesis, California State University-Fullerton, 1979, 19.

Lebewohl (Farewell)

The sweet simplicity of *Wanderlied* is a far cry from the tormented farewell in *Lebewohl*. Set for a “double choir” with eight total voices, this piece is a representative of the polychoral writing found in the collection. The role of the male voices is a brief repeated pattern:

Example 34 Hugo Distler, *Mörike-Chorliederbuch: Lebewohl*, mm. 1-3



Example 35 Hugo Distler, *Mörke-Chorliederbuch: Lebewohl*, mm. 15-20

stark

zen. „Le - be - wohl“. Ach tau - send - mal hab' ich mir es
zen. „Le - be - wohl ____“. Ach tau - send - mal hab'
zen. „Le - be - wohl ____“.
- be - wohl“, „Le - be wohl ____“.
- be - wohl“, „Le - be - wohl ____“.

vor - ge - spro - - - - - chen, hab' ich mir es vor - ge - spro - -
ich mir es vor - ge - spro - - - - - chen,
Ach tau - send - mal hab' ich mir es vor - ge -

There is a declamatory homophonic style to much of the text, and the piece would pair well with music by a composer such as Giaches da Wert, whose passionate music also made use of this type of writing. The harmonies are somewhat reminiscent of the German composers of the late

19th century such as Max Reger, whom Distler has acknowledged for having a direct influence on his harmonic language.¹⁹⁶

Other Small Choral Works

While Distler's known output is relatively small due to the short timeframe of his professional life, the last twenty years has seen the release of several previously unpublished works. Research in the Hugo Distler Archive has yielded new works in both the instrumental and choral idiom, but these pieces have not been previously addressed in any scholarly writing for American audiences. Among major scholarly writing on Distler in the English language, only Palmer's dissertation includes a full works list, which is now known to be incomplete.¹⁹⁷ In 1998, Michael Töpel in collaboration with Arndt Schnoor worked with the Hugo Distler Archive to complete new performing editions of four short choral works.¹⁹⁸ The pieces were discovered as part of a large collection of manuscripts entitled *Kontrapunkt*, and Töpel's edition would seem to suggest that there are a number of other works within the collection that have yet to be brought to publication.

The pieces that have been published all appear to be from very early in Distler's career as a musician with the newest likely originating from late 1930 or early 1931 and the others resulting from counterpoint lessons with Hermann Grabner at the Leipzig Conservatory. The pieces vary somewhat in difficulty but are certainly all accessible to choirs at the high school level. A brief discussion of each piece follows.

¹⁹⁶ John R. Crandall, "Hugo Distler (1908-1942): Performance Analyses of the Four Sacred Cantatas for Chorus and Chamber Ensemble," Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, 1999, 44.

¹⁹⁷ An updated works list can be found on the website for the Hugo Distler archive and has been included as Appendix C in this document.

¹⁹⁸ Hugo Distler, "Nun ruhen alle Wälder – Choralmotette und frühe motettische Werke," ed. Michael Töpel, Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter- Verlag, 1998. Bärenreiter 7545.

Motette über den Choral Nun ruhen die Wälder

The first of the short pieces in this collection is a motet based on the chorale *Nun ruhen die Wälder*, a setting of text by Paul Gerhardt which actually utilizes an earlier melody thought to be composed by Heinrich Isaac.¹⁹⁹ He also utilizes texts from *Nun sich der Tag geendet* (verse 4) and Luke 24:29 (verse 1). The soprano carries the chorale melody in each of the five verses of Distler's setting. Interestingly, the voicing for the verses varies from SATB (verse 1 and 3), to SSATB (verse 5), SAA (verse 4), and SA (verse 2). While its specific origins are unknown, this suggests that Distler may have written this piece either as an academic exercise or in preparation for a future job where the personnel of the choir would be unknown. Further evidence that he intended to make the piece accessible to a variety of singer abilities is the label *Bicinium*²⁰⁰ applied to the second verse. This term was historically used to designate pedagogical duos by Lutheran teachers.²⁰¹ This is also the only verse in which any sort of barlines are employed (though they are only indicated between staves, rather than through).

Example 36 Hugo Distler, *Nun ruhen alle Wälder*, 2 Vers, mm. 1-4

2. Vers
Bicinium

S
A

Der Tag ist nun ver-gan-gen, die

Der Tag ist nun, ist nun ver-gan-gen,

¹⁹⁹ Reinhard Strohm, "Isaac, Henricus, 2. Works, (iv) Songs," *Grove Music Online*, accessed April 3, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²⁰⁰ "Bicinia had virtually disappeared from organ literature since Bach, but Distler used them frequently [in his organ music]." (Lara L. West, "Compositional Techniques in the Organ Music of Hugo Distler" (DMA diss., University of Kansas. 2008), 6).

²⁰¹ Bruce A. Bellingham, "Bicinium," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 17, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

The manuscript which is held in the archives shows that these barlines were not originally included but were added to a second draft.²⁰² The lack of barlines in the other four verses will certainly present a challenge to choirs with less experience, and part independence among singers is certainly required for success with this piece.

Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ

The motet *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* was originally found together with several other settings captioned “Four voice imitative vocal settings of given texts (motet movements)”.²⁰³ In its original state, the text is incomplete in that it was only written out for the bass part in its entirety. The editor has included texts for all parts in the edition for Bärenreiter. Set for SATB choir, the range is somewhat challenging with basses frequently singing as low as E2 and altos dipping as low as F3. The voices sing in polyphony throughout with the exception of brief duets by the sopranos and altos, such as in the last seven bars of the piece. However, the inclusion of barlines and unchanging meter make the piece relatively straight forward rhythmically. While the music always cadences with triadic harmony, singers will be challenged to sing linearly and to articulate the imitation rather than thinking vertically because of the frequent passing dissonances between lines. This piece, as with the other early student examples of Distler’s work, lacks the rhythmic inventiveness for which his style became synonymous. However, reflections of his influences are present within the work. In m10 and m33, the soprano and alto are paired in parallel perfect fourths, which likely shows the influence of early renaissance harmony.

²⁰² Michael Töpel, “Preface,” from *Nun ruhen alle Wälder: Chormotette und frühe motettische Werke* by Hugo Distler, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1998), 3.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Example 37 Hugo Distler, *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, mm. 32-33

Nö - ten hel - - fen - kann,
Nö - ten hel - - fen - kann,
mir - aus Nö - ten hel - fen kann,
Er - den ist - kein Mensch ge - born. der

Gloria in Excelsis Deo (Dreistimmige Vokalfuge)

As the title suggests, one of Distler's composition assignments was a three-part vocal fugue on the text *Gloria in excelsis Deo* for SAT voices. Indicating an *Allegro Assai* tempo, the twists and turns of the vocal part make this a challenging and exciting little piece. The soprano voice introduces the melody in m1 and is echoed in imitation by the altos a perfect fourth below in bar five and finally by the tenors an octave below in bar 10. The range of the tenor part is particularly challenging with a span of nearly two full octaves. Each of the parts is in nearly constant motion with the only rests for any voice coming for the sopranos who get a brief two beat respite in m29.

The soprano line features a particularly challenging passage in its introduction of the fugue subject:

Example 38 Hugo Distler, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, mm. 7-9



Distler most often follows passages of difficulty (such as mm7-8) with more straightforward scalar passages (m9). Another moment of interest is the duet of contrary motion between the soprano and tenor in mm33-34:

Example 39 Hugo Distler, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, mm. 33-34



Despite relatively simple rhythms and the small forces required, this three-voice fugue is a challenging piece and represents an interesting window into the mind of a young composer.

Ave Maria zart

Of the four pieces included in this set, *Ave Maria zart* is by the far the most simple and is representative of a sound that might be considered the most old-fashioned. As a result of its brevity, editor Michael Töpel added an additional verse of text to create the performance edition. Each voice enters in simple imitation and though much of the text is set syllabically, several

melismatic runs are given to each voice. One interesting feature of the piece is the final cadence. Whereas Distler typically completes pieces with a full chord and sometimes adds melodic material or added chord tones, *Ave Maria Zart* allows each voice to end independently as it comes to rest on a final F.

Example 40 Hugo Distler, *Ave Maria zart*, mm. 30-33

den. den.

lis ter Mund. ist.

e Ret lis ter Mund. ist.

mit der Ga - bri - e Ret - - - - - lis Mund. der un - ser - - - - - ter ist.

This piece is certainly not representative of Distler's style though even in the example above he demonstrates an early proclivity for cross rhythms. The piece demonstrates a young composer in the midst of his education, and because of its simple rhythms and essentially stepwise motion, it would be excellent piece to serve as an introduction to Hugo Distler.

CHAPTER SIX

FUTURE PERFORMANCE AND MUSICAL LEGACY

It is the intention of this document to illuminate the musical works of Hugo Distler by providing a broad cultural and biographical context, identification of general style characteristics, and a discussion of specific repertoire. With this framework provided, this chapter discusses Distler's choral work as it exists within the more general scope of his oeuvre and highlights several non-choral, non-organ works. With this information, one is able to discuss the future works and impact Distler may have had were his life not ended so abruptly. His legacy, the work of his students, and his lasting influence are also discussed. Finally, this chapter will serve as an opportunity to advocate for the increased performance of Distler's work by drawing connections to other works and composers, giving ideas for programming, and providing suggestions for choral conductors interested in programming his works.

Non-Choral/Organ Works

This document has focused solely on the choral works of Hugo Distler, and specifically works from *Der Jahrkries*, op. 5, *Geistliche-Chormusik*, op. 12, and *Mörike-Chorliederbuch*, op. 19, and his compositions which are strictly for organ are also well documented in existing scholarship. However, while choral and organ music certainly represent the bulk of his compositional output, he has also composed beyond these realms, and these non-choral, non-organ pieces play an important role in defining him as a composer. Several of these works are addressed here in an effort to demonstrate the breadth of Distler's music and to explore these influences which may not be readily present among his choral and organ works.

Elf kleine Klavierstücke für die Jugend, op. 15b

The *Elf kleine Klavierstücke für die Jugend* (Eleven Small Piano Pieces for the Youth) is a delightful surprise in Distler's catalogue and is interesting if only for its definite contrast with the other works in his oeuvre. Some previous scholarship including the early dissertation by Anders suggests that the title is somewhat misleading in suggesting that the pieces are for the youth as they are quite difficult. He suggests that while it is quite possible that Distler intended the pieces as an étude for his son Andreas²⁰⁴, their suitability to the smaller hands of a younger player may simply be owed to Distler's own small stature. "Distler himself had small, bird-like hands and he delighted in playing with the hands close together, overlapping, interweaving, etc."²⁰⁵

The pieces are each only about one minute long with the longest being about two and a half minutes. Playful titles like *Trommeln und Pfeifen* (Drums and Pipes), *Echo*, and *Die Zigeuner* (The Gypsies) foreshadow the sort of whimsy which is found in the selections. They also show a great diversity in style and sound. This collection of pieces was written in 1942, the last year of Distler's life. Anders notes, "It is remarkable that in those calamitous days of fear and inner turmoil that he should turn to the writing of such innocent and blissful music as this."²⁰⁶ These pieces were, in fact, planned for a much larger collection, including music for four hands, that Distler planned to submit to Bärenreiter. In a letter dated from February 19, 1936 that Distler wrote to his friend Ingeborg Heinsen, he states:

²⁰⁴ Anders, *Hugo Distler*, 61.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 62.

*Die Stücke, ziemlich mit das neueste von mir, finde ich besonders gut gelungen und modern in der Haltung. Wenn Du auf der Suche nach zeitgemäßer Klaviermusik bist, würde ich sie Dir sehr empfehlen.*²⁰⁷

[The pieces, which are the newest from me, I find particularly well done and modern in attitude. If you are looking for contemporary piano music, I would highly recommend them to you.]

This collection is not unlike Robert Schumann's *Album für die Jugend*, op. 68 (Album for the Youth), a collection of forty-three short works which were written for his daughters in 1848.

While this is certainly an apt comparison, a more direct influence was Belá Bartók's *Gyermekeknek* (For Children), Sz. 42. His wife and his former piano student Franziska Bräck would later confirm that Distler was attempting to simulate the rhythm that Bartok used in his collection. A newspaper article titled *Moderne Klaviermusik* appeared in 1931 in which Distler discussed works by Bartók, Hindemith, Poulenc, and others. The same article, in fact, affirms that Distler did intend the music to be for youth as he expressed "his great interest in a child-friendly, and still demanding musical education - with appropriate educational works, as he found exemplified in Bartók children's songs for piano."²⁰⁸

Drei Geistliche Konzerte für Sopran und Orgel, op. 17

One of the two works with opus number in Distler's catalogue for solo voice, *Drei Geistliche Konzerte für Sopran und Orgel*, op. 17 was among the early works that Distler wrote while living in Stuttgart. It seems that during this time he was struggling to find the inspiration to complete the proposed *Johannespassion* and was turning to a variety of works as he searched for proper

²⁰⁷ "Offizielle Homepage Hugo Distler."

²⁰⁸ "Offizielle Homepage Hugo Distler." Originally: "... sein großes Interesse an einer kindgerechten und dabei anspruchsvollen musikalischen Erziehung und Bildung - mit geeigneten Unterrichtswerken, wie er sie beispielhaft in Bartóks Kinderliedern für Klavier vorfand.", trans. by the author.

motivation.²⁰⁹ The vocal solo includes many of the elements that Distler demonstrates in his choral writing and is similar to the solo soprano lines of *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, op. 12, nr. 6. The longer melismatic phrases frequently include breath marks within words, and the organ part features the interval of the fifth as pedal tone in the left hand and repeated fifths in the right hand.

