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Title:

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Date:

2023

Citation:

Gabriel, J. (2023). From Acoustic Scenery to Sonic Dramaturgy: Music in Radio-Specific Drama of Weimar Republic Germany. Verhulst, P (Ed.). Mildorf, J (Ed.). Word, Sound and Music in Radio Drama, (1), pp.19-44. Brill.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/339384>

From Acoustic Scenery to Sonic Dramaturgy:  
Music in Radio-Specific Drama of Weimar Republic Germany

John Gabriel

Abstract: The introduction of public radio in Germany in 1923 sparked the ambition of a new kind of radio drama. While early efforts substituted visual elements of traditional drama like stage action and scenery with narration and sound effects, later producers sought to fundamentally reconceive drama for radio from a purely acoustic standpoint. In this chapter, I argue that music played a significant role in the development of this new ‘sonic dramaturgy.’ I demonstrate the role music played in conceptualizing the new approach to drama and examine the role of music theatre in early experimental and later large-scale works.

The 1923 debut of public radio in Weimar Republic Germany opened tantalising new opportunities for theater, both spoken and musical. As a mass medium, radio promised to expand audiences from a handful of elites with the means and inclination to regularly attend the theatre to the entire populace. In theory, anyone could tune in; in practice, radio remained the domain of the middle to upper-middle classes (see Ross 2011: 28). Radio broadcasting also posed new challenges. Among them, it laid bare the degree to which works written for the stage relied on scenery, stage action and other visual elements to convey essential information. For such works, a new, purely acoustic approach to ‘staging’ needed to be developed. This realisation inspired others to advocate for the creation of an entirely new form of radio-specific, purely acoustic theatre.

In the early years of German radio, stations initially compensated for the lack of a

visual element by adding naturalistic sound effects throughout works: characters entering and leaving scenes were accompanied by the sounds of opening and closing doors; characters in motion were indicated with footsteps; scenes set on ships had continuous background sounds of splashing waves. The term for this practice, *akustische Kulisse* (acoustic scenery), reflected its function: as a substitute for the visual elements of stage productions. Pervasive use of acoustic scenery quickly fell out of favour as it became clear that listeners did not need constant sonic reinforcement: if it was clear from the spoken text that a character was walking, the sound of footsteps was superfluous; the sound of splashing water at the start of a scene alone was enough to indicate the location without continuing it throughout. Too much acoustic scenery distracted listeners from the text, exhausted their ears and constrained their imaginations.

Responses to this realisation can be roughly divided into three broad trends. In the first, acoustic scenery was reduced to only those moments necessary for listeners' comprehension, but it remained scenery: naturalistic reproduction of sounds that supplemented the text and did not challenge the text's status as primary conveyer of meaning. In the second, all sound effects (and sometimes all music) were stripped from the production and only the text was read. When broadcasting works originally written for the stage, certain key information about the dramatic events was lost, but this was considered preferable to supposedly corrupting the text with narration, sound effects, etc. New radio-specific works in this format sought to convey all necessary information via the text alone. The most common labels for this approach were *Wortspiel* (word play), *Worthörspiel* (word radio play), or *literarisches Hörspiel* (literary radio play). In the final approach, sound effects and music were elevated to equal partners with the text, each carefully conceived as independent carriers of information that, in combination, provided a complete aural representation of the dramatic action. I call this approach *sonic dramaturgy*.

Speculative discourse about sonic dramaturgy and isolated works that attempted to realise it go back to the first years of German radio, but it was only in the years 1928 and 1929 that sustained practical experimentation began.<sup>1</sup> There are many reasons for this delayed start. Technology had, in the words of one critic, only just reached the point of “basic tolerability” (Hernried 1930: 39). Additional factors included larger budgets, as the number of radio subscribers increased, and changes in personnel. In the early years of radio, stations’ theatre departments were dominated by established figures from spoken stage theatre who were gradually replaced by new personnel with more practical radio experience and a desire to explore the unique possibilities radio offered.

When sustained experimentation began, it took three main forms. The first preserved the model of the spoken stage play, but gave music and sound effects a greater role. The second was as sonic montage, generally constructed of a series of short scenes that might include dramatic sketches, musical numbers and reportage (actual or imitation reporting from outside the studio, like sports broadcasts, political debates, or ‘roaming microphones’ visiting zoos, factories, train stations, etc.). These scenes could be performed live or played from recordings. While scholars have explored the influence of silent film on this approach, the important role of music and music theatre has been largely overlooked. The third was radio-specific music theatre, which built on the integration of music and text in stage genres like opera as a prototype for sonic dramaturgy.<sup>2</sup> In modern scholarship, radio music theatre has been treated as a purely musical phenomenon that developed in parallel to approaches based in sonic montage. Intersections between the two, as well as the important role of text and sound effect in radio-specific music theatre, have equally been under-examined.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christiane Timper (1990: 17–18) chronicles a number of such works from the early years of radio in Germany, but as Solveig Ottmann notes, Hans Flesch, then Intendant at the Frankfurt station and soon to become Intendant at the Berlin station, claimed in 1928 that “he had not yet heard a radio work ‘that did not turn out to be a disguised stage play that had eliminated its optical element’” (qtd. in Ottmann 2013: 346). All translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> This approach was especially championed by Hans Flesch and Ernst Schoen at the Frankfurt and later Berlin stations. For a focussed examination of their work and biographies, see Ottmann (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Timper, for example, excludes the sonic montage experiments of Fritz Walter Bischoff and the Breslau station (cf.

Additionally, the history of radio-specific music theatre in Weimar Germany usually cuts off in 1930 or early 1931, as works that were specifically labeled *music* theatre (or related labels, like radio opera) fell off.<sup>4</sup> The enduring influence of radio-specific music theatre on the sonic dramaturgy of radio works not explicitly labeled ‘musical’ has been under-appreciated.

In this chapter, I argue that music played a significant role in the development of sonic dramaturgy in radio-specific works throughout the Weimar Republic. My argument has two parts. First, I demonstrate the role that music played in conceptualising the new function of text, sound effect and music, as well as in their combination on a micro-level. Then, I examine the role of music theatre in the more sustained practical experimentation with sonic dramaturgy in the second half of the Weimar Republic and its impact on the development of large-scale works with sonic dramaturgy. I show how both the experience of adapting stage music theatre to radio and of creating radio-specific music theatre impacted approaches to sonic dramaturgy not only in specifically musical works, but also in montage works and those more closely modelled on spoken theatre.

### Music as Metaphor

On the most basic level, advocates of sonic dramaturgy drew on music as a metaphor for their ambitions of a purely sonic artwork. One of the earliest and most vocal of such advocates, critic Hans Siebert von Heister, claimed in 1926 that “pure radio art is absolute, like music” (qtd. in Stoffels 1997b: 943). Such analogies remained current through the end of the Weimar period. Critic Rudolf Arnheim argued in his 1933 book *Rundfunk als Hörkunst (Radio: An*

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1990: 44).

