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REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIFE IN ALEXANDER ZEMLINSKY’S
SINFONISCHE GESÄNGE, OP. 20

by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts
degree in Music in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

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INTRODUCTION

Much to his disappointment, Alexander Zemlinsky had to set aside his compositional endeavors throughout most of his life due to the demanding responsibilities that came with his career as a highly respected conductor. As a result, the Viennese composer has been recognized more for this career and for his association with Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg than for his own compositions. However, within the last forty years, scholars have attempted to acquaint modern listeners with Zemlinsky’s once hailed but now underappreciated music, the caliber of which has been commonly compared to that of Mahler and Strauss.1 While Zemlinsky’s operas and large-scale symphonic works have received increasing attention over the years, his songs, in particular his Op. 20, the Sinfonische Gesänge, have gone largely unnoticed. Not only do these songs illustrate Zemlinsky’s fully developed compositional style, but his selection of texts and their arrangement as a collection reflects the strong impression of African-American culture on 1920s Berlin society.

A sign of the post-war infatuation with American culture, the music of the “jazz age” was still in vogue in Germany and Austria at the end of the 1920s.2 By this time, American musical idioms had been incorporated into the mainstream culture, and eventually, the allure of African-American culture penetrated the firmly established German art music tradition, with elements of ragtime, jazz, and

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spirituals finding their way into such genres as opera and art song. Certain rhythmic figures associated with dance, jazz-influenced instrumentation that prominently featured brass and percussion, and non-operatic vocal styles were often employed to musically depict exotic black American personas. Whether or not these musical characteristics accurately represented the black American’s and his culture, these characteristics appeared commonly in compositions throughout the 1920s and 30s, leading listeners to infer such associations, making them difficult for a composer of this era to ignore.

As a conductor, Zemlinsky was familiar with the new jazz-influenced operas and stage works of his younger contemporaries that incorporated musical elements related to ragtime and jazz, such as Kurt Weill’s Die Dreigroschenoper and Ernst Krenek’s Jonny spielt auf, the “biggest event to rock the opera world in the 1920s.”¹ Zemlinsky’s Sinfonische Gesänge, which drew on the style of these works, heralded a period of creative rejuvenation for his compositional career. Due to an unusually light season at the Krolloper in Berlin and a break in his arduous international conducting tour, Zemlinsky composed the Sinfonische Gesänge in 1929, five years after his last completed composition, the String Quartet, no. 3. While the piece’s title suggests that it is simply a collection of symphonic songs, the work is a cyclical setting of poetry taken from the book, Afrika Singt: Eine Auslese neuer Afro-Amerikanischer Lyrik, published that year in Berlin. Editor Anna Nussbaum and her colleagues, Hermann Kesser, Josef Luitpold, and Anna Siemsen, introduced the popular art and prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance to Germany through a

¹ Ibid., 27.
compilation of English poetry translated into German. The collection consisted of contemporary works by renowned writers associated with the movement such as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and most remarkably, Langston Hughes, who is the poet most frequently represented in the collection.

In August of 1929, immediately after the work’s completion, Zemlinsky, who was exceedingly proud of his newest composition, wrote to Universal Editions about its possible publication. Citing the “prevailing economical and musical crisis,” Universal unfortunately declined to publish the songs.⁴ Zemlinsky persisted, but his efforts were continuously rejected. Universal eventually accepted the piece for publication in 1931, but it was not actually published until 1935. By this time, the Nazi-influenced German society of the 1930s associated the African-American culture that had been popular in the 1920s with degeneracy and exhibited hostility towards those who embraced it. Naturally, Zemlinsky’s Op. 20 was not warmly received. The piece received an uneventful radio premiere on April 8, 1935 in Brno—not in Vienna, Prague, or Berlin as the composer had hoped—and was conducted by Heinrich Jalowetz, who was a known “fugitive from Nazi Germany” by the time of the premiere;⁵ although Jalowetz was a friend of Zemlinsky’s, the composer’s association with the conductor was not a positive endorsement for his music. The Sinfonische Gesänge were not performed again during Zemlinsky’s lifetime, not even after the composer immigrated to the United States in 1938. However, the songs were revived many years later in 1964 in Baltimore by a former

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⁵ Ibid., 362-63.
student of the composer, conductor Peter Hermann Adler, with the legendary African-American baritone William Warfield. The only other documented performance took place in New York City in 1996 by Dennis Russell Davies and Simon Estes, another celebrated African-American baritone. In addition, the Sinfonische Gesänge were recorded in the early 1990s and early 2000s; there are four recordings available to date.

Despite the fact that the songs were not popular at the time of their premiere, Zemlinsky's Sinfonische Gesänge reveal how Europeans, particularly Germans and Austrians, perceived African-American culture in the 1920s. Just as the poems are not from the pen of the same poet, the songs are not from the perspective of one persona. Rather, the work is presented as a series of scenes that demonstrate the various experiences of the African-American as constructed by the composer. The somber themes and serious issues—such as lynching, slavery, disillusionment with life, and death—presented in the cycle complement one another to produce an emotionally coherent work.

The chapters of this thesis have been organized in relation to major themes presented in cycle: the portrayal of the African-American as primitive, the topic of lynching, and the representation of the universal emotions of loss and disillusion through Romantic musical conventions, and how the use of two major musical styles affects the overall meaning of the cycle. The opening chapter describes the intention

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7 The most recent recording was produced by EMI in 2004. Other recordings were made by Decca (1993-4), Capriccio (1993), and S.I. (2000).
of the editors of Afrika Singt as stated in its preface and how the collection aims to characterize African-American culture as having a rich and extensive heritage that extends to its African roots; within Berlin’s culture, though, this perspective helped reinforce the view of African-Americans as being exotic and primitive. While African-American personas and characters are evident throughout the entire work, the songs “Lied aus Baumwollpacker,” “Übler Bursche,” and “Afrikanischer Tanz” present stereotypical depictions of an exotic Other strongly associated with African-Americans. Illustrated musically in all three songs, these portrayals—the slave, the violent and dangerous man, and the sensual woman, respectively—relate to stereotypical representations of black Americans recognized by the popular culture of 1920s Berlin.

The second chapter focuses solely on the topic of lynching because the theme functions as a strong structural element in the work: the two songs that frame the cycle, “Lied aus Dixieland” and “Arabesque” use the topic to establish and reinforce, respectively, the dismal mood of the overall cycle. The chapter surveys the prevalence of lynching imagery in America in the early twentieth century, how the images made their way to Europe, and how it was perceived by Europeans. The illustrative musical elements of both songs suggest that the imagery was familiar to Germans, even if lynching was not commonly practiced in Europe in the 1920s. The songs present the subject in very contrasting ways: the opening song acts as a lament, while the final one is an ironic reaction to the practice. Particularly with “Arabeske,” while others have discussed the song and Zemlinsky’s supposed interpretation, no one has accounted for the specific musical gestures connected to
characters in the poetry, his symbolic use of orchestration, the song’s use of both primitive and lyrical styles, and the relationship of all these elements to the text. By contextualizing the songs and connecting their imagery to customary depictions of lynching, the composer’s approach to the texts and their specific meanings become more evident.

The use of a Romantic lyrical style to represent universal emotions in the songs “Totes braunes Mädel” and “Erkenntnis,” and that style’s effect on the overall work is explored in the final chapter. Zemlinsky humanized the exotic Others he depicted elsewhere in the cycle by alternating the primitive songs with ones that are comparatively lyrical and more Romantic in style; even though these two songs also contain imagery that suggests an African-American persona—the physical description of a dead black girl in the former and the setting of Harlem in the latter—their underlying themes of death and disillusion are more universal than specific to the African-American experience.

In the *Sinfonische Gesänge*, Zemlinsky utilizes the conventional techniques commonly used in late Romantic Lieder to unify his cycle: tonal relationships, common textual themes, manipulation of orchestration to represent a particular topic, and strategic organization of the subject matter. The contrast of styles and their alternating arrangement in the cycle, however, suggests that Zemlinsky intended to depict African-Americans as being part of culture that was exotic yet with whom the composer’s audience could still possibly identify.

Thus, like the culture it is meant to represent, Zemlinsky’s *Sinfonische Gesänge* is multi-faceted. The composer presents images of African-American
culture through various personas that deal with difficult issues like slavery and lynching and face universal experiences like death, sadness, and disillusion. While representing a range of situations and emotions, the songs are skillfully connected through musical and textual elements to create a series of seemingly separate scenes into a cohesive cycle that represents a grim impression of African-American life.
CHAPTER I

PORTRAYING AFRICAN-AMERICAN STEREOTYPES

THROUGH PRIMITIVISTIC MUSICAL TOPICS

Depictions of the American Negro had appeared in the performing arts and literature in Europe well before the 1920s. Yet, some of the African-American art created in the early twentieth century influenced Europe’s existing cultural perceptions and, subsequently, their high art and popular culture. During the Harlem Renaissance, a new attitude surfaced in African-American art. The newest generation of black artists, musicians, and writers was encouraged to apply both their American and African heritages equally to their work, as opposed to completely assimilating into Eurocentric American culture. Ultimately, exotic representations of African primitivism emerged in African-American art and literature, and became a distinctive characteristic. These depictions made their way to Europe through art, music, theater, and literature, where they combined with the preexisting German view of the primitive black into a modified construction of the modern, twentieth-century African-American, who was capable of creating meaningful art yet was still considered fairly unrefined.

Using the celebrated 1929 collection *Afrika Singt* as its literary source, Alexander Zemlinsky selected poems for his *Sinfonische Gesänge* that exhibit some aspect of the African-American construct as understood by Europeans. Emphasized by primitivistic musical characteristics, the musical settings of three of the seven songs—“Lied der Baumwollpacker,” “Übler Bursche,” and “Afrikanischer Tanz”—utilize similar musical topics and present their personas and poetic imagery in a
manner that reflects the ways in which 1920s Berlin understood African-Americans. These songs portray three types of exotic Others associated with African-American culture: the overworked slave, the dangerously violent man, and the seductive woman. Each song’s prominent use of brass and percussion instruments, percussive treatment of orchestration and jazz rhythms are recognizable primitivistic depictions of African-Americans as seen in other contemporaneous works. Zemlinsky’s application of these musical topics, in addition to his use of illustrative motives that are meant to represent either a persona or character in each song, serve to accentuate the African-American’s Otherness and provide an exotic flavor to poems that were not originally intended to be so.