Example 41 Hugo Distler, *Lieben Brüder, schicket euch in die Zeit*, Op. 17, Nr. 3, mm. 20-26

In the first four bars of *Freuet euch in dem Herrn allerwege*, he uses the repetition of text in a manner which truly highlights the meaning of the words *Freuet euch* (Rejoice ye):

Example 42 Hugo Distler, *Freut euch in dem Herrn allerwege*, Op. 17, Nr. 2, mm. 1-4

²⁰⁹ Bruno Grusnick, *Hugo Distler, 800 Jahre Musik in Lübeck*, 1982, 28.

It is clear that these settings for solo voice and organ share many of the same techniques displayed in Distler's choral writing. It is also possible that as he wrote the work, he was yearning for a simpler time; the remarks preceding the score suggest that "The organ is not treated here as merely accompanying continuo, but as an independent concertante instrument, and requires careful consideration in execution, especially in their dynamic relationship to the voice."²¹⁰ He goes on to say that he had the "intimate" tone of the smaller Jakobi organ in mind during the writing process. Anders suggests, "It is straightforward proclamation with occasional "nervous" rhythms (a ubiquitous trait in Distler) and frequent harsh dissonances. Occasionally the vocal line seems entirely disassociated from the accompaniment."²¹¹

The declamatory nature of the text, like much of Distler's work, owes an influence to Heinrich Schütz, whose similarly named work (*Kleine Geistliche Konzerte*, a massive collection of works for one to four voices) was an influence for Distler. The somewhat freely sung opening of *Lieben Brüder, schicket euch in die Zeit* very closely resembles the work of Schütz:

Example 43 Hugo Distler, *Lieben Brüder, schicket euch in die Zeit*, Op. 17, No. 3, mm. 1-3

ruhig fließend (60), aber frei im Zeitmaß

Lie - ben Brü - der, schi - cket euch in die

H.: Spielpfeife 8; [Principal 16']

²¹⁰ Hugo Distler. *Geistliche Konzerte*, op. 17. Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1938. Translated by the author.

²¹¹ Anders, *Hugo Distler*, 53.

Example 44 Heinrich Schütz, *Eile, mich, Gott zu erretten*, SWV 282, mm. 1-3



Even the more active melismatic lines of Distler's work (see Fig. 41) are quite similar to the more florid lines of Schütz's work, demonstrating small twists and turns primarily centered around an interval of a third or a fourth.

Example 45 Heinrich Schütz, *Bringt her den Herren*, SWV 283, mm. 17-20

While Schütz covers a wider range, the rhythmic and primarily stepwise motion of the music is quite similar. It is clear that Distler took great influence from Schütz for his *Drei Geistliche Konzert*, and thus, their similarities extend beyond those found in their respective choral works.

Kammerkonzert für Cembalo und elf Soloinstrumente

Although Distler's *Kammerkonzert für Cembalo und elf Soloinstrumente* (Chamber Concerto for Harpsichord and Eleven Solo Instruments) was written in the years between 1930-1932, it was not premiered until November 28, 1998 after a performance edition was prepared by

Michael Töpel in conjunction with the Hugo Distler Archive.²¹² This nineteen-minute piece is scored for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in B, Horn in F, Bassoon, Harpsichord (double manual), two Violins, two Violas, Cello, and Double Bass. It is written in three movements: 1. Allegro, II. Andante tranquillo, and III. Allegro vivace e con brio. The first movement opens with a statement of the first theme by the strings:

Example 46 Hugo Distler, *Kammerkonzert I*, mm. 1-6

The image shows a musical score for six string instruments: 1. Violine, 2. Violine, 1. Viola, 2. Viola, Violoncello, and Kontrabaß. The score is for measures 1 through 6 of the first movement. Each instrument part is written on a staff with a treble or bass clef and a 2/4 time signature. The music is marked with a crescendo and 'poco a poco' (p cresc. poco a poco). The first violin part begins with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes. The second violin part begins with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes. The viola parts begin with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes. The cello and double bass parts begin with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes.

This theme is then essentially echoed by the wind instruments. The ornamented trills in the second violin in m7 hint at the material played by the harpsichord which enters in m24. While the main theme is based primarily on rhythmic momentum, the harpsichord takes on a more improvisatory quality which is present throughout the piece by moving rapidly through alternations of notes that begin with a whole step before increasing in range and complexity. As the harpsichord part develops in complexity, the strings and winds continue to prominently

²¹² “Offizielle Homepage Hugo Distler.”

support the rhythmic material which was introduced in the beginning. In mm98-101, Distler uses rhythmic perfect fourths in the left hand to accompany the melodic material.

Example 47 Hugo Distler, *Kammerkonzert I*, mm. 98-101



The use of perfect fourths and fifths is typical in both Distler's instrumental and choral writing.

The close of the first movement demonstrates the driving rhythmic momentum that Distler maintains throughout the piece.

Example 48 Hugo Distler, *Kammerkonzert* I, mm. 204-207



The second movement of the *Kammerkonzert* begins with a strong, emphatic *ffz* opening which quickly dissipates into tranquil and melodic playing by each of the eleven instruments. The slow 6/8 begins to lull the listener into a relaxed mood, and then, the harpsichord tumbles into a seemingly chaotic and almost improvisatory undulation beneath the more contemplative strings and winds. Measure 27 then repeats the intense opening material before again

relinquishing to a softer and more docile musicality. As before, with the increased intensity from the harpsichord as the motor for the music, the strings and winds increase in intensity until m49 when the harpsichord takes on the role of accompanist for a stunning melody from the flute. This melody continues until the end of the movement when it trails off and sounds almost incomplete.

The third and final movement of the *Kammerkonzert* is the longest and most intense of the work. The opening melody played by the flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, and first violin and viola is the rhythmic and melodic basis for the movement:

Example 49 Hugo Distler, *Kammerkonzert* III, mm. 1-4



This theme is continually stated in the harpsichord and other instruments throughout and is generally the transition in and out of harpsichord solos. As the theme weaves in and out, it becomes clear that rhythmic variety is what drives Distler's work. Frequent modifications of the theme within the harpsichord generate great intensity. Longer passages of solo work from the harpsichord are especially interesting as they may be as close to a demonstration of Distler's improvisatory skills as one can find. It is well documented that some of his most prized music came in the form of improvisations at the organ, particularly while working at the Jakobikirche. Unfortunately, these performances were never recorded or transcribed, and thus, one has only the memory of those in attendance to describe the brilliance of these performances. The *Kammerkonzert*, however, puts this improvisatory quality front and center:

Example 50 Hugo Distler, *Kammerkonzert* III, mm. 69-78

The musical score for Cemb. (Cembalo) is presented in three systems. The first system, measures 69-71, shows the right hand with a rapid, repeated eighth-note pattern in the treble clef, while the left hand has a few notes in the bass clef. The second system, measures 72-74, continues the right hand pattern, with the left hand becoming more active with eighth-note patterns. The third system, measures 75-78, shows the right hand with a series of rests, while the left hand continues with a complex, chromatic eighth-note pattern. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

The repeated rhythmic patterns move effortlessly as if streaming straight from Distler's mind to the keys. An improvisatory feeling in notated music is often difficult to capture, and perhaps this is the reason that Distler never completed the work nor sent it for publication. The origins of the work date to his time in Lübeck, and during his first year in Leipzig, he sent a copy to Günther Ramin, to whom he had dedicated the first completed portion.²¹³ The third movement exists in its entirety. However, the first and second were incomplete and held at the Distler Archive in *Bibliothek der Hansestadt Lübeck*. The edition available from Bärenreiter was "reconstructed" by Michael Töpel in 1998.

Though it was never completed, the importance of this work cannot be overlooked. A renaissance in the performance and composition of music for the harpsichord was underway in

²¹³ Grusnick, *Hugo Distler*, 10.

the early 20th century. This was led by Polish keyboardist Wanda Landowska among others. She commissioned works by composers such as Falla and Poulenc and was the first to record Bach's *Golberg Variations*.²¹⁴ This is all to say that the composition of a harpsichord concerto was very much in vogue during Distler's lifetime and would continue to be an important art form in the 20th century with works written by composers such as Frank Martin and even minimalist Philip Glass. It cannot be stated definitively, but given this context, there is every reason to believe that Distler may have completed this work and perhaps written further compositions in this genre had his career extended longer. Distler's *Kammerkonzert* is thus important both as a look into the improvisatory spirit of his instrumental composition and as a means of considering the depth of his work as an artist.

Programming the Music of Hugo Distler

The music of Hugo Distler is well known to some and yet completely foreign to many. There are those who place him among the great German composers of the 20th century due to his contributions to the organ repertoire and sacred music. Though his life was cut short, leaving a relatively small catalogue of works behind, his music provides an excellent set of repertoire which is well suited to choirs, regardless of size, age, or skill-level. Having previously highlighted several of these works, the following section will advocate for an increase in the performance of Distler's music by drawing programmatic connections and outlining skills and techniques for the modern conductor with an aim to create greater accessibility for any ensemble.

St. Jakobikirche Vespers Music

When Distler first heard the *St. Matthews Passion* of Heinrich Schütz performed for a Friday night Vesper Service at the St. Jakobikirche, his life was indelibly changed. He would go

²¹⁴ Lionel Salter, "Landowska, Wanda," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 18, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

on to work with Bruno Grusnick and Axel Kühl to program thirty-eight Vesper Services between 1931-1936. In addition to programming this music, Distler performed from the organ and also conducted the volunteer choirs of the church. Thus, the programs for these services can be considered as primary starting points for music which can be paired with Distler's own compositions, which were also often included on these services. The complete programs for these services have been printed in several other sources²¹⁵.

For the church conductor, one major benefit to these programs is that they include the hymns which are to be sung by the congregation. As an example, for the eighth Vespers, on Nov. 29, 1931, Distler opened and closed the program from the organ with two pieces by J.S. Bach: *Pastorale, F-dur* for the prelude and *Präludium und Fuge, Es-dur* for the postlude. After the liturgy, the congregation sang the chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, the basis for Distler's *Kleine Adventmusik*, op. 4, which was subsequently performed by the choir. This relatively simple program would be well-suited for any Sunday in Advent and could be taken on by even the most modest church choir.²¹⁶ The chorale tune *Nun komm* is a popular one, and it is utilized in several prominent, modern books of worship in a variety of hymns. Works for the organ based on this melody are also widely available.

In the cases where no Distler music is specifically programmed, one might simply consider the composers which were included on a given program as a stepping-stone to creating a new program. While Bach and Buxtehude were certainly favorites for these services, several programs were considerably more varied. For example, the sixteenth Vespers (November 2,

²¹⁵ A complete list of the Vesper programs is included in writing by Larry Palmer and more recently was printed in the dissertation by Harper.

²¹⁶ Op. 4 is written for three-part choir (SAB) and is relatively accessible for smaller, less experienced choirs. The piece does require violin, oboe, and flute and has the option for a cello to double the organ. Further, an excellent organist is required for this piece as in as the works by Bach.

1932) not only includes works by the aforementioned favorites, but also pieces by Scheidt, Resinarius, Othmayer, Pachelbel, Osiander, A. Kniller, M. Praetorius, Zachow, Hassler, and Schütz. The conductor of a more experienced choir could create a concert by simply taking these names, selecting pieces from each, and weaving in Distler's music throughout. One should consider it less important that the exact pieces which Distler programmed are included. Rather, the music of Distler will be highlighted by providing the context of the music which served as a major influence on him as a composer, conductor, and performer.

Distler certainly had favorites, and it is easy to see the pervasiveness of works by historical German composers on these programs. They were, however, not limited in this way. Non-German composers such as Caldara, Sweelinck, and Gabrielli were all performed at one point. He also included the music of contemporaries such as Kurt Thomas and Ernst Pepping and even performed the work of his student, Jan Bender, in his penultimate Vesper Service at St. Jakobi.²¹⁷ As many of the composers included in this section had secular compositions in addition to their sacred output, the inspiration taken from these programs ought not be limited to the director of the church choir.

The Old Becomes New: Arnold Mendelssohn, Max Reger, and Kurt Thomas

A variety of both musical and social factors in the late 19th century led to a shift in musical composition in Germany. With the excesses of the Romantic era in full force, a general shift towards the recognition and popularity of "historical" music was promoted by many composers and theorists. An increased availability of music along with newly organized complete editions of the works of composers such as Schütz and Monteverdi provided greater

²¹⁷ Bender's *Takkata* (1936) was performed as the prelude for Vesper 37 on November 29, 1936. The remainder of the program was all music composed by Distler, highlighting in particular the melody *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*. The chorale was sung by the congregation, the choir sang his *Kleine Adventmusik*, and he performed his organ partita (op.8/I).

access for conductors and students alike. For some, this simply meant a greater awareness leading to increased study and influences of this music being easily identified within their composition. For others, it contributed to a complete and total reaction against the music of the 19th century. While this shift had its earliest origins in the early part of the century, it was not until the latter 1800s that a true reform in choral music would take place. Arnold Mendelssohn is among those who would reject the excess of his peers in favor of a return to a cappella vocal music. Mendelssohn's friendship with Max Reger was influential in Reger's preoccupation with the Protestant chorale and tendency towards *Gebrauchsmusik*.²¹⁸ His organ works were championed and frequently performed by Karl Straube. Finally, Kurt Thomas, a student of both Arnold Mendelssohn and Karl Straube, was at the forefront of the New German Church Music and helped to pave the way for composers like Distler and Pepping.