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Stoffels, for example, argues that “the musical radio play must be considered a central radio-specific genre” but does not pursue its legacy after 1930–1931 (1997b: 939).

*Art of Sound*) that “as a purely acoustic art, [radio] is much more closely related and connected to music than to other acoustic arts (sound film, theater)” (22f.).

Two specific musical metaphors are revealing. The first is the symphony as a reference for a non-narrative, abstract collection of sounds that was considered meaningful and achieved the status of an artwork.<sup>5</sup> Von Heister, for example, described “the new radio play” as a “symphony of sounds [*Klangsymphonie*]” (qtd. in Schneider 1984: 17). Creators of radio works also designated their works ‘symphonies’ to lend credibility to new and unfamiliar formal structures. The most influential example of this was Fritz Walther Bischoff’s *Hallo! Hier Welle Erdball!* (*Hello! Station Planet Earth Calling!*), produced at the Breslau station in 1928. The work is usually labeled a *Hörfolge*, or acoustic scenic montage: it is a montage of individual scenes, or *Hörbilder*, that take the listener on a world tour by dropping in on fictional radio broadcasts from around the globe, including a soccer match, news reports, a dispatch from a jungle expedition and music. Bischoff, however, initially labelled the work a *Hörspielsinfonie*, or radio play symphony.

Bischoff’s use of the word symphony had multiple references. As was widely discussed at the time, it linked his sonic montage to Walter Ruttmann’s 1927 film *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*), a montage of documentary footage of urban life and technology in the city of Berlin. But as critic Herbert Urban noted, both Bischoff’s and Ruttmann’s uses of the word symphony also drew on associations with the musical genre. Exploring the appropriateness of the metaphor, Urban first notes that the *Hörspiel* (radio play or radio work) component of *Hörspielsinfonie* was not entirely accurate. “*Hör-Film-Symphony*” or acoustic film symphony would be more appropriate, due to the work’s montage form and debt to film. Urban considers the reference to the symphony, however, to be apt. The term, he explains, refers to “something a priori musical, traditional”,

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<sup>5</sup> This way of understanding the artistic treatment of sound effects continues into postwar scholarship on Weimar German radio (cf. Würffel 1978: 14).

and specifically to “something cohesive” (1928: 490). Such a claim to formal unity defended against criticism that montage-based works consisted of randomly thrown-together sounds, or, in Ruttmann’s case, images. Urban, however, does not push the symphony metaphor any further than to claim that both Ruttmann’s film and Bischoff’s *Hör-Film-Symphony* evince formal unity, provided in the former by “the red thread of the progression of a work day”, and in the latter by its “topicality [*Aktualität*]” (ibid.). The musical means by which symphonies are generally considered to form coherent wholes, like motivic development or harmonic schemes, are not mentioned.

Second, opera’s integration of music and text, and of sonic and visual dramaturgy, made it an attractive metaphor for the combination of music, text and sound effect on radio. The most obvious example of this was the anachronistic adoption of the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* in radio discourse. *Gesamtkunstwerk* refers to a specifically Wagnerian approach to opera, but the only aspect of it that was really taken up in radio discourse was a vague sense of the integration of all the elements of stage opera: music, text and staging. Carl Hagemann, for example, argued:

The pure radio work [...] will likely make use of all acoustically effective means, from primitive noises, to all possibilities of musical expression, to the enlivened word in spoken or sung passages. The pure radio work will, to all appearances, be an acoustic *Gesamtkunstwerk*. (1928b: 231)

Similarly, Bischoff described his experiments with sonic dramaturgy as “continuations of the idea of the radio work as the creation of an acoustic *Gesamtkunstwerk*” (qtd. in Wittenbrink 1997b: 1174), and von Heister claimed that “a radio work should be pure radio art, in which sound effect, music, and words work together and form a *Gesamtkunstwerk* like the opera”

(Stoffels 1997b: 943). Regardless of whether all opera constituted a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the role of music in opera led some in the early years of radio to believe that stage opera would require little adaptation for radio broadcast. Composer and radio critic Kurt Weill, for example, argued in 1925 that

[adapting stage spoken theatre for radio] creates so many difficulties, but also so many new possibilities, that certainly sooner or later a new genre of acoustic theatre will develop. The opera, however, is capable of continuing to broadcast existing works from the operatic literature. It can make use of the panacea of music, which is able to portray and paint all the outer and inner events of the plot, the dramatic and the emotional. (1925/2000b: 275)

The naivety of Weill's initial claim was quickly proven by the experience of broadcasting stage opera. While operatic music often provides the "inner" or "emotional" insight as Weill describes, listeners soon realised that it does not consistently provide the kinds of "outer" or "dramatic" information that Weill himself notes are lost when stage spoken theatre is broadcast, like "stage decoration, gestures, and costumes, [...] the entire involvement of the eye" (ibid.). Indeed, two years later, Weill (1927/2000b: 347) described Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*, 1876) as poorly suited to the radio precisely because, as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the visual elements of the work played an essential role that was lost in radio broadcast.

Opera broadcasting in Germany took two forms: live broadcasts from opera houses and live broadcasts from radio studios.<sup>6</sup> The latter allowed stations more leeway to adapt

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<sup>6</sup> Broadcast from recordings was initially not possible for technical reasons. The first opera to be played from recording on German radio was *La Bohème* (1896) on 1 March 1929. After the technology was developed, it remained controversial. Radio's liveness was considered by many to be one of its defining features, and playing from records as a cost-cutting measure was criticised for putting musicians out of work. See Stoffels (1997a: 714–

operas for radio, but in both cases a variety of strategies emerged to compensate for the lost visual information, with no single solution finding universal acceptance. A major question was whether to use narration to compensate for radio's lack of visual information. While this was also an issue when broadcasting spoken theatre, opera's musical content posed an additional challenge. Most stations were loath to modify an opera's musical score beyond cuts for length.<sup>7</sup> As Renate Schumacher notes, "the aesthetic quality" of opera was thought to "lie primarily in the audible", as opposed to spoken theatre, where it lay "in the visible" (1997: 1198). Adding narration to opera was thus especially tricky.

In its bluntest form, narration in broadcasts of spoken theatre involved a voice reading a play's stage directions (cf. Wittenbrink 1997a: 1041–1044). Such interruptions would occur wherever the stage directions appeared, including mid-scene. Opera made such a technique impossible, as the music regulated the pace. Interjecting such narration required disrupting the score, either pausing the music or adding narration as voice-over. Substantial reconfiguration to allow narration to play a greater role, as in the *Opernquerschnitt*, a genre we will return to below, was controversial, and narration was therefore usually only inserted where breaks in the music already occurred, primarily between acts. This points to music's two key contributions to the development of sonic dramaturgy. First, music's regulation of the pace of opera became a model for the coordination of the elements of sonic dramaturgy. Second, the strategies developed to add narration to opera created new formal models for radio works with sonic dramaturgy.