**Germany’s Impression of the African-American**

The notion of the African-American as primitive had long existed in German culture before the idea was presented in Nussbaum’s *Afrika Singt*. The “idea of Blackness” became familiar to Germans during the colonization of Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although images and perceptions had been borrowed from other cultures, namely the French and British, centuries before.\(^8\) The construction of foreign peoples, as described by Timothy Dean Taylor, was meant to establish them as being completely different from Europeans; thus, they represented everything that the refined European was not: “wild, cannibalistic, irrational, sexually ravenous, monstrous.”\(^9\) Colonized lands were viewed as being

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feminine because they were susceptible to “masculine” control by the more
dominant countries;\textsuperscript{10} the feminized unfamiliar lands resulted in depictions of
“foreign, forbidden, female bodies,” and enhanced the sensuality of exotic women.\textsuperscript{11}
Prior to the twentieth century, German contact with Africans was limited and
somewhat idealized; the subject of blackness or discussions of black people
appeared mostly in literature, drama, and philosophy as a concept. It was not until
World War I that the interaction took place on European soil as German soldiers
fought black French troops, whose supposed savageness was magnified through the
horrors of war.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, the fear of Americanization after the war heightened
German hostility toward anything foreign to them, and consequently affected the
reception of black Americans in Germany in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{13}

The primitive artistic aesthetic used to represent the exotic was already well
established by the early twentieth century. In the visual arts, Paul Gauguin’s
paintings of the late nineteenth century frequently included nude female figures
from non-Western cultures in his rudimentary-styled artworks. Characterized by
crudely drawn black outlines and bold colors, the style contributed to the Modernist

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{12} Gilman, xi-xiv.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
aesthetic of visual art, in which the idea was to “[abandon] representation as a principal goal and [liberate] color and line from their former roles.”\textsuperscript{14}

Musically, works considered to be exotic demonstrate qualities that differ from the music of conventional Eurocentric culture in order to depict a perceptually far-removed location. Several types of exotic musical features—such as chromatic and seemingly undirected harmonies, non-diatonic modes, and the use of foreign musical instruments—came to represent several distant cultures and locales over time.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, representations of the primitive also displayed similar characteristics. The most famous twentieth-century example of primitivism was Igor Stravinsky’s controversial 1913 ballet \textit{Le Sacre du Printemps}. Presenting a scene of pagan Russia, the work’s primitivistic and unconventional choreography and costume design were musically accompanied by percussive orchestration, harsh dissonances, and stark irregular rhythms, which together made it an iconic model of art in this style.

Topics that became exclusively associated with African-American primitivism in 1920s Germany came from popular entertainment sources, particularly those that modeled themselves after American minstrelsy shows and the Harlem club scene. Even though French-style cabaret had already made its way to the country around the turn of the century,\textsuperscript{16} the influence of ragtime, jazz, and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14}Walter Frisch, \textit{German Modernism: Music and the Arts} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4.
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the American revue show considerably affected popular culture both artistically and socially. Records imported from America and performers such as Sam Wooding and his orchestra, which toured Europe with the revue show *The Chocolate Kiddies*, introduced audiences to spirituals and revue songs together with compositions by Duke Ellington, Joe Trent, and Stephen Foster.\(^\text{17}\)

American recordings and live shows provided German and Eastern-European musicians with models for jazz composition and performance practices. Soon, German musicians began imitating the idiom, even though jazz in the Weimar Republic was more a creation of German musicians than an absolute replication of something that could be considered authentically American. In December 1925, Alfred Baresel published his *Jazz-Buch*, the first jazz textbook, which was meant to validate jazz as an appropriate art music;\(^\text{18}\) by 1927, the genre was such a significant part of the mainstream culture that the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt am Main began to offer the first jazz courses in Europe, and the director of the department, Mátyás Seiber, published a jazz pedagogy book in 1928.\(^\text{19}\)

Jazz in the 1920s was closely associated with popular dance, especially the shimmy, the Charleston, and the foxtrot.\(^\text{20}\) Berlin’s dance culture was omnipresent, affecting all forms of culture from visual art to the newest fashion trends. Jazz


\(^{\text{18}}\)J. Bradford Robinson, “Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany: In Search of a Shimmy Figure,” in *Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 124-126.

\(^{\text{19}}\)Cook, 30.

\(^{\text{20}}\)Ibid., 31.
dances were linked to blackness even though they were largely performed by white German men and women. Despite the increasing prevalence of jazz, many were opposed to the acceptance of the genre as a serious music because of its association with popular culture and dance; the syncopated rhythms and irregular movements were especially reminiscent of primitivism, which was not founded in the refined German music tradition. Moreover, because some Germans resented anything American due to the crippling economic problems caused by the stock market crash of 1929, they labeled jazz as a detestable foreign infiltrator.\footnote{Ibid., 42.}

In the late 1920s, perhaps no one in Europe embodied the primitive African-American identity more than Josephine Baker. The playful characterization of Baker’s on-stage personas, her shimmy-influenced dancing, her costumes, and her athletic build all served to emphasize the sensual primitive woman who flaunts her body.\footnote{Susan Laikin Funkenstein, “Fashionable Dancing: Gender, the Charleston, and German Identity in Otto Dix’s ‘Metropolis,’” \textit{German Studies Review} 28 (February 2005): 30-34.} Baker began singing and dancing in \textit{La Révue Nègre} in Paris in 1925, and the show traveled to Berlin the following year. Its program featured numbers typically found in minstrel shows, depicting scenes set in the rural South and emphasizing the African-American who had experienced slavery and the Civil War. However, Baker’s “Savage Dance” finale, in which she appeared topless and in a grass skirt, was the grand showstopper. She reprised her performance in the 1928 German production of her 1926 Paris show entitled \textit{All Aboard! (Bitte umsteigen!)}, though this time trading in her grass skirt for one made of bananas. Despite the fact that the
singer and actress was a celebrated and respected entertainer, her characters nonetheless represented the primitive exotic Other within the dominant culture.

Regardless of the mixed reaction toward African-American primitivism, ragtime and jazz remained highly influential on Berlin popular culture and art. The *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement of the 1920s relied on the primitive aesthetic as a tool in portraying modern culture in contemporary art. For instance, artist Otto Dix’s works reflected the influence of popular culture. His triptych, “Metropolis” (1928), especially reflects the strong impact of American culture, jazz, dance, and African-American identity on Berlin’s “decadent popular culture” through its night club setting and its depictions of women, particularly through their angular poses and their hairstyles and dress.23

Jazz, because of its exotic quality and relevant social significance, had an effect on the works of Ernst Krenek, as well as those of Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith. Krenek’s revolutionary work, *Jonny Spielt Auf* (1927), was the first *Zeitoper*, an opera that utilized aspects of popular culture to illustrate a social commentary imbedded in the piece. In his opera, Krenek made use of jazz harmonies, particularly dominant-seventh chords and blue notes, and applied recognizable dance rhythms. He also incorporated instruments that were typical of the ensemble for jazz or revue shows, utilizing an exhaustive array of percussion instruments and featuring solo violin, saxophones, banjo, and piano.24

23 Ibid., 37-38.

Krenek also ascribed the culturally recognizable traits of the exotic Other to the title character of the opera, Jonny. A black American violinist who is socially and sexually uninhibited, Jonny is musically distinguished by what J. Bradford Robinson identifies as a “shimmy figure” (Example 1.1). According to Ralph Locke, “a composer might isolate a stylistic element, lending it more significance than it actually had in the American genre.” Thus the rhythm, as contrived as it might be, would automatically evoke jazz and its connection to dance to the German listener. As a result, other works by contemporaneous composers, particularly Kurt Weill, also employed this same figure in operas and songs either as an ostinato or within a melody to depict jazz or even an African-American persona.

Example 1.1: Shimmy figure as used in Krenek’s *Jonny Spielt auf*  

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Afrika Singt and the Representation of the New American Negro

Afrika Singt: Eine Auslese neuer Afro-Amerikanischer Lyrik, the first collection of African-American poetry available in German translation, was published in 1929 in Leipzig and Vienna. Released at the height of German fascination with African-American culture, the anthology is a compilation of one hundred translated poems by prominent American writers of the celebrated Harlem Renaissance, edited by Anna Nussbaum and her colleagues, Anna Siemsen, Josef Luitpold, and Hermann Kesser. Nussbaum’s Afrika Singt was intended to portray black American life to a German audience through the original perspective of African-American poets.28 Most of the poems, as well as the poets’ biographies provided at the end of Afrika Singt, came from Countée Cullen’s 1927 anthology, Caroling Dusk. Cullen’s book was meant to be a monument of black American literature that demonstrated how African-American writings were a worthy component of the English literary tradition.29 Although some poems contain universal themes like love and loss, many of the poems center on topics that were particular to the writers’ complex heritage and could only be understood and relayed by black Americans themselves.

In the preface to Afrika Singt, Nussbaum explicitly asserted that with her collection, “no glorification of the Negro is intended. [The book] is conceived as a

28 In other discussions of Afrika Singt, the collection is attributed to Anna Nussbaum because of her status as the main editor. Therefore, throughout this thesis, the collection will be credited to Nussbaum. However, situations in which another person is the translator for a specific poem, my discussion or citation will credit that individual.
contribution to the truth."\textsuperscript{30} This “truth” can be best summarized in one of the final paragraphs of the preface:

With young voices, Africa sings the longing after their magical original homeland, which is as old as our Earth; the source of a thousand years of oppression in a foreign land; childlike, fervent belief in deliverance; life’s cheerful joy and deepest humiliation; but also the knowledge of their own worth; the virile decision for action; the powerful self-claim to the highest goal. The race problem becomes a class problem. Both will and must find answers.\textsuperscript{31}

While the preface acknowledges the value of African-American art and culture, through phrases like “their magical, original homeland” and “childlike, fervent belief,” the primitiveness at the roots of the culture is emphasized. As a result, these writings could be perceived more as something exotic than merely as a variety of English literature.

Despite the significant influence of \textit{Caroling Dusk} on the organization of the collection, the goals of \textit{Afrika Singt} do not reflect those of Cullen. Instead, Nussbaum’s objective to present African-American literature reflect the views of Alain Locke, another prominent writer and public figure associated with the Harlem Renaissance. His notion of embracing the African heritage in black American art was originally presented in \textit{The New Negro}, a comprehensive collection of newly-composed essays, poems, and stories by black writers, which he edited in 1925. Like

\begin{flushright}

\textsuperscript{31} Nussbaum, 10: “Mit jungen Stimmen singt Afrika: die Sehnsucht nach der zauberhaften Urheimat, die so alt wie unsere Erde ist; die Qual aus tausendjähriger Bedrückung in der Fremde, kindlich-inbrünstigen Glauben an Errettung; jauchzende Lebensfeude und tiefste Erniedrigung; aber auch die Erkenntnis eigenen Wertes; die mannhafte Entscheidung für die Tat; die kraftvolle selbstbehauptung zu höherem Ziel. Das Rassenproblem wird zum Klassenproblem. Beide werden und müssen Lösung finden.”
\end{flushright}
Cullen’s collection, *The New Negro* also embodied a modern intellectual and artistic expression of the African-American that was rooted in a tradition. The book soon became known as the budding Harlem Renaissance’s “definitive text, its Bible;” not only did it present literature by prominent African-American figures both new and established, but it also included an exhaustive bibliography containing sources about Negro literature, music, drama, and folklore, about literature and music inspired by African-American culture, and about racial issues.

Many of the ideas expressed in the preface to *Afrika Singt*, particularly the recognition of the African homeland’s significance and the tone Nussbaum used to describe African-American culture, reflected the rhetoric used in *The New Negro*. Though Locke never explicitly said anything about longing for the homeland, as had been suggested in the *Afrika Singt* preface, he did acknowledge the importance of having an appreciation for African culture. In the forward to *The New Negro*, Locke declared that “Negro life...is finding a new soul,” and expanded on this statement in the essay that introduces the collection, claiming that “[t]his deep feeling of race is at present the mainspring of Negro life.” Locke described how in order for American Negros to approach the subjects of race, spirituality, and purpose, they must consciously connect with the African diaspora both within and outside of America. This “new internationalism” would not only contribute to “the future

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34 Locke, ed., *The New Negro*, 1. In Nussbaum’s preface to *Afrika Singt*, she directly quotes this sentence to explain Locke’s ideology of the New Negro and the role of his art.
development of Africa” but would also help the “New Negro” understand both his ancestry and his role within society.\textsuperscript{35} According to Locke, by relating their current issues to those who shared their heritage, black Americans not only enriched their own spirituality and life, but also served to improve race relations within and beyond their own situation.

