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Citizen of the *Staatsoper*: Erich Kleiber's Musical Migration

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Abstract. Conductor Erich Kleiber was born in Vienna, made his reputation in Berlin, fled Nazism for Latin America, and tried briefly to return to postwar East Berlin before dying in 1956. His life illustrates the wide diversity in mid-century migratory stories. For so many of Kleiber's fellow migrants, flight disrupted established structures, contexts and networks. More recently, scholars have emphasized refugees' creative self-reinvention. Kleiber's story illustrates both these outcomes while embodying neither; his narrative is one of musical and political continuity, involving a particular kind of Habsburg cultural nostalgia, insulated by his wealth and fame.

Erich Kleiber was once considered one of the twentieth century's greatest conductors. Kleiber crafted a global reputation during twelve astonishing years at the Berlin Staatsoper and elsewhere between 1923 and 1935. Bullheaded and brilliant, he premiered new modernist work from all across Europe, welcoming both arguments and praise. He was beloved by musicians, singers, and stagehands—less so by orchestra administrators, who found him impossible to manage. He demanded, and got, astronomical fees and burdensome rehearsal schedules. Audiences worshiped him. He was a sought-after visitor on the world's best-known stages, from Mexico City to New York to Milan to Moscow. He worked with and transformed great performers, including Birgit Nilsson and a young Maria Callas. A 1929 photo, famous at the time, captured the era's star orchestral and opera conductors, popularly referred to as the "Big Five": the diminutive Kleiber stands in the center, dark eyes staring, flanked by Bruno Walter, Arturo Toscanini, Otto Klemperer, and Wilhelm Furtwängler.

But while these other four conductors have gone down as central figures in the history of twentieth-century art music, Kleiber is now largely forgotten, a curiosity for musical devotees. There are many potential reasons for his lack of prominence. Save the Staatsoper, most of his career was itinerant; he never developed a long-term artistic relationship with another

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ensemble. He distrusted art-music culture in the United States as mechanical and slapdash; the prominence of North American ensembles in global art music by the 1950s meant that this choice had long-term consequences. He was slower than his contemporaries to embrace long-form recording technology and thus left behind relatively fewer recordings. And his name has perhaps been eclipsed by the genius of his son Carlos Kleiber, regarded by his peers as the most influential conductor in history.[1]

But Kleiber's tumultuous transnational life is worth remembering, for reasons that go well beyond the musical. First, Kleiber's life illustrates "migration as a master narrative" in German history and beyond it.[2] Most of Kleiber's life was lived in what his biographer mournfully called "vagabondage." His first two decades played out back and forth between Habsburg Prague and Vienna. After finishing his musical studies, Kleiber began the standard art-music series of apprenticeships and assistant director positions in cities and towns all over German-speaking central Europe, hoping to gradually improve his standing and land in a major capital-city theater. His twelve years in Berlin were followed by lucrative stints as a touring conductor. Kleiber complained about this, but nevertheless made a life from it. His mental map seems to have been populated mainly by grand urban theaters, lovely homes or apartments, elegant vacation destinations, and natural settings in which he could take his preferred long walks to contemplate music. At his level of talent and prestige—and much like the world of art music more generally—Kleiber's life was naturally trans-, supra-, or subnational, sometimes all three at once.[3] As Neil Gregor and Thomas Irvine have noted, "musical 'Germanness' can appear in unexpected places … It can appear between cultural geographies and can help to make new ones."[4]

Second, those factors—his talent, which granted him both prestige and privilege, and his easy mobility—contributed to Kleiber's political obtuseness. To his mind, the great stages were city-states of their own accord, over which he by rights would benevolently rule. That the theaters happened inconveniently to be located within countries, or affected by those countries' economies or politics, was utterly immaterial to him. His only consistent political concern was his own artistic autonomy. To maintain it, Kleiber repeatedly proved willing to negotiate with authoritarians. He tried to ignore or work within Nazism for two years, and later promised Goebbels good behavior in exchange for a Nazi-coordinated position in Buenos Aires. After the war, he allowed himself to be charmed and reassured by East German leaders who offered him the helm at his beloved Staatsoper, working with them for several years before abandoning the effort. (Kleiber, of course, was far from the only prominent conductor willing to make these kinds of accommodations, as the vast literature on Wilhelm Furtwängler and Herbert von Karajan makes clear.) Certainly Kleiber used his prominence to help friends and colleagues escape Nazi Europe and to negotiate better conditions for

[1]Carolyn Wray, "Carlos Kleiber Voted Greatest Conductor of All Time," *BBC Music Magazine*, March 17 2011 (http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/bbcworldwide/worldwidestories/pressreleases/2011/03_march/carlos_kleiber.shtml).

[2]Sarah Thomsen Vierra, "Central, Not Subsidiary: Migration as a Master Narrative in Modern German History," in *Modern Germany in Transatlantic Perspective*, ed. Michael Meng and Adam R. Seipp (Berghahn Books, 2020), 200–16.

[3]On musical mobility both within and beyond art music, see Celia Applegate, *The Necessity of Music: Variations on a German Theme* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), chap. 3.

[4]Neil Gregor and Thomas Irvine, "Introduction," in *Dreams of Germany: Musical Imaginaries from the Concert Hall to the Dance Floor*, ed. Gregor and Irvine (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 17.

East German musicians after the war. Still, one of the larger themes clarified by an examination of Kleiber's life is his privileged apolitical pliability. Kleiber was always an émigré, not a refugee; he left when he chose to, not because he had to.

A related constant throughout Kleiber's life was his adherence to an identity and affiliations that were territorial and cultural, not political. On the one hand, Kleiber's mental geography was rooted in Vienna, not in Berlin: he would always yearn for his romanticized vision of the Habsburg capital. "I so long to be there," he wrote of Vienna in 1918. "I shall never know peace until I get there." He continued his quest for a position in Vienna until the end of his life. Writing from Berlin to his sister Elisabeth, Kleiber explained, "I was asked if I wouldn't take German nationality, but I told them that they would take away the best in me if they did that."[5] In 1938, upon moving to Latin America, Kleiber and his family took Argentine citizenship; he alternately referred to himself as "an old Austrian" and "an old Argentinian" in his later correspondence, insisting to his wife in a 1939 letter that "I am *not* a Pan-European but unconditionally for AUSTRIA REDIVNA, jawohl!!!!!!"[6]

What that meant in practice was somewhat less clear. Kleiber's professed Austrianness was shorthand for an idiosyncratic identity, roughly synonymous with the values and cultural legacy of the central European intelligentsia as it developed from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. It was wider than the Habsburg or post-Great-War Austrian state, and emerged from the "Jews and progressive Austrians and Germans," who crafted it within the slippages between nationalizing states and universalizing cosmopolitan culture.[7] Its component parts were, first, a somewhat Humboldtian or Goetheian vision of *ernste Musik*, *Bildung* and *Kultur* divorced from place, era, or political power, and second, the duty of German-speakers to discover and convey these universal values through scholarship and high culture to the world. Frederick the Great was as important within Kleiber's mental universe as Franz Josef of Habsburg. Musically speaking, it ranged from Mozart to Schönberg and beyond: Kleiber translated his expansive, iconoclastic musical *Heimat* into teaching from the podium, asking his audiences to hear Bartók as Beethoven's equal, Revueltas alongside Ravel.[8] Celia Applegate has noted that "Music surely ought to be regarded as a crucial contributor to cultural citizenship," and Kleiber's cultural citizenship translated everywhere and nowhere, rooting Kleiber in a musical context rather than a political one. He was a citizen of Beethoven, Berg, and the Staatsoper far more than he ever would be of Austria or Argentina. In Latin America during the Second World War, Kleiber and the central European refugee musicians who worked with him were understood as "Germans." Few of them carried a passport matching that term. But the terminology mattered less than the music and the culture that music might represent.

