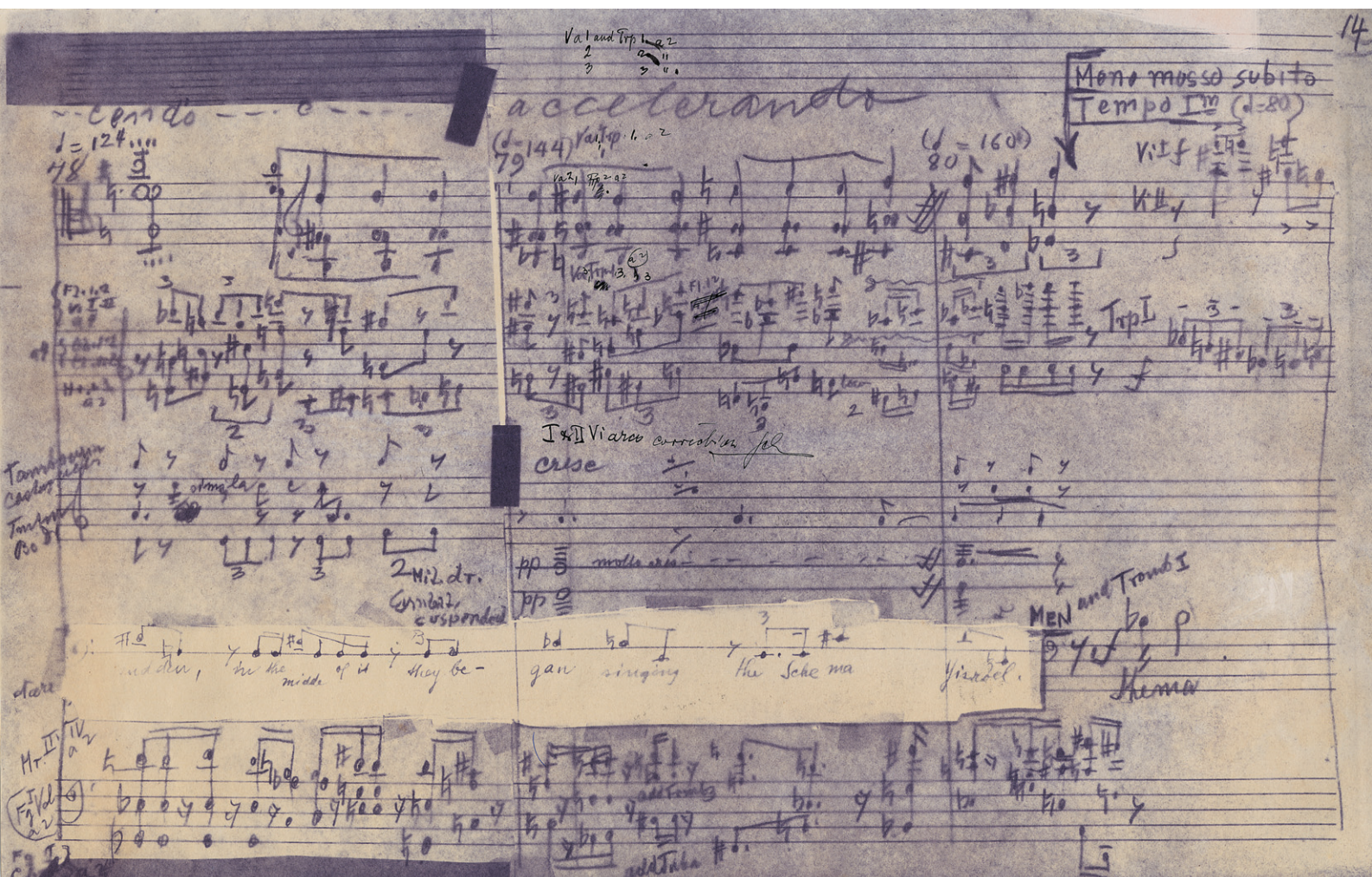


Joy H. Calico

Vanderbilt University / German Studies Association

Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* in Postwar Europe: Musical Remigration and Holocaust Commemoration in the Germanys

Report



Handwritten musical score for Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw*, page 14. The score is written on aged paper with various annotations and markings. It includes staves for Violin I and II, Trumpet I, and Tuba. The tempo markings are "Crescendo", "accelerando", and "Meno mosso subito Tempo III (d=80)". The key signature is D major. The score is numbered 14 in the top right corner.