Locke also supplied another essay, entitled “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” in which he described the strong stylistic influence of African sculpture on modern African-American visual art.\textsuperscript{36} Moreover, the artwork of Aaron Douglas and Winold Reiss presented in the book was intended, according to Locke, to exemplify a “graphic interpretation of Negro life....aimed to portray the soul and spirit of a people.”\textsuperscript{37} Their style of artwork was not exclusive to The New Negro but certainly helped to achieve the appearance of the collection that Locke aimed to create.\textsuperscript{38} Riess modified his distinctive designs found in the journal Social Graphic for the illustrations in The New Negro, and the angular dancing bodies in Harlem night clubs became similarly posed figures in the jungles of Africa.\textsuperscript{39} In addition, drawings of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 15.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 254-267.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 419.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Douglas’s work was also frequently featured in important African-American periodicals of the time, especially in The Crisis and The Opportunity, and also appeared in popular international journals like Vanity Fair (The New Negro, 420). Reiss—who was not black but a white German immigrant whose art on Mexican, Native American, and African-American themes gained notoriety in the 1920s—captured Locke’s attention with his work for the journal Survey Graphic.
\item \textsuperscript{39} In a special March 1925 issue entitled “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro,” the artist illustrated portraits of notable Harlem Renaissance figures and decorated the pages with borders resembling tribal bands [Survey Graphic 6, no. 6 (Spring 1925): 627-725.]; also, as noted in the Foreword, Locke discloses that this March issue of Social Graphic was the inspiration for The New Negro and that it served as its “nucleus.” Locke, The New Negro, xxvi.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
African tribal masks, which resemble the photographs of masks and sculptures presented in Locke’s essay on African art, are scattered throughout the book in between the pages of poems and stories. With these essays and illustrations, the collection provided examples of a cultural and historical foundation that black Americans could accept as their own.

According to critics both German and American, Nussbaum’s book successfully transported the art and soul of the Harlem Renaissance to German readers. In a 1929 review by Kurt Tucholsky, Nussbaum’s collection was hailed as a “very beautiful book;” the highly acclaimed German journalist and satirist also acknowledged that even though the translations may not have been perfect, the editors were nonetheless able to effectively convey the messages of each text.40 In a 1933 issue of The Crisis, one of the most significant African-American publications of the early twentieth century, Percy L. Julian wrote, “When Anna Nussbaum published in 1929 ‘Afrika Singt,’ a collection of poems of young Negroes, translated into the German Language [sic], it marked a new epoch in European effort at interpretation of American Negro Youth,” and by 1930, “one found a copy of ‘Afrika Singt’ on the bookshelf of nearly every cultured German home.”41 Nonetheless, though Nussbaum’s collection was meant to give African-American writers a chance to present themselves and their culture in the modern world, the existing German


perception of the African-American as primitive nonetheless influenced the interpretations of the poems.\(^{42}\)

**Primitivism in the *Sinfonische Gesänge***

In Zemlinsky’s *Sinfonische Gesänge*, the idea of the African-American as exotic is most evident in the second, fourth, and sixth songs, and Zemlinsky’s use of previously established musical topics associated with jazz and primitivism in these settings suggests that he read them as such. The songs “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” “Übler Bursche,” and “Afrikanischer Tanz” each portray one version of an African-American stereotype as recognized by German culture at the time: the slave, the violent and drunk man, or the sensual woman, respectively. By employing common primitivist percussion orchestration and the shimmy figure in a fashion similar to their use in other contemporaneous works, these songs display musical features that accentuate the black personas in the texts and emphasize an exoticism associated with African-Americans.

Zemlinsky’s Op. 20 contains many elements that emphasize its exotic subject. The work uses a substantial brass and percussion palette, including timpani, jazz drums (tom-toms), and wood block in almost every song. There is also a mandolin in the final song of the cycle, “Arabeske,” in order to emulate the banjo, although it is inaudible due to the song’s busy texture. Additionally, the shimmy rhythm that was present in Krenek’s opera appears throughout the work; it is most identifiable in the

\(^{42}\) Nussbaum, ix.
second and fourth songs of the cycle, “Lied der Baumwollpacker” and “Übler Bursche,” and also appears modified in the song “Afrikanischer Tanz.”

Each song’s treatment of the shimmy figure represents the exotic character depicted in each text and also works in conjunction with other themes or motives to bring out that character’s specific traits. In “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” the shimmy figure is not meant to suggest the carefree dance from which it was originated because the text is a slave song. Jean Toomer’s original poem is constructed in a free form and uses African-American dialect, but Josef Luitpold’s German translation arranges the content and modifies the language to fit into three strophes organized by a formal rhyme scheme. The slave describes his arduous labor in the fields, and hopes that God will take mercy on his obedience and relieve him from his torture. Though he says he and his brothers should not wait until Judgment Day for their deliverance, he asserts that “the soft cotton ball rolls the hellish way to the kingdom of heaven,” and that “they can’t blame god [for not helping them] if they don’t roll.”

The combination of two musical elements, the shimmy figure and a theme associated with rolling cotton, both reflect the content of the persona’s narrative, and affect the overall construction of the song. The music of “Lied der Baumwollpacker” does not follow the formal structure of the poem, but instead consists of repeated melodies and rhythms related to the text. The text and shimmy rhythm together oppose the typical stock representation of a slave character that would have been recognizable from revue and minstrelsy shows (Example 1.2).

Whereas the slave in minstrel shows normally would have been happily

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43 The texts for these songs can be found in Appendix A.
accepting of his situation, the persona in “Lied der Baumwollpacker” is not. The use of the rhythm provides a sense of forward motion that corresponds to the persona’s desire to change his situation; the rhythm is only used to set portions of text from the first two strophes, particularly the phrase “Wir warten nicht auf den jüngsten Tag.”

Example 1.2: “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” shimmy rhythm, mm. 19-21

Unlike Krenek’s presentation of the shimmy figure, which occurs on the beat in common time, Zemlinsky’s use is modified. First appearing in m. 13 in the brass, then imitated by the vocal melody in m. 15, the rhythm starts on beat 2 instead of the downbeat, and is reinforced by the oboe, bass clarinet, and woodblock (Example 1.3). Occasionally, variations of the pattern occur, as demonstrated in the vocal lines beginning at mm. 36 and 47. While the rhythmic emphasis may be shifted or the note values augmented from quarter note to half notes in these instances, the figure remains recognizable throughout the piece and characterizes the persona’s steadfast outlook.
Example 1.3: “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” mm. 13-17

However, in spite of the persona’s determined attitude, he cannot break away from his servitude, which is reflected by the song’s main theme. The piece begins with an ominous melody in A-minor presented only in the low woodwinds (Example 1.4); both its contour and its frequent repetition in the song reflect the continuous action of rolling cotton in the fields. Its role in the piece becomes more
apparent when the voice enters in mm. 8-12, as the persona calls out to his fellow workers to “come” and keep rolling as only the motive, played by the strings, and a strongly enforced beat accompany the vocal line.

Example 1.4: “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” main theme, bassoon, mm. 1-3

The recurrence of the A-minor melody at the end and the return of the phrase “Komm, Bruder, komm” suggest he and his brothers are confined to this life of hard work; thus, despite his desire to move forward, the repetition of that particular musical material and consequently the construction of the song reminds the persona and the listener that he is stuck in his situation no matter what he does. The melody and rhythm used on the first instance of “Wir warten nicht” at m. 19 (Example 1.2), the phrase that suggests defiance and change, returns in the orchestra at m. 44 and in the vocal line when the phrase reappears in the second strophe (m. 47); however, because the last line of the final strophe does not use the same text phrase, the music does not return. In Zemlinsky’s setting of the final
stanza, the rhythm does not follow the shimmy figure, but rather, the main theme that opened the piece dominates the final section of the song, symbolizing the slave’s inability to break away.

As in “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” the melodies derived from the shimmy figure and representative motives in “Übler Bursche” are structured to follow the poem’s content rather than its form. However, unlike the former song, the musical material used in “Übler Bursche” portrays an entirely different stereotype. The übler Bursche personifies the savage characteristics of the black Other that the previous character does not: hypersexuality, drunkenness, and violence. He brags about beating his wife and mistress, takes pride in his ill-temperedness and alcoholism, and declares that he has no desire to reform himself. Ironically, it is the song’s major tonalities and playful melodies that portray the negative qualities of the exotic black American male.

Yet, instead of using jazz idioms to characterize the persona as Krenek did in his popular depiction of Jonny, the African-American man with no inhibitions, the piece’s thick texture, predominantly composed of brass and woodwinds, and its ostinati are elements of more historical examples of exoticism. While there are several brief melodies that do appear out of the active texture in “Übler Bursche,” none of them are fully developed. In Zemlinsky’s setting, the effect created by these musical elements reflects the primitive character of the persona, who is inherently savage. The percussive treatment of the woodwinds and strings and a stronger emphasis on rhythm than melody are in a manner typical of the primitivistic style.44

44 Locke book
As the persona tactlessly brags about his indiscretions, the shimmy rhythm accentuates his destructive qualities. For example, the figure first appears at m. 22 at the phrase, “Nur der Schnaps und die Schlechtigkeit,” which demonstrates the persona’s real “badness” (Example 1.5). As the trombone doubles the vocal melody an octave below, the other brass and percussion instruments provide rhythmic support against the urgently moving eighth-notes in the bassoon and bass clarinet. The only other appearance that the figure makes is at the phrase, “dem Teufel im die Hand, freu mich auf seine Kohlen” beginning at m. 67, in which the speaker expresses that he does not mind going to visit the Devil or his coal. Unlike the persona from “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” the übler Bursche does not appeal to God for help, but proudly accepts his fate, suggested by the assertively driving rhythm of the text.

Example 1.5: “Übler Bursche,” shimmy rhythm, mm. 22-25

There is not a strict sense of form in the song, but musical motives and the shimmy figure connected to the text structure the narrative in a manner similar to
the construction of “Lied der Baumwollpacker.” The opening C-major melody introduced in the E-flat clarinet in “Übler Bursche” performs a similar role to the opening A-minor melody of the previous song. The melody in “Übler Bursche” returns frequently throughout the song (Example 1.6), and characterizes the flippant personality of the persona through its rapid tempo and comically quick staccato articulation.

The most striking feature of this theme is the derivation of a two-note motive that comes to represent the bad man’s primitive nature (Example 1.6, m. 2). This “braying” gesture generally appears in the bassoon, trombone, low strings, and timpani parts. While these instruments are commonly used to invoke the idea of the primitive Other, as is evident in some of the other songs in this cycle, the whinny created by the interval and timbre is also reminiscent of a donkey, and is therefore a critique of the persona’s character.45

The braying gesture appears throughout the song, most notably at awkward moments for the persona. For instance, the appearance of the figure in mm. 49-56 follows the strophe in which the persona exclaims that he beats his wife and mistress because he is sad. The song pauses briefly, but resumes as the persona realizes that he is never capable of being good. The gesture’s presence in this section insinuates that he is laughing off his bad behavior but may also be overcompensating to mask his pain.

Example 1.6: “Übler Bursche,” mm. 1-2

Although the complete C-major theme is repeated after its first statement, it does not appear again in its entirety until m. 53, before the third stanza which begins “Bin ein schlechter Tropf.” In the setting of the final strophe, the theme continues to play buried underneath the texture and is often transformed by chromatic inflections until the end of the piece. The effect of discomfort created by the repetition of the braying gesture in mm. 49-56 is reproduced again towards the end of the song, further signifying the persona’s recognition of his true evil disposition. The playfully mischievous E-flat clarinet melody that characterized the
dismissive outlook of the persona in the beginning clearly returns in the final moments of the song (mm. 76-81). Yet, it is largely obscured by the busy texture, the appearance of the vocal line’s declamatory melody in a much higher register, blaring dissonances in the other voices, and the text that claims that the man would not go to heaven “even if [he were] picked to go.” The over-emphasized declaration of the braying gesture, which is repeated four times in almost every instrument (mm. 84-86), demonstrates that the persona has finally convinced himself of his real character; however, the excessive repetition of the statement suggests that he has to force himself to admit to these qualities as being part of his innate nature.