Arnold Mendelssohn (1855-1933)

The son of a second cousin to Felix, Arnold Mendelssohn is clearly overshadowed in history, and thus, his name is perhaps a double-edged sword: consistently recognized but destined to be overlooked. In spite of that, he stands at the center of a musical transition and is a very important figure in the musical lineage of Hugo Distler. He was important as a teacher and composer, and he truly should be considered "one of the most important transitional figures in the renewal movement."²¹⁹

Arnold Mendelssohn did not start his education as a musician but first studied law. In 1877, however, he turned towards music and began his studies at the *Institut für Kirchenmusik* in

²¹⁸ John Williamson, "Reger, Max," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 4, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²¹⁹ Gilbert Stewart Seeley, "Protestant Choral Music Since 1925," DMA diss., University of Southern California, 1969, 7.

Berlin. There, he studied organ²²⁰ with Carl Haupt²²¹ and learned composition from Eduard Grell.²²² Through these professors, Mendelssohn would surely have developed an appreciation for the music of Bach and Palestrina. Upon finishing his education in Berlin, Mendelssohn was appointed as the musical director and organ professor at Bonn University. Here, Mendelssohn would establish a friendship with Jules Smend and with Friedrich and Phillip Spitta. This “Bonn circle of friends”²²³ would do much to promote the music of Heinrich Schütz, particularly in 1885, the 300th anniversary of Schütz’s birth. Mendelssohn would do much more to further the study and performance of historical music by editing works by Schütz, Hans Leo Hassler, and Claudio Monteverdi.

It was not only his interest and promotion of historical music that makes Arnold Mendelssohn important to this lineage, but also his views on Protestant church music. Mendelssohn called for “a return to post-reformation ideals in liturgical music,”²²⁴ and was especially interested in the importance of a cappella music as the musical force of the worship service.²²⁵

As long as church music was a refuge for musicians who were not good enough for the concert stage and opera house, as reported by the composer Arnold Mendelssohn during his youth (b. 1855), as long as the position of a church musician was, as a rule, only on a

²²⁰ Edward F. Kravitt. "Mendelssohn, Arnold." *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 21, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²²¹ Haupt was an organist who is mainly recognized as a teacher, and *Grove Music Online* cites him as a primary teacher for a number of organists.

²²² Grell was a conductor and composer and was one of the “greatest proponents of early church music, particularly of works in the style of Palestrina. It is likely that he passed on this passion for historical music to his student Arnold Mendelssohn. (Reinhold Brinkmann and Bernd Wiechert, "Grell, Eduard," *Grove Music Online*, accessed April 2, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.)

²²³ Pritchard, *Creative Historicism*, 31.

²²⁴ Strimple, *Choral Music*, 20.

²²⁵ Friedrich Blume, *Protestant Church Music: A History*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1974, 409.

part-time basis, there was no hope that church music could again occupy a respectable place in the framework of German musical life.²²⁶

With these standards in place, Mendelssohn “evolved a purer and more appropriate polyphonic liturgical idiom.”²²⁷ Mendelssohn’s philosophies were passed down to his students, the most famous of which were Paul Hindemith, Kurt Thomas, and Günter Raphael. These philosophies also extended to influence composers such as Johann Nepomuk David and Ernst Pepping, important figures of the New German Church Music.

Important works by Mendelssohn from the 1920s include his *Deutsche Messe* (1923) for eight part mixed chorus and the *Geistliche Chormusik* (1926). The latter is a group of fourteen liturgical motets for various parts of the church year. These works are considered by many to be among the “first monuments of the new church music.”²²⁸ While only predating Distler’s earliest published works by four years, these works highlight both the historical influence seen in Mendelssohn’s music and the impact he would have on Protestant church music of the early 1900s. In addition to these larger works, he wrote a large number of smaller liturgical works.²²⁹ It is widely believed that Mendelssohn was the originator of the concept of *Gebrauchsmusik* which was firmly established and championed by Paul Hindemith.²³⁰ Indeed, “. . . . it was the

²²⁶ Oskar Söhngen, “What is the Position of Church Music in Germany Today?” in *Cantors at the Crossroads*, ed. Johannes Riedel (London: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 203.

²²⁷ Kravitt, *Mendelssohn*.

²²⁸ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 29.

²²⁹ The bulk his extant autographed scores, as well as several hundred letters to and from Mendelssohn, are held at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

²³⁰ Anders, *Hugo Distler*, 77.

towering figure of Arnold Mendelssohn who perhaps more than anyone else paved the way for a genuine “rebirth” of German Protestant church music.”²³¹

Max Reger (1873-1916)

As a major composer of organ and choral music at the turn of the century, there is no doubt that Max Reger (1873-1916) influenced changes in the sound of German church music. As a young organist, Max Reger studied the works of F. Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Liszt. It was later as a 17-year-old student of Hugo Riemann that Reger would study the works of Brahms and Bach. Though Catholic himself, Reger was encouraged by Riemann and Phillip Spitta to compose four-part Protestant chorales in the style of Bach.²³² Additionally, Reger followed the lead of Johannes Brahms (who had developed an affinity for the music of Heinrich Schütz) in developing *a cappella* vocal music and organ music for the worship service.²³³ For writing music that hearkened back to an earlier era, Reger has been described as “a Baroque master born a century and a half too late.”²³⁴

Despite the fracture in their relationship, Riemann’s influence on Reger can be seen through his compositions and in the music that inspired him as a young composer. Reger went on to teach Hermann Grabner, who was highly influenced by Reger’s style. Reger also maintained a long-time friendship with Karl Straube, who was a teacher of Günther Ramin. In this way, Reger would have an impact on both of Distler’s primary mentors. While the aural impact of Reger’s influence is perhaps more easily heard in the music of Hindemith, his attention to historical

²³¹ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 262.

²³² Blume, *Protestant Church Music*, 402.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 409.

²³⁴ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 13.

music and his passion for *a cappella* music are an important part of the development of new German church music.

Kurt Thomas (1904-1973)

Though Kurt Thomas (1904-1973) only predates the birth of Hugo Distler (1908-1942) by four years, his influence on Protestant choral music of the 1900s is irrefutable. Thomas studied with Karl Straube and Arnold Mendelssohn, and he shared a teacher with Distler as both studied with Hermann Grabner.²³⁵ By the age of 21, Thomas had been appointed a professor at the Leipzig Conservatory. He would later teach at the Berlin Conservatory, a post that he would relinquish to Hugo Distler in 1940.²³⁶ Thomas propagated A. Mendelssohn's assertion of the superiority of *a cappella* vocal music and made great contributions to the success of this ideal.

One of the first exciting choral events in the more recent history of music was the 1925 Leipzig premiere of the Latin *Messe in A* for soloists and two choruses, Op. 1, by Kurt Thomas. . . For the first time in a long while a young composer had, with an unaccompanied choral work, successfully participated in the genesis of new music and at the same time established his artistic reputation. Furthermore, Thomas's Opus 1 was the first work of a dawning musical epoch that restored a cappella music within the complex of living musical developments, thereby placing it on a par with great instrumental music.²³⁷

Thomas was very involved in the youth movement in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, and this movement's influence also impacted a young Hugo Distler. A major philosophical area of this movement was a sense of national pride and a focus on German historicism. These ideals spread to music and would continue to influence composers writing in a historical style. That the music

²³⁵ Hanspeter Krellmann and Erik Levi, "Thomas, Kurt," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 21, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²³⁶ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 34.

²³⁷ Blume, *Protestant Church Music*, 417.

of Kurt Thomas was directly influential on Hugo Distler can be seen in the fact that Distler twice programmed Thomas's music as a part of his Vespers service at St. Jakobi.²³⁸

Distler's Students and The Progression of New German Church Music

Hugo Distler left a lasting legacy not only as a composer, but also as a major innovator in the style typically referred to as the New German Church Music. He left an indelible impression on his students and on composers whose careers began or continued after his death. Students of Distler include such composers as Jan Bender, Siegfried Reda, and Helmut Bornefeld whose works each show the influence of Distler's teaching. His influence extended beyond direct contact with young composers, however, and can be seen in the works of many composers in the second and third generations to take up the style of the New German Church Music.²³⁹ Among his peers of the first generation, one can see hallmarks of Distler's work included in compositions by Hans Friedrich Micheelsen, Walter Kraft, and Günter Raphael.

Jan Oskar Bender (1909-1994)

Jan Bender was born in 1909 in Holland where he developed an affinity for the organ and an early interest in composition. In 1929, he began to study organ at the Marienkirche with organist Walter Kraft.²⁴⁰ During this time, he became familiar with the work of Karl Straube and Günther Ramin and "thought that Leipzig must be a great place to go study church music."²⁴¹ Upon entering the Leipzig Conservatory in 1930, he studied organ with Straube, piano with Carl

²³⁸ McKinney, *Organ Works*, 45.

²³⁹ The division of twentieth-century Protestant German composers into generations is suggested by Gilbert Stewart Seeley.

²⁴⁰ David Fienen, "Jan Bender: A Church Musician of the 20th Century," in *Perspectives on Organ Playing and Musical Interpretation: Pedagogical, Historical, and Instrumental Studies – A Festschrift for Heinrich Fleischer at 90*, ed. by Ames Anderson, et al. (New ULM, Minnesota: Graphic Arts, Martin Luther College, 2002), 61.

²⁴¹ David Lowel Folkerts, "A Comprehensive Performance Project in Organ Literature With a Catalog of Jan Bender's Published Organ Works," DMA diss., University of Iowa, 1973. 140.

Martienssen, and composition, conducting, and music theory with Kurt Thomas. After only a short time, he was strongly encouraged by outside forces to return to Holland. Bender recalls: “Then the Nazis came, and Straube said, ‘Bender, you are still a Dutchman.’ I had been living already a couple of years in Germany, but he said, ‘You will never get a position here. You are Dutch, and you better go home.’”²⁴² After leaving for Amsterdam for a short time, he returned to Lübeck in 1934 and enrolled at the Lübeck Staatskonservatorium where he began his studies with Hugo Distler.

His relationship with Distler blossomed not only as a student, but also as a patron of the St. Jakobikirche where he was frequently a part of the Vespers services. Bender sang under Bruno Grusnick in the *Sing- und Spielkreis*, and his *Tokkata* (1936) for organ was the opening section for the 37th Vespers Service on November 29, 1936.²⁴³ He became an authority on Distler’s music while on tour with *Sing- und Spielkreis* and was featured as an organist on pieces such as Distler’s partita on *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, which was frequently included on programs.²⁴⁴ It was Distler who most strongly motivated him as a composer and encouraged him to remain disciplined in his craft. In Bender’s own words: “I remember once that Distler was very angry with me because I said, ‘Oh, I can still write more modern.’ He said, ‘No, you can only write what you feel, if you can do it still another way then you are on the wrong track.’”²⁴⁵ It was this sort of guidance that would have its most formative impact on Bender, who recalls:

²⁴² Ibid., 93.

²⁴³ Harper, *Renewal Movement*, 120.

²⁴⁴ Fienen, *Jan Bender*, 63.

²⁴⁵ David Herman, *The Life and Work of Jan Bender*, Chantry Music Press: 1979. 19.

“Lessons in Leipzig with Karl Straube, C. A. Martienssen, and Kurt Thomas taught me how to study; lessons with Bruno Grusnick and Hugo Distler taught what to study.”²⁴⁶

In Bender’s early career, he faced many of the trials and tribulations that had created such fear in Hugo Distler. With rising conflicts between the Confessing Church and the German Christian Church, Bender refused to play a service in which a German Christian pastor had been installed in place of a Confessional pastor; he was arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp as a result. In the summer of 1939, he was called to active duty for the military. He lost his left eye as a result of shrapnel from a grenade in battle in 1941, and later, in 1944, he was captured by the Allies. He spent nearly a year in a POW camp in France. Despite the obvious difficulty of the situation, Bender was able to complete several pieces during this time which would contribute to his *Singbüchlein*, op. 1, a collection similar to Distler’s *Der Jahrkreis*, op. 5.²⁴⁷

Bender’s legacy is most strongly felt for the work he was able to do in the United States. After having seen some of his work in *Musik and Kirche*, Pastor Fred Otto of Fremont, Nebraska commissioned him to write a *St. Mark Passion* in 1954, and he soon became a “house composer” for Concordia Publishing House.²⁴⁸ His career in the United States continued soon thereafter as he was hired at Concordia Teacher’s College in Seward, Nebraska in 1960. Here he continually programmed the music of Distler in addition to many other composers of the New German Church Music, such as Has Friedrich Micheelsen and Ernst Pepping.²⁴⁹ His career would next

²⁴⁶ Jan Bender, “Hugo Distler, Bruno Grusnick, und ich,” in *Festschrift für Bruno Grusnick* (Hänssler, 1981), 23, quoted in David Fienen “Jan Bender,” 65.

²⁴⁷ Fienen, *Jan Bender*, 70.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

necessitate travel to Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. In the spring of 1971, he and fellow composer Heinz Werner Zimmerman exchanged positions, and Bender took over at the Kirchenmusikschule in Berlin. Thus, in addition to continuing his own work as a composer, he was able to constantly promote the music of Distler and those who followed in his footsteps.