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<sup>7</sup> It was quickly determined that it was more difficult for radio listeners of both spoken and music theatre to maintain concentration than audiences at a staged performance. In radio discourse, this was largely attributed to the audio-only nature of the medium, which required the ear to do all the work instead of dividing the work over the ear and the eye. For opera and music theatre, 90 minutes was generally agreed to be the maximum a listener could maintain focus (cf. Ettinger 1931: 110).

## Music as Acoustic Regulator

In 1929, composer Walter Gronostay penned text and music to the *musikalische Hörspiel*, or musical radio play, *Mord (Murder)*. This work tells the story of a factory director who discovers his wife in bed with another man, kills them both, and then goes on the run from the police. With the exception of an extended imitation of a radio news report at the end, the work is scored musically throughout. Text is either sung or its spoken rhythm is exactly indicated. No sound effects are used, but certain key noises, like the revving up of a car's motor, are imitated in the orchestra or by the chorus. *Mord* was one of the first commissions of the Berlin station in its brief effort to support the development of sonic dramaturgy by calling for specifically *musical* radio-specific theatre. The rationale for such a musical campaign was captured by Gronostay in an article introducing the work, in which he claimed that his initial motivation had not been to compose a specifically *musical* work, but rather that he turned to music "as an acoustic regulator" (1929: 1429).

Music's ability to serve as an acoustic regulator was made possible by a new understanding of the other sonic elements of radio works – sound effects and the sounds of language – as musical. Looking back on the development of sonic dramaturgy, Arnheim described "the rediscovery of the musical sounds within noise and language" as the first step in the process of the "combining of music, noise, and language into a unified sonic material" (1933/1979: 22). After such a rediscovery, "music recommends itself to [radio] as a wonderful aide to work out the pure formal characteristics of its building materials [i. e. the unified sonic material]" (ibid.: 23). On the one hand, music was a way of understanding the new role of sound effects and the sounds of language as independent carriers of meaning. On the other hand, thinking of sound effects and the sounds of language as musical opened new ways of conceiving, notating, rehearsing and performing them.

Let us consider the reconceptualisation of sound effects first. In the commonplace and over-determined dichotomy of noise as meaningless and music as meaningful, sound effects had previously fallen into the category of noise. They were considered incapable of carrying independent meaning and thus relegated to reinforcing meaning created by the text.

Advocates of sonic dramaturgy sought to elevate sound effects to the category of meaningful. Critic and author Rudolf Leonhard, for example, argued in 1928:

Sound effects [...] must [...] not be accompaniment, nor generically applied stock sounds [*Akzidenz*], but also not explanatory. Rather [they must be] the expression itself. [...] They must not be scenery, they should not stand on the sidelines, but rather in the center of the action. (161f.)

Typical of such advocates, Leonhard drew on music. In his schema, music was the “most organised and greatest example” of a sound effect. His emphasis on music’s organisation here is notable, and he writes that all sound effects should aim to achieve music’s level of organisation. This idea also informed experimental sound-effect devices that sought to achieve the same nuanced and precise production of sound effects that instruments did for music.<sup>8</sup> For example, Hamburg radio producer Hans Bodenstedt reported in 1927 on his station’s efforts to develop a sound machine “that makes it possible to bring forth the most complicated sounds as if from an organ with registers at every needed volume” (qtd. in Stoffels 1997b: 943). Discussing this machine, scholar Ludwig Stoffels notes that its purpose

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<sup>8</sup> The reconceptualisation of sound effects as music bears certain similarities to avant-garde music of this period, especially Italian Futurism and the work of Luigi Russolo. The invention of a sound effect organ furthers this similarity, as Russolo spent some time in the late 1920s living in Paris and working on a sound organ for use accompanying silent film (cf. Davies 2017: 256). Although the general ideas of Italian Futurism and descriptions of Russolo’s noise music were well-circulated, it is unclear what, if any, exposure German sound technicians or others involved in sonic dramaturgy had to specific Futurist manifestos, works, or noise makers. It is therefore difficult to speak of any specific influence of Italian Futurism on German radio. There is, however, evidence that German radio sonic dramaturgy directly influenced Futurist approaches to radio (cf. Berghaus 2007: 109).

was the “rhythmicisation and musicalisation of sound effects” (ibid.). Meaningfulness was thus linked to control and precision, qualities that music was thought to exemplify.

Another regularly recurring idea was that ‘naturalistic’ sound effects could be supplemented or even replaced by ‘stylised’ sound effects produced on musical instruments. Critic Robert Weege, for example, argued that “the music of radio works” should be “stylised sound effects, divested of their actual sounds and recreated as musical [*tönend*] and rhythmic sonic-structures [*Tongebilde*]” (qtd. in Timper 1990: 31). Meanwhile, Carl Hagemann, Intendant of the Berlin station, wrote that “one should use naturalistic sound effects in radio works as little as possible,” but that stylisation “elevated sound effects into the sphere of artistic expression” (1928a: 309). We can see how the musicalisation of sound effects provided a framework for their combination and manipulation in one of the earliest radio works with sonic dramaturgy, *Bellinzona*, written by theatre director Rolf Gunold in 1924.<sup>9</sup> Gunold’s colleague Alfred Braun recalled that Gunold sought to sonically portray a recent real-life train crash “without connecting dialogue” (Braun 1968: 43). Instead, he based the work primarily around sound effects and music that imitated the sounds of trains. In line with trends we have already seen, the work was often described as a “symphony” (ibid.). In his review of the work, Kurt Weill emphasised the specific musical techniques employed by Gunold. This included “six different pedal points taken from acoustic recordings of speeding trains that follow each other or overlap like musical motives”, “words, calls and ‘gestures’ [that] grow from a friendly allegro over an anxious foreboding andante to a raging prestissimo”, and “the terribly shrill dissonances of the collision” (1925/2000a: 280). As we will see, musical terminology for qualities like tempo and dynamics were widely adopted to discuss other sonic phenomena on radio.