In contrast to “Lied der Baumwollpacker” and “Übler Bursche,” the sixth song introduces another dimension of primitivism and a third stereotypical African-American persona, the seductive female. In “Afrikanisher Tanz,” the primitivistic musical style in combination with a more melodic lyricism presents primitivism associated with dancing in two different ways. The song is composed in a ternary form: the savagely forceful A section is characterized by a pulsing rhythm that is accented by percussion and low-pitched instruments and its simple declamation of the vocal melody, and is contrasted with the seductively lyrical melodies of the B section, which portray the dancer’s feminine sensuality.

The emphasis on rhythm in the opening A section produces a vigorous *afrikanischer Tanz*. The text setting in the A section is similar to that of “Lied der Baumwollpacker”: the syllabic declamation is mainly in quarter notes and stays on the beat, reinforcing the steady rhythm of the piece. The bold rhythms of the opening portion of the piece portray the beating of the tom-toms, which prepare the
crowd for the dance of the “night-veiled girl.” To emphasize the steadiness of the pulse, the meter remains the same throughout the entire piece, unlike the varying metrical structures of all the other songs in the cycle. Thus, although the rhythm is syncopated, the basic beat remains consistent.

The regular rhythm of the shimmy figure creates the song’s dance-like quality. Though the figure is modified—reversed and augmented in this case—it still represents the same primitivistic idea projected in the other songs; instead of short notes followed by long notes, the piece opens with two half-notes followed by two quarter-notes figure (Example 1.7). In this instance, the figure’s appearance implies that the dance in this scene is not one commonly found in German music, but one that is particularly associated with the song’s exotic characters.

Example 1.7: “Afrikanischer Tanz,” modified shimmy rhythm, mm. 1-4

The appearance of the “night-veiled girl” in the B section, however, creates a clear departure from the song’s opening savage dance. The dancer does not enter seamlessly into the scene with the drums but rather interrupts them. The pause that
occurs at m. 22 and the immediate reduction in texture afterward help to depict the woman as a distraction. Her presence changes the tone of the entire piece: the tonality modulates from its original F-sharp minor to an ambiguous D major/minor.

As the song moves into the next section, the overwhelmingly strong rhythmic quality of the beginning is disrupted by the flowing chromatic melodies played by the flute and E-flat clarinet, depicting the woman whirling softly in a circle. At the entrance of the vocal melody in m. 26, the lyricism of the melodic phrasing differs drastically from the vocal melody of the A section. The text setting is still mostly syllabic, but the values have been augmented to half-notes instead of quarter notes, which slightly differentiates the melody from the throbbing beat maintained by the violas and percussion.

The woodwind instrumentation recalls Salomé’s *Dance of the Seven Veils*, and the sinuous direction of the flute’s melody line is suggestive of the *Seguidilla* in Bizet’s *Carmen* (Example 1.8), both well-known musical representations of enticement and seduction.46 While the girl’s sensuality is depicted through the woodwind melodies (Example 1.9), the shimmy figure indicates her particular primitivism. The continual presence of the shimmy figure rhythm played by the horns and trumpets in the background suggests the savageness of her dance, which denotes this dancing woman as a primitive Other who, like Josephine Baker, would have been recognizable in Berlin’s popular culture.

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46 These two particular works have been selected as examples because both had been conducted by Zemlinsky prior to his composition of this cycle. Beaumont, 186.
Example 1.8: Bizet, *Carmen*, “Seguidilla,” flute melody, mm. 1-8

Example 1.9: “Afrikanischer Tanz,” woodwinds section, mm. 26-35

In each of the three musical settings, the exoticism of the characters is emphasized through primitivistic musical topics. The characters of “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” “Übler Bursche,” and “Afrikanischer Tanz” represent three kinds of African-American stereotypes that would have been familiar to Berlin audiences, and the music accentuates the characteristics attributed to each: the slave that
continues to work hard despite his misery, the flippant crassness of the bad man, and the savage yet sensual dance of the girl. The construal of African-American Otherness is most evident through the use of a primitivistic orchestration dominated by brass, percussion, and woodwind scoring, a percussive treatment of the instrumentation, and the use of a rhythmic figure recognizably associated with the shimmy. In addition, illustrative motives directly connected to the text develop the individual characters within each setting. Although the original poetry was not written to be interpreted as being exotic, the musical settings of each translated text and the presentation of the characters represent people and locations that would have been perceived as such.
CHAPTER II

DEPICTIONS OF LYNCHING IN THE SINFONISCHE GESÄNGE

To create a somewhat authentic presentation of African-American life, Nussbaum’s *Afrika Singt* included deliberately shocking poems about lynching, which had practically become an exclusively black American experience at the turn of the century. Many of the themes selected for *Afrika Singt* reflect the editors’ purpose of presenting the poets’ “shocking cries for help for liberation and promising testimony to the light of aspiring mankind.”

In the early twentieth century, lynching, which was most commonly practiced in the American South, garnered much attention both nationally and internationally. Transmission through the written word, detailed photographs and cartoons, and the new medium of film, enabled Europeans to become familiar with the practice and its social significance for American culture.

The two songs that frame the cycle, “Lied aus Dixieland” and “Arabeske,” present reactions to the topic of lynching through contrasting perspectives. Though no specific references to the practice exist in the composer’s letters or journals, Zemlinsky appeared to have understood the murderous, discriminatory practice through the lynching imagery presented in the poems. The composer approached the poems similarly: both songs’ harmony and form are organized in relation to their poetic structure and textual perspective, and Zemlinsky’s symbolic manipulation of the orchestration and motives emphasizes the underlying content.

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of each text. However, the first song portrays a heartbroken response to lynching from an internalized point of view, while the cycle’s final song concludes with an ironic message of social indifference to the practice as seen from an externalized angle. Thus, the portrayal of the topic from two separate perspectives within the cycle effectively exhibits the complexity of reactions that surrounded lynching in the early twentieth century.

**Lynching Imagery in early 20th-century Popular Culture**

At the turn of the twentieth century, radical changes in American culture, such as the development of new industrial technologies and the decreasing dependency on a rural economy, heightened previously existing hostility left over from the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. Former plantation towns were now evolving into bustling metropolises, and because of new employment and housing opportunities that were available in larger cities, African-Americans and European immigrants accounted for a growing portion of the urban population. As a result, cities were becoming larger and more crowded. Even though such expansion occurred everywhere in the nation, many of the cities in the South had not experienced this kind of rapid change and industrialization, which produced profound social unrest. With the influx of people into one concentrated area, the rates of crime and poverty naturally increased. In response, white citizens, upset by these social changes, began to enforce segregation or “Jim Crow” laws. These

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regulations largely prevented non-white inhabitants from entering certain territories in order to “protect” white citizens, especially white women.\textsuperscript{49} Nonetheless, municipal law enforcement did not seem to alleviate the rising crime rate or justly punish those guilty of offenses such as rape and murder, consequently prompting citizens to take matters into their own hands.

By the turn of the twentieth century, lynching had become a highly publicized act of intolerance disguised under the pretense of criminal justice.\textsuperscript{50} The vigilantism intended to be a method of keeping the peace quickly became a publicly acknowledged demonstration of one race’s appropriation of control over another. In an article that explores lynching within law enforcement history, David Garland asserts “that public torture lynchings were, first and foremost, collective criminal punishments and that this is how they were represented and understood by most actors and commentators at the time they occurred,”\textsuperscript{51} but also maintains that “public torture lynchings were a mode of racial repression—and more obliquely, of class and gender control—that deliberately adopted the forms and rituals of criminal punishment.”\textsuperscript{52} Needless to say, many who were lynched, mostly black people and immigrants, had not committed the crime of which they were accused; yet, the simple fact that these people were automatically considered “uncivilized” and “dangerous” by the white population became sufficient reason to persecute

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\textsuperscript{49}Ibid., 5-8.
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\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 798.
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them. General occurrences of lynching in America had decreased overall by the turn of the century. However, the number of black victims had risen considerably, particularly in the South. While many incidents were never reported and thus the available figures are not entirely accurate, it has been estimated that “between 1889 and 1918, 85 percent of recorded lynchings were done to black victims,” and that at least 3,200 black men were victims of lynching between 1880 and 1940.

The white citizens’ sense of superiority was strongly reinforced by the communal aspect of the act, which was perhaps its most significant attribute. Unlike other displays of racially-motivated violence, lynching became an extravagant community event that spectacularly expressed the message of white supremacy. In an effort to appeal to the public’s sympathies, reports about lynchings customarily divulged details of the crime committed, usually recounting a story of a white victim assaulted by the black perpetrator, instead of focusing on descriptions of the lynching itself. In response, hundreds gathered from all over to watch the public executions, sometimes traveling into town by train and crowding the highways in order to witness the action. Workers would be allowed to take the day off of work, and while the crowds were predominantly composed of white men, children would...

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54 Kirschke, 48.

55 Ibid., 54.

56 Wood, 3.


58 Wood, 71.
stay home from school, and families would often partake in picnics and observe from afar while an execution took place.\(^5^9\)

Because lynching was a public event, it naturally became a common photographic focus. Improvements in technology had made hand-held cameras and film more accessible and inexpensive, and amateur photographers frequently took the opportunity to take pictures at major community affairs and sell them to be used in journals and newspapers or as souvenirs.\(^6^0\) Images of lynchings were not only mementos of the events, but also represented the extreme racial disparity of the culture, serving as a visual reminder to black Americans of its constant threat. Characteristically, lynching photographs centered on the actual execution. Photographs depicting the horrifying humiliation and torture that usually occurred beforehand—which generally consisted of the victim being stripped naked, brutally beaten, and having his genitals dismembered—were extremely rare; in many cases, victims were redressed or partially covered up before the photo was taken in order to conceal any mutilation. In many pictures, large groups of people, either those who committed the act or those who were merely spectators, commonly posed with the lynched victim, much in a fashion similar to hunting photography.\(^6^1\) On occasion, photographs even featured women and children standing in near the lynched figure, further emphasizing its normalized status in American culture.

\(^{59}\) Kirschke, 65; Wood, 71.

\(^{60}\) Wood, 77.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 97.
In the late 1890s and early 1900s, pictures of lynchings were purchased to be developed into postcards, which circulated all over the America and abroad. Because of the graphic nature of the images, the postmaster general banned the sending of lynching postcards in 1908, but the rule was largely disregarded by the public, demonstrating lynching’s acceptance in American society; the custom continued well into the early decades of the twentieth century.\(^{62}\) While taking pictures and sending postcards of lynched victims seems highly perverse today, a contemporary fascination with death combined with the popularity of the postcard generated an international phenomenon in this type of card. For instance, French soldiers fighting in Indochina sent postcards of their Vietnamese victims back home to their loved ones,\(^{63}\) and graphic images of mutilated bodies and the ravages of the Mexican Revolution were mailed throughout North America during the early twentieth century.\(^{64}\) In addition, as early as 1896, lynchings were photographed and recorded to advertise Thomas Edison’s earliest talking picture machines, which were presented at various county fairs across the country.\(^{65}\) Eventually, lynchings became commonly featured in early cinema: D.W. Griffith’s 1915 notorious film *The Birth of a Nation* is perhaps the most famous example of “the national spectacle of

\(^{62}\) Kirschke, 67.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 239, n. 65.