Much of Bender's choral output demonstrates a similar motivation to Distler's *Der Jahrkreis* in that it was written specifically for use in the church service and likely with a specific ensemble or type of ensemble in mind. This is nowhere more evident than in *Sing to the Lord A New Song: A Primer of Christian Song* which he dedicated to "Christian Youth and Dr. Hans Lilje, D.D., Landesbischof of Hannover."²⁵⁰ The collection is a small set of canons which highlight the text of the Ten Commandments and other service music, such as the Apostolic Creed and the Lord's Prayer. While the music is simple and does not specifically show techniques directly reminiscent of Distler, his directives in the "Technical Remarks" demonstrate similar motivation and intent. He suggests that when the Lord's Prayer is sung, "the accompaniment must be adapted to the free character of the declamation," suggesting that the words were of the utmost importance. He further adds that "tonal expression never goes beyond the expression of what is contained in the text." Just as Distler believed choral music to be the most powerful expression of the word of God, so did Bender place high value on this relationship.

In *Fear Not, for Behold, I Bring Good Tidings of Great Joy*, op. 32 No. 7, several techniques that stem from the Distler tradition can be seen. Frequently changing meter is present, as is true of many of Bender's works. Just as in Distler's oeuvre, this is done strictly to

²⁵⁰ Jan Bender, *Sing to the Lord a New Song: A Primer of Christian Song* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959).

manipulate the music to best suit the text. In mm31-36, there is a shift between 4/4 and 5/4 which allows the words “Savior”, “Lord”, and “Christ” to be sung on the naturally stronger downbeat.

Example 51 Jan Bender, *Fear Not, for Behold, I Bring Good Tidings of Great Joy*, Op. 32, No.

7, mm. 30-36

tid - ings of great joy, of great joy. For un - to
I bring good tid - ings of great joy.
you is born to - day in the
For un - to you is born to - day
cit - y of Da - vid a Sav - ior, which is
in the cit - y of Da - vid a Sav -
Christ, the Lord. a Sav - ior, which is Christ, the Lord. which is
ior, which is Christ, a Sav - ior, which is Christ, the Lord. which is

In the closing measure of the piece, as the sopranos move to the cadential material (a iv-I movement), the altos are given a final melodic statement. This is similar to the use of melodic material in cadential material noted in chapter two and frequently demonstrated in Distler's op. 12 although this is on a much smaller scale.²⁵¹

Example 52 Jan Bender, *Fear Not, for Behold, I Bring Good Tidings of Great Joy*, Op. 32, No. 7, mm. 73-75

Finally, in *Hodie Christus Natus Est*²⁵² Bender uses several techniques that are very clearly descended from his work with Distler. The piece opens with a melismatic statement of “hodie” by the altos. This is followed by the same phrase echoed but this time also doubled by the sopranos a fourth above, which is immediately followed by a response from the tenors and basses singing in perfect fifths.

²⁵¹ Jan Bender, *Fear Not, for Behold, I Bring Good Tidings of Great Joy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969).

²⁵² Jan Bender, *Hodie Christus Natus Est* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958).

Gaily ($\text{♩} = 144$) **JAN BENDER,**

SOPRANO
Ho - di - e, ho -
Born to - day, born -

ALTO
Ho - di - e, ho -
Born to - day, born -

TENOR
Ho - di - e,
Born to - day,

BASS
Ho - di - e,
Born to - day,

PIANO
f
for rehearsal only

di - e, ho - di - e Chri -
to - day, born - to - day, Christ.

di - e, ho - di - e Chri -
to - day, born - to - day, Christ.

8 ho - di - e, ho - di - e Chri -
born to - day, born to - day, Christ.

ho - di - e, ho - di - e Chri -
born to - day, born to - day, Christ.

²⁵³ Hildegard Holland Cox, “A Study of Two Twentieth-Century Orgelkonzerte Based on “Es Sungen Drei Engel” By Johann Nepomuk David and Hans Friedrich Micheelsen” (DMA diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1999).

Distler, who demonstrated a proclivity for the use of these intervals. What can also be seen in this example is the frequent and specific indication of breaths for the singer. Bender like Distler was very direct in his breathing indications, which allow for a clear interpretation of phrasing even in times of frequently changing meter and also allow the singer to clearly navigate more difficult melismatic passages.

Generally, Bender's music lacks the sort of rhythmic vitality that set Distler apart as a composer. However, his contributions to church music in America should not be ignored. Having written over 2,500 compositions (114 of which have opus numbers assigned), he was highly prolific as a composer. This includes 444 choral pieces.²⁵⁴ These works show the inspiration and technique which were derived from his time working alongside Hugo Distler and provide a plethora of accessible options for choirs of all sizes, ages, and ability levels. Beyond his work as a composer, he was a constant champion for the work of German composers and helped to promote this music in America during his work as a teacher and composer.²⁵⁵

Siegfried Reda (1916-1968)

Siegfried Reda studied organ and composition with Distler at the *Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik*²⁵⁶ and also served as his assistant director for the Berlin Academy

²⁵⁴ Fienen, *Jan Bender*, 79.

²⁵⁵ An extended interview with Jan Bender regarding his relationship with Hugo Distler was utilized in the thesis by Charles Anders (cited in the bibliography to this document). Other extended interviews are included in the works by Folkerts and Herman. These texts serve as a valuable resource for those wishing to further understand this relationship.

²⁵⁶ Interestingly, Jan Bender emphatically states that Reda was *not* a student of Distler. In an interview with David Folkerts he says: "A couple of years ago, I talked with him, [asking] if he was a student of Distler's, because I consider myself as the only student of Distler. I know from Lübeck that he had some [students]. But I know that there was no composer. Then in Stuttgart he was busy with other things. He had to teach. [Some of his teaching was] composition, that's true. He hardly had time enough, but that was because of his choir work, and in Berlin the same. That is what he suffered about: he couldn't compose. He had no time to concentrate on composition any more, and that was what he felt [to be] his job, his assignment the dear Lord had given him. And that just drove him nuts. I asked Reda then if he considered himself a student, or even influenced by Distler's music. He was not a student, that

Choir.²⁵⁷ While in Berlin, Reda was also a student of Ernst Pepping. Whereas Jan Bender composed largely in the choral idiom, Reda, despite a significant choral output, is more recognized for his organ music. He was considered to be “an authority on organs, and often served as a consultant in this capacity.”²⁵⁸ Like Bender, however, he also had a significant teaching career, which included the mentorship of Wolfgang Hufschmidt, a composer of the “third generation” of composers of New German Church music.²⁵⁹

Two collections by Reda stand out for the similarity of intention to *Der Jahrkreis*. *The Old Epistle Lessons* (1948) and *Das Psalmbuch* (1948) are each large collections of music intended for use in the church service. The former contains forty-one Epistle motets for the season of Advent through Trinity, and the latter a collection of forty-five Psalm settings.

Das Psalmbuch represented a valuable contribution to the post-war offerings of German Protestant church music. In providing selections within the grasp of many reorganized German choirs, it served as a genre of liturgical *Gebrauchsmusik*. Even more significant, however, was that the collection was couched in a distinctly contemporary idiom.²⁶⁰

It was this type of music written for the church service which most clearly demonstrated the techniques which he learned from Distler.

His liturgical choral music developed Distler’s principles, with a deeply emotional declamatory style, rich in animated gestures, which is relieved at intervals by quasi-instrumental melismas; the choral pieces and the concert works share textures constructed

is for sure. He said “No, we just write in a similar style.” But he thought he certainly was not under the influence, nor was he a student of Hugo.”

²⁵⁷ John P. Bernthal, “From Teacher to Student: Tradition and Innovation in the Chorale-Based Organ Works of Distler and Reda,” *The Diapason*, 84(12) (1993): 12.

²⁵⁸ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 117.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

in several layers.²⁶¹

There are other compositions by Reda that not only show the influence of Distler, but also demonstrate that both shared similar influences in early music. Just as Distler was extremely taken by first hearing the music of Schütz, Reda describes his first significant musical memory as a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*: "I cannot say whether it was the overwhelming greatness of Bach's tonal realm or the story of the Passion of our Lord that penetrated with frightening reality at that time in my childhood that caused such emotion."²⁶² Similarly, as Distler showed a predilection for the music of madrigalists and other early composers such as Ockeghem, Reda's *Madrigals* are a "combination of possibilities of motet and madrigal and – in the sense of Reda's modern ideal – a blending of the old and the 'new'."²⁶³ Reda recognized Distler's ability to assimilate the best of historical styles into his works and specifically enjoyed the organ partita on *Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme*, saying:

. . from the strength and particular constancy, that not only had he (Distler) come face to face with this influence and carried it through with success, but he was also able to amalgamate within it the spirit and the language and the formal principles of our time with the elements of the former hierarchically-austere art of the old.²⁶⁴

Indeed, Reda frequently paid tribute to Distler both in letters and in composition and recognized the influence that his teacher had upon him. His *Choral-Konzert I: O wie selig ihr doch, ihr Frommen* is written largely as a musical homage to Distler and includes a poem at the beginning of the manuscript by his friend (and fellow Distler student) Helmut Bornefeld titled

²⁶¹ Klaus Kirchberg, "Reda, Siegfried," *Grove Music Online*, accessed February 18, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²⁶² Richard Allen Webb, "Siegfried Reda (1916-1968)" (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1974), 2.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13. Quoting Klaus Kirchberg, "Er stellte sich der Gegenwart," *Musik und Gottesdienst*, 23:4 (1969), 92.

“In memoriam Hugo Distler”.²⁶⁵ However, Reda also departs from the music of Distler in many regards as he “felt more and more that both his style and his teaching of composition were being held back by Distler’s backward reflections on Schütz with which he had been indoctrinated.”²⁶⁶ He was exposed to works by Bartók, Stravinsky, and Messiaen, which lead him to expand his techniques into increasingly dissonant tonal language, dodecaphonic techniques, and more expansive forms. It seems that he believed that in order for his creativity to reach its full potential, it was necessary to expand beyond composing in a strictly liturgical idiom:

Allow me please again to express at least two things openly: the first, that I can no longer acquiesce in writing and publishing what is still vocal music after Hugo Distler, - the other, that the mere “light-touching” of the question of the renewal of the sacred-service choral music through larger or smaller new works without a methodical order appears to me as one of the unhealthiest symptoms in the situation of creating. So I believe that my (perhaps somewhat “late”) work is at least one of the most materials answers from that compositionally-substantial, important-for-the-future portion that hitherto scarcely had been appreciated. Entirely having in mind the sacred service-liturgical functions, by this my work is tied. The togetherness of worship order and church music renewal until now have been becoming binding in a very narrow sense for the creative.²⁶⁷

While his work as a composer would lead him further away from the music of Distler, Reda would continue to serve as a major proponent for the performance of Distler’s music. The final stop in Reda’s career was as the music director for the Mülheim Petrikerche where he, despite his criticisms of the movement, would frequently program repertoire of the New German Church music. “It was self-evident that the choir would become the carrier of the church music concerts in the Petrikerche, and the tireless compositions of Distler and Pepping. . .”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 49.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 19.

²⁶⁷ Gerhard Schumacher, “Vom Auftrag neuer Kirchenmusik (Briefe von Siegfried Reda),” *Sagittarius*, 3 (1970): 32, in Richard Allen Webb, *Siegfried Reda*, 44.

²⁶⁸ Webb, *Siegfried Reda*, 157.

Helmut Bornefeld (1906-1990)

Helmut Bornefeld sent Hugo Distler a letter welcoming him to the “organ-less south”²⁶⁹ and was therefore one of the first people to welcome him to Stuttgart upon his arrival. Bornefeld had conducted a chamber choir in Esslinger which Distler would later remount as the Esslinger Singing Academy. The initial letter from Bornefeld sparked a longtime friendship and partnership between the two musicians, who were discussed the musical scene in Stuttgart and a “common love for musical theatre.”²⁷⁰ Although no work was ever completed (primarily owing to a lack of time²⁷¹), letters between Distler and Bornefeld discussed collaborations on texts by Nestroy (“Lupazivagabunus”), the Brothers Grimm (“Gevatter Tod”), and on a work about Hercules (“Herakles”).²⁷²

Helmut Bornefeld had studied at the Stuttgart Hochschule für Musik under Ewald Strässer, Hugo Hull, H. Roth, A. Kreutz, and Herman Keller and thus, was not directly a student of Hugo Distler in the strictest sense of the word.²⁷³ Despite that, he is often referred to as a “pupil”²⁷⁴ of Distler or even as a “disciple” of Distler’s work.²⁷⁵ Bornefeld also worked very directly with Siegfried Reda; together they founded the *Heidenheimer Arbeitstage für neue Kirchenmusik* [Heidenheim Study Days for New Church Music], an annual festival which ran

²⁶⁹ Distler-Harth, 246.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 248

²⁷¹ Ibid., 251.

²⁷² Ibid., 248-250.

²⁷³ Klaus Kirchberg, “Bornefeld, Helmut,” *Grove Music Online*, , accessed February 27, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²⁷⁴ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 110.

²⁷⁵ David Otto Johns, “The Organ-Reform Movement: A Formative Influence Upon the Twentieth Century Church Music Composition, Practice, and Pedagogy” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma), 74.

from 1946-1960.²⁷⁶ As with Reda, the influence of Distler's music inspired Bornefeld greatly. He recalls:

Distler writes a kind of music not merely *for* the organ but one might almost say, *from* the organ. . . . Distler's Lübeck registrations were a revelation to a whole generation of organists and did more toward the shaping of a new organistic tonal knowledge than whole books of theoretical writings.²⁷⁷

And the respect and inspiration was mutual, as "one of Distler's last desires was to write an opera on a libretto of Bornefeld."²⁷⁸

The influence of both Hindemith and Distler on Bornefeld is clearly demonstrated in his large output of *Gebrauchsmusik* which he compiled in his *Das Choralwerk*. This large work of many volumes includes: six volumes for organ or other keyboard instrument (which may also incorporate vocal solo or unison choir), six volumes of about 200 pieces for small choir and organ, three volumes for unison choir or solo and other instruments ad lib., two volumes of chorale preludes for organ, twelve volumes for one to five voices, organ and other instruments ad lib., ten volumes for three to five voices a cappella, two volumes of instrumental church sonatas, and three volumes of compositions for advanced organ soloists.²⁷⁹ The motets in this collection demonstrate an "amalgamation of the chorale with elements from the music of Distler, Carl Orff . . . medieval parallel organum . . . [and] Bartók. . ."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Arlene deYoung-Judd, "Helmut Bornefeld," *American Organist* 28(5) (1994): 64

²⁷⁷ Helmut Bornefeld, *Orgelbau und neuer Orgelmusik* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1952): 12-13, Tr. By Philip Gehring in "Distler's Organ Works," in *The American Organist*, 46 (1963): 14, quoted in Arlene deYoung-Judd, "Helmut Bornefeld," *American Organist* 28(5) (1994): 64.