[5]John Russell, *Erich Kleiber: A Memoir* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1957), 147.

[6]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 187, author's emphasis and exclamation points. This comment is most likely "Austria rediviva," or "Austria revived," incorrectly transcribed by Russell. Thanks to Rok Stergar for his assistance.

[7]Malachi Ha-Cohen, "From Empire to Cosmopolitanism: The Central European Intelligentsia 1867–1968," *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 5 (2006): 117–33, esp. 118.

[8]On this concept, the classic statement is Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin, eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). Regarding the history of music and musicking, Celia Applegate's work is central, in particular, *The Necessity of Music* as well as Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). Also see Gregor and Irvine, *Dreams of Germany*.

A discussion of context and sources will help to situate Kleiber's life and work. He was one of several thousand central European refugee and émigré musicians to find refuge in wartime Latin America, although he was better known, wealthier, and more sought after than the vast majority of his fellow migrants, allowing him choices most of them could not make. Most refugee European musicians across Latin America joined or formed orchestras, and trained local musicians and composers in national conservatories. Many participated in a complex web of cultural-diplomatic entanglements, especially antifascist political organizations. During the war Latin American, North American, and Nazi governmental and private agencies helped them, paid them, and surveilled them. Other refugees focused more narrowly on musical politics. They played Wagner and Beethoven on local stages even as the Nazis claimed these composers; they programmed Mendelssohn on the radio and explained to Latin American listeners why that mattered. They joined Latin American composers in bringing folk motifs and melodies into the classical canon. The refugees became transmitters and translators of different strands of musical modernism across the Atlantic and the Americas, bringing newer twelve-tone and neoromantic approaches to their Latin American students, performing and programming works by other refugees and their generational contemporaries among the Latin American, European, and North American avant-garde. Even when they could establish or reestablish a career, however, the generally straitened circumstances of art music in postwar Latin America complicated the creation of an artistic legacy and ensured that these artists left a relatively light footprint in their new homelands. Their lives were often substantially disrupted by their wartime exile, whereas Kleiber was able to do in Latin America what he had done in Europe, *mutatis mutandis*.

Source material on Kleiber is strikingly sparse given his preeminence, leaving the historian to write into and around Kleiber's silences. One admiring biography exists, written by John Russell, an art critic at the *Times of London* and *New York Times*. The two men were friends. Russell clearly had access to Kleiber's private correspondence while crafting the biography. But much of that is now lost or inaccessible, as is the correspondence of his wife, Ruth Goodrich Kleiber, and his children, Veronika and Carlos. A few letters remain in archives in Argentina, Austria, and Germany.[9] Where possible, I have used Kleiber's own words; I have done my best to fill in the obvious gaps.

From Vienna to Berlin

Both sides of Kleiber's family were from southern Germany, but his parents met and married in Prague, then moved to Vienna to look for work. Kleiber was born in Prague in 1890. His father, a music-loving high school teacher, died early; Kleiber's mother, also a devoted amateur musician, died in 1896. Kleiber and his sister moved back to Prague, to be raised by their grandfather, an imperial carriage maker from Marienbad. But only a year later, the grandfather died, and Kleiber and his sister returned to Vienna to live with their aunt.

[9]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*. On Russell and the Kleiber correspondence, see Rosamund Bernier Russell, private email to me, February 1, 2013. The two main archival holdings of Kleiberiana are Kleiber's correspondence with composer Alban Berg, in the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus and the Österreichischer Nationalbibliothek (which contains a few other Kleiber letters), and Berlin's Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde. The Teatro Colón archive (inaccessible to me) contained a few Kleiber letters, some of which are translated in Duilio Abelardo Dobrin, "Erich Kleiber: The Argentine Experience (1926–1941)" (Ph.D. diss, School of Music, Ball State University, 1981). The several interesting biographies of Carlos Kleiber do not deal in much depth with the subject of his father.

Kleiber attended gymnasium, studied violin, and fell in love with opera. In 1906, at sixteen, he watched Gustav Mahler conduct his own Sixth Symphony, and decided to become a conductor.[10]

Kleiber did his university work in Prague, where he studied philosophy, history, and art history, as well as conducting and composition at the Prague Conservatory. He ingratiated himself as a volunteer at the Deutsches Theater, but was soon hired as *Kapellmeister*. In 1911, he directed his first performance there. A year later, he dropped out of the conservatory to take a third-director position at what was then the princely court at Darmstadt, making Kleiber *Grossherzogliche Hofkapellmeister*. Kleiber remained in Darmstadt for seven years, attracting acclaim from his colleagues and the local press. He also socialized with the court's "scholars and litterateurs," as well as the artists of the *Wolfskehl* circle. The First World War intruded almost not at all into court life in Darmstadt, until the "Grand-Duke decided that, as the war had not come to his theater, his theater should go to the war," sending Kleiber and the ensemble to perform in Bucharest and Brussels. Kleiber also stepped in with no notice to run a rehearsal of Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, proving himself capable of running rehearsal while sight-reading a completely unfamiliar score. This improved an already promising reputation. Between 1919 and 1923, he took positions in Barmen-Elderfeld, Düsseldorf, and Mannheim, the latter two as first conductor.[11]

In 1923, Kleiber was invited to conduct Beethoven's *Fidelio* at the Berliner Staatsoper unter den Linden (Berlin State Opera). The Staatsoper musicians loved him; soon he had been hired as *Generalmusikdirektor* of one of the world's best opera houses, at only thirty-three years old, during a moment of acute political and economic crisis. As Kleiber took up the Staatsoper baton, his biographer recalled, "Five hundred people were arrested for rioting, Jews were beaten to death in poor quarters of the city, the police were said to have opened fire on money-changers, the profiteers' women walked the town in their high yellow boots, and a good seat at the Staatsoper cost just under four million marks."[12] But Kleiber seems to have been insulated entirely from any of these pressures.

Kleiber rapidly demonstrated breathtaking range in the opera house and the concert hall. He gave memorable performances of the standard repertoire—Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Richard Strauss—while adding eccentric programming alongside it, such as pieces by Mozart's father Leopold, or Frederick the Great. Most importantly, Kleiber made his reputation as a crucial element of Berlin's interwar modernist ferment. Kleiber battled on behalf of musical modernism "at the time when it really *was* a battle," including atonal, experimental work.[13] His interpretations, often brilliant, changed musical history. His 1924 revival of Leoš Janáček's opera *Jenůfa* returned both opus and composer to the canon; he premiered Alban Berg's landmark opera *Wozzeck* in 1925, Franz Schreker's *Der singende Teufel* in 1928, and

[10]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 19–23, 36–37, 43; Gerhard Brunner, "Kleiber, Erich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (https://libezp.nmsu.edu:2072/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.15119); "Kleiber, Erich," *Oxford Music Dictionary* (https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.15119).

[11]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 19–23, 36–37, 43, 54–56; Brunner, "Kleiber, Erich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*; "Kleiber, Erich," *Oxford Music Dictionary*.