\(^{64}\) An interesting collection of postcards from the Mexican Revolution, including some graphic images, has been compiled into the book, *Border Fury: A Picture Postcard Record of Mexico’s Revolution and U.S. War Preparedness, 1910-1917* by Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponaro (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988).

\(^{65}\) Kirschke, 65.
white supremacist ‘justice,’ filmic performance, and sacred ceremony.”  

For the white community, these images served not only as souvenirs and concrete evidence of successfully exercised “justice,” but also functioned as a symbol of social dominance of one race over another.

Soon, images of American lynching scenes began to appear in Europe. The way in which they were presented suggests that the topic and imagery were already familiar to Europeans early in the century and demonstrates that those outside of America understood the racist implications of the practice. In the second issue of The Crisis, an African-American periodical devoted to issues that concerned the black community, a cartoon from the Paris satirical journal L’Assiette au Beurre, captioned “Illustrating the life of Mr. Roosevelt, shows something of prevailing European opinion of America,” presented an international take on America’s social culture. The description that Amy Helene Kirschke provides in her book vividly describes the cartoon, and includes a quotation that accompanied the cartoon in its original French publication:

> The drawing was of a young man strung up by a rope, arms and legs bound, wearing cutoff “country clothes.” He appears in blackface, his eyes bulge out in caricature, and his lips are white and heavily exaggerated. His tongue hangs out of his mouth. A white man, the lyncherman, stands in the background; crowds appear behind him. The

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66 Wood, 145.

67 While many in the black community feared for their lives, several prominent figures actively protested lynching practices, and used these images to strengthen their campaign against it. Ida B. Wells vigorously crusaded for civil rights by using statistics and photographs to empirically found her anti-lynching arguments, which were printed and distributed widely through pamphlets. Her cases were generally accepted as being precise and so well informed that she was one of the most commonly cited sources for lynching statistics by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [Kirschke, 60]. W.E.B. Du Bois’ famous publication The Crisis openly addressed the matter in print, and frequently featured political cartoons and editorials that addressed lynching and also included graphic photographs as anti-lynching propaganda.
artist was showing that the audience didn’t see him as a living being but rather as a comedic buffoon. Seeing the victim this way allowed the “sport” to continue. Below the image, this quote was included in L’Assiette au Beurre: “I was born October 27, 1858 in the midst of indescribable enthusiasm. A great banquet was given. Each guest brought a present of ale, whisky, mutton chops, ginger ale, or corned beef. The poor people having nothing of this sort to offer decided to burn a Negro alive under our windows.” The clear implication was that this was the only “gift” the poor people could offer the new baby—a man burned alive, a gift of entertainment.68

The depiction of lynching as conveyed in the cartoon is highly reminiscent of lynching photography. Also, its exaggerated characterization of the victim and the crowd around him illustrates the European impression of American racial disparity.

As in America, images of lynching also circulated through various types of popular media in Europe, especially through the postcard. The postcard’s popularity began as a European phenomenon with Germany leading the industry. To create these types of souvenir cards, German postcard companies purchased photographs from amateur and professional photographers, and in turn manufactured the images as postcards that were then sold and distributed internationally.69 Perhaps one of the most famous lynching postcards contains an image of a lynching that took place in Andalusia, Alabama, but the card itself was printed in Germany. Sent to John Holmes, a white Unitarian pastor and anti-lynching advocate, the postcard contains a message on the back stating “This is the way we do them down here. The last lynching has not been put on card yet. Will put you on our regular mailing list. Expect one a month on the average.” The photo on the front, featuring a large group

68 Kirschke, 56-57.

of men crowding around a lifeless corpse, is typical of American lynching photography, and the writing on the back aptly reflects the attitude of many Southern whites. However, the significance of this particular example is that the German practice of buying these images from Americans and selling them back as postcards was commonplace, and provides one example of how widely these images were distributed and received.

“Lied aus Dixieland:” An Emotional Reaction to Lynching

Zemlinsky never specifically addressed the issues surrounding lynching, but the two poems he selected to frame the cycle both include unmistakable lynching imagery. According to his widow, Louise Zemlinsky, the composer was obsessed with the 1927 trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants who were tried for and convicted of a Massachusetts armed robbery and murder that took place in 1920. Zemlinsky was so passionate about the affair that he signed a petition for their retrial in 1927, and according to Louise, it was the only time in his life that he was politically active. While Zemlinsky’s participation in this is not directly related to lynching, his awareness of the case suggests that he might have read about other American events at that time, and lynching-related articles were frequently reported in German newspapers and periodicals.

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70 Beaumont, 346.

71 Gorrell, 59.

For his *Sinfonische Gesänge*, the songs “Lied aus Dixieland” and “Arabeske”—translations of Langston Hughes’s “Song for a Dark Girl” and Frank Horne’s “Arabesque” respectively—both address the topic of lynching, but differ from one another in terms of the perspective of each poem’s narrative and in its use of lynching imagery. These two songs which frame the cycle present two different views toward the practice while both complement the somber tone of the overall work. In the first song, the text’s first-person narrative becomes a sympathetic portrayal of survivor’s grief, and the second song reveals an outsider’s apathetic reaction to the lynching scene. Through the use of symbolic motivic development and illustrative orchestration and the construction of form in relation to poetic structure, the significance of their perspectives and, consequently, the meanings of each text are emphasized.

The opening song, “Lied aus Dixieland,” is an internalized, reflective account of lynching. Compared to Hughes’ original text, the German translation is more personal through the word “dich” to refer directly to the persona’s lover in the tree, and by altering the imagery to actively depict the persona within the text. Although there is a distinct musical motive present throughout the entire song, the whole-step/half-step neighbor figure (Example 2.1), the structure of the piece dramatically responds to the imagery presented in the three stanzas of the poem. Each strophe contains some graphic, physical aspect of lynching: the lover’s body hanging on a tree, being “crushed, [and] swept by the wind,”\(^{73}\) and the “naked shadow” that remains “on a naked tree.” The imagery is unmistakable, and the poem’s
geographical reference to the South, as established by the phrase that begins each stanza of the poem, confirms the setting. As expected, the composer uses illustrative text painting to reflect the persona’s narrative as presented in the poem. However, much in the style of a Mahler orchestral song, the song’s form develops as a dramatic realization of the persona’s story.

Example 2.1: “Lied aus Dixieland,” mm. 1-3
To stage the opening of the scene, the sparse texture and ambiguous tonality in the brief instrumental prelude establishes the stillness of the setting through the consecutive entrances of the woodwinds with slow statements of the main melodic motive. Typical of Zemlinsky’s style of thematic development, the primary melodic construction of the song grows out of this simple figure, which evokes grief and sadness. As the persona begins to describe the event at m. 2, the vocal line assumes the motive and expands it into a lyrical melody, which is a series of groupings of the motive at pitches that have been stated by the other instruments.

As demonstrated almost immediately in the song, the oboe typically is separated from the texture and becomes directly connected to the persona’s grief and emotional reaction to the imagery. The oboe’s melody in m. 3 originates from the main motive, and continues as the vocal line continues, even though the other instruments have mostly dropped out by m. 4. In the middle section of the song, its melodies mostly double the vocal line (particularly at mm. 19-20 and mm. 26-27). Consequently, its use in this manner is strongly reminiscent of the oboe in the lieder of Mahler, who orchestrated his song “Der Einsame im Herbst” in a similar fashion in order to evoke a sense of isolation. Such a reference serves to audibly portray the persona’s emotion throughout the song, even though it is not fully described in the text.74

As the song progresses, the motive and harmony enhance the drama of the scene. In the opening section of the song, the D-minor chords that appear in the strings and the trombones suggest that tonality as the tonic; but it is largely

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74 An example from Mahler’s “Der Einsame im Herbst” appears in Chapter 3 as Example 3.1b.
obscured by the layering of the figure which produces glaring dissonances. Thus, the clear presence of the B-minor tonality in mm. 21-25 (Example 2.2), as suggested by the B-C#-D ostinato in the cellos and basses, and F#s in the viola line, indicates the emotional climax of the narrative. When the persona calls out to the “white Jesus” for mercy, the texture becomes thicker with the addition of more violas, and the accompaniment becomes more urgent through tremolo and driving sixteenth-notes in the strings. Furthermore, the high vocal range brings out the persona’s heightened anxiety, and her sigh of desperation is depicted in the violas’ glissando that occurs after the word “gefragt” (m. 25). The main motive is featured in the trombones and vocal line and accentuates the word “wozu” (mm. 26-27), the chromaticism of the line expressing urgency as well as frustration with the uselessness of prayer.

The music of the third stanza in relation to the rest of the song most effectively demonstrates the persona’s physical presence in the song. The stripping down of the texture and melody in the final section (mm. 29-45) is evocative of her emotional breakdown. The repetition of bare imagery through the words “nackter” and “kahlen” of the final phrases not only illustrates the savage brutality of the lynching that resulted in her lover’s death, but also the withdrawal of the persona’s hope. The harmony returns to being vague and highly dissonant, the accompaniment shifts from being lush and full into something more meager, and the vocal line moves back down to its lower register.
Example 2.2: “Lied aus Dixieland,” mm. 20-28
Example 2.3: “Lied aus Dixieland,” mm. 29-38
Example 2.4: “Lied aus Dixieland,” mm. 43-45

In addition, the rhythmic pacing of the song slows down considerably as the persona’s emotional distress causes her to become breathless. As the percussion and brass weakly punctuate the beat, the vocal melody is fragmented, unlike its original lyrical quality; the duration of each syllable is noticeably augmented from the rapid declamation of eighth- and sixteenth-notes in the previous section. In the postlude, the exasperated viola glissando from the “wozu” section appears again and is now coupled with the timpani, jazz drum, and trombones. The steady beat that slowly fades out to the end of the song suggests that the persona can do nothing
more than walk away from this memory. Thus, in his setting of “Lied aus Dixieland,” Zemlinsky allows the listener to experience what the persona is feeling as she relives that moment once more.

“Arabeske:” Illustrating Social Indifference to Lynching

In Zemlinsky’s setting of “Lied aus Dixieland,” the persona’s pain as caused by the lynching is sensitively portrayed in the music. The song “Arabeske,” however, approaches the topic as an externalized response to the lynching imagery presented in the poetry. The perspective of a third person in the text eliminates any personal involvement with the action, and the narrative as it is structured in the text presents itself as coming from a detached spectator, revealing the poem’s ironic message of society’s indifference to those victimized by lynching. Even though the poetic tone and formal construction of Horne’s “Arabeske” vary significantly from those of “Lied aus Dixieland,” Zemlinsky essentially structured the piece in a similar fashion by relating the music directly to the organization and content of the text. In this song, the treatment of motivic material and orchestration functions to musically illustrate the pictorial moments of the text and to embody each of the characters in the scene and what they represent. When combined together, these elements serve to effectively express the overall message of the piece.

Frank Horne’s descriptions of the characters and the scene in the original English poem would have been clearly understood by an American reader, but its German translation has proven to be more problematic for composers interpreting
the text through their musical settings. The poem centers on the dismal image of a dead black man hanging in a tree above two children, a white girl and a black baby, who play underneath in the shade. The way in which Horne uses the imagery in the text suggests society's general lack of sympathy to the lynching problem and criticizes its normalization within American culture. According to Malcolm Cole, the translation of the word “rocking” as “schaukeln” in the German version completely misconstrued the imagery and portrayed a man happily swinging in the tree as the children play below. He asserts that Zemlinsky “created [a] finely-crafted [composition] that was totally inappropriate to the stark message of Frank Horne’s poem;” by Cole’s evaluation, the quick tempo and primarily major tonalities of the setting creates a positive, cheerful reading of the text that completely misses the point.