Berlin Program GSA Distinguished Lecture 2015

Joy H. Calico

Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* in Postwar Europe: Musical Remigration and Holocaust Commemoration in the Germanys

Opening Remarks and Introduction: Paul Nolte, Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut
Freie Universität Berlin
Commentary: Matthias Pasdzierny, Universität der Künste, Berlin

On June 30, 2015, Joy H. Calico, Professor of Musicology and Director of the Max Kade Center for European and German Studies at Vanderbilt University, delivered the annual Berlin Program GSA Distinguished Lecture, thereby exemplifying and strengthening the growing transatlantic cooperation between the German Studies Association and the Freie Universität. The choice of lecturer was all the more fitting, as it represented a sort of homecoming for Calico, a former Fellow of the Berlin Program, which since 1986 has supported the research of North American scholars working in the humanities and the social sciences.

In her talk, Professor Calico highlighted aspects of her latest book, “Arnold Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw* in Postwar Europe,” in which she analyzes the impact and reception of the composer’s 1947 twelve-tone piece in Europe between the late 1940s and late 1950s. Schoenberg, who had fled the Nazi terror and emigrated to the United States, wrote the piece for an American audience. Yet *A Survivor* and its haunting subject of the fate of Jews during the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto was written in German, English and Hebrew, enjoying performances in Western Europe as well as in the Eastern Bloc. Calico argued convincingly that the fascinating history of Schoenberg’s powerful piece has implications beyond music. Its transnational performance “irritated every exposed nerve in postwar Europe,” and the different receptions in Europe during this “musical remigration” reveal anxieties about musical modernism, the Holocaust, questions of guilt, anti-Semitism, dislocation, Allied occupation, and geopolitical concerns in Cold War Europe. *A Survivor* and how it was viewed reveals aspects of postwar European culture and politics long overlooked while making a significant contribution to the literature focused on emigres and their remigration to Europe.

After a brief introduction to Schoenberg, his emigration, and the background of *A Survivor*, Calico played most of the powerful and moving piece before delving into the heart of her presentation. Although the book ultimately contains a total of six case studies, the lecture concentrated on the microhistories of West and East Germany during the mid-1950s.

By the mid-1950s, the Federal Republic of Germany was a sort of “hothouse” for avant-garde music, particularly due to the advocacy of the International Summer Courses for New Music in

Darmstadt (IFNM) that promoted music repressed in the Third Reich. Yet West Germany was also home to virulent resistance to new music, often articulated by critics who had been active between 1933 and 1945 and who exhibited anti-Semitic and anti-American sentiments that went beyond mere aesthetic resentments. Thus when advocates, many of whom had close personal and professional ties to Schoenberg, reintroduced the composer's work in 1950 after a more than ten year absence, they faced sharp resistance.