[12]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 62–63, esp. 71. The year 1923 was also the occasion of Kleiber's first guest-conducting stint in Vienna: see Matthias Pasdzierny, "Erich Kleiber," in *Lexikon verfolgter Musiker und Musikerinnen der NS-Zeit*, ed. Claudia Maurer Zenck, Peter Petersen, and Sophie Fetthauer (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 2014) (https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexmperson_00001840).

[13]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 14, author's emphasis.

Darius Milhaud's *Christophe Colombe* in 1930.[14] Béla Bartók commented that Kleiber's 1928 performance of his piano concerto had allowed him "'for once' [to hear] the work as he had hoped to hear it."[15] Kleiber's thoroughgoing success in Berlin granted him international prominence and invitations to the world's greatest stages and ensembles: Milan's La Scala, London's Covent Garden, the New York Philharmonic.[16]

In 1926, Kleiber took on a set of concerts at the spectacular Beaux-Arts Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Argentina, one of the greatest theaters in the Americas. Kleiber would return to the Colón almost yearly for the next several decades, but his initial reception gave little sign of what would follow. He recalled, "I found when I got there … that I was not regarded as the *Generalmusikdirektor* from Berlin, or even as a leading figure from the Staatsoper, but as a small, skinny, completely unknown person with a baton in his rucksack who happened to answer to the name of Erich Kleiber." Buenos Aires audiences were accustomed to prominent European visitors, but mainly to Italian and French operas, not to the central European repertoire. They were equally unused to conductors shooting them cold looks when they chatted during boring operatic passages or arrived late.[17]

But Kleiber soon won Buenos Aires over as he had Berlin. His performances of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* in 1928 and 1929 were discussed not just in the local press but in the *New York Times*.[18] Kleiber also fell in headlong love with Ruth Goodrich, a young staffer at the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, to whom he proposed a day after meeting her. Kleiber spoke no English at that point; Goodrich did not speak German. Among other methods, Kleiber wooed her by filling her room with white roses.[19] Their daughter Veronika was born in 1928 and son Karl in 1930 (Karl would later become Carlos when the family moved to Argentina).

Back in Germany, Kleiber's career ran into political obstacles. From the late 1920s on, the German radical right claimed that Kleiber and Goodrich, both practicing Catholics, were Jewish. The Nazi newspaper *Völkische Beobachter* likened Kleiber's performance at Bayreuth to Judas defaming a "German temple."[20] Kleiber's repeated efforts to jump from Berlin to the Vienna Staatsoper—part of his lifelong dream of a permanent position in Vienna—were thwarted by similar rumors. Both in 1928 and again in 1934, rumors flew that Kleiber was Jewish—or, alternatively and ironically, that he was a Nazi. Both such accusations, depending on the situation and the accuser, could serve to block Kleiber or any other musician from a job. In a 1934 letter to Alban Berg, Kleiber admitted that he appreciated the Nazi goal of awakening German greatness, but that he

[14]Russell *Erich Kleiber*, 76–78, 134–35; Brunner, "Kleiber, Erich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*.

[15]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 67, 70.

[16]There is some disagreement about Kleiber's presence in Milan. Gerhard Brunner in the *New Grove Opera Dictionary* claims that Kleiber's Italian opera debut came as late as the 1951 Maggio Musicale in Florence; John Russell discusses multiple appearances at La Scala beginning in the 1920s.

[17]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 103–4.

[18]I. G. Labastille, "Music in Argentina: South America's 'Spring' Season Enriched by German and Italian Guest Leaders," *New York Times*, December 22, 1929.

[19]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 104, 108.

[20]The Kleibers worshiped at and had their son baptized at St. Hedwig's Cathedral, behind the Staatsoper and a center of anti-Nazi sentiment as opposed to their neighborhood church, St. Bernhard's: Charles Barber, *Corresponding with Carlos: A Biogaphy of Carlos Kleiber* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 12; Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 60. Ruth Kleiber does seem to have had Jewish ancestry. See Alexander Werner, *Carlos Kleiber. Eine Biographie* (Mainz: Schott Verlag, 2008), 21ff.

> was *never* a member of the N.S.D.A.P. … never as well had the intention of becoming one!!! Despite repeated requests! … I always sympathized with the *national* movement—but now I can no *longer follow* it *into the realm of the "race question"*—because I am in possession of an artistic conscience, thank God.[21]

Kleiber's commitment to "degenerate" modern music may have in fact been the deciding factor in Vienna. In Berlin, it brought him into increasingly direct conflict with Nazism: specifically, with Josef Goebbels, who had full control over German musical and theatrical work by September 1933, and with Hermann Göring, whose position as minister-president and Minister of the Interior of Prussia gave him authority over Berlin stages. Both Göring and Staatsoper general director Wilhelm Furtwängler had tried to talk Kleiber out of a scheduled performance of Berg's *Suite from Lulu* on November 30, 1934.[22] In fact, Göring met with and pressured Ruth Goodrich, who explained that for Kleiber, being able to direct the Berg suite was a "matter of life and death." Goodrich secured Göring's reluctant approval, but recalled that while Göring had kept her waiting in the hallway, "a nurse … went by with two young lions on a leash, as if it were the most natural thing in the world."[23] The metaphor—something about absurdity and leashed savagery—practically writes itself.

Kleiber's time in Berlin was almost over. *New York Times* reporter and critic Herbert Peyser wrote that the *Lulu Suite* performance was hailed as a resounding success, despite the regime's resistance, threats of demonstrations, and the forced resignation of the lead soprano just a few days before the premiere.[24] Within a week after *Lulu*, when Kleiber had made some noise about leaving the Staatsoper immediately, the "Nazi secret police" confiscated his passport and confined him to his room for an undisclosed amount of time.[25] The regime also threatened his family, and the possibility of financial penalty. So Kleiber fulfilled his Staatsoper contract, which continued through January 1935, ending with two performances of *Tannhäuser*.[26] The Nazis tried several times to lure Kleiber back, but he insisted that the condition for his return would be that his first concert feature the work of the banned composer Felix Mendelssohn.[27]

[21]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 130; Margaret Notley, "1934, Alban Berg, and the Shadow of Politics: Documents of a Troubled Year," in *Alban Berg and His World*, ed. Christopher Hailey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 223. Emphasis in original.

[22]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 141–42, 145–47. The Nazi authorities had rejected Kleiber's programming the Berg suite once before, in April 1934: see Notley, "1934, Alban Berg, and the Shadow of Politics," 227, including excerpted letter from Kleiber to Berg, October 24, 1934, on 249. Kleiber and Furtwängler worked together at the Staatsoper, Berlin Philharmonic, and Staatskapelle. Kleiber suspected Furtwängler of pressuring him as a means of improving his own position after having supported the composer Paul Hindemith, whose jazz-inflected work the Nazi regime considered "entartete Kunst," or degenerate. On the Hindemith affair, see, among others, Michael Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[23]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 146.

[24]Herbert F. Peyser, "Berg's 'Lulu' Wins Acclaim in Berlin," *New York Times*, December 1, 1934, cited in Notley, "1934, Alban Berg, and the Shadow of Politics," 257.