²⁷⁸ deYoung Judd, "Helmut Bornefeld," 64.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁸⁰ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 110.

One such motet, *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*, does clearly demonstrate several characteristics which seem to be derived from the works of Distler. One immediately notices the constantly shifting meter and the barlines which are placed between, rather than through, the staff. Also clearly demonstrated is the type of phrase elision which Distler exhibits throughout his *Geistliche Chormusik*.

Example 54 Helmut Bornefeld, *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*, mm. 15-17

wieder ruhig *mf*

1. Zier _____, jetzt a
3. rafft _____, und da

p

1. und Zier _____, jetzt a - ber hoch _____ sch
3. ge - rafft _____, und da - her bist _____ I

p

1. Zief _____, jetzt a - ber hoch _____ schimpfie
3. rafft _____, und da - her bist _____ Du kom

Example 55 Helmut Bornefeld, *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*, Verse 4, mm. 5-7

1.

Sün-de trägt _____, sie - he, das ist Got-tes Lamm, sie -

al - les mei - - ne Last _____; ich

Du ge - tra - -

al - les mei - - ne Last _____; ich

Du ge - tra - -

al - les mei - ne Last _____; ich

Du ge - tra - gen

As is true of Distler's music, here Bornefeld is able to move through sections of text and musical material without creating any sort of break within the larger fabric of the piece.

Whereas Siegfried Reda ultimately felt constricted by the more strict ideals of Distler's teaching, Bornefeld's compositions remained much more closely tied to this style. Perhaps this was because he found his music to be "'radical' not only in one respect (i.e., stylistically) . . . but just as 'radical' acoustically, idiomatically, liturgically, and intellectually; by this I mean [that it] penetrates to the core of the matter."²⁸¹ He was continually complimentary in his admiration of Distler's work:

The newness of Distler's choral style lies not so much in the sound and content as in the care with which an elementary vocalism, genuinely produced by the words, is combined with liberties of modern music. However, just as this vocalism renounces every aria-like or instrumental patronage, the expressive power of this music does not derive from a naturalistic or psychological description of the object, but from an objective handling of it in a style which is just as typical as it is personal.²⁸²

The importance of Helmut Bornefeld, much like Jan Bender, is thus not only in his contributions as a composer—or as an expert on the organ—but also in his consistently high praise and long-lasting advocacy for the music of Distler and his contemporaries.

Hans Friedrich Micheelsen (1902-1973)

Though Micheelsen was born six years earlier, he began his more serious study of music in 1928, a year after Distler began at the Leipzig Conservatory. Micheelsen studied with Paul Hindemith at the *Staatliche Hochschule* in Berlin.²⁸³ While Micheelsen's career parallels Distler's in many ways, it seems that a variety of challenges delayed the completion of his

²⁸¹ Blume, *Protestant Church Music*, 487.

²⁸² Anders, *Hugo Distler*, 55.

²⁸³ Cox, *Orgelkonzerte*, 48.

education; he graduated from the Berlin *Hochschule* in 1937.²⁸⁴ Micheelsen's catalogue includes three Passion settings, a German Requiem setting titled *Tod und Leben*, and *Die Weihnachtsbotschaft*, a Christmas oratorio.²⁸⁵ "His compositional manner is characterized by an emphasis on melody, clear-cut phrases containing numerous parallel fourths, fifths, and triads, and the fusion of mildly contemporary harmonies with older practices such as the use of a *cantus firmus*."²⁸⁶ Among his *Gebrauchsmusik* is the Easter cantata *With High Delight*, a simple setting of the old chorale tune *Mit Freuden zart*. The piece sets 4 stanzas of text for choir and organ and includes a verse each for SAB, unison treble, SSA (a cappella), and SATB voices. Some of the devices Micheelsen employs in his music which specifically stem from Distler's influence are the use of the so-called "Distler melisma", which consists of "rhythmic alternation of pitches in a small interval (usually a third or fourth) over a single syllable of text," and the use of parallel fifths in contrary motion.²⁸⁷

Walter Kraft (1905-1977)

Another contemporary of Distler whom is important to consider is Walter Kraft. Distler himself believed that he and Kraft shared a great deal in common, and considered themselves to be peers. In a letter to Waldemar Kling he wrote:

I also believe that first of all the Lübeck "younger set" (among whom I count the only slightly older organist of St. Marien, Walter Kraft, and the Buxtehude research and scholar Bruno Grusnick, and to whom I, although originally a Leipziger, seem to belong) are consistent and even prejudiced, if you will, in their enthusiasm for the music from the 16th century, back to the older French (Machaut), English (Madrigalists), and the

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 49.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 50.

²⁸⁶ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 105-106.

²⁸⁷ William Braun, "The Life and Sacred Choral Music of Hans Friedrich Micheelsen (1902-1973)," DMA diss., Ball State University, 1984. 60, 65.

Netherlanders of the early school (Okeghem), and in their endeavors to make this music, and only this music the basis for their own.²⁸⁸

Kraft had studied with Hindemith in Berlin and was the organist at the Marienkirche from 1929-1947. During his time there, he resumed the *Abendmusik* tradition by programming oratorios, cantatas, and organ recitals.²⁸⁹ This parallels the Vespers services being hosted at the Jakobikirche but seems to lean more toward a concert performance than a worship service. Kraft was also a champion of Distler's music:

*Das erste herausragende Ereignis des Jahres 1933 ist für Distler die Aufführung seiner "Choralpassion". Sie wurde in der Passionszeit in mehr als zwölf Städten gesungen und hinterließ einen ungewöhnlich starken Eindruck. In Lübeck fand ihre Aufführung am 3. April unter Leitung von Walter Kraft und Hermann Fey (Choralvaritonen) statt.*²⁹⁰

[The first major event of 1933 for Distler, is the performance of his *ChoralPassion*. It was sung during Lent in more than a dozen cities, leaving an unusually strong impression. It was first performed in Lübeck on April 3, under the direction of Walter Kraft and Hermann Fey (Choralvaritonen).]

Kraft's parallel career, like other Distler contemporaries, leads to a question about who influenced whom. It is likely a case of mutual admiration in which proponents of the *Singbewegung* were actively feeding off inspiration from their peers.

Kraft became well known as a musician for his recordings, many of which are currently available digitally. Among his projects are recordings of Handel's twelve organ concertos and the complete solo organ works of Bach and Buxtehude.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 31.

²⁸⁹ Georg Karstädt and Arndt Schnoor, "Lübeck." *Grove Music Online*, accessed February 27, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²⁹⁰ Grusnick, *Hugo Distler*, 13.

²⁹¹ "Walter Kraft (Organ)," accessed on April 3, 2014, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Kraft-Walter.htm>.

Günter Raphael (1903-1960)

Günter Raphael²⁹² may have been destined for music from a very early age; his father was the director of music at the St. Matthäus-Kirche in Berlin.²⁹³ He studied music with Arnold Mendelssohn²⁹⁴ and later found a great deal of support from Karl Straube “to whom he dedicated his *Requiem*.”²⁹⁵ His early work showed the influence of composers from the late 19th century:

His music is often on a lofty plane, with a penchant for six- to eight-part writing to achieve dramatic effect. Although the influence of Bruckner and Reger is traceable, the manner in which Raphael synthesizes such elements as polyphony with unison and chordal passages, and clear diatonic lines with dissonant structures, has given him a distinctly individual profile as a composer.²⁹⁶

It was in his later career (post 1934) that he began to turn toward the music of the past through working on new complete editions of the music of Bach and Handel. His work would reflect the inspiration of this historical music along with that of the *Singbewegung*. Like Distler, Raphael would model his *Geistliche Chormusik* (1938) on the work of Schütz.²⁹⁷

Heinz Werner Zimmermann (b.1930)

Of the composers recognized in this document as having been strongly influenced by Hugo Distler, Zimmermann’s music represents what seems to be at first glance the greatest departure from Distler in an aural context. “To a greater extent than any other German composer, Zimmermann’s church music shows the mingling of traditional elements with idioms of jazz and

²⁹² A complete works list, discography, and curriculum vitae can be found on his official website. The website was created by his daughter Christine, whose foundation continues in her name. http://www.guenter-raphael.de/index_engl.html.

²⁹³ William D. Gudger and Erik Levi, "Raphael, Günter," *Grove Music Online*, accessed February 27, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

²⁹⁴ Blume, *Protestant Church Music*, 412.

²⁹⁵ Gudger and Levi, “Raphael, Günter.”

²⁹⁶ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 109.

²⁹⁷ Gudger and Levi, “Raphael, Günter.”

popular music.”²⁹⁸ The influence of jazz can be heard not only in the types of harmonies he chooses, but also in the instrumentation of many of his works. The *Psalmkonzert*, which is generally regarded as his most well-known work²⁹⁹, is scored for SSATB choir, unison children’s choir, baritone soloist, three trumpets, vibraphone, and string bass.³⁰⁰ That the vibraphone is a twentieth-century American invention³⁰¹ already indicates a great departure from the more traditional music composed by Distler. Though the vibraphone has made many appearances in “classical” music, it is also recognized as an integral instrument in percussion and jazz ensembles, and this style was very appealing to Zimmermann. He was also known for creating what he described as a “pluralistic polyphony” in which he would attempt to fuse imitative polyphony with choral homophony³⁰², and for using “twin and triplet chords” which combined two or three independent chords simultaneously.³⁰³

Despite his more “contemporary styles”, Zimmermann certainly fits into the tradition which follows after Distler. He began studying with Wolfgang Fortner in 1950, and eventually succeeded him as instructor of theory and composition at the Protestant Institute for Church Music.³⁰⁴ Among the musical characteristics that became important as a result of his studies is the “importance of the close connection between word and tone” which “gave the melodies of the

²⁹⁸ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 193.

²⁹⁹ Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire*, New York: OUP, 2009. 591.

³⁰⁰ Zimmermann, Heinz Werner. *Psalmkonzert*, Revised Edition, English by Audrey Davidson and Marian Johns (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1965).

³⁰¹ James Blades and James Holland, "Vibraphone," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 2, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

³⁰² Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 210.

³⁰³ Friedrichhelm Brusniak. "Zimmermann, Heinz Werner." *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 1, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

³⁰⁴ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 193.

Reformation such rich values.”³⁰⁵ In many of his scores, despite the difficult rhythms (owing to the influence of jazz), he suggests that “the actual singing of the parts is easy and natural, since they are derived from a natural and meaningful declamation of the text.”³⁰⁶

More specifically, Zimmermann wrote several pieces which point very directly to the influence of Hugo Distler. His *Vesper* was written largely to “provide a new medium of expression for the Protestant worship service,” and he acknowledges the efforts of Distler, Fortner, and others for helping to create this opportunity for contemporary musical statement.³⁰⁷ Further, Zimmermann wrote a piece titled *Chorvariationen über ein Thema von Distler* (1964) for soprano solo and four- to six-part mixed choir. The piece did not actually include any music which was written by Distler. Rather, it utilized a theme that Distler had used in his setting of the *Nürnberger Grosses Gloria, 1525*.

Weder die Melodie des “Nürnberger Großen Gloria 1525” noch die des Kirchenliedes “Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr”, aus denen sich das Thema der vorliegenden Chorvariationen zusammensetzt, sind von Distler. Von Distler jedoch ist die Idee, das deutsche Gloria in excelsis, vergegenwärtigt durch eine überaus lebendige, unabhängige, ja ekstatische Rhythmik, der gebundenen Form eines Kirchenliedsatzes gegenüberzustellen. Der kompositorische Ausgangspunkt der Variationen ist daher weniger ein Variationsthema herkömmlicher Art als eine Formidee. Thema ist die Gleichzeitigkeit der beiden inhaltlich übereinstimmenden, formal gegensätzlichen Texte. (Von diesen wird das Kirchenlied gleich in der 1. Variation auf die volle Anzahl seiner 4 Strophen erweitert.) Die Gleichzeitigkeit zweier Texte, die durchweg beibehalten wird, verbürgt die Einheitlichkeit und ermöglicht die Mannigfaltigkeit des Zyklus.

[From Distler, however, is the idea – the German Gloria in excelsis – brought to life by an exceptionally lively, independent, indeed ecstatic rhythm, which is contrasted with the strict form of a hymn setting. The compositional point of departure of the variations is therefore less a variation theme of the customary type than a form of the idea. The theme is the simultaneousness of the two texts, which agree in contents but are formally

³⁰⁵ Heinz Werner Zimmermann, “New Concepts of Hymnody and Polyphony,” Lecture given at Union Theological Seminary, New York, Fall, 1967, (Mimeographed): 7, quoted in Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 195.

³⁰⁶ Heinz Werner Zimmermann, “*Lobet, ihr Knechte des Herrn und Uns ist ein Kind geboren*,” (Berlin: Verlag Merseburger, 1957): Foreword, quoted in Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 194.