Sonic dramaturgy also required a new sonic understanding of text, involving both the

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<sup>9</sup> Theresia Wittenbrink notes that von Heister, an early advocate of sonic dramaturgy, called *Bellinzona* “a ‘trailblazer’ of the radio play that was not recognised and supported early enough” (1997b: 1163).

sounds produced when speaking and the sonic qualities of the voice itself.<sup>10</sup> Arnheim went so far as to argue that “in works for radio, the sound of the word is more important [...] than the meaning of the word” (1933/1979: 20). This new focus on language as sound was also shared by advocates of text-only radio works, who believed that greater attention to the sonic qualities of language and voice would help obviate the need for sound effects and music. Hermann Kesser, for example, argued: “The best acoustic scenery is not made by noises, but rather by the voice, by the characteristic voice, the distinguishable voice, the modulatory, vibrating voice. [...] In radio, we need voices that can create an atmosphere” (1931/1984: 189). Music played an important role in this new understanding of the voice for advocates of both word-only and sonic dramaturgy. Kesser, to name one, attributed Alfred Braun’s status as “one of the best radio speakers in the German language-zone” to Braun’s background in music (ibid.: 190). This lent Braun a diverse range of advantages, from a better ability to manage tempo and pacing, to “a powerful, musically-disciplined and highly-nuanced breath control” (ibid.). Musical practice also became a model for directing speech on radio. Arnheim claimed that there was “no proper terminology” for speech direction and lamented that “it is only vaguely known” among directors of spoken radio plays “how one can work with musical terms” for qualities like the tempo, volume and phrasing of speech (1933/1979: 24).

Such musical approaches to the voice impacted the way authors shaped their texts. Arnheim advocated a musical model for the assignment of voices to roles and the order of scenes with attention to both timbre and range. For timbre, he advocates thinking of voices as resembling the sounds of instruments: “the long-windedness [and] powerfulness of the deep brass [...] twanging, inhibition, [and] thinness of the woodwinds” (ibid.: 26). Authors could make use of the associations vocal timbres carry to inform listeners about a character’s

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<sup>10</sup> Also at play here was radio’s connection to the development of sound poetry. For example, Kurt Schwitters adapted and performed his “Sonate in Urlauten” (“Sonata in Primordial Sounds,” originally written 1923) for the Stuttgart station in 1932.

personality or motivations. The other component of voice was range, “like in music, [...] soprano, alto, tenor, bass” (ibid.: 30). Arnheim argued that one of the primary structural goals in the form of a radio work should be contrast and variation, and that this variation is achieved at three levels: first in the assignment of voice types to characters, second by building each scene around contrasting voice types, and finally in the ordering of scenes so that different combinations of voice types come to the fore. Arnheim also cautioned that pairing similar voices together was difficult, but could work when “for example two basses [...] are fiercely fighting each other” (ibid.: 30f.). Meanwhile, Carl Hagemann noted that such contrasts among voices could also help make clear when characters enter and leave a scene. He further extended this newly-musical understanding of language and the voice to blur the line between speech and singing. This could be achieved with a more flexible division between speech and song, as well as “spoken-singing [*Sprechgesang*] (or even singing) with instrumental accompaniment [...] during emotionally heightened outbursts – during dramaturgically important moments in the dialogue – at the high points of the scenic progression” (1928b: 231).

In addition to the musicalisation of sound effects and speech, sonic dramaturgy also necessitated an expanded role for music in radio works. The original role of music in acoustic scenery, as described by Alfred Braun, one of its leading proponents at the Berlin station, was “for the clarification of the interior and exterior situation of a scene, for the characterisation of a particular setting [and] for the underscoring of dialogue” (1929/1950: 150-51).

Advocates of sonic dramaturgy, however, were interested in exploring ways that music could be used to provide greater structural unity and additional levels of meaning. One early example of this, which seems not to have caught on, was developed by Bischoff, the Intendant at the Breslau station. In a 1926 radio adaptation of Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck* (1836–1837, unfinished), he and director Viktor Heinz Fuchs replaced acoustic scenery with

“symbolic sound illustration” provided by a solo clarinet (Wittenbrink 1997a: 1088). A more influential early contribution was Kurt Weill’s music to a 1926 radio adaptation of Christian Dietrich Grabbe’s 1822 play *Herzog Theodor von Gothland*. In the words of a critic identified only as Dr. C. St.: “Kurt Weill’s music blazes a new path [...]. It avoids programmatic underscoring, like leitmotivic characterisation, and concerns itself only with elements of the overarching plot.” (1926: 2580) Weill’s music met the plot “on the magical level of meaningful content and thus achieves a synthesis that will be of enduring importance for playwriting and composition” (ibid.). One example of how Weill achieved this was a textless chorus whose music provided a kind of detached observation and commentary on the action, like “the chorus of an ancient tragedy” (ibid.). Meanwhile, emotional impact was heightened with strategic mixing of speech and music. For example, switching from singing back to speech “in the beautiful song, whose verse the castaway woman speaks while the saxophone takes over the melody” brought the work “to a harrowing highpoint” (ibid.). Weill’s approach bears many similarities to the kinds of innovations he and other composers associated with the New Objectivity in music were pursuing in their music theatre for the stage, where he also sought to give music a more independent role and a more critical, detached relationship to the plot.<sup>11</sup> We will return to this below.

After sound effect and voice had been musicalised and the role of music had been expanded, musical notation provided a means of planning and realising their combination. Specifically musical works like *Mord*, discussed above, or Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith’s frequently discussed example *Der Lindberghflug* (*Lindbergh’s Flight*, 1929), made use of actual musical notation with imitations of sound effects composed into the musical parts.<sup>12</sup> In Paul Hindemith and Robert Seitz’s *Sabinchen* (*Little Sabine*, 1930),

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<sup>11</sup> On New Objectivity and stage opera in the Weimar Republic, see Cook (1988: 27–39) and Grosch (1999: 101–180).

<sup>12</sup> This work went through multiple revisions and name changes. Its final version (without Hindemith’s music) is known as *Der Ozeanflug* (*The Flight across the Ocean*).

traditional sound effects were notated in the score in a manner reminiscent of percussion parts. In less thoroughly musical works, musical notation also provided a model for how to coordinate all the sonic elements of a work. In an article introducing his work *Ballade von der Stadt* (*Ballad of the City*, 1928), author Theodor Csokor described the necessity of developing a “sonic score [*Geräuschpartitur*]” to accompany his script “line by line” (1928/1984: 156f.) This terminology was also picked up by critic Alfred John, who described the scripts for the experimental scenic montages of the Breslau station like *Hallo! Hier Welle Erdball!* as “radio play scores [*Hörspielpartituren*]” (1929: 3).

Musical notation could also help in the planning of sonic montages for radio. Noises could be transcribed into musical notation or a close approximation thereof, which was then cut and pasted to mock-up the final product. This process was essential in complex sonic montages, including perhaps the most complex sonic montage produced in Weimar Republic Germany: Walter Ruttmann’s *Weekend* from 1930. *Weekend* was a sonic sibling to Ruttmann’s film *Berlin: Die Sinfonie einer Großstadt*. This time, Ruttmann used sound film to record sounds, but not images, from around Berlin. He then cut and reordered segments of the film to create a loose narrative of a weekend in Berlin, from the end of work on Friday to the start of the workday on Monday with an excursion to a lake in between. As he planned out the work, Ruttmann transcribed the recorded sounds onto a music staff (albeit with only three lines), which enabled him to capture key elements like shape, gesture and rhythm (cf. Goergen 1989: 130f.).