[25]"Nazi Papers Score Dr. Furtwaengler," *New York Times*, December 8, 1934. Russell notes that the Nazis had once arrested Kleiber at the German border, but does not provide specifics: Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 149. Claudia Maurer Zenck clarifies that Göring tried unsuccessfully to stop Kleiber from leaving Germany. See Maurer Zenck, "Rücksicht vs Rückgrat. Miszellen zur Uraufführung der 'Symphonischen Stücke aus der Oper Lulu,'" *Die Musikforschung* 64, no. 3 (2011): 259–67.

[26]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 148; David Wooldridge, *Conductor's World* (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 183–85; "Kleiber Again Resigns Post with Prussian Opera," *New York Times*, January 2, 1935, 15.

[27]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 147, 149; Matthias Pasdzierny, "Erich Kleiber."

Kleiber had unknowingly embarked on the second half of his career, returning to the steady migration that had marked his first decades. His biography and scraps of correspondence do not mention the Nuremberg Laws, the annexation of the Sudetenland, or Kristallnacht: no one seems concerned about where the family might land. Kleiber's world remained musical rather than political. The Kleiber family moved first to Austria, near Salzburg, and later to Geneva and Lugano in Switzerland. Between 1935 and 1938 he maintained a full schedule as a sought-after visiting conductor, avoiding the Nazi Reich; he crisscrossed Europe and continued his visits to the Teatro Colón in 1937 and 1938.[28] In fact, it was during one of these visits that the former President Alvear helped him exchange his Austrian citizenship for Argentine citizenship.[29]

But the expansion of Nazi influence across Europe did touch Kleiber somewhat. A stint conducting Wagner in Amsterdam was canceled, the claimed reason being that "an avowed enemy of National Socialism" ought not to conduct Wagner. When Mussolini enacted race laws barring Italian Jews from Kleiber's planned performance of *Fidelio* at La Scala, Kleiber canceled the performance and sought tranquility in Roquebrunn Cap-Martin on the Côte d'Azur, also a favored vacation haunt of Coco Chanel, Greta Garbo, Winston Churchill, various Rothschilds, and Salvador Dalí. His sister sent a postcard with a reproduction of a painting of the Turkish siege of Vienna; despite the French Riviera outside his window, Kleiber wrote back grimly, "There's a modern one too, alas!"[30]

Wartime Work in Latin America

Kleiber's respectful biographer falls silent regarding the family's move to the Americas, from 1938 to 1948. But the Berlin archives have more to say. Kleiber's return to Buenos Aires's Teatro Colón was arranged by Josef Goebbels, who worried about the portrayal of German culture on important international stages in countries with significant European "colonies." Nazi cultural leaders were anxious about representation of German greatness on the global stage, especially regarding competition with their Axis allies, the Italians. Argentina's "colony" of Germans was far smaller than its population of Argentine-Italians, many only a generation removed from their homeland.[31] As part of a short-lived cultural-

[28]Barber, *Erich Kleiber*, 16: Alain Paris, *Lexikon der Interpreten klassischer Musik im 20. Jahrhundert, 1992*, 377; Nicolas Slonimsky, *Dear Dorothy: Letters from Nicolas Slonimsky to Dorothy Adlow*, ed. Electra Slonimsky Yourke (Rochester and Suffolk: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 505; David Patmore, *A–Z of Conductors*, Naxos Online (http://www.naxos.com/person/Erich_Kleiber/31643.htm#Arranger).

[29]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 166–67.

[30]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 159–60, 164, 166–67; "Won't Direct at La Scala: Kleiber Refuses Because of Milan Opera Ban On Jews," *New York Times*, December 30, 1938, 10.

[31]On immigrant "colonies" in Buenos Aires, see, *inter alia,* Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City 1870–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); María Mónica Bjerg, *Historias de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2009); Benjamin Bryce, *To Belong in Buenos Aires: Germans, Argentines, and the Rise of a Pluralistic Society* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); José C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). César A. Dillon's work on the Asociación Wagneriana de Buenos Aires and other German-speaking cultural centers provides useful context: César A. Dillon, *Asociación Wagneriana de Buenos Aires (1912–2002): historia y cronología* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2007). On Axis cultural relations, see Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 29. Martin concludes that the Nazi-Fascist "cultural Axis" was "not quite real," in that it did not involve true alliance and coordination, but that it was useful to both sides to appear to be unified; see esp. 105.

relations campaign to woo Latin American elites, during the 1930s the Nazis sponsored a succession of odd bedfellows to take up the baton, design stagings, and train singers for the German seasons at the Teatro Colón.[32]

The first was Fritz Busch, formerly of the Dresden Stadtstheater (Municipal Theater). Busch was dunned out of his Dresden post in March 1933, when local Nazis filled the theater, howling and brawling.[33] Busch brought to Buenos Aires a set of talented colleagues, including the voice instructor (*Korrepetitor*) Erich W. Engels and the conductor and composer Robert Kinsky. Both were Jewish, as was Engels's wife, the soprano Lydia Kindermann. They came with Goebbels's blessing and funding; Berlin also sent them backdrops and talented singers.[34] Busch was also able to bring Carl Ebert, the director at the Berlin Städtische Oper/Deutsches Opernhaus (Municipal Opera).[35] Busch and Ebert were generally recognized as outstanding talents; rumor had it that Hitler hoped to find a way to keep Busch in Berlin. But both had been denounced as ideologically problematic. Nazis who claimed Ebert's work at the Städtische Oper was "culturally absolutely Bolshevik" and "asocial" wrote that "such a man should never again be placed in a leading role in German culture, and should not have a leading role outside Germany, especially in bringing to life the work of Richard Wagner."[36] Ironically, Ebert helped stage many Wagner programs at the Colón.[37] Then Busch publicly condemned the Nazi regime and returned to European posts safely outside Nazi control, first occasional trips to the Glyndebourne Festival in England, later for permanent posts in Denmark and Sweden.[38] Ebert left as well.

Kleiber replaced Busch as the head of the Colón's German season in 1936, thanks to Nazi approval and funding, and Kleiber's willingness once again to negotiate with Nazism for the good of his career. The old lie that Kleiber was Jewish reemerged, of particular concern to

[32]Úrsula Prutsch and Gisela Cramer, *¡Americas Unidas! Nelson A. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940–1946)* (Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012) as well as National Archives documents make clear that Nazi efforts to conduct other kinds of cultural diplomacy in Latin America, for example via radio, were always anemic and had basically ended by 1943.

[33]Vera Giannini, "Fritz Busch: A Son Remembers His Father," *The Opera Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1986): 57–74, esp. 57, 59. Contrary to the depiction of the March events in Busch's son Hans's memory, the Bundesarchiv documents indicate that some employees of the Stadtstheater may have conspired with local Nazis to force Busch out: Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch) R/9361/V, Archivsignatur 78259.

[34]Fritz Busch, *Pages from a Musician's Life*, trans. Marjorie Strachey (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), 211, 213; Grete Busch, *Fritz Busch Dirigent* (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1970), 77; Peter Ebert, *In This Theater of Man's Life: The Biography of Carl Ebert* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1999), 90; J. Hellmut Freund, "Fritz Busch. Ein deutscher Musiker draussen in der Welt," in *Musik im Exil: Folgen des Nazismus für die international Musikkultur*, ed. Hanns-Werner Heister, Claudia Maurer Zenck, and Peter Petersen (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993). On Goebbels's funding German opera at the Colón, see BArch R55 15.9, Theaterwesen im Ausland, Akte 20553 (Argentina 1933–1943), for example, letter dated February 13, 1937, Bühnennachweis.