³⁰⁷ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 208.

opposing. (Of these, the hymn is expanded in the first variation equal to the full amount of its 4 verses.) The simultaneousness of the two texts, which is maintained throughout the work, guarantees a sense of unity and makes the diversity of the cycle possible.]³⁰⁸

Zimmermann is representative of many composers who showed influences from Distler in the generations that followed his death. The end of the war and the subsequent musical freedom experienced in Germany provided the inevitable opportunity for expanding musical horizons. In Zimmerman's music, we see traces of Distler's groundbreaking work alongside a host of other influences which allowed for the continued development of Protestant choral music in the twentieth century.

Wolfgang Hufschmidt (b. 1934)

Hufschmidt began his serious musical study in 1953 under the tutelage of Siegfried Reda. It was with Reda at the Essen *Folkwanschule* that he was "exposed to the "classical" choral music of Distler and Pepping."³⁰⁹ Among his first works were a *Messe* and a series of *Epistelmotteten*. These works each show the early influence of Distler, along with that of his lessons with Reda. This fact can be seen in the music and is openly acknowledged by Hufschmidt himself:

. . . the first results of my occupation with the elementary language of the old and now probably already the new "classical" choral music; the attempt to transform the articulate motet technique of Distler's with the differentiated-expressive language of Reda into a concise and sweeping choral style.³¹⁰

The *Messe* (SATB, Soprano and Tenor soloists) includes a combination of German and Latin text, and it is immediately evident that the communication of the text is of the utmost

³⁰⁸ Heinz Werner Zimmermann, liner notes to *Hugo Distler: Das ist je gewisslich wahr/Fürwahr, er trug unsere Krankheit – Heinz Werner Zimmermann: Choravariationen über ein Thema von Distler*, Spandauer Kantorei, conducted by Helmuth Rilling, Cantate Records 650221, LP, 1965.

³⁰⁹ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 218-219.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

importance. The repeated plea for mercy is stated by the choir in each language (“Kyrie eleison”, “Herr, erbarme dich”), and the choir continues to repeat small sections of text throughout the first movement. Most of the text is presented in the tenor soloist’s part, which is to be sung “fließend deklamierend hervortreten” (come to the fore with flowing declamation) and is essentially unmetered.

Example 56 Wolfgang Hufschmidt, *Messe: Kyrie*, mm. 15-21

15

Solo

erregt beginnend

Herr, er -

fließend deklamierend hervortreten

Ky - ri - e, Gott Vater in E-wigkeit,

Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son!

Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son!

dich, er - bar - me dich, er - barm, er -

dich, er - bar - me dich, er - barm, er -

19

bar - me dich!

(nachlassend)

groß ist dein Barmherzigkeit, al - ler Ding ein Schöpfer und Re - gie - rer, e - le - i - son!

barm, er - barm, er - bar - me

barm, er - barm, er - bar - me

The declamatory style of the soloist shows clear influence from Heinrich Schütz. The piece was, in fact, written for a “special worship service held as a part of the 1956 Heinrich Schütz Festival in Düsseldorf.”³¹¹ In this way, one can see a link to Distler’s own *Eine deutsche Choralmesse* and *Choralpassion*. Frequently changing meter and bar lines which run between rather than through the staves are also indicative of Distler’s influence. Melismatic phrases sung by each soloist throughout the *Gloria* are similar to those found in Distler’s op. 12 (such as the soprano soloists’s lines in *O Gott in deiner Majestät* or *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*). Finally, in the last measure of the *Agnus Dei*, Hufschmidt comes to rest on a chord which could be considered a G major chord, filled with ninth partials (A) and an added E in the alto voice. This type of added harmonic information in final chords was also typical in the work of Distler.

Example 57 Wolfgang Hufschmidt, *Messe: Agnus Dei*, mm. 59-62

bis zum Schluß noch nachdrücklicher

men!
men!
men!
men!
men!
men!

men, a - men, a - men!
a - men a - men

³¹¹ Seeley, *Protestant Choral Music*, 219.

Like many others of his generation, Hufschmidt's composition came from his education in the now "classic" style of Distler and grew to include many new techniques of the twentieth century as he "gradually freed himself from their adherence to the past."³¹²

Programmatic Pairings

While the list of historical figures who influenced Distler or were included in his own programming provides a wonderful list of repertoire to choose from, the modern conductor is unlikely to create a program which only exists of music written prior to Distler's death in 1942. Even if we are to consider the composers which immediately precede this section in the document, those who took up the mantle of Distler upon his death, we are similarly unlikely to program entire concerts of music only in the style of the New German Church Music. Where then do we look in more modern music for pieces which are similar to or would pair well with Distler's music?

An obvious choice is to seek out music that shares a similar musical aesthetic to that composed by Distler. While Distler's choral output is essentially exclusively a cappella, the combination of organ and voice is a logical link for music pairing with Distler. *Seek Him That Maketh the Seven Stars* (1998) by Jonathan Dove sets biblical text (Amos 5:8; Psalm 139) for SATB div. choir and organ. Despite the religious origins of the text, it need not be cast in a spiritual context, and only the final "Amen" explicitly gives away any sectarian overtones. The bulk of the choral work in *Seek Him* is based on repetition, either through short repeated iterations of "seek him" (e.g. mm.6-7) or through voices singing in pseudo-canon (e.g., S/A mm.9-14). The momentum of the piece is largely carried by the quickly repeated figure in the organ. Dove makes some interesting rhythmic choices in mm73-76 and similarly in mm86-89.

³¹² Klaus Kirchberg, "Hufschmidt, Wolfgang," *Grove Music Online*, accessed February 27, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

seek him, seek him, seek him

seek him, seek him

seek him, seek him

seek him, seek him

seek him that

sempre staccato

Another modern piece that might pair well on a concert filled with Distler's music is Nico Muhly's *Bright Mass with Cannons* (2005).³¹³ Muhly has cited the Anglican choral tradition of his youth as the main inspiration for the *Bright Mass* with specific recollections of the music of Howells, Tye, Tallis, and Taverner.³¹⁴ This piece, like the aforementioned work by Dove, combines choir (SSAATTBB) with organ to create an overall aesthetic that might fit well

³¹⁴ Nico Muhly, “A Good Understanding,” accessed April 3, 2014, <http://nicomuhly.com/discographie/2010/a-good-understanding-2/>.

alongside either Distler's choral or organ music. As one becomes familiar with Muhly's music, it becomes clear that his writing for keyboard is dissimilar from typical "accompaniment" writing. While the organ truly does accompany the chorus, it does so in a partnering sense. It is an equal voice in the music, filled with soloistic figures and carrying momentum through more static choral writing. The organ also regularly employs open fourths and fifths in succession. These are intervals that Distler used regularly in his choral writing.

Example 59 Nico Muhly, *Bright Mass With Canons: Kyrie*, m. 1

The image shows a musical score for two staves of organ music. The top staff is marked "solo, brassy" and "f". The bottom staff is also marked "solo, brassy" and "f". A note between the staves reads "each part should be independent, not synchronized".

The vertical vocal harmony is filled with the type of cluster chords which are so indicative of late twentieth and early twenty-first century choral music, but they are most often achieved as the result of melodic motion. Paired voices are regularly set apart by one or two beats in rapid succession and move against each other in canon before coming to rest in these clusters.

Example 60 Nico Muhly, *Bright Mass With Canons: Gloria*, mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Soprano, Alto, and Organ. The tempo is marked "Fast ♩ = 114". The lyrics are "Glo-ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o". The organ part is marked "mp".

Poetic Pairings

While Distler's early choral output was primarily sacred, the *Mörike-Chorliederbuch* remains one of the favorite collections of his oeuvre. The poetry of Mörike has been used by several other composers, most famously in the lieder of Hugo Wolf. One could easily pair several of Distler's settings (most of which are less than three minutes in duration) with other settings of Mörike's poetry to create a set on a concert. Choral composers who have also set Mörike's work include Harold Genzmer (*Zwei Mörike-Chöre*, SSAATBB), Matti Borg (*12 Gedichte von Mörike*, SATB, 1997), Fritz Brun (*Er ist's / Gebet / Lebewohl / Mausfallen-Sprüchlein*, SSA, and *Junger Volker (Gesang der Räuber)*, TTBB), and Roy B. Hinkle (*Elfenlied*, TTBB).

Other Pairings and Recontextualization

It is somewhat simple to pair Distler with music by composers who were directly influenced by him, used the same cantus firmi or texts, or even who used similar instrumentation and thus achieved a similar aural aesthetic. Likewise, Distler was very direct about the music that influenced him, which provides conductors with a plethora of historical music to pair with Distler's music. The similarity of pieces in this context allows for a smooth and simple connection to Distler but ultimately does little to recontextualize his music.

The influence of medieval music is seen most often in Distler's use of hocket-like vocal interaction. His predilection for open fourths and fifths is also a nod to the music of this era. In his *Funktionelle Harmonielehre*, Distler says "The new music, especially the young German choral music, reused these pure intervals with fondness, especially . . . in parallel, as an

expression of the purest, strict consonance.”³¹⁵ Similarly, Steve Reich was inspired by the works of Pérotin for his composition *Proverb* (1995).

Though the sopranos sing syllabically with one note for each word, (and every word of the text is monosyllabic) the tenors sing long melismas on a single syllable. Perotin’s influence may be heard most clearly in these tenor duets against soprano, which clearly resemble three part *Organum*. That same influence plays a more indirect role in the soprano augmentation canons which are suggested by the augmentation of held tenor notes in Perotin’s *Organum*.³¹⁶

An aural connection to Distler may not be immediately heard in *Proverb*, but the clearly shared influence provides an opportunity for the listener to experience Distler’s music in a new setting. Including selections from Bornefeld’s *Das Choralwerk* would also fit well here, as would the obvious inclusion of music by Pérotin himself.

When considering Pérotin, one need turn no further than *Viderunt Omnes*, one of the pieces which is most well known by choral musicians. Distler’s preference for the use of parallel fourths and fifths that has already been demonstrated stems directly from this music. One need only refer to the opening of the work to see similarities.

Example 61 Pérotin, *Viderunt Omnes*, mm. 1-5



³¹⁵ Hugo Distler, *Funktionelle Harmonielehre – mit Beiheft: Lösung sämtlicher Aufgaben* (Kassel, Germany. Bärenreiter-Verlag: 1936), 6.

³¹⁶ Steve Reich, “Composer’s Notes,” accessed on April 3, 2014, <http://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Steve-Reich-Proverb/557>.

For Distler, the rhythmic energy of this piece would surely have been something he found exciting. It has already been stated that Distler took influence from the use of parallel intervals and developed them in the melodies of many of his works (specific examples are provided in chapter two). The frequent rests in the example above help add to the rhythmic vitality and are as much a part of the music as the pitches. Similarly, Distler utilized breath marks within melodic lines to allow for the extension of phrases and to create increased rhythmic energy. Thus, despite the vast differences in the style and compositional approach between these composers, the works of Pérotin and other similar early composers would fit well on a program with Distler's music with each serving to enhance the experience of the other.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

In the years following Distler's death, he remained an important figure in Germany. Choirs and festivals were organized in his name, and the Hugo Distler Choir of Berlin, which was founded in 1953 by Klaus Fischer-Diskau, continues to be active today.³¹⁷ These events and organizations created to honor the work of Distler as a composer were not uncommon.

Such festivals and tributes as the Berlin *Kirchenmusiktage* 1948, the 1952 celebrations in Kassel and Nuremberg (three concerts of Distler's works), and the *Distler-Gedenktage* in Hanover from November 8 through 11, 1958, in which Distler choirs of Berlin and Hanover took part, assure that Distler's music will be heard by many, including young composers and conductors.³¹⁸

His mantle was taken up in America by his student Jan Bender and other musicians who continued to promote the New German Church Music in the United States. His influence was also felt in Sweden, which underwent a similar reform movement in church music in the mid-twentieth century. The sort of community singing that was so important to the Youth Movement in Germany and that was reflected in the composition of *Gebrauchsmusik* by Hindemith, Distler, and their contemporaries was championed by Fritz Jöde through a series of lectures and courses in Sweden from 1935-1948. This helped lead to the development of *Allsång* community singing programs throughout the country. Distler's choral music was very influential in the compositions of Swedish church music at the time.

. . . the elements of polyphonic clarity and natural declamation have provided models for the neo-renaissance style which is seen in contemporary Swedish church music. His melodic invention shows relationships to Gregorian chant, which has experienced a

³¹⁷ "Offizielle Homepage Hugo Distler."

³¹⁸ Palmer, *Hugo Distler*, 149.

marked renewal as a basis for choral composition in Sweden. Such an interest can be found in the philosophy and music of Sven-Erik Bäck, and others.³¹⁹

Because of the popularity and legacy that Distler left in the years following his premature death, certain questions remain. Why has this composer who was once considered to be one of the most important rising stars in Germany been relegated to a certain level of obscurity today in America? While the music of Hugo Distler and his contemporaries saw a surge in popularity among American choirs and conductors in the 1950s and 1960s, these numbers seem to be in decline in more recent years.³²⁰ There are a variety of reasons that Distler's music is not performed including difficult rhythmic language, complicated by lack of barlines and frequently changing meter. A primarily sacred output and the exclusively German texts may also be a barrier for certain conductors. It is the hope of the author that this document will serve to highlight the diversity of Distler's catalogue and to provide a broader context for his work which will encourage an increased performance of his music. In particular, the songs of the *Mörke-Chorliederbuch*, op. 19 provide a large set of repertoire that is vastly under-appreciated and should be considered among Distler's most important contributions to choral music. This collection features music for mixed, men's, and women's choirs in settings for one to eight voices. Though the more difficult pieces in the collection are rife with complex rhythms and challenging chromaticism, there is also an abundance of much simpler works. Future efforts to aid in the preparation of and awareness of this music to high school choral conductors will be an important step in the promotion of Distler's music.