The use of notation was not just a practical means of organising sonic events, but also a physical representation of the musical way of thinking considered necessary to create a coherent sonic dramaturgy. While there were a handful of composers, like Walter Gronostay, who were successful sole-creators of radio works with sonic dramaturgy, the more revealing examples are sole-creators from other domains, like Ruttmann and Bischoff. Writing about

the creation of *Weekend*, for example, while Ruttmann claimed that his primary guide in the process was “simple instinct”, he also admitted that his process in assembling the work followed “similar rules to those of music” (qtd. in Eisner 1930/1989: 130f.) Meanwhile, a film critic identified only as Christophor described sound in the work playing an unfamiliar “dual role”: “the sounds come from *reality*, but have also been processed *musically*” (1930/1989: 132). The need for such a musical sensibility also spurred a new valorisation of collaboration between writers, composers and sound technicians/directors. Critic Jochen Klepper, for example, wrote that “the writer of a radio word play [*Worthörspiel*] should come from poetry, [and] the author of the sound radio play [*Geräuschhörspiel*] from music.” (1931–1932/1984: 193) Klepper justifies this distinction by noting that the latter “must be able to work as easily with the rolling of a diesel train, the rattling of machines, the roaring of the wind and the chirping of birds as the conductor of an orchestra is [able to work] with his different instrumental voices” (ibid.). Von Heister, meanwhile, described the “creator” of works with sonic dramaturgy as “simultaneously a poet of musical tones [*Ton*] and words” (qtd. in Schneider 1984: 17). Nevertheless, such collaboration still required a heightened musical sensibility from each participant. As Arnheim describes, “the author, who only writes plot and text and leaves it to the director to translate this piece of literature into the language of sound [...], is useless” (1933/1979: 123). Indeed, this is the process described by Csokor above. His radio scripts included detailed “technical notes” of the sounds or music required, which he then relied on composers and sound technicians to translate into a sound score (1928/1984: 156f.).

Musical understandings further influenced the assembly of sonic dramaturgy in how formal coherence was created across a radio work. Drawing from music, there were two primary ways to do this. The first involved the consistent use and development of recognisable motives (via concepts like motivic work, developing variation or Wagnerian

*leitmotifs*). The second involved the use of specific music-dramatic forms. While we have seen how musical forms like the symphony or *Gesamtkunstwerk* were used as vague metaphors, we will return to the way specific music dramatic forms were adopted below. Before that, let us consider how a musical conception of motivic unity was translated to sonic dramaturgy.

At least as early as 1925, von Heister introduced the idea that sonic dramaturgy should be built around “a unifying theme, a persistent auditory motif that tied the work together” (Jelavich 2006: 84). At the end of the Weimar period, Arnheim developed this idea at length: “A *Hörspiel* should have a sonically graspable basic motive.” (1933/1979: 28f.) This basic or “sonic motive” should “strongly follow the content” of the work and manifest across all its sonic elements: speech patterns, sound effects and music (ibid.). Arnheim relates this practice to that of the Wagnerian *leitmotif* (as with *Gesamtkunstwerk*, this term was widely and loosely used) (ibid.: 100). As an example, Arnheim uses a radio play based on the story of the Golem with a “hollow, groping” sonic motive (ibid.: 29f.). This motive “does not simply involve the sound of the Golem’s voice or the Golem’s style, but rather much more generally translates the character of the Golem into sound” (ibid.) In another example, a sound effect is established to have a certain meaning. Arnheim cites an unnamed play in which a ticking clock is the sole sound effect at a character’s mother’s house. This sound then assumes the meaning of a feeling of comfort and security the character feels there. Once this meaning is established, it can then be recalled, like a reminiscence motive, throughout the work (cf. ibid.: 67) Furthering the musical model, Arnheim also calls for a contrasting secondary motive or motives to highlight the conflict that drives the drama (cf. ibid.: 30).

Returning to our discussion of narration above, let us turn to how efforts to adapt stage opera to radio, specifically by creating spaces for narration, shaped the discourse and practice of sonic dramaturgy. In both spoken theatre and opera, critics were divided over whether narration was an unacceptable intrusion into the existing work, a regrettable necessity or a completely acceptable (even positive) feature of the new medium. For instance, radio executive and advocate of an explicitly musical approach to sonic dramaturgy Ernst Schoen believed narration to be a viable option for opera broadcasts, but musicologist and critic Ludwig Misch complained that it brought the opera “into the realm of the epic, the oratorio” (1931a: 378). This, in turn, led Misch to consider the possibility that “the oratorio – in the history of its development known to be the twin of the opera free from the stage – may prove itself to be the form most appropriate to the presentation of a plot set to music on the radio” (ibid.; see also Schoen 1934).

Misch was hardly the first to suggest that the oratorio was well-suited to radio’s audio-only format. One of the earliest arguments for the oratorio as a radio-appropriate genre came from Wilhelm Heinitz in 1924. After dismissing “spoken drama, spoken theatre, opera, and operetta” as unfit for radio, he boasted: “In Hamburg, the radio has recently conquered a new realm (of music), namely, the oratorio. We believe that the strengths of the radio on the musical-artistic side lie here” (373f.). Heinitz derived this argument from a vocal defence of narration. For him, strategies that subsumed information traditionally conveyed visually, like setting or stage action, into dialogue or monologue were insufficient. He argued that “we do not trust [a speaker] when he admits to standing before us as an actor,” but that “we [do] trust him, when he stands before us as a narrator” (ibid.: 373).

Advocacy for the oratorio bloomed in the late 1920s alongside the first sustained wave of experimentation in sonic dramaturgy and radio-specific music theatre. Critic Richard

Stein, for example, criticised the call for new radio-specific genres as reinventing the wheel. Playing on the fact that the most commonly used German word for radio play, *Hörspiel*, did not include the term “radio [*Radio-* or *Funk-*]” but instead the term “acoustic [*Hör-*]”, he claimed: “An acoustic(/radio) play [*Hörspiel*] has already existed for centuries, that is, the *oratorio*. [...] If one really wants to create a musical play specifically for radio, one must in all cases begin with the secular oratorio” (1928: 567). Indeed, as radio stations began commissioning radio-specific music theatre in the late 1920s, a number of composers turned to the oratorio and related genres, like the cantata. For example, Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith’s *Der Lindberghflug* was alternately labeled a *Lehrstück*, radio cantata and even “sport oratorio [*Sport-Oratorium*]” (Steinhard 1929: 216). Hanns Eisler and Ernst Toch composed radio cantatas – *Tempo der Zeit* (*Tempo of the Times*) and *H2O*, respectively – and Erwin Schulhoff dubbed his radio-specific work *H.M.S. Royal Oak* a “jazz oratorio”.