However, Antony Beaumont contradicts Cole’s assessment and maintains that Zemlinsky did in fact recognize the lynching imagery. Beaumont argues that Cole “overlooks [the poem's] optimistic implication," and supports his claim by connecting “Arabeske” textually and tonally to “Lied aus Dixieland.” Because of the tonal parallel between the two songs—“Lied aus Dixieland” is predominantly in D minor and “Arabeske” is in D and F-sharp Major—Beaumont interprets the piece not

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76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Beaumont, 364n.
only as “a song of progress, but also of hope.” Additionally, the presence of children in the poem and the lyrical style in which Zemlinsky sets that portion of its text might imply a more innocent and positive interpretation.

Nonetheless, both Cole and Beaumont neglect other components of the German translation and the music that express the original poem’s implications. Like the text of Zemlinsky’s opening song, the poem is situated in the South, which was closely associated with lynching scenes. Furthermore, the use of the word “Nigger” to refer to the black man in the poem would have been recognized as a derogatory term by Germans in the 1920s. In both instances in which the man is described, he is pictured “high in the tree.” While the word “schaukeln” does translate as “rocking,” the word “hoch” indicates that this person was not leisurely lounging in the tree on a sunny day, but was more likely to have been placed in that position.

Zemlinsky modeled his composition according to the ternary structure of the poem. The text presents two focal points within one tableau: the opening A section centers on the black man in the tree, but attention to this picture is diverted by the use of a dash and the abrupt shift in imagery to the B section which features the children. The A section of the song is characterized by identifiable primitivistic musical topics that have been established earlier in the cycle: a strong beat reinforced by brass and percussion together with relatively declamatory, non-lyrical

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80 Ibid., 364.
81 Ibid.
melodies (mm. 1-30). The brass and high woodwinds assume the whole-step, two-note gesture that initially occurs on the word “Nigger” (Example 2.5).

Example 2.5: “Arabeske,” vocal melody, mm. 7-12

![Example 2.5: “Arabeske,” vocal melody, mm. 7-12](image)

The motive is repeated frequently by the brass and woodwinds throughout the A section to represent the character of the black man. To reflect the negative connotation of the man’s presence, a sinister tremolo in the second violins in mm. 22-30 plays against the motive, and illustrates the imagery of the body “stamping holes” in the shining, laughing sunlight. Thus, at the word “Sonne” (mm. 28-29), the scene is not bright and sunny as one would expect, but cacophonous and harsh as a result of the clash between the D-minor scales in the violas and bassoons and the F-sharps and A-flats that appear in the rest of the texture (Example 2.6).
Example 2.6: “Arabeske,” mm. 25-29.

The two conflicting styles used within the song—the primitively percussive A section versus the comparatively lyrical B section (beginning at m. 31)—mirror the disparity of the scene. The instrumental core of the B section does not feature brass and percussion as prominently as the opening segment, but rather the strings and
woodwinds present the more delicate material that characterizes the children. The timbral distinctions suggest racial differentiation: the white girl is represented by instruments with brighter tone qualities, chiefly the B-flat clarinet, violin, and oboe, and the little black baby she is taking care of is symbolized through the darker yet still gentle timbres of the A-clarinet, bassoon, and bass (Example 2.7). The brass and percussion are not primarily associated with the children, but are heard mostly in conjunction with the opening vocal melody and motive from the A section, which appears buried within the texture (mm. 71-87). Even though the man is not mentioned in the text, the listener is reminded of the presence of his body, and his music continues to “stamp holes” in the children’s sunlight throughout the B section.

Other obvious musical elements allude to the poem’s intended message of indifference. The grand fanfare of the golden torrent of sunlight, now primarily in D major instead of D minor, comes to a crashing halt at m. 87. The song then quickly resumes, repeating the A section material. Though the music is immediately familiar when it resumes at m. 88, it has been transformed somewhat in its treatment of the black man’s melody and motive: the defining figure on the word “Nigger” returns, but it does not occur as frequently as before. This time, the sunlight’s music modulates away from D major to F-sharp major, and triumphantly prevails in spite of the holes that the black man creates with his body. As demonstrated in this final moment of the song, the cheerful image of the children playing sweetly in the sparkling sun functions as an ironic illustration of indifference that overshadows the black man.
Example 2.7: “Arabeske,” mm. 36-46.
Example 2.7—continued
Though very different in their presentation of the imagery, the two songs of Zemlinsky's *Sinfonische Gesänge* provide depictions of and reactions to lynching. The dichotomy of perspectives offered—one from within the scene and the other looking on from the outside—reflects the convoluted reactions toward the practice. Through both songs' symbolic use of motives and orchestration, “Lied aus Dixieland” musically expresses its lamenting persona’s grief, whereas “Arabeske” presents a depiction of deliberate social apathy toward the victim of a lynching. Because of the overwhelming prevalence of lynching imagery in the United States and abroad during the early twentieth century, Zemlinsky’s awareness of the practice is plausible. However, it is difficult to say what the composer personally thought about lynching because no comments exist in his writings and his musical settings present two conflicting views. Nonetheless, the topic encapsulates the solemn tone of the overall cycle, and reveals that the composer must have considered lynching a major issue in African-American culture to have included it so prominently in his song cycle.
CHAPTER III

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTRASTING MUSICAL STYLES AS USED IN THE

SINFONISCHE GESÄNGE

Zemlinsky’s Sinfonische Gesänge constructs African-Americans as exotic, as demonstrated by the stylistic characteristics of the songs discussed thus far. In most of the pieces in the cycle, the personas or characters are presented as distant Others who deal with issues that are largely beyond the composer’s own culture. However, the cycle’s construction of black American culture has additional depth in the two songs that depict common Romantic themes: the death of a loved one and disenchantment with life. The subjects of the songs “Totes braunes Mädel” and “Erkenntnis” are generally recognizable through their more lyrical, relatively refined style. The juxtaposition of the movements’ music with the poetic themes and primitivistic style of the other songs suggests that Zemlinsky’s representation of African-American culture that can be viewed as being more than merely exotic, and its individual members can undergo familiar emotional experiences like suffering and grieving.

While the collection reflects the Modernist aesthetic of its time particularly through its somber subject matter and highly chromatic tonal language, the Sinfonische Gesänge are constructed using the conventions of the Romantic song cycle. Drawing on preceding models of song cycles, the work exhibits cohesiveness through tonal relationships and subject matter. Although the cycle is not presented as a traditional narrative in which one character experiences a linear sequence of events, the songs appear as a series of various moments experienced by multiple
personas, and feature situations that are characterized through their alternating styles, either the primitive style or the lyrically refined style, both of which rely on illustrative orchestration and are enhanced by symbolic motivic development specific to each song. Thus, the overall work presents a representation of a culture through exotic situations and characters that are somewhat removed from Zemlinsky’s audience, yet also portrays them in a way that can be universally recognizable.

**Romantic Depictions of Loss and Disillusion**

Distinct from the other poems in the cycle, the texts of “Totes braunes Mädel” and “Erkenntnis” do not represent scenes that are exclusively associated with black Americans. As a result, the settings do not utilize the primitive musical tropes that characterize the other songs of the cycle. Rather, in these pieces, the expressive instrumentation and sensitive approaches to text setting are similar to techniques found in mid- and late-nineteenth-century Romantic Lieder, and are not necessarily exotic. The primary thematic material in each of these pieces is generally articulated through a lyrical melody, as opposed to the speech-like patter of text-declamation that is usually paired with short, shrill motives and a heavy use of percussion and brass, as heard in most of the previously discussed songs.

The poems “Totes braunes Mädel” and “Erkenntnis” depict two universal experiences: death and disillusionment. “Totes braunes Mädel,” a translation of Countée Cullen’s “A Brown Girl Dead,” describes the scene of a young girl’s funeral. The “black Madonna” is laid out in her finest white dress, adorned with white roses,

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83 The German texts and the original English texts of both songs are provided in Appendix A.
and surrounded by white candles; the white, religious imagery emphasizes the girl’s innocence, making her death even more devastating. Cullen’s original poem is a third-person narrative that shares the details of the event; Josef Luitpold’s German translation, however, puts an active character into the scene by changing the last line of the poem from “She’d be so proud she’d dance and sing/to see herself tonight,” to “Was wär das für Tanzen und Singen jetzt/Könntest du dich seh’n.” The modification allows someone to speak directly to the girl, and thus, creates the perspective of a grief-stricken viewer, even though the reader is not aware of who that person may be or what their relationship to the girl is.

Unlike most of the other poems in the collection, Anna Nussbaum’s German version of “Erkenntnis” stays very close to the content and structure of the original. Translated from Langston Hughes’ poem “Disillusion,” the poem features a speaker who longs to be cleansed from all of the city’s corruption: its darkness, its “wild laughter,” its “salty tears.” The persona expresses a sense of disappointment with the promises the city of Harlem supposedly offers and declares that he will not return to the city.

According to Antony Beaumont, the texts of “Totes braunes Mädel” and “Erkenntnis” may have resonated personally with Zemlinsky. In his biography of the composer, Beaumont describes the composer’s personal disenchantment during this time, and connects these songs to specific events in his life. “Totes braunes Mädel” was the first song of the collection to be composed in April of 1929, and its setting came shortly after the death of his first wife, Ida, who suffered from leukemia and died in January 1929. According to Beaumont, the dark girl of the poem represents
Zemlinsky’s wife and is a character that could also be connected to the dark maiden popularly found in German folk poetry.\textsuperscript{84} Langston Hughes’ “Disillusion” presents an internal conflict, and Zemlinsky was experiencing disenchantment with his career.\textsuperscript{85} His compositional progress had been involuntarily sidelined by his conducting duties for five years, increasing his resentment about the relative lack of appreciation for his creative work.\textsuperscript{86} Consequently, that these texts express emotions with which Zemlinsky could have identified personally may suggest why they are composed in a style strikingly different from the rest of the cycle.

Zemlinsky’s choice of orchestration in these particular pieces, specifically the use of solo woodwinds, demonstrates a stylistic connection to earlier examples of orchestral Lieder. Although the woodwind treatment is sometimes used to represent some exotic element, such as portraying sensuality in “Afrikanischer Tanz,” the instruments as used in these two songs suggest an emotional reaction to the textual content similar to the treatment of the oboe in “Lied aus Dixieland.” Zemlinsky’s emotive treatment of the woodwinds in his songs is strongly evocative of the woodwind melodies in some of the orchestral songs of Gustav Mahler, who frequently used the same type of instrumentation to create effects similar to what

\textsuperscript{84} Beaumont, 360-361.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid. However, as Beaumont asserts, the poem’s imagery is akin to that of the ghettos of Leopoldstadt, where Zemlinsky was raised, and of the slums of Prague, where he spent most of his career.