³¹⁹ Robert William Larson, "A Study of Contemporary Church Music in Sweden" (DMA diss., University of Southern California, 1965) 68.

³²⁰ Gilbert Seeley, telephone interview with the author, March 13, 2014.

Like so many composers of his generation, Distler also offers a great deal of sacred music which is accessible to even the most amateur church choir. In particular, the music of *Der Jahrkries*, op. 5 and *Liturgische Sätze über altevangelische Kyrie- und Gloriaweisen*, op. 13 were specifically intended for use in a liturgical setting and were written for the volunteer choirs with which he was associated. Distler specifically suggests that modifications to his music may be made in order to achieve the most successful performance. This includes altering or omitting texts, transposing of the music, including or substituting instruments for voice parts, and even encouraging the conductor to participate as a singer in small choir situations. With this information, American conductors should feel comfortable translating or substituting English texts if language requirements would otherwise prevent the performance of this music. The rhythmic vitality of Distler's music and its intimate connection to the church service place his works at the pinnacle of quality for church choral music.

Hugo Distler is not the only composer of New German Church Music whose music deserves to be highlighted. Future research is necessary to continue to illuminate the works of these composers. Of particular interest is the life and work of Arnold Mendelssohn, whose efforts as a historian, composer, and pedagogue place him in an elite company as a contributor to the musical landscape of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Despite his vast contributions, his name and music are relatively unknown among modern conductors. The bulk of his extant scores and over one hundred letters of personal correspondence are currently held at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. An illumination of works by Distler, Mendelssohn, and other composers in this lineage will certainly lead to the discovery of a vast repertoire of works which are of a substantial quality and yet accessible to a variety of choirs.

Future scholarship on Hugo Distler would benefit greatly from the availability of a greater number of resources which are currently only available in the German language. In particular, the biographical details provided in Distler-Harth's biography and the personal sentiments contained in Distler's letters are resources which provide much greater context for Distler's thoughts and perspectives on life and music. Beyond finding more personal details in these sources, future scholarship would be well served by the continued examination of Distler's secular works. Whereas this document contained a brief examination of the Mörike-Chorliederbuch, little has been written about the works of the *Neues Chorliederbuch*, op. 16 or his secular cantata *An die Natur*, op. 9.

It is the contention of the author that through the increased performance of these "simple" works, the gaining of a greater appreciation and understanding of Distler's music is inevitable. Further, the appendices provided in this document include information previously unavailable to the American audience. The documents are provided in an effort to provide a depth of knowledge for those conductors programming Distler's music and to help contextualize his career and musical point of view. Armed with this information, the musical analysis provided in this document, and suggestions for programming his music, conductors should feel more confident than ever in taking on this repertoire.

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APPENDIX A

Vorwort [Foreword] to Mörike-Chorliederbuch, op 19

Das Mörike-Chorliederbuch enthält 48 Sätze in verschiedenster Besetzung für A-cappella-Chor zu etwa 40 Gedichten des Meisters. Die im Hinblick auf chorische Bearbeitung von mir getroffene Auswahl ist bemüht gewesen, alle mir dafür geeignet erscheinenden Gedichte (nicht nur der von Mörike selber veranstalteten Ausgabe letzter Hand) heranzuziehen – eine angesichts des Gesamtwerks des Dichters freilich nur geringe Anzahl. Über den Grad der Eignung des einen oder anderen Liedes zu chorischer Bearbeitung mögen die Ansichten geteilt sein, zumal in vielen Fällen die klassischen Mörikevertonungen Hugo Wolfs den Versuchen einer andersgearteten musikalischen Deutungsweise hemmend entgegenstehen. Was mich als Chorkomponist gerade zu Mörike hingezogen hat, ist zunächst seine innerhalb des 19. Jahrhunderts, ja überhaupt in der neueren Zeit einzig dastehende elementare rhythmische Kraft und Freizügigkeit, und daneben jene in hohem Maße an das alte deutsche Volkslied gemahnende Objektivierung des poetischen Gehalts durch die künstlerische Formung, die sich, wie das dichterische Werk gerade unseres Meisters beweist, durchaus mit inniger Subjektivität und charaktervoll-eigenständiger Prägung in jedem einzelnen Fall vereinen läßt.

[The Mörike-Chorliederbuch contains 48 settings in a variety of voicing for a cappella choir to about 40 poems of the master. With regard to the chorale treatments I chose, I have been busy selecting all poems which appeared suitable (not just organized by Mörike's final edition) – only a small number, of course, in light of the complete works of the poet. Regarding, the degree of suitability between the music and the text, the views may be divided, especially since in many cases the classic Mörike musical settings by Hugo Wolf preclude any attempts at a different kind of musical interpretation in an inhibitory manner. As a choral composer, what attracted me to Mörike, is that he was first within the 19th century, and in modern times is the only one to use such unexampled rhythmic power and freedom of movement, and beside those to a large extent on the old German folk song objectification of the poetic content through the artistic form, which, as the poetic work of our Master proves, certainly can combine well with the intimate subjectivity and full of character-independent imprint in each case.]

Über die Ausführung der Chorsätze im einzelnen ist grundsätzlich zu bemerken:

[For the execution of the individual choral movements notice:]

1. *Bei Taktwechsel bleibt stets (half note = half note, quarter = quarter) usw., sofern nicht anders angegeben.*

[1. Time changes always remain constant (half note = half note, quarter = quarter), etc., unless otherwise stated.]

2. *In den meisten Fällen, überall da, wo Inhalt, Technik des betreffenden Satzes, Stimmumfang usw. es gestatten, können die gleichstimmigen Sätze statt von Frauen- bzw. Jugendchor auch von Männerchor und umgekehrt gesungen werden.*

[2. In most cases, wherever necessary, technique corresponding to the phrasing, vocal ranges, etc., it allows equal voice parts to be sung instead of Women's, and Youth Choir instead of Men's Choir, and vice versa.]

3. *Von Transposition sollte man nur in Ausnahmefällen Gebrauch machen. Bei einer ganzen Reihe von Sätzen würde bei Transposition der Charakter verlorengehen.*

[3. Transposition should only be used in exceptional cases. In a number of phrases the character would be lost in transposition.]

4. *Bei vielstrophigen Bearbeitungen können u. U. nach dem Ermessen des Chorleiters Strophen ausgelassen werden, nicht bei Chorvariationen. Grundsätzlich sind alle Strophen notiert (mit einer Ausnahme: "Agnes").*

[4. In songs with multiple verses, edits may be made to omit verses, at the discretion of the conductor, but not in choir variations. Basically, all the verses are listed (with one exception: "Agnes").]

5. *Von dynamischen Vortragsbezeichnungen wurde abgesehen. Die Vortragsweise ergibt sich zwangsläufig aus dem textlichen Vorwurf und den andeutenden Überschriften am Kopf des betreffenden Satzes und bei Zeitmaßwechsel. Prinzipiell ist größtmögliche Freiheit in der Darstellung sowohl innerhalb der einzelnen Strophe wie von Strophe zu Strophe anzuraten.*

[5. Dynamics are apart from the performance markings. The manner of performance results necessarily from the interpretation of the text, and the performance indications at the head of the relevant phrases and time changes. In principle, the greatest possible freedom in interpretation is advisable both within each stanza as well as verse to verse.]

Vaihingen bei Stuttgart, Juni 1939
Hugo Distler

APPENDIX B

Nachwort [Afterword] to Der Jahrkreis, op. 5

Der "Jahrkreis", eine Sammlung von 52 zwei- und dreistimmigen geistlichen Chormusiken, ist aus kirchenamtlicher Praxis heraus entstanden und hofft, allgemeinem Bedürfnis nach leichter, gottesdienstlicher de-tempore-Musik zu entsprechen. Bei den gemischtstimmigen Sätzen bewegt sich die Männerstimme – die der deutlichen Unterscheidbarkeit wegen durchweg in Baßschlüssel notiert ist – stets in so bescheidenen Stimmgrenzen, daß – etwa bei Stimmenmangel – der Chorleiter sehr wohl allein zu singen in der Lage ist. (Die Mehrzahl dieser Sätze habe ich selbst in dieser gewiß auch in beschränkten Verhältnissen zu ermöglichenden Besetzung ausgeführt.) Es ist jedoch nicht gesagt, daß nicht viele der Motetten auch stärkere Besetzung gestatten, manche infolge ihrer technisch und musikalisch anspruchsvollen Fassung sogar erforderlich erscheinen lassen, wie etwa fast alle freien Motetten. Durch entsprechende Transposition, die bei jedem Satz gestattet und in vielen Fällen bei der Einordnung der Motette in den Rahmen des Gottesdienstes erforderlich sein mag, werden die meisten der im Original als für gleiche Stimmen notierten Sätze gemischtstimmig und umgekehrt. Die Unterlegung der Texte und die Einordnung der Choräle ins Kirchenjahr ist in vielen Fällen nicht anders denn als persönlicher Vorschlag des Komponisten zu betrachten; es ist selbstverständlich möglich, den Weisen auch andere Texte als die angegebenen unterzulegen, sofern sie dem Charakter des betreffenden Satzes nicht widersprechen. Es ist nicht notwendig, jeweils die ganze Motette in all ihren Verstexten und verschiedenen Sätzen durchzuführen; die in der Regel beträchtliche Anzahl der angeführten Verse dient in den meisten Fällen nur zur Auswahl. Man beschränke sich anfangs etwa auf die Aufführung nur der leichtesten Sätze, wobei zu bemerken ist, daß die zweistimmigen Sätze nicht auch immer die am einfachsten auszuführenden sind. Aus praktischen Gründen unterlegte ich den an zweiter Stelle stehenden zweistimmigen Bearbeitungen stets auch den Text des zweiten Verses des betreffenden Chorales: der Wechsel von dreistimmiger Fassung (erster Vers), zweistimmigem Satz (zweiter Vers) und rondoartiger Wiederholung der ersten dreistimmigen Fassung (als letzter, dritter Vers) ergibt eine einheitliche, künstlerisch voll befriedigende Formung größeren Ausmaßes. (Wird nur die zweistimmige Bearbeitung des Chorales gesungen, ist selbstverständlich mit dem Text des ersten Verses zu beginnen). Um möglichste Freizügigkeit bei der Wiedergabe zu gewährleisten, wurde – mit Ausnahme der freien Motetten – fast auf jegliche Tempo und Dynamik betreffende Angabe verzichtet; für das Zeitmaß der Choralmotetten ist das übliche Choraltempo Maßstab – jedenfalls hüte man sich in allen Fällen vor zu langsamer Temponahme. Bei Taktwechsel bleibt in der Regel Viertel gleich Viertel, sofern nicht anders angegeben. Im Te-deum kann die einstimmige Vershälfte entweder von einem Solisten oder vom Chor, auch (transponiert, als Männerstimme) vom Geistlichen responsorisch gesungen werden; das gleiche gilt von dem Passionsgesang Bei Stiller Nacht und ähnlichen Sätzen, wo entweder Chor und Chor oder Chor und Solostimme alternieren. Auch solistische Wiedergabe ganzer Motetten ist in den meisten Fällen möglich. Die Unterstützung der Vokalstimme durch geeignete Instrumente (chorisch oder solistisch) bzw. deren selbständige Ausführung von ganzen Sätzen oder einzelnen Stimmen ist zu empfehlen, sofern der betreffende Satz nicht zu unmittelbar aus dem jeweiligen Wortrhythmus gestaltet erscheint. Manche der gleichstimmigen und, durch entsprechende Transposition, auch gemischtstimmigen Bearbeitungen sind auch zur Ausführung durch Männerchor geeignet. Bei selbständiger Textunterlegung dürfen keine rhythmischen Veränderungen vorgenommen werden. Das Singen

zweier sich auf gleicher Tonhöhe befindenden Noten zu ein und derselben Silbe erfordert stets, zwecks rhythmischer Verdeutlichung der zweiten Note, eine (möglichst kurze) Atemzäsur. Durch sinnvolle Kombination mehrerer Motetten untereinander lassen sich vollständige Zyklen von Chormessen bilden.