Another genre thought to be closely related to the oratorio that attracted similar interest as a model for radio-specific works was the revue. Rudolf Arnheim, for example, described an unnamed *Funkrevue* (radio revue) by Karl Schnog and Walter Gronostay as having an “abstract oratorio style” (1932/1984: 117). By this, he meant the way the work featured both traditional (i. e. human/animate) characters as well as choruses representing larger institutions (like a record company). Radio’s audio-only nature freed listeners from seeing or even needing to imagine physical singers or their characters; acousmatic voices could be accepted as representing abstract referents.<sup>13</sup> The lack of a visual element in radio thus opened up new possibilities of theatrical representation.

A key similarity between the oratorio and the revue in radio discourse was their perceived epic character, a quality they shared with the *Hörfolge* (acoustic scenic montage) and related radio genres. While genre labels like the distinction between the *Hörspiel* and the

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<sup>13</sup> Acousmatic refers to sounds whose sources cannot be seen.

*Hörfolge* could be subjective, in a 1932 article Klepper noted one rough distinction that could be drawn between them: “The *Hörspiel* is the form that is closer to drama. It has a through-going plot, conveyed by main characters. [...] The *Hörfolge* has a more epic character” (193f.) In his 1930 monograph *Das Hörspiel*, Hermann Pongs emphasized a related similarity between the oratorio and *Hörfolge*: “The goal of radio oratorios [*Funkoratorien*] is the formation of collective ideas in thematic scenes and *Hörfolgen*” (36; see also Warschauer 1930: 88–90). This emphasis on collective, as opposed to individual, expression and appeal was widespread in the discourse on the New Objectivity in music and literature, and played a key role in growing interest in the oratorio as a stage genre. As a mass medium, radio also appealed to advocates of this new collectivism.<sup>14</sup>

The label *Hörfolge* emphasised the montage-like *Folge*, or series, of individual scenes or musical numbers. When scenes imitated (or made use of actual) news reportage or consisted of musical numbers, the form appeared particularly epic and oratorio-like. This is especially relevant for the sonic dramaturgy of the radio-specific works that were produced by Fritz Walther Bischoff and his collaborators at the Breslau station. Many of these collaborations were built around or prominently included reportage and musical numbers, and they were alternately labelled both radio-revues (*Funkrevue*) and *Hörfolgen*.<sup>15</sup> The radio-revue *Song*, for example, brought together songs with texts by leading writers set to a jazzy popular-music idiom by leading composers.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Pongs described Bischoff and composer Edmund Nick’s collaboration *Leben in dieser Zeit* (*Life in these Times*), a piece its

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<sup>14</sup> These ideas were widespread in the discourse. For some examples related to works discussed here, see Preussner (1929) on Hindemith; Strobel (1928) and Mersmann, Schultze-Ritter, Strobel, Windsperger (1928) on Stravinsky. For a counterargument against collectivism in music and opera, see Abendroth (1931).

<sup>15</sup> For example, the critic Silesius designates “Bei mir – Grammophon!”, “Hochzeitsreise auf Wellen” and a third unnamed work as all being both revues and “musical *Hörfolgen*” (1929: 529). Meanwhile, as Theresia Wittenbrink notes, “most of the Breslau station’s newly commissioned works of the 1929/30 season were supposed to further develop the form of the radio-revue [*Funkrevue*], for which Bischoff had delivered an example with *Song*” (1997b: 1174).

<sup>16</sup> In addition to contributions from Bischoff (as author) and Nick (as composers), *Song* featured (among others) texts by Bertolt Brecht, Erich Kästner and Kurt Tucholsky, and music by Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill and Richard Enders.

creators dubbed a “*Hörfolge* with music”, a typical example of a “radio-oratorio [*Funkoratorium*]” (1930: 36).

In *Hörfolgen* and related genres, the lines between epic and dramatic and between oratorio and opera could be blurred when individual scenes portrayed events dramatically within the larger epic form. An important precursor to such blended forms arose in the adaptation of stage opera for radio broadcast. Beyond the addition of narration to stage opera that Misch complained about above, entirely new dramatic forms emerged in which radio producers attempted to cut the length of the operas, convey the visual elements of the work acoustically and preserve the integrity of the musical score. One such form was the *Opernquerschnitt*, literally an opera cross section that used new spoken text to create a coherent narrative out of highlights from an opera. A common approach was to rearrange the work as an individual character recalling the events of the opera after the fact. An early example of this was produced at the Breslau station in 1924 (before Bischoff’s arrival) by reframing Bizet’s *Carmen* as *Josés letzter Traum* (*José’s Final Dream*). A similar approach blended operas with the original texts on which they were based, so that musical numbers were linked by the accompanying passages in the original story. This approach was less common as it was only possible when the original text lent itself to such treatment, as was the case with Albert Lortzing’s opera *Undine*, based on the fairy tale of the same name by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué. In such treatments, the narrator was perceived less as an intrusion into the opera than as a storyteller naturally part of the artwork. Notably, this approach was the brainchild of Oswald Kühn, who described it as a move to an “epic form of radio-opera” (qtd. in Stoffels 1997b: 902).

While the influence of the oratorio and of hybrid epic-dramatic approaches is most clearly demonstrated in radio-specific *music* theatre, it was also felt in radio-specific works with sonic dramaturgy that were more directly modelled on spoken theatre. In his review of

one such work, *Der Tanz von Cölbigk* (*The Dance of Cölbigk*, 1926), Weill praised the way that text and sound were woven together in the sonic dramaturgy: “An artistic form emerges that is near to a spoken oratorio” because music “follows the formal organisation of the whole”, as opposed to “follow[ing] some naturalistic attempt at representation” (1927/2000a: 337). *Tanz von Cölbigk* made use of two levels of narration, one – a female voice – providing overarching narration related to the broad sweep of the plot, and the other – a male voice – providing the more specific details of individual moments and scenes, while the scenes themselves presented events dramatically. Weill comments that “the writer has managed to elevate an epic story-telling to a certain dramatic tension”, but that “the mistakes that are particularly noticeable in a radio broadcast and that mark the work as not yet a truly radio-specific work lie primarily in the fact that the epic element is overemphasised” (ibid.). He proposed the 1918 music theatre piece *L’Histoire du soldat* (*The Soldier’s Tale*), by composer Igor Stravinsky and author Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, as a model for “the kind of new dramatic form to which an alternation between the narrator and the dramatic characters can lead” (ibid.). Echoing arguments we encountered earlier about the need for collaboration in the creation of sonic dramaturgy, Weill further suggested that *Tanz von Cölbigk*’s author “Gerhart Hermann must work together with a musician in the continuation of his efforts” (ibid.). Such a development of this spoken oratorio format “can certainly point the way to a new kind of radio play [...] that is adapted to the sensory perception of the ear to make dramatic events clear without giving up the aesthetic advantages of the theatre” (ibid.: 338), that is, to sonic dramaturgy.