[35]BArch RK H0033, file Carl Ebert.

[36]BArch RK H0033, file Carl Ebert, letter "N.S.Betriebestelle Städtische Oper 20 May 1933."

[37]BArch R55/20553, Abschrift, letter from Buenos Aires German embassy to the Auswärtiges Amt, July 24, 1935. Ambassador von Thermann wrote to Berlin for money to pay for better Spanish-language translations of Wagner works like the *Nibelungenlied* and *Tannhäuser*.

[38]Busch was the founding musical director of Glyndebourne, in Sussex, England, from 1934 on, bringing on Ebert as his director; he took long-running positions in Denmark and Sweden. But he did take Argentine citizenship in 1936, bought a vacation home in Uruguay, and returned to the Colón for brief stints thereafter until his death in 1951. BArch) R55/20553, Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda Abt I Argentinien, December 1, 1936, Thermann report about the German opera season.

Nazi decision-makers given the presence of so many Jews and refugees in the Colón's staff and ensemble. The aristocratic Nazi ambassador to Argentina, Edmund von Thermann, a devoted high-culture aficionado, wrote Berlin in alarm about Kleiber's supposed "non-Aryan ancestry."[39] Meanwhile, Kleiber expressed through interlocutors his willingness "to behave absolutely correctly toward Germany … there is no reason to expect difficulties."[40] Kleiber seems largely to have kept his part of this bargain, although his biographer noted that Kleiber helped Jewish colleagues escape Berlin and Vienna, among them violinist Jascha Horenstein and Berlin theater director Josef Gielen.[41]

The Colón was the closest thing Kleiber had to a permanent home during his wartime exile. Kleiber's biographer recorded him telling Erich Eisner and other colleagues that "'Our work's got into the woodwork here,'" and joking that when he died, he planned to haunt the huge chandelier in the Colón's auditorium.[42] Buenos Aires, one of the continent's most Europeanized cities, thanks to significant British, French, and German investment and "colonies," felt familiar to the Kleibers. (As late as 1941, journalist John Gunther reported that "every Argentine of the upper classes thought of Paris as his spiritual home. I have met Argentinians who never read a book in Spanish until they were 20. Everything had to be French."[43]) The Kleibers had taken Argentine citizenship even before they fled Europe. In Buenos Aires, they lived alongside many other émigrés and refugees in the tony neighborhood of Belgrano; their farm La Fermata in Alta Gracia, near the city of Córdoba, was close to that of the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla.[44] Kleiber's children Carlos and Veronica were very interested in the city's literary avant-garde. Carlos attended the salon of María Rosa Olivar, who sat on the editorial board of *Sur*, Latin America's foremost literary journal during the 1930s.[45] The Kleibers moved frequently to follow Kleiber's work. Composer and pianist Nicolas Slonimsky, who met Ruth Goodrich Kleiber in Chile, wrote of her that "She is a very energetic type of female, and

[39]BArch) R55/20553, Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda Abt I Argentinien, letter from von Thermann, April 13, 1937.

[40]BArch) R55/20553, Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda Abt I Argentinien, February 13, 1937, letter from Bühnennachweis Vermittlungsstelle Berlin, Abteilung Gastspiele.

[41]Barber, 17, 29; Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 195.

[42]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 195.

[43]John Gunther, *Inside Latin America* (New York: Harper, 1941), 282–83. More generally, see J. P. Daughton, "When Argentina Was 'French': Rethinking Cultural Politics and European Imperialism in Belle-Epoque Buenos Aires," *The Journal of Modern History* 80 (December 2008): 831–64; Jeane Delaney, "Immigration, Identity and Nationalism in Argentina, 1850–1950," in *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America*, ed. Nicola Foote and Michael Goebel (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014); Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Robert Kelz, *Competing Germanies: Nazi, Antifascist, and Jewish Theater in German Argentina, 1933–1965* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2020); Ronald C. Newton, "Indifferent Sanctuary: German-Speaking Refugees and Exiles in Argentina 1933–1945," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affair*s 24, no. 4 (November 1982): 395–420; Stefan Rinke, *Der letzte freie Kontinent. Deutsche Lateinamerikapolitik im Zeichen transnationaler Beziehungen* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1996); Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[44]Barber, 20, 27.

[45]Barber, 29; Rosalie Sitman, *Victoria Ocampo y Sur: Entre Europa y America* (Buenos Aires: Lumiére, 2003). See also Rosalie Sitman, "Protest from Afar: The Jewish and Republican Presence in Victoria Ocampo's *Revista Sur* in the 1930s and 1940s," in *Rethinking Jewish-Latin American Relations*, ed. Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 132–60.

drives her car over the Andes with the children from Buenos Aires, which I think is a little bit too much."[46]

Despite the European veneer of Buenos Aires's wealthier neighborhoods, mid-century Latin American elites were often ambivalent about Europeanness. The horror and bloodshed of Europe's Great War had cast doubt on the supposed supremacy of European civilization.[47] After the war and the Mexican Revolution, Latin Americans entered a new period of regional nationalism, rejecting European or North American tutelage and exploring their own cultures for inspiration. Composers viewed Aztec or Native American cultures as the "ur-American" basis on which to build.[48] Some recently arrived Europeans encouraged this nationalist shift, for example the German-born musicologist "Francisco" Curt Lange in Montevideo, who wrote of Europe as a "hecatomb," no longer capable of inspiring or teaching the world. Lange encouraged Latin American musicians and composers to "draw on their own cultural resources."[49]

Kleiber's world, and his art, thus meant different things to different audiences at different moments. When Latin American elites attended art-music performances, learned instruments, or otherwise demonstrated knowledge of the European musical canon, they were signaling their engagement with what many still understood as a superior, universal artistic tradition. And yet European music could equally stand for a blinkered culture whose best days had passed. During Kleiber's 1931 stint at the Colón, for example, *La Prensa*'s critic sniffed that the German symphonic repertoire needed to be alleviated and modernized by Argentinian pieces and a more eclectic musical selection. The German season's programming, supposedly "based on the [Buenos Aires] German community's tastes," did not correspond to the needs and aspirations of "a city as new and cosmopolitan as is Buenos Aires."[50] Buenos Aires's German colony—and Kleiber—were thus distanced from the needs of a vibrant, energetic Latin America.

Yet Kleiber was still able to draw audiences, and something like his accustomed salary, touring Latin America as a visiting conductor. His concerns seem to have been at least in part related to reputation and fees: a 1939 letter to his wife notes that "I think that I could get plenty to do here [i.e., in Buenos Aires] but I will not in *any* circumstances go below my normal fee and I don't think they could afford it. Besides, I'm not going to take the

[46]Nicolas Slonimsky, *Dear Dorothy: Letters from Nicolas Slonimsky to Dorothy Adlow*, ed. Electra Slonimsky Yourke (Rochester and Suffolk: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 186.

[47]This is a vast literature. A sampling: Paulo Drinot and Alan Knight, eds., *The Great Depression in Latin America* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Michael Goebel, "Reconceptualizing Diasporas and National Identities in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1850–1930," in *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America*, ed. Nicola Foote and Michael Goebel (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014); Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London and New York: Verso, 1999); Alexandra Stern, "Mestizofilia, biotipología y eugenesia en el México posrevolucionario: Hacia una historia de la ciencia y el estado, 1920–1960," *Relaciones. Estudios de Historia y Sociedad* XXI, no. 81 (2000) (https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=13708104); Pablo Yankelevich, ed., *Nación y extranjería* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2009).