\textsuperscript{86} Gorell, 59-60. This fact was acknowledged and confirmed by the lack of a Festschrift that was expected to be published in 1931 for Zemlinsky’s sixtieth birthday; in 1932, Paul Stefan wrote an article recognizing the fact that Zemlinsky’s music was respected but not admired.
Zemlinsky produces in three songs of his cycle. The primary obbligato instrument in “Erkenntnis” recalls “Der Einsame im Herbst” from Das Lied von der Erde (Examples 3.1 and 3.2). The connection not only occurs through similar instrumentation, but in both of these songs, the solo oboe’s separation from the rest of the texture sonically symbolizes the isolation presented in the texts. Additionally, the imagery of dying autumn presented in “Der Einsame im Herbst” is no consolation for the persona’s weariness, just as the idyllic vision of Harlem fades away for the persona in “Erkenntnis.” By alluding to this known example of loneliness, the emotional content of Zemlinsky’s setting is highlighted, and can be recognized by a listener who is familiar with the previous song.

The solo woodwind melody in “Totes braunes Mädel” creates an effect analogous to that found in “Erkenntnis” and in Mahler’s Lieder. The sparse texture as well as the solo bassoon passage that opens this song somewhat resembles the beginning of the third song of Kindertotenlieder, “Wenn dein Mutterlein” (Examples 3.3 and 3.4). Even though Zemlinsky utilizes percussion and prominently features the bassoon as the main melodic instrument, and Mahler’s song contains the harp and uses the English horn most prominently, the orchestration is similar, especially the use of the woodwinds, horn, and low strings. The darker timbres of the

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87 Zemlinsky’s familiarity with and admiration of Mahler is well-documented, and the two composers were closely connected throughout their careers. Allusions to the older composer’s style and works are most evident in orchestral works and orchestral songs. For example, Zemlinsky’s opera, Es War Einmal..., the premiere of which was conducted by Mahler in 1900 at the Hofoper, adopts a motive found in Mahler’s Fourth Symphony; in fact, this musical material originated from the vocal melody of “Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen” of the Rückert Lieder, one of Mahler’s most famous songs. Moreover, throughout his entire career, Zemlinsky frequently conducted Mahler’s works, such as the Kindertotenlieder and Das Lied von der Erde. The latter of these ultimately became the “hallmark of [Zemlinsky’s] concert repertoire,” and has been considered to be a major, if not the greatest, influence on Zemlinsky’s most famous work, the Lyrische Symphonie. Beaumont, 224.
woodwind core of the ensemble and the contour of the bassoon line are comparable to that found in Mahler’s Lied, and produce the same affect of isolation and grief. Also, the possible reference to Mahler’s song, which depicts a father mourning for his daughter, is especially appropriate for the textual reference to the dead girl’s mother who mourns for her daughter in “Totes braunes Mädel.” The stylistic associations between the two songs inform the interpretation of the song by reinforcing the emotional pain of losing a daughter.

Example 3.1: “Erkenntnis,” mm. 1-10
Example 3.2: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, “Der Einsame im Herbst,”

mm. 1-23
Example 3.3: “Totes braunes Mädel,” mm. 1-10
Example 3.4: Mahler, *Kindertotenlieder*, "Wenn dein Mutterlein," mm. 1-8
In spite the influence of Mahler’s music, each song by Zemlinsky maintains its own distinctive formal construction, melodic style, and musical depictions of dramatic components particular to its scene. Both songs have loose ternary forms;
sections are created through changes in texture, orchestration, and tonality. The A
sections set the dismal tones for the piece and introduce the subject matter, and the
B sections portray sudden shifts in the narrative.

The solemn theme of death is represented throughout “Totes braunes Mädel”
by a dirge-like beat maintained in the percussion and brass, evoking a burial march.
The pulse is only interrupted at the song’s brief yet stirring emotional outburst
(Example 3.5, mm. 18-21). In the text, the narrator speaks directly to the dead girl,
wishing that she could now see herself in her beautiful burial gown for which her
mother sacrificed her ring. This emotional climax is marked by many distinct
stylistic elements. Tonally, the song stalls on a static enharmonically-spelled D-
minor chord. The shift in rhythmic and harmonic motion is also accompanied by a
drastic change in the vocal line; the lyrical melody that distinguishes the first part of
the song is abruptly transformed into a disjunct recitative that is declaimed over the
static chord. While the text of the poem ends here, the song does not. Instead, the
music from the previous section returns in order for the first line of the poem to
repeat. Although the repetition of previous material resolves the overall instability
of the passage, it also serves as a sober reminder to the narrator that the girl is still
dead.

The structural shift in “Erkenntnis” works in the same manner, even though
it depicts something entirely different. The passionate allure of Harlem described in
the poem comes to life in the B section of the song (Example 3.6, mm. 17-26). The
contemplative oboe melody, which is accompanied by strings in the A section, is
suddenly interrupted by an energetic beat in the trumpets, trombones, and low strings, recalling the lively pulse of the city. The driving beat of Harlem dominates this portion the song, and the seductively mocking flute melody dances along and “wildly laughs” as the vocal line literally weeps through the extended sighing gesture on the word “Tränen” (mm. 24-25). Eventually, textural and tonal stability are restored: the strings and oboe return as the persona vows to never return to the city. Yet, the recollection of Harlem exists in the lingering brass and woodblock parts of the final measures, suggesting that Harlem will not go away.

Example 3.5: “Totes braunes Mädel,” mm. 18-21
Example 3.6: “Erkenntnis,” mm. 17-25
The Effect of Two Musical Styles on the Interpretation of the Cycle

Instead of using one consistent musical style throughout his settings, variety and depth of African-American life is created with two contrasting styles. The topics of the texts the composer selected are exclusively about black Americans: every text mentions a recognizable aspect of African-American culture, whether it is lynching, slavery, or a specific place, such as Harlem or a night club. Only through the musical settings is the listener informed of what these texts and the characters within them are meant to represent within the cycle. The majority of the pieces depict a foreign Other who is far removed from Berlin society. However, instead of a series consisting of one primitivistic song after another, the texts and music demonstrate something deeper than superficial stereotypes by embodying universal experiences and the emotional reactions to them. In this sense, Zemlinsky’s representation still keeps the African-American as distant, but the personas are easier to relate to and thus, more accessible.

Even though there is no overarching story to the cycle, the arrangement of the songs does suggest a sense of cohesion in the work as a whole. Antony Beaumont attributes the arrangement in part to poetic relationships. In Beaumont’s analysis, Op. 20 appears as a dichotomy largely between light and dark that further translate into more specific emotions and states of being. Light emotions represent humility, repentance, and purification, while the dark embodies brutality, bereavement, and injustice. In the center separating the two is the state of disillusion, which is represented explicitly in the fifth song and acts as the
“asymmetrical axis to the whole cycle.” Beaumont positions each song in its position around a circle according to its tonality, which then corresponds to a set of emotions that are arranged to illustrate a dichotomy. He asserts that the idea of a duality within the work exists primarily because it is a common structure found in Zemlinsky’s oeuvre, citing his Op. 5 Lieder and his Second String Quartet as examples. However, besides the relationship of the first and final song’s D tonic, there are no other arguments made for harmonic relationships between other songs, nor does Beaumont discuss any other unifying factors.

Beaumont’s idea of a dichotomy that is focused around the theme of disillusion can be further extended by recognizing the composer’s deliberate use of musical styles in relation to poetic topics. The songs that feature a lyrical style are interspersed between ones that primarily portray the exotic black character through a primitivistic style. Additionally, the tempi used also alternate from song to song, further emphasizing the aural contrast between each piece (Figure 3.2). The tempo and style of each piece directly relate to their subject matter, and the large-scale contrast creates pairings between the songs of the cycle. The pairings do not always perform the same function: while some pairings may evoke similar...
Figure 3.1: Beaumont’s Diagram for the Overall Structure of the *Sinfonische Gesänge*

![Diagram]

Figure 3.2: Organization of the *Sinfonische Gesänge*, Op. 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lied aus Dixieland</td>
<td>A woman’s lamenting response to the lynching of her lover.</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>Sehrlangsam</td>
<td>Lyrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lied der Baumwollpacker</td>
<td>The song of a slave working in the fields.</td>
<td>a/b-flat</td>
<td>Schwer (massige)</td>
<td>Primitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totes braunes Mädél</td>
<td>The funeral of a young girl</td>
<td>e-flat</td>
<td>Langsam</td>
<td>Lyrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Übler Bursche</td>
<td>A wicked man who indulges in bad behavior because he is sad.</td>
<td>C/c</td>
<td>Lebhaft (muṣige)</td>
<td>Primitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erkenntnis</td>
<td>Distillation with the promises of Harlem and city life.</td>
<td>C/D</td>
<td>Auserst ruhig (poco Adagio)</td>
<td>Lyrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrikanischer Tanz</td>
<td>Allure of a woman dancing in a night club.</td>
<td>♭</td>
<td>Sehrlébhaft (d)</td>
<td>Primitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabeske</td>
<td>Children playing underneath a lynched body.</td>
<td>D/F#</td>
<td>Lebhaft, nicht z. schnell</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
emotions, others may only depict a similar scene or bring out the contrast between characters. However, the arrangement of the songs and the relationships between their styles, subject matter, and tempi provide more details that affect interpretation of each one's meaning.

The first two songs present the same feeling of powerlessness: the song of a lamenting woman, who cannot help that her lover is hanging in a tree, comes before the song of the slave, who is trapped working in the fields. Both personas reach out to God to help them rise above their misfortune, but their prayers go unanswered. Thus, they are forced to accept their fate for what it is, and both physically keep moving on, the woman walking away from the scene of the lynching and the man continuing his work in the field. The pairing between the third and fourth songs brings out the two main traits of the totes braunes Mädel and the übler Bursche: her innocence versus his evil. Because “Totes braunes Mädel” is heard before “Übler Bursche,” the imagery of the innocent and pure girl dressed in white stands out from the reckless and wicked behavior of the bad man. A third pairing occurs between “Erkenntnis” and “Afrikanischer Tanz,” in which both settings explore the enchantment of Harlem nightlife. One setting illustrates the scene negatively and the other positively, but both share common musical characteristics such as the strong percussive beat and sinuously sensual woodwind melodies that are intended to present similar locations.

In relation to the attributes of the other songs in the cycle (as illustrated in Figure 3.2), “Arabeske” appropriately serves as the anchor. It appears as a suitable conclusion for the entire work. It satisfies the pattern established in the cycle in its
use of both primitive and lyrical styles, which are layered in the B section of the
song, and its quick tempo. Also, its poetic content and tonality relate to the
beginning of the cycle. However, these traits, in addition to its major tonality and the
scene of children playing harmoniously below the man in the tree, superficially give
the impression that “Arabeske” concludes the *Sinfonische Gesänge* with a complete,
or even positive, ending.

Beaumont’s diagram places “Arabeske” on the side of brutality, bereavement,
and injustice. Even though this assignment gives some weight to his claim that the
general theme of the cycle is “disillusion,” the song’s placement on his spectrum
does not completely comply with his overall interpretation of its “hope.” In order to
reflect such a reading, the song would need to appear in between the two ends of
Beaumont’s spectrum since it would represent both the positive and negative
qualities demonstrated in the cycle. This placement would actually situate the song
within the category of disillusion, which is, in fact, a fitting interpretation for the
piece since the musical setting of text suggests social indifference. Neither is the
song happy nor does it suggest a sense of hope and betterment. Beaumont’s diagram
does not aptly provide a place for this song, and if he were to place it in the middle,
it would coincide with the placement of “Erkenntnis” and skew the axis.

According to Beaumont’s diagram and his conflicting interpretation of
“Arabeske,” the song does not appear to leave the cycle fully resolved. However, the
song’s harmonic structure, its subject matter and meaning, its use of both primitive
and lyrical styles, and its placement within the cycle demonstrates the large-scale
cyclicality of “Arabeske.” Given the similar topics and tonalities of the first and last
songs of Op. 20, the two pieces are actually connected. Thus, the lyrical D minor lament of “Lied aus Dixieland” responds to the primitive D major representation of the dead man in “Arabeske,” creating yet another pairing within the cycle. In this respect, the collection, despite its many tonal ambiguities and its lack of a linear narrative, operates as a true cycle.