### *Malpopita: The First Radio-Specific Opera*

While the oratorio and oratorio-like adaptations of stage opera provided one set of models for radio-specific works, another stream in the development of sonic dramaturgy sought to develop forms that were more recognisably operatic with a predominantly dramatic, as opposed to epic, structure. Although several works had been billed as *Funkoper*, or radio-specific operas, the first such work to which the label stuck was *Malpopita* from 1930 with music by Walter Goehr and libretto by M. Friedrich Mendelssohn and Robert Seitz. Drawing on many of the trends that informed the contemporary stage opera genre of *Zeitoper*, or topical opera, *Malpopita* told the story of a factory worker who gets a job on a ship sailing to the South Pacific, looking for adventure. The ship crashes on the eponymous tropical island, where he briefly enjoys an idyllic life until one of the other sailors discovers oil. Industry comes to the island, and the worker finds himself back at the factory.

*Malpopita*'s reception was sharply divided over ideas about opera and radio-specificity. For some, Goehr, Mendelssohn and Seitz had created a work that preserved the essential qualities of opera while also being completely adapted to the specifics of radio. For others, *Malpopita*'s creators had sacrificed defining features of opera in their pursuit of radio-specificity, resulting in a work that might be an effective *Hörspiel*, but not an opera. This debate focussed on two specific features: narration and the role of music. Ultimately, neither *Malpopita* nor subsequent *Funkoper* could reconcile competing expectations about these features. Although the genre fizzled out in the Weimar period, the reception of these *Funkoper* reveals the confluence of approaches to sonic dramaturgy in radio-specific music theatre and other radio-specific theatre in the final years of the Weimar period.

There was no narration in *Malpopita*. The work was carefully constructed so that all necessary information was either clear from the dialogue or from the music. For some critics, this 'solved' one of the great challenges of adapting stage opera for radio, and they praised the work for preserving a dramatic (as opposed to epic) approach. Ludwig Misch, for

example, prefaced his review with a definition. Radio opera “may neither be aided by the explanatory word, as the ‘Opernquerschnitt’ does as a substitute [for the visual], nor by the narrating word, which serves the epic genre of the oratorio” (1931b). From this perspective, Misch found *Malpopita* “a thoroughly successful attempt to convey a ‘plot’ solely through the ear” (ibid.). In order to achieve this dramatic structure, Misch was willing to accept other features of the work, such as a relatively simple dialogue- and action-driven plot (as opposed to one full emotional reflection by characters), and music that was “primarily illustration” of setting and action (ibid.).

Misch’s assessment was shared by a critic identified only as Henschel, who echoed the belief that radio’s lack of a visual element required a straightforward plot, and praised *Malpopita* for nevertheless stimulating the listener’s imagination. Henschel (n. d.) focussed on the effective use of sonic dramaturgy in the work. Information about the setting was carefully embedded in characters’ dialogue, while the music alternated between stylised sound effects and elevated musical accompaniment. Here, Henschel credited Goehr for diverging from certain expectations of stage opera in order to make the work more radio-appropriate, including replacing recitative with spoken text and arias with musical numbers closer to popular song (cf. ibid.). Operatic singing was felt, by some, to be unsuited to radio. Arnheim, for example, complained that the fullness and volume of opera singing made the voice sound distorted and the text difficult to understand. Instead, he called on opera singers “to learn a more intimate, less massive, more microphone-appropriate way of singing from their frivolous colleagues, the gramophone singers” (1933/1979: 51; see also Leonhard 1928/1984: 161). Henschel (n. d.) does not note that this was also related to current practice in modern stage opera, with composers like Weill also drawing on popular music in this way.

This points to the broader role of music in *Malpopita*. As mentioned earlier, in order to avoid narration, the music provided stylised sound effects and other ‘descriptive’ passages

to inform listeners about the scenes. Generally, the music was in the style of the New Objectivity (see above). As Christopher Hailey (1994) has shown, this style was well-suited to radio and was popular with many composers writing for radio, including Hindemith and Weill. In addition to its creative engagement with jazz and popular music (styles on which many other radio composers, like Bischoff's collaborator Edmund Nick, drew heavily), the New Objectivity in music eschewed the kind of emotional or subconscious expression and lyricism that had characterised much nineteenth- and pre-WWI twentieth-century opera. Some critics, however, felt these musical characteristics took *Malpopita* too far away from essential qualities of opera. As critic Lothar Band wrote: "*Malpopita*, this most recent attempt to discover the new land of the radio opera, remains completely in the realm of the *Hörspiel*. [It] is fundamentally only an extension of [its] earlier musical expansions [of the radio play]" (1931b: 148). Band was especially critical of the radio-appropriate New Objectivity elements in the music, particularly the lack of lyricism and the replacement of traditional arias sung with full voice for popular music-inspired songs. Another critic, identified only as W.H. Bol., similarly complained that the use of spoken text with musical accompaniment as opposed to recitative "reveals the spoken radio play to be an overemphasised starting point" (1931). Other critics focussed on how Goehr's music fulfilled the dual role of stylised sound effect and musical accompaniment, the former of which they deemed inappropriate for opera.

Ultimately, Band suggested that radio-specific opera may not be possible. Instead, he advocated turning to the oratorio as a model for radio-specific music theatre and abandoning the label (and ambition) of radio *opera* (cf. 1931b: 148). That is, in order to preserve key elements of what Band and his colleagues deemed essential to opera and to music theatre generally – like lyricism and music free of stylised sound effect – they were willing to accept narration or other epic elements reminiscent of the oratorio. Band's approach evinces a conservative view of opera, either unaware of the latest trends in stage opera or implicitly

rejecting them, but so does Misch's insistence that opera should not contain epic elements. Many stage operas of the time also explored epic/dramatic blends. In addition to the well-known collaborations of Weill and Brecht, one particularly influential example was Stravinsky's 1927 "opera-oratorio" *Oedipus Rex*. Notably, Weill claimed this work's "oratorio-like form" also "makes [it] particularly well suited to the radio" (1928/2000: 3177).<sup>17</sup> Such blending would become even more prominent in later radio-specific works.

### After *Malpopita*

By the end of 1931, much of the enthusiasm that had greeted the idea of the first radio-specific opera when *Malpopita* premiered had evaporated. Band noted in December of that year that "one speaks but rarely of 'radio-specific' opera", even though broadcasts of stage opera continued unabated (1931a: 409f.). Erwin Schoen, who commissioned a number of the oratorio-like works mentioned above (like Schulhoff's *H.M.S. Royal Oak*), lamented in September 1932: "While in the last few years the radio play as a specific theatrical genre has made undeniable progress, there has been no such advancement in the operatic literature. There is still no radio opera" (qtd. in Ottmann 2013: 241). Although interest in works explicitly labelled as radio-specific music theatre or opera had fizzled out by 1931, the impact of such works on the development of sonic dramaturgy endured.

Composers like Gronostay and Goehr continued to contribute to new radio works in which music and sound played ever greater roles. Goehr, for example, provided music for a "Hörspiel with music" with a text by Seitz titled *Die Carry Moore G.m.b.H. (Carry Moore Ltd.)* that one critic described as a "modern operetta" (Stoffels 1997b: 923). Another of his

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<sup>17</sup> On the broader interest in oratorios at the time and their impact on modern stage opera, see Epstein (1928).

projects was the music for *Die verhexte Stunde* (*The Bewitched Hour*), a *Hörfolge* from 1932. The text of this work was assembled by Ernst Bringolf, combining original material with excerpts from Edgar Allan Poe, Gustav Meyrink and Guy de Maupassant. Christiane Timper (cf. 1990: 41) has suggested that *Die verhexte Stunde* may have been modelled on the *Opernquerschnitte* discussed above. The plot loosely describes a series of spooky, horrific events around the world unleashed by a mysterious demonic force. Music and creatively deployed sound fill much of the work. Goehr's music combines elements of his Weill-esque style from *Malpopita* with Schoenbergian atonality (he had studied with Schoenberg) and sound effects generated by musical instruments. For example, sound effects and musical stylisations of them imitate the beeping of wireless telegraph transmissions, followed by text imitating news reports which seem to emerge out of and translate the supposed Morse code. Other text involves naturalistic portrayals of characters responding to horrors with whispers, gasps, screams, etc. Throughout, both kinds of text are overlaid in a manner reminiscent of the oratorio-like voice leading in spoken works described by Arnheim and Weill.

Gronostay also remained closely involved in the development of sonic dramaturgy in radio works, writing music for them and directing sound effects and vocal performance. Reviewing an unidentified radio play in 1932, Rudolf Arnheim described Gronostay's contribution in ways that anticipate Arnheim's own description of music as a model for "voice-leading" and directing spoken text: "It was very revealing how Gronostay the musician as a dialogue-director set the voices against each other as purely characteristic sounds; how he used the sound of groaning, moaning, and sighing as acoustic sign language; how he overlaid the voices in sections" (1932/1984: 112). Another work for which Gronostay attracted praise was *Glocken* (*Bells*) from 1930. This *Hörfolge* did not have a unified plot, but instead consisted of a series of scenes that all had diegetic bell sounds in the background. The sounds of bells, provided by Gronostay, permeated the entire work, and scenes seemed to

emerge out of and retreat back into the peals. Critic Felix Stiemer praised the use of sound, writing:

The sound of the bell, which creates a massive space for itself, surrounded virtually the entire broadcast. Its individual scenes did not separate themselves from each other, but instead appeared at a rapid pace in the background of this sounding space. [...] Here one can no longer speak of underscoring the events, as the sound has itself become the dramatic event that speaks more clearly and directly to the listener than words ever could. (1930: 65)

This thorough use of sound represented a refreshing new direction in *Hörfolgen*, which Stiemer complained had “begun to stagnate” in their “picture book [*bilderbogenartige*] schema”: “One could think of this *Hörfolge* being realised in the usual way as an acoustic film, in which the direction only generates transitions and interweaving – here, however, a new *Hörspiel* has appeared that is coherently built on acoustic events.” (ibid.) Achieving such effects required not just technological advances (in recording, fading, etc.), but also new creative approaches to sound and music.

How Gronostay achieved the bell effect in *Glocken*, for example, is unclear in the preserved sources, but descriptions suggest novel uses of recording technology and/or compositional technique. Stiemer found it “very noteworthy that [the bell effect] was not achieved with complex new technology, but with the simplest, long familiar technical means” (ibid.). As Ralph Kogelheide has documented, Gronostay was involved in a project recording actual sounds, including church bells on gramophone for use on radio and in stage theatre productions.<sup>18</sup> These recorded sounds may have been used in *Glocken*, and if so, they may

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<sup>18</sup> Gronostay also composed and recorded original music that could be used as generic background (pastoral music for rural settings, etc.), but Kogelheide (cf. 2017: 136) affirms that the bell sounds are real recordings, not

have been somehow manipulated during playback. Alternatively, Gronostay may have composed music that imitated the sounds of bells and manipulated the sound compositionally.

The reception of *Glocken* tantalisingly hints at early experimentation in sound manipulation that (like Ruttman's *Weekend*) anticipates later developments in electronic and tape music. Another such work that achieved similar effects via live musical performance was *Trommel, Trommel, Gong* (*Drum, Drum, Gong*, 1932), conceived and directed by E. Kurt Fischer. In an article on music in radio works from late in the Weimar period, Fischer called for a new kind of "simple and quiet melody [emerging] from the agitated vibrato of the gong" (qtd. in Timper 1990: 26). After an opening gong sound, students and performers from the Mary Wigman School in Dresden began improvising on percussion instruments and recorders, inspired by rhythms and sounds of the gong's vibrato and likely working with some predetermined rhythmic and melodic cells.<sup>19</sup> The work is non-narrative, "combining scenic [portions] with songs and politically-critical spoken texts" (Fischer n. d.: 21). These texts consisted of a man speaking to both the masses (a speaking choir) and his own inner voice (a single female voice for contrast) about "how far the individual should or should not subordinate himself to the masses" (Timper 1990: 43). The group improvisation of music neatly mirrored this dilemma in the text, with performers having to balance individual improvisation with the need to create a coherent ensemble product.

## Conclusion

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<sup>19</sup> instrumental imitations.  
Fischer claimed there was no score because they could not afford a composer (cf. n. d.: 21). However, the recording of the work evinces certain well-defined motives which were likely worked out in advance.

In this chapter, I have explored the development of sonic dramaturgy in the radio drama of Weimar Republic Germany, arguing that music and music theatre played an important and heretofore underappreciated role in the development of radio-specific theatre in this period. Music served as a model for the new role of sound effect and language in sonic dramaturgy and for their combination in new radio-specific works. Meanwhile, the adaptation of stage music theatre for radio provided formal models. While radio-specific music theatre has tended to be analysed separately from forms modelled on spoken theatre or from montage forms modelled, in part, on film, I have shown that music was a formative influence on all of these genres. Furthermore, the legacy of radio-specific music theatre continued in these other genres even after radio stations largely ceased actively pursuing radio-specific music theatre.

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