[48]Carol A. Hess, *Representing the Good Neighbor: Music, Difference, and the Pan American Dream* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. chap. 2.

[49]Corinne Pernet, "'For the Genuine Culture of the Americas': Musical Folklore, Popular Arts, and the Cultural Politics of Pan Americanism, 1933–1950," in *Decentering America*, ed. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 134, 141.

[50]"Los conciertos sinfónicos del maestro Erich Kleiber," *La Prensa*, October 8, 1931.

jobs away from the Argentinian conductors or from Kinsky, etc …"[51] Kleiber took on conducting seasons in Chile and Cuba, visiting work in Lima and Mexico City, and shorter dates across the continent, particularly conducting Beethoven cycles. He claimed to dislike it, as he wrote his wife in 1940:

> Everything that you've built up—or think you've built up—in a few days or weeks is pulled down on the morning after the last concert and swept away by the cleaning-women. *Nothing is left*. It's as if a travelling circus had been there: just some holes in the ground, a few heaps of sawdust, and some horse-droppings …[52]

Impermanence notwithstanding, Kleiber adapted quickly to his new circumstances, in part because his work remained relatively unchanged. Kleiber's Latin American musicians loved him as his European musicians had, noting his combination of rigorous musicianship, empathy, and humor. He was often able to professionalize and improve his musicians' working conditions—an important issue given that many players had to "sell chocolate in the streets or play all night in a night-club to earn anything like a decent living."[53] Chilean pianist Rosita Renard recalled affectionately that he would tease her about her habit of counting rhythms quietly to herself in English as she played Mozart. Kleiber, whom she called "Papito (Daddy)," pretended to scold her: "Rosita, I hired you to play the piano, not to sing."[54] Kleiber helped the Mexican string player Abel Eisenberg obtain conducting positions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.[55] His first violinist at the Colón, Carlos Pessina, remembered Kleiber fondly. And in Latin America as in Europe, Kleiber insisted on surprising his audiences with newer and less traditional repertoire. He put Chilean, Peruvian, and Argentinian composers on his programs alongside Beethoven, Weber, and Richard Strauss.

Kleiber's yearly visits to Mexico City between 1941 and 1944 offer a useful encapsulation of his wartime work.[56] Mexico earned its postwar reputation as a *país refugio* through its reception of thirty thousand Spanish Republican refugees and a prominent group of German-speaking leftists, including Anna Seghers, Bodo Uhse, Egon Erwin Kisch, Paul Merker, and Lenka Reinerová. But generally speaking, Mexico closed its doors to central Europeans, especially Jews. The total number of German-speakers entering the country between 1937 and 1943 was tiny, ranging from three to five thousand. Of those, relatively few were musicians on whose talent Kleiber might have been able to build.[57]

[51] Letter dated September 19, 1939, cited in Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 177.

[52] Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 190; letter cited is from January 1940.

[53] Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 193–94.

[54] Samuel Claro Valdés, *Rosita Renard, pianista chilena* (Santiago: Editorial Andres Bello, 1993), 216.

[55] Abel Eisenberg, *Entre violas y violines: Crónica crítica de un músico mexicano* (Mexico City: Edamex, 1990), 30–39, 53.

[56] For Kleiber's multiple immigration documents into Mexico, see Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico City, Mexico: F209/5/1 Departamento de Migracion 1927–1950 Argentinos, Caja 02 Dellacanonica-Laporte 134050/183/178.

[57] Of this already small number, historians estimate that only twelve to eighteen hundred German-speaking refugees in Mexico were Jews. On immigration to Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s, see Haim Avni, "Cárdenas, México y los refugiados, 1938–1940," *Estudios interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 3, no. 1 (1992): 5–22; Daniela Gleizer, *El exilio incómodo: México y los refugiados judíos, 1933–1945* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México/UAM-Cuajimalpa, 2011), esp. 40–41; Judit Bokser Liwerant, "Alteridad en la historia y en la memoria: México y los refugiados judíos," in *Encuentro y alteridad: Vida y cultura judía en América Latina*, ed. Judit Bokser Liwerant and Alicia Gojman de Backal (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), 342–61; Marcus G. Patka, *Zu nahe der Sonne. Deutsche Schriftsteller im Exil in Mexiko* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag,

Kleiber could have used some *Landsmänner* in Mexico, as he was explicitly barred from his usual guest stint with a national orchestra. Mexico City art music was essentially under the control of the powerful, well-connected composer and conductor Carlos Chávez.[58] Chávez had helped found the Mexican National Symphony Orchestra; he directed it and controlled hiring and programming. The symphony's previous director, Julián Carrillo, had trained in Leipzig. In contrast, Chávez deprecated music from German-speaking Europe and its practitioners. No non-Mexicans were allowed to play in his orchestra. Over time, Chávez gained control of other musical organizations, such as the initially independent Ópera de México/Ópera Nacional.

Kleiber was generally able to supersede the obstacles Chávez set for him. For example, on Kleiber's first visit in 1941, Chávez threatened to fire any orchestra musicians who played with Kleiber. Kleiber managed to conduct his Beethoven festival at the Palacio de Bellas Artes with an ad hoc orchestra made up of players drawn from the capital's nightclubs and bars, with the help of the Mexico City musicians' union.[59] (The union musicians adored Kleiber, naming him their honorary Secretary General when he returned in 1942.)[60] On his 1942 and 1943 visits, Kleiber conducted the relatively new Mexican national opera companies, staffed at the time by German-speaking refugees such as Carl Alwin and Wilhelm von Wymetal, before Chávez gained control.[61]

As he had done in Europe and on stages elsewhere in Latin America, Kleiber's programming in Mexico combined standards such as Bizet's *Carmen* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* with "music that stimulated [the audience's] nerves," in particular that of tonal modernist composers Manuel Ponce and Silvestre Revueltas. This assuredly did not endear Kleiber to Carlos Chávez, who understood himself and his epigones as sole representatives of the Mexican

1999), 42; Pablo Yankelevich, ed., *Nación y extranjería* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2009); Pablo Yankelevich, ed., *México, país refugio: La experiencia de los exilios en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia; Plaza y Valdés, 2002); Katya Somohano and Pablo Yankelevich, eds., *El refugio en México: Entre la historia y los desafíos contemporáneos* (Mexico City: Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados and Secretaría de Gobernación, 2011).

[58] On Chávez, see Leonora Saavedra, most recently Saavedra, ed., *Carlos Chávez and His World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), as well as the work of Robert Parker and Alejandro L. Madrid, in particular *In Search of Julián Carrillo and Sonido 13* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Also see Yolanda Tapia, "The Political Power of Carlos Chávez and His Influence upon Silvestre Revueltas and Blas Galindo" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2018).

[59] Abel Eisenberg, *Entre violas y violines: Crónica crítica de un músico mexicano* (Mexico City: Edamex, 1990), 29.

[60] AGN Mexico City, Carlos Chavez—Prensa Personal—Caja 3 Volumen II exp 40 Erich Kleiber, *El Universal*, March 1, 1942, and *Excelsior*, March 1, 1942.

[61] The Ópera de México, 1938–1942, became the Ópera Nacional in 1943 and was part of the Chávez-run Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes soon thereafter. Its 1947 programs noted that the opera was by and for Mexicans. AGN Mexico City, Avila Camacho Caja 1126 703.4/96 Opera Nacional Subvencion 11-6-43; Avila Camacho Caja 0421 432.3/60 Filharmonicos DF Conflicto intergremial opera 2-4-43; Carlos Chavez collection, Correspondencia Caja 9, Vol I, exp 41 (1943 Opera Nacional), also Chavez collection, Correspondencia, Caja 9, Vol I, exp 42 (1947, Opera Nacional, undated draft mission statement beginning "Opera Nacional es una asociacion civil formada exclusivamente por mexicanos…"); *50 años de ópera en el Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Mexico City: Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1986), 37; Christian Kloyber and Marcus G. Patka, *Österreicher im Exil. Mexiko 1938–1947, Eine Dokumentation* (Vienna: Verlag Deuticke, 2002), 455.

avant-garde.[62] As he had championed Alban Berg in Berlin, so he featured Silvestre Revueltas for his 1943 and 1944 performances. Revueltas's sister Rosaura claimed to have approached Kleiber with her brother's work; Kleiber even went so far as to adapt Revueltas's film scores for *Redes* (*Nets*, 1934–1935) and *Música para charlar (Chit-Chat Music*, 1938) into orchestral suites for the concert stage, and premiered them in 1943 and 1944. Kleiber's is now the most commonly played version of this piece.[63]

Another way Kleiber's Mexico visits adumbrated his Latin American work overall is the seemingly random nature of his political engagement. Kleiber agreed to be interviewed for the radio by various German-speaking antifascist organizations, all of them much farther left than his own political inclinations. The first was ARAM, the Acción Republicana Austriaca de México (Austrian Republican Action Group in Mexico), founded by Austrian communists and social democrats with a small admixture of liberals. ARAM's membership held diverse opinions, and their only point of political agreement was that the Habsburgs should be kept out of postwar Austrian politics. Most of ARAM's activities were culturally focused, including Austrian musical evenings, in a setting called the "Café Prater," serving apple strudel as the Schrammel Trio played.[64] ARAM also had a half-hour-long Friday afternoon radio program, *La Voz de Austria/Der Stimme Österreichs* on Radio Gobernación/XEPD, to play Austrian music for the Mexican audience, as a form of refugee cultural relations.

The specifics of ARAM's engagement seem to have mattered little to Kleiber, who accepted positions as honorary president of many Austrian societies across the region in a general antifascist spirit.[65] Kleiber's sense of eventual postwar politics was vague and apolitical, as his remarks on the Mexico City radio make clear. On January 15, 1943, just before a local soprano sang Johann Strauss's *Lieder*, Kleiber spoke:

> All of you true Austrians should have only one ideal, that the word Austria should be able to mean more than it has in the past, and that out of the Allied victory a new Austria might arise. That should be our goal. I beg you not to concern yourselves unduly with the form our government will take in the future. The time for politicization will happen later. [Now] I greet all our countrymen with a hearty and forthright *Grüß Gott*. May the Lord protect our little country [sic: *Landl*].[66]

[62]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 77, 27, 230; Octavio Sosa, *70 años de ópera en el Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2004), 65ff; on Ponce and modernism, see Alejandro L. Madrid, *Sounds of the Modern Nation: Music, Culture and Ideas in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 92.

[63]Rosaura Revueltas, *Los Revueltas: biografía de una familia* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1980), 204, 289. Antonia Teibler-Vondrak and Roberto Kolb-Neuhaus differ about the effect of Kleiber's edits on the modernist charge of Revueltas's score; see Antonia Teibler-Vondrak, "Auf den Spuren Erich Kleibers in Mexiko (1943–1944). Seine musikalischen und politischen Aktivitäten sowie seine Bearbeitungen von *Redes* und *Música para charlar* des mexikanischen Komponisten Silvestre Revueltas," in *Wiener Musikgeschichte. Annäherungen—Analysen—Ausblicke; Festschrift für Hartmut Krones*, ed. Hartmut Krones, Julia Bungardt, Eike Rathgeber, Maria Helfgott, and Nikolaus Urbanek (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 599, comment about the predominance of Kleiber's version is on 607–8; Roberto Kolb-Neuhaus, "Silvestre Revueltas's *Redes*: Composing for Film or Filming for Music?," *Journal of Film Music* 2, no. 2–4 (March 2010): 127–44, and liner notes, *Redes* (DVD: Naxos, 2016) x n29 (English), xi n26 (Spanish).

[64]Christian Kloyber, ed., *Exilio y cultura: El exilio cultural austriaco en México* (Mexico City: Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 2002), 134–35; Patka, *Zu nahe der Sonne*, 125.

[65]Ruth Aspöck, "Österreichische antifascistische Gruppen in Lateinamerika," in *Vertriebene Vernunft II: Emigration und Exil österreicher Wissenschaft*, ed. Friedrich Stadler (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1988), 1000.

[66]Kloyber and Patka, *Österreicher im Exil*, 342–43. Russell also describes this speech but dates it inaccurately to the last weeks of the war, when Kleiber was not in Mexico. See Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 240.

For another example of Kleiber's undiscerning politics, Kleiber did an interview during that same visit with German communist Paul Merker of the organization Freies Deutschland (Free Germany).[67] Freies Deutschland was an important antifascist network, supporting an eponymous journal as well as a publishing company, Das Verlag *El Libro Libre*, and a cultural organization, the Heinrich Heine Klub. Egon Erwin Kisch, Anna Seghers, Bodo Uhse, Alexander Abusch, and Andre Simone were among its most prominent members. Freies Deutschland's journal, mainly in German with a Spanish-language insert intended for Mexican elites, was sold throughout Latin America and shipped to bookstores in South Africa, Australia, China, Sweden, Palestine, Great Britain, India, and the Soviet Union. The journal covered news extensively, drawing on its own correspondents based in London and elsewhere as well as summarizing reports from other journals and radio networks: *Aufbau, German-American, Neue Volkszeitung, Atlantic Monthly*, the BBC, and Radio Moscow, among others.[68] The Heinrich-Heine-Klub attracted a regular audience of some two hundred to eight hundred people at its gatherings and was one of the most important centers of German culture and letters in Latin American exile between 1941 and 1946.[69]

In short, Kleiber's Latin American sojourn maintained patterns he had established in Europe. He was sought after as a touring conductor of the first order and was paid handsomely for it. He joined forces with anyone who could help him do his best musical work, whatever their political orientation or general background, from Josef Goebbels to Erich Engel to musicians from Mexico City's bar bands. He accepted honorary chairships of Austrian exile organizations, which he mostly ignored; he did a radio interview with German communists affiliated with Moscow. What mattered, always, was the music, and the faraway dream of a postwar Europe, the details of which could remain comfortably hazy.

War's End: Back to Berlin?

The war had greatly changed the world—but not, it seemed, Kleiber's world. The final ten years of his life covered familiar terrain: offers of work at the world's most prominent stages, arguments with orchestra administrators over fees and programming, efforts to protect beloved musicians and teach singers, circling hopefully between Vienna and Berlin. Now as before, Kleiber indulged in the luxury of willful political blindness, willing to compromise with authoritarians and hurl angry rhetoric at democrats. Very little of it seemed to matter. Each time, Kleiber was able to extricate himself, look for other, better offers, and dream of Vienna.

[67] Kloyber and Patka note, but do not describe the content of, this interview (on *Por un mundo libre/Für eine freie Welt* on Radio Nacional/IEFO): Kloyber and Patka, *Österreicher im Exil*, 340. On Freies Deutschland in Mexico, among others, see Renata von Hanffstengel, Cecilia Tercero Vasconcelos, and Silke Wehner Franco, eds., *Mexiko. Das wohltempierte Exil* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Interculturales Germano-Mexicanas, 1995); Patrik von zur Mühlen, *Fluchtziel Lateinamerika. Die deutsche Emigration 1933–1945. Politische Aktivitäten und soziokulturelle Integration* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1988); Fritz Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politisch-kulturellen Emigration aus Deutschland (1937–1946)* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986).

[68] Patka, *Zu nahe der Sonne*, 98–100.

[69] Elisabeth Gronau, "Der Heinrich-Heine-Klub in Mexiko-Stadt, 1941–1946" (master's thesis, Neuere Deutsche Literatur, Humboldt University), 2005, 3.

Offers from outside Latin America were coming Kleiber's way, and to take them, he had to break the lucrative long-term contract he had held in Cuba between 1943 and 1947. The Cuban national symphony orchestra was run

> [b]y a *Patronato* of wealthy amateurs who financed the orchestra and expected, in return, to have the last word in the choice of programmes. The players came, in many cases, from the local police and fire brigade bands, and their instruments were often on temporary loan from the *Patronato*. The concerts were subscription concerts and the audience came almost entirely from those who could afford to take a whole season's bookings in advance.[70]

But Kleiber had found much to his liking in Cuba. The *Patronato* paid his exorbitant salary, tolerated the number of rehearsals he demanded, and helped him create a set of *conciertos populares* for Cubans who could not afford regular season tickets.[71]

In 1947, however, when the *Patronato* innocently requested that he program more Johann Strauss waltzes, Kleiber suddenly and publicly found himself appalled, conveniently freeing him for work elsewhere. As he left Havana, he indignantly compared the *Patronato*'s actions to Nazi efforts to control his artistic freedom in 1935.[72] Kleiber landed well, of course: Toscanini had invited him to New York, to serve as the principal guest conductor of Toscanini's NBC Symphony for the 1945–1946 and 1947–1948 seasons. From there he would go to London, while maintaining his busy itinerant schedule across the Atlantic, from Buenos Aires to Florence and other stages. Kleiber evidently underwent an "audition" at the Vienna Philharmonic in 1951; the literature says little about this arrangement, embarrassing to a conductor of his stature, and evidence of his deep unfulfilled desire to return to Vienna.[73]

Kleiber had two main postwar European engagements. The first was in London, as Covent Garden's first guest conductor after the war, chosen personally by *intendant* David Webster. At least briefly, it seemed possible that Kleiber might stay. Kleiber earned his standard press plaudits in the *Daily Mail* and elsewhere. His singers and musicians adored him, as usual. His work with soprano Sylvia Fisher as the Marschallin in Strauss's *Rosenkavalier* helped her become "not only undisputed prima donna but one of the finest singers of the day." The Covent Garden singers recalled their work with him as "a shared 'spiritual experience.'" Kleiber was said to be able to handle both his musicians and the dramatic direction of his operas as would a psychologist and teacher.[74]

And yet, as happened more often than not, Kleiber's tenure at Covent Garden quickly became complicated. As conditions of a permanent contract, Kleiber insisted on a staggeringly high salary and total artistic control. "There was a tendency for arguments to be settled with the threat of 'Well then, I am going back to South America!'—where, apparently, whatever Kleiber had wanted Kleiber got!"[75] Webster recalled a discussion with Kleiber in which a great smile came over his face: "I don't think I make rows, but maybe

[70]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 198.
[71]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 198–99, 202.
[72]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 204.
[73]Wooldridge, *Conductor's World*, 185; Patmore, *A–Z of Conductors*. Kleiber's postwar commitments in Latin America are mentioned, among others, in SAPMO-BArch DR 1/34 letter to Kleiber at the Hotel Bolivar in Lima, Peru, June 30, 1954, from Maria Rentmeister.
[74]Montague Haltrecht, *The Quiet Showman: Sir David Webster and the Royal Opera House* (London: Collins, 1975), 142, 145–46, 173.
[75]Haltrecht, *The Quiet Showman*, 175.

it is true to say that where I am rows seem to be!" Brilliance seemed to be where Kleiber was, too: his performances of Berg's *Wozzeck* in 1952 were so acclaimed that Berg's publisher asked Vienna's leading conductors to travel to Covent Garden, to better understand Berg's work. Still, Covent Garden let Kleiber move on.[76]

Kleiber had kept up his visiting-conductor schedule while at Covent Garden, of course. One of his most frequent occasional destinations had been Berlin—to be specific, and perhaps surprising, East Berlin, where he flirted for years with a new group of authoritarian leaders, hoping to regain "his" Staatsoper on his own terms. Kleiber was not entirely blind to the postwar devastation in both Germanies, to the new circumstances of the Cold War, to the possible consequences of his actions. But certainly no one would praise him for his political acuity. As he had throughout his life, Kleiber continued to see his talent and the primacy of his art as far more significant than any political constellation. Once again, he would be wrong.

Can we excuse Kleiber for his political pliability in the service of art? Certainly, art music—tied so profoundly to German identity since the eighteenth century—was viewed on both sides of the Iron Curtain as tremendously significant.[77] For Germans traumatized by their wartime experiences, music represented a connection to past cultural glories and an escape from present hardship. As Celia Applegate has noted, "The 'survival stories' of twentieth-century Germans have a steady undertone of musical experiences."[78]

But for the occupying powers, music quickly became a competitive arena of cultural diplomacy. Domestically, the occupiers' alleged devotion to art music might prove useful as "a public symbol of the occupiers' intentions and of their commitment to high culture." Concerts began in the Soviet sector, with the Berlin Philharmonic performing its first postwar concert on May 26, 1945, and a concert amid the rubble in Dresden on June 6. SMAD also began transmitting musical radio programming, initially from Berlin Radio on Masurenallee, and soon thereafter from Goebbels's station, now renamed Radio-Berlin-Tanzorchester. In both East and West, composers—and whenever possible, artists—banned under the Nazis returned to concert stages; pianos were pulled from the husks of buildings.[79]

From a standpoint of international competition, the occupying powers hoped to attract not just previously banned artists but the most prominent among them. Kleiber, like other prewar greats, represented an opportunity: whoever gained him could brag that he had chosen the side that would better support artists, freedom, true Germanness. And, of

[76]David Webster, "Kleiber: An Appreciation," *Tempo* 39 (Spring 1956): 5–6.

[77]Among the excellent work historicizing postwar German music, see Joy Calico's "Jüdische Chronik: The Third Space of Commemoration between East and West Germany," *Musical Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (2005): 95–122; Joy Calico, "Schoenberg's Symbolic Remigration: *A Survivor from Warsaw* in Postwar West Germany," *The Journal of Musicology* 26, no. 9 (Winter 2009): 17–43; Wolfgang Geiseler, "Zwischen Klassik und Moderne," in *So viel Anfang war nie. Deutsche Städte 1945–1949*, ed. Hermann Glaser, Lutz von Pufendorf, and Michael Schöneich (Berlin: Siedler, 1989); Michael Haas, *Forbidden Music* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Janik, *Recomposing German Music: Politics and Musical Tradition in