To begin with, the conductor Hermann Scherchen encountered reservations on the part of the orchestra and chorus who felt uncomfortable with the very "unpleasant" subject of the piece, fearing that its content was too dark. Though the performers voted narrowly to go ahead with its performance, another camp of opposition was the press. Although *A Survivor* enjoyed largely positive reviews and several pundits underscored the piece's importance for remembering the Nazi regime's crimes, Calico sees Hans Schnoor as representative of the opposition to the piece. A former Nazi party member and chairman of the Dresden chapter of the *Reichsschriftskammer* of the *Reichskulturkammer*, Schnoor worked as a music critic and musicologist in postwar West Germany. Using his column as a bully pulpit, Schnoor railed against modern music radio programming, especially if publicly funded. *A Survivor* raised Schnoor's ire in particular, seeing it as an affront to "all decent Germans." His criticism and the debate it unleashed eventually garnered national coverage. At the heart of Schnoor's condemnation was a disdain for public radio that imposed a "tyranny" of returning emigres enabled by the Allied occupation, all couched in Nazi and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Though many pundits were quick to decry Schnoor as an unrepentant Nazi, many of his colleagues agreed with him. Though Schnoor represented but one member of a cadre of music critics and musicologists whose careers had started under fascism and whose style remained unchanged in the 1950s, Calico argued that a significant portion of the public agreed with them. *A Survivor's* reception in West Germany, Calico concluded, both revealed enthusiasm for the work's important political message and attempt to reveal the atrocities of Nazism, but it also inflamed anger for the same reasons.

Calico next discussed the history of *A Survivor's* first performance in the Eastern Bloc. Here, as in West Germany, Schoenberg disciples and their network paved the way for a 1958 performance in Leipzig, with Herbert Kegel conducting. While no evidence indicates that the ruling regime advocated for Schoenberg's piece, the very fact that *A Survivor* was performed several times indicates that the ruling SED party did not oppose it, since any artistic production required state approval. Calico theorized that *A Survivor* conveniently dovetailed with the East German regime's political ideology, enabling its dissemination. Schoenberg's overarching theme of resistance suited the foundational narrative of the GDR, a de-Semitic antifascism that saw fascism as a product of capitalist imperialism. Concurrently, however, the Holocaust and Nazi racism were regarded as unrelated to National Socialism, so that the GDR could instrumentalize history and antifascist resistance against the West and its militarist and fascist circles, while marginalizing the Jewish experience.

Calico indicated that unlike in the FRG, critics of the performance did not home in on the aesthetic qualities of the piece. Newspapers of the token oppositional parties identified the Jewishness of the composer and the subject matter, but the SED press concentrated on the German perpetrators, thus acknowledging broad culpability, even if the victims were not explicitly

identified. Overall, Calico concluded, *A Survivor* faced less resistance in the GDR than in the FRG, presumably because “de-Semitized antifascism had actually preempted the potential problems of a twelve-tone cantata about the Holocaust.” Calico moreover argued that because of *A Survivor*’s political uses for the regime, Schoenberg supporters could use the piece as an “antifascist Trojan Horse” through which socialist modernists could introduce dodecaphony into the GDR.

Overall, Calico’s lecture on an interdisciplinary subject demonstrated her important contribution to the field of musicology and history, adding in particular to the rich literature on exiles and remigrants during the postwar period. Specifically, Calico revealed how a broad network of Schoenberg students and supporters managed to circulate *A Survivor* throughout Europe and how it resonated with different audiences and acquired new meanings specific to the “acoustics” and geopolitical concerns of a given time and place. The lecture made a compelling case that Prof. Calico’s framework seems well-suited for similar inquiries and studies. Certainly, the positive reactions from the moderator as well as the audience indicated that the lecture produced great interest from a variety of fields and perspectives, and the continued conversations during the reception further confirmed that Prof. Calico’s thought-provoking and engaging lecture had made a strong impression on the attendees.

Report written by Peter Gengler, July 2015

Peter Gengler is Ph.D. candidate studying modern German history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is currently a Doctoral Fellow in the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies. His areas of interest are Central European cultural and political history, particularly the legacy and memory of National Socialism, the Holocaust, and war in postwar West and East German society. At the Freie Universität he is conducting research for his dissertation on expellee interest group memory politics and the construction and instrumentalization of expulsion narratives in public discourse in the Federal Republic of Germany between 1944 and 1990.

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COVER ILLUSTRATION

Original manuscript page from *A Survivor from Warsaw* by Arnold Schoenberg, mm. 78-80

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