Through the arrangement of the *Sinfonische Gesänge*, the work expresses one impression of what it meant to be African-American. The *Sinfonische Gesänge* do not depict one person’s individual story, but instead represent different components that delineate an idea of African-American life. According to the construction of the cycle, all of the characters within each song are part of a culture that is unified through its defining issues and characteristics, demonstrated through the connection of musical material and textual themes. The presentation of multiple personas and contrasting perspectives, the frequent utilization of ternary forms that repeat actions or significant messages within each song, and the deliberate juxtaposition of styles and tempi suggest a cyclical course for the entire work instead of a linear progression. Similar to the musical interpretation of “Arabeske,” which suggests that the socially indifferent reaction to lynching will persist, many of the experiences portrayed within the cycle are depicted in the music as situations that are frequently recurring for the work’s various characters; the woman in “Lied aus Dixieland” will continue to mourn, the slave will continue to work in “Lied der Baumwollpacker,” and the world of Harlem and the exhilarating nightlife will continue to excite some and torment others, as depicted in “Afrikanischer Tanz” and “Erkenntnis” respectively.
Although Zemlinsky’s typical compositional style can be considered an extension of a late Romantic idiom, his reliance on techniques commonly found in late nineteenth-century Lieder serves a different purpose in some of the *Sinfonische Gesänge*: to characterize universally experienced emotions. In the songs “Totes braunes Mädel” and “Erkenntnis,” as well as in “Lied aus Dixieland,” Romantic musical characteristics act like a topic in order to represent sorrowful emotions, such as love, loss, and disillusion. While the style itself is not ascribed any particular meaning, its treatment within the cycle to relate to the texts’ emotional content is similar to the application of primitivistic musical elements to suggest exotic stereotypes. Together, the arrangement of songs and their tonal, textual, and stylistic relationships not only create a cohesive musical work like any other Romantic song cycle, but they also reveal a telling description of how African-Americans were perceived in European culture.

**Conclusion**

Although Zemlinsky often selected foreign literature as the basis of many of his vocal works, he was embracing a new world in the *Sinfonische Gesänge*. With his Op. 20, Zemlinsky attempted to return to the musical scene after five years without a new composition by selecting contemporary texts that had already been set by a younger generation of composers, such as Erich Zeisl and Wilhelm Grosz. Even though the settings of younger composers were generally well-received, the prolonged delay in the publication of the *Sinfonische Gesänge* appears to have affected its reception. Therefore, by the time of its premiere in 1935, the work’s African-American subject was met with general neglect, if not actual disdain.
The composer’s depictions, however, are similar to Anna Nussbaum’s characterization of the African-American as stated in her preface to *Afrika Singt*. The songs do not “glorify the Negro,”91 but portray the complex heritage of African-Americans and the myriad of issues that they faced. The mood of the *Sinfonische Gesänge* implies that African-American life was not easy and carefree, but a continual struggle, a sober fact with which Zemlinsky may have identified. To the same extent that his settings of “Totes braunes Mädel” and “Erkenntnis” may reflect personal experiences, the entire cycle could be a representation of the composer’s sense of feeling oppressed.

Regardless, such biographical connections do not indicate that the work is about the composer himself. While the precise meaning of Zemlinsky’s composition is subjective, the songs themselves exist as an informative representation of African-American exoticism in the early twentieth century. The people represented in the cycle are not German or even European, but are of an entirely different world, and one that the composer’s culture happened to be fascinated by. Thus, the *Sinfonische Gesänge* render an exotic construction of black America as created and understood by its contemporary German audience.

However, the delicate crafting of the songs reveals that the collection is more than a creation inspired by a fashionable trend intended to attract listeners through its focus on African-American culture. Though his settings may seem insensitive or even racist to modern listeners, Zemlinsky presented a collection of characters intended to be recognized as African-American by his German audience. The black

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91 Nussbaum, 9.
American was viewed as being part of a distant culture that experienced situations and issues separate from Zemlinsky’s Austro-Germanic culture. The idea of the African-American as Other is portrayed through the composer’s use of well-established primitive musical topics that are characterized by a heavy use of brass and percussion as well as ostinati, dance rhythms and syncopation. Alternatively, the cycle suggests that black Americans responded to matters such as lynching, disillusionment, and death in ways similar to the cultivated German, as demonstrated by its use of a familiar, nineteenth-century Romantic Lied style created through lyrical melodies, fairly stable tonality, and a prominent use of solo woodwinds. Thus, through the Sinfonische Gesänge, a complex view of the African-American exotic Other is revealed.
### APPENDIX

**ORIGINAL POEMS AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS IN AFRIKA SINGT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Poem</th>
<th>German Poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song for a Dark Girl</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lied aus Dixieland</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way Down South in Dixie</td>
<td>Weit unten im Süden in Dixieland,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Break the heart of me)</td>
<td>O brich, mein Herz, o brich,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They hung my black young lover</td>
<td>Sie haben an einen Baum gehängt,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To a cross roads tree.</td>
<td>O Ärmster, Liebster, dich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way Down South in Dixie</td>
<td>Weit unten im Süden in Dixieland,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Bruised body high in air)</td>
<td>Zermalmt, von Wind umweht —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I asked the white Lord Jesus</td>
<td>Und ich hab den weißen Herrn Jesus gefragt:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the use of prayer?</td>
<td>Wozu, wozu noch Gebet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love is a naked shadow</td>
<td>Weit unten im Süden in Dixieland,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a gnarled and naked tree.</td>
<td>Ich leb, ich atme kaum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O Liebe — Nackter Schatten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An einem kahlen Baum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langston Hughes</td>
<td>Translated by Josef Luitpold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cotton Song</strong></th>
<th><strong>Lied der Baumwollpacker</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Come, brother, come. Let's lift it;</td>
<td>Komm, Bruder, komm. Pack an und roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come now, hewit! roll away!</td>
<td>Die Baumwollballen rund und voll.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shackles fall upon the Judgment Day</td>
<td>Es endet einmal noch die Plag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But let's not wait for it.</td>
<td>Wir warten nicht auf den jüngsten Tag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God's body's got a soul,</td>
<td>Die Baumwollballen walzen weich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodies like to roll the soul,</td>
<td>Den höllischen Weg ins Himmelreich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't blame God if we don't roll,</td>
<td>Und trittst du zu Jesus, Bruder, so sag:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come, brother, roll, roll!</td>
<td>Wir warten nicht auf deinen jüngsten Tag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton bales are the fleecy way,</td>
<td>Gab Gott dem Baumwollpacker die See,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weary sinner's bare feet trod,</td>
<td>Daß sie der andre martre und quäl?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softly, softly to the throne of God</td>
<td>Gott wird nicht grollen,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We aint agwine t' wait until th' Judgment Day!</td>
<td>Wenn wir nicht rollen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nassur; nassur,</td>
<td>Komm, Bruder, roll die Wolle, roll.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hump.</td>
<td>Translated by Josef Luitpold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eoho, eoho, roll away!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We aint agwine to wait until th' Judgment Day!&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Can't blame God if we don't roll,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Come, brother, roll, roll!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jean Toomer
A Brown Girl Dead

With two white roses on her breasts,
White candles at head and feet,
Dark Madonna of the grave she rests;
Lord Death has found her sweet.

Her mother pawned her wedding ring
To lay her out in white;
She'd be so proud she'd dance and sing
to see herself tonight.

Countee Cullen

Totes braunes Mädel

Schwarze Madonna hat sterben gemußt.
Tod hat sie geraubt.
Zwei weiße Rosen auf der Brust,
Weiße Kerzen zu Fuß und Haupt.

Deine Mutter hat ihren Ring versetzt,
Dich zu kleiden so weiß und so schön.
Was wär das für Tanzen und Singen jetzt,
Könntest du dich sehn.¹

Translated by Josef Luitpold

Bad Man

I'm a bad, bad man
'Cause everybody tells me so.
I'm a bad, bad man.
Everybody tells me so.
I takes ma meanness and ma licker
Everwhere I go.

I beats ma wife an'
I beats ma side gal too.
Beats ma wife an'
Beats ma side gal too.
Don't know why I do it but
It keeps me from feelin' blue.

I'm so bad I
Don't even want to be good.
So bad, bad, bad I
Don't even want to be good.
I'm goin' to de devil an'
I wouldn't go to heaben if I could.

Langston Hughes

Übler Bursche

Bin ein übler, übler Bursche,
Jeder hat mich auf dem Strich,
Bin ein Bursche, übel, übel,
Jeder schimpft auf mich.

Nur der Schnaps und die Schechtigkeit
Sind bei mir allezeit.

Hau mein Weib durch
Und das kleine Mädel,
Schalg hin, schag drauf,
Mädel, Frau, Frau, Mädel,
Muß immerzu prügeln,
Sonst hab ich den Dreh im Schädel.

Bin ein schlechter Tropf,
Will nichts anders sein!

Bin ein übler Bursche,
Will kein braver kerl sein!

Dem Teufel die Hand,
Freu mich auf seine Kohlen,
Möcht nicht in den Himmel hinein,
Auch wenn sie mich holen!

Translated by Hermann Kesser

¹ Zemlinsky changes the last two lines of the poem to “Was das für ein Tanzen und Singen wär/ Könntest du dich sehn” in his setting.
Disillusion

I would be simple again,
Simple and clean
Like the earth,
Like the rain,
Nor ever know,
Dark Harlem,
The wild laughter
Of your mirth
Nor the salt tears
Of your pain.
Be kind to me,
Oh, great dark city.
Let me forget.
I will not come
To you again.

Langston Hughes

Erkenntnis

Ich möchte wieder einfach sein,
Wie Erde,
Wie Regen
Einfach und rein;
O hätt ich nie gekannt
Dunkles Harlem,
Das wilde Lachen
Deiner Lust,
Die salzigen tränen
Deiner Pein.
Sei gut zu mir,
O große, dunkle Stadt.
Laß mich vergessen.
Ich will nicht wieder
Zurück zu dir.

Translated by Anna Nussbaum

Danse Africaine

The low beating of the tom-toms,
The slow beating of the tom-toms,
Low ... slow
Slow ... low---
Stirs your blood.
Dance!

A night-veiled girl
Whirls softly into a
Circle of light.
Whirls softly ... slowly,
Like a wisp of smoke around the fire---

And the tom-toms beat,
And the tom-toms beat,
And the low beating of the tom-toms
Stirs your blood.

Langston Hughes

Afrikanischer Tanz

Grollen die Tom-Toms,
Rollen die Tom-Toms,
Grollen,
Rollen,
Wecken dein Blut.
Tanz!

Nachtumhülltes Mädchen
Dreht sich leis
Im Lichterkreis,
Rauschwölkchen um das Feuer.

Und die Tom-Toms rollen
Und die tom-Toms grollen,
Rollen,
Grollen,
Wecken dein Blut.

Translated by Josef Luitpold
The little Irish girl,  
Red-headed — gray-eyed,  
In a blue little dress,  
A black baby  
With white lace...  
The little redhead  
Kisses  
With rosy red lips  
So tenderly  
The little black head  
Gray eyes smiling  
In black eyes.  
And the merry sunshine  
Laughs  
— Golden torrent...  

Down in Georgia  
High in the tree  
Rocks a nigger  
...Stamping holes in the  
Laughing sunlight —
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