- Hugo Distler

[The "Jahrkreis", a collection of 52 two-and three-part sacred choral music has arisen out of direct church practice and hopes to meet the general demand for lighter, music de tempore [fitting the Liturgical calendar]. In the mixed-voice settings, the man's voice moves - which is marked distinctly in the bass clef for consistency - always in such humble vocal limitations that - if there is a lack of voices - the choirmaster is very well capable of singing alone. (Most of these settings I have certainly done in these reduced circumstances, enabling them to work.) However, it is not to say that many of the motets would not also allow a stronger ensemble, which, due to their technically and musically sophisticated elements, may even appear necessary, such as in almost all free motets. Through appropriate transposition, which is allowed in each setting and in many cases it may be necessary in the context of worship in the classification of the motet, most of the voicing listed in the score than for the same sets of parts are mixed voices and vice versa. The adequacy of the texts and the classification of the hymns in the church year is not regarded in many cases as anything other than personal suggestion of the composer, and it is of course possible to also have other texts than those set specified, provided they do not contradict the character of the respective setting. It is not necessary in each case that the whole motet texts, with all their verses and different settings I performed; one can generally choose from the considerable number of verses listed in most cases. It confines itself initially around the performance of only the lightest sentences, it being noted that the two-part phrases are not always the easiest to execute. For practical reasons, I placed the standing second two-part adaptations always also the text of the second verse of that Chorales: the change from three-voice version (first verse), two-part version (second verse) and rondo-like repetition of the first three-part version (as the last, third verse) gives a unified, artistically satisfying forming larger extent. (If only the two-part treatment of the Chorales is sung, of course, it is to begin with the text of the first verse). To ensure greatest possible freedom of movement when playing, it was - with the exception of the free motets - made virtually to any tempo and dynamics relevant specification; for the tempo of the chorale motets is the usual chant-like tempo of the chorale tune, in any case one should beware of accelerating too slowly. For meter changes, the rule is that the quarter note remains the same, unless otherwise indicated. In the *Te Deum* the unison half of the verse is sung either by a soloist or the choir, and responsorials are sung by the clergy (transposed to the male voice); the same is true of the *Passiongesang*, *Bei Stiller Nacht* and similar settings where either choir and chorus or choir and solo voice alternates. Even solo performance of the motets is possible in most cases. The support of the vocal line with the appropriate instruments (in groups or solo) or the independent performance of whole phrases of individual vocal lines is recommended, provided that this does not directly detract from the respective rhythm of the words. Some of the equal voices settings and, through appropriate transposition, even mixed-voice arrangements are also suitable for execution by male chorus. During independent text underlay no rhythmic changes may be made. The singing of two syllables on the same pitch indicated by tied notes, always requires a catch breath (as short as possible) for the purpose of rhythmic clarity of the second note. Through meaningful

combination of several motets among themselves, complete cycles of chorale form can be measured.]

APPENDIX C

Hugo Distler Works List

Although works lists have been included in previous academic writing for English speaking readers, these lists must be considered incomplete. Larry Palmer's seminal writing only includes those works which were published with opus number. Hugo Distler wrote a plethora of works that were either not published, or were not even performed during his lifetime. Further, new scholarly research has led to the preparation of several works in the last twenty years. Some of Distler's final writing, such as *Ritter Blaubart* and *Die Weltalter*, has been made available in editions prepared by Michael Töpel. The following list was adapted from the website maintained by the Hugo Distler Archive.

Works with Opus No.

- op. 1 *Konzertante Sonate für zwei Klaviere*
Concert Sonata for Two Pianos
Premiered April 8, 1930
Breitkopf & Härtel 30377
- op. 3 *Eine deutsche Chormesse*
Six-voice Mixed Choir
Premiered October 4, 1931
Breitkopf & Härtel Partitur-Bibliothek Nr. 4967
- op. 4 *Kleine Adventmusik*
Flute, Oboe, Violin, Cello (optional), Organ, SAB Choir, and optional narrator
Premiered November 28, 1931
Breitkopf & Härtels Partitur-Bibliothek Nr. 4967
- op. 5 *Der Jahreskreis*
52 two and three-part sacred choral songs
Completed October 1932
Bärenreiter 676
- op. 6/I *Christ, der du bist der helle Tag*
SAB choir, two violins, basso continuo
Premiered February 26, 1933
Bärenreiter 636
- op. 6/II *Drei kleine Chormotetten*
 Es ist das Heil uns kommen her
 Komm Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott
 Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren
Premiered November 5, 1933
Bärenreiter 589

- op. 7 ***Choralpassion***
Five-voice mixed choir and two cantors.
Premiered March 29, 1933
Bärenreiter 633
- op. 8/I ***Orgelpartita Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland***
Premiered December 26, 1932
Bärenreiter 637
- op. 8/II ***Orgelpartita Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme***
Premiered October 13, 1935
Bärenreiter 637
- op. 8/III ***Kleine Orgelchoral-Bearbeitungen***
BA 1222
- op. 9/1 ***An die Natur***
Secular cantata for mixed chorus, soprano, string quarter (or quintet) and piano
Premiered August 16, 1933
Bärenreiter 683
- op. 10 ***Die Weihnachtsgeschichte***
SATB a cappella and four cantors
Premiered December 1, 1933
Bärenreiter 690
- op. 11 ***Choralkantate Wo Gott zuhaus nit bigt sein Gunst***
Five-voice mixed choir, five soloists (ad. lib), strings, two oboes, and harpsichord
Completed 1933
Bärenreiter 750
- op. 11/II ***Kleine Choralkantate Nun danket all und bringet Ehr'***
Five-voice mixed choir, soprano, tenor, strings, and organ
Completed 1939
BA 758
- op. 12 ***Geistliche Chormusik***
- op. 12/I ***Singet dem Herr sein neues Lied***
Premiered April 29, 1934
Bärenreiter 751
- op. 12/II ***Totntanz***
Premiered April 29, 1934
Bärenreiter 752

- op. 12/III ***Wach auf, du deutsches Reich***
Premiered November 9, 1934
Bärenreiter 753
- op. 12/IV ***Singet frisch und wohlgemut***
Completed 1934
Bärenreiter 754
- op. 12/V ***Ich wollt, daß ich daheim wär***
Premiered October 13, 1935
Bärenreiter 755
- op. 12/VI ***Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme***
Premiered October 13, 1934
Bärenreiter 756
- op. 12/VII ***In der Welt hbt ihr Angst***
Premiered March 19, 1936
Bärenreiter 757
- op. 12/VIII ***Das ist je gewißlich wahr***
Premiered July 9, 1941
Bärenreiter 1801
- op. 12/IX ***Fürwahr, er tru unsere Krankheit***
Premiered July 9, 1941
Bärenreiter 1802
- op. 13 ***Liturgische Sätze über altevangelische Kyrie- und Gloriaweisen***
Two to Eight Voices
Completed 1934
Bärenreiter 884
- op. 14 ***Konzert für Cembalo und Streichorchester***
Premiered April 29, 1936
Bärenreiter 1000
- op. 14b ***Allegro spiritoso e scherzando***
Third movement from the originally proposed four movement op. 14, removed
from the original publication
Bärenreiter 7687
- op. 15a ***Sonate für zwei Geigen und Klavier über alte deutsche Volkslieder***
Sonata for two violins and piano on old German folk songs
Bärenreiter 1091

- op. 15b ***Elf kleine Klavierstücke für die Jugend***
 11 Small Piano Pieces for Youth
 Completed 1935
 Bärenreiter 1803
- Op. 16 ***Neues Choraliederbuch***
 Mixed Choir a cappella
 Written 1936-1938
1. *Bauernlieder*
 Bärenreiter 1056
 2. *Minnelieder I*
 Bärenreiter 1057
 3. *Minnelieder II*
 Bärenreiter 1058
 4. *Kalendersprüche I* (January to March)
 Bärenreiter 1059
 5. *Kalendersprüche II* (April to June)
 Bärenreiter 1060
 6. *Kalendersprüche III* (July to September)
 Bärenreiter 1061
 7. *Kalendersprüche IV* (October to December)
 Bärenreiter 1062
 8. *Fröhliche Lieder*
 Bärenreiter 1063
- op. 17 ***Geistliche Konzerte***
 High Voice and Organ
 Completed 1937
1. *Es ist ein köstlich Ding, dem Herren danken*
 2. *Freuet euch in dem Herren allewege*
 3. *Lieben Brüder, schicke euch in die Zeit*
- Bärenreiter 1231
- op. 18/I ***Dreißig Spielstücke für die Kleinorgel oder andere Tasteninstrumente***
 30 Pieces for Small Organ or other Keyboard
 Completed 1938
 Bärenreiter 1288

- op. 18/II ***Orgelsonate (Trio)***
 Premiered June 21, 1939
 Bärenreiter 1308
- op. 19 ***Mörke-Chorliederbuch***
 Premiered June 26-27, 1939
Erster Teil for Mixed Choir (24 Songs)
Zweiter Teil for Women's Choir (12 Songs)
Dritter Teil for Men's Choir (12 Songs)
 Bärenreiter 1515
- op. 20/I ***Streichquartett a-moll***
 String Quartet in A minor
 Premiered February 21, 1942
 Bärenreiter 2693
- op. 20/II ***Konzertstück für zwei Klaviere***
 Edition of *Streichquartett in a-moll* for Two pianos
 Final Version Premiered February 28, 1941
 Bärenreiter 1807
- op. 21/I ***Lied am Herde***
 Solo Cantata for Baritone and Chamber Orchestra
 Premiered with Four Hand Piano October 1, 1941
 Bärenreiter 1979
 Orchestral Version Premiered February 3, 1941
 Bärenreiter 1828
- op. 21/2 ***Kleine Sing- und Spielmusik***
 Variations on *Wo soll ich mich hinkehren?* for voices and instruments (flute,
 oboe, string quartet, piano or harpsichord)
 Bärenreiter 2046

Secular Choral Works Without Opus Number

Es geht ein dunkle Wolk Herein (1932) – SATB
 Bärenreiter 1699

Die Sonne sinkt von hinnen (1935) – SATB
 Kleine Bärenreiter-Ausgabe 940

Der Tag hat sich geneiget (1932) – SATB
 Bärenreiter 6368

Vöglein Schwermut (1932) Three Part Men's Choir
Nagels Chorblätter 43

Vier Volksliedsätze (1940)

Ich hab die Nacht geträumet (SATB)

Weiß mir ein Blümlein blaue (SAB)

Wach auf, wach auf (Six Part Mixed Choir)

Ich wollt gern singen, weiß nit wie (SATB)

Bärenreiter 1699

Sacred Choral Works Without Opus Number

Wacht auf, es tut Euch not (SATB)

Premiered September 1936

Bärenreiter 949

Jesus Christus gestern und heute (Three Equal Voices)

Written 1938, Published 1940

Kleine Bärenreiter-Ausgab 1608

Ach Herr, ich bin nicht wert (SATB)

Released in 1944

Kleine Bärenreiter-Ausgabe 1997

Acht kleinere Chormotetten (1939) For Equal Voices

Released in 1940:

Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir

Christum wir sollen loben schon

Der du bist drei in Einigkeit

Gelobt sei Gott im höchsten Thron

Gott der Vater wohn uns bei

Heut triumphieret Gottes Sohn

Ich ruf zu dir Herr Jesus Christ

O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden

Bärenreiter 1590

Vom Himmel hoch, Englein kommt (1940 - SATB)

Released in 1944

Kleine Bärenreiter-Ausgabe 1590

Den geboren hat ein' Magd (1941 – SATB)

Released 1944

Kleine Bärenreiter-Ausgabe 1996

***Macht hoch die Tür* (SATB)**

Released 1951

Bärenreiter 3010

***Heut ist ein Kindlein uns geboren* (1928 – SATB)**

Bärenreiter 6481

***O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf* (1932 – SATB)**

Released 1934

Kleine Bärenreiter-Ausgabe 1065

***Mit Freuden zart* (1934 – Two Equal Voices)**

Die Kantorei, Berlin-Steglitz, Choralblatt D1, D2

***Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, alle gleich* (1935 – SATB)**

Bärenreiter 934/935

***Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein* (1935 – SATB)**

Bärenreiter 936/937

Instrumental Works Without Opus Number

Kleine Sonate in C-Dur

Premiered June 18, 1929

Erhalt uns Herr, bei deinem Wort

Two Intonations for Organ

Premiered February 15, 1931

Bärenreiter 8224

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern

Organ Chorale

Likely Written in 1931

Bärenreiter 8224

Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her

Small Concerto and Chorale for Organ

Written after 1935

Bärenreiter-Verlag

Instrumental-Vocal Works Without Opus Number

***Drei Lieder* (1931)**

Alto and Piano

Bärenreiter 4116

Kleine Sommerkantate

Two Sopranos and String Quartet

Written in 1941

Bärenreiter 1064

Works Discovered or Published Posthumously

Konzertstück für Klavier und Orchester

Premiered 1955

Bärenreiter 2783

Piano Edition Bärenreiter 2783a

Kammermusik für Flöte, Oboe, Violine, Viola, Violoncello und Klavier

1994 Edition prepared by Hermann Harrassowitz

Premiered September 22, 1988

Strube Verlag. Edition 7039

Nun Ruhen alle Wälder

Choral Motette

Written 1930-1931

Premiered 1998

1998 Edition Prepared by Michael Töpel

Bärenreiter 7545

***Drei motettische Werke* (1928)**

Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ

Gloria in excelsis deo

Ave Maria zart

1998 Edition Prepared by Michael Töpel

Bärenreiter 7545

***Kammerkonzert für Cembalo und elf Soloinstrumente* (1930-1932)**

1998 Edition Prepared by Michael Töpel

Premiered November 1998

Bärenreiter 7687

***Allegro spiritoso e scherzando* (1935-1936)**

Third movement originally planned for op. 14

1998 Edition prepared by Michael Töpel

Premiere of full 4-movement Harpsichord Concerto on November 28, 1998

Bärenreiter 7687

Ritter Blaubart (1940)

Incidental Music for Ludwig Tieck's *Ritter Blaubart*

Chamber Orchestra (Flute or Piccolo, Oboe or English Horn, Bassoon, Horn, Snare Drum, Triangle, Strings, Harpsichord) with Soprano and Tenor

2001 Edition Prepared by Michael Töpel

Premiered September 29, 2002

Bärenreiter 7711

Die Weltalter (1942)

Four Motets for Mixed Choir and String

Proposed for the oratorio *Die Weltalter*

Der Mensch und die Erde

Der Mensch und das Wasser

Der Mensch und die Luft

Der Mensch und das Feuer

2008 Edition Prepared by Michael Töpel

Premiered June 24, 2008

Bärenreiter 9351

Piano Score: Bärenreiter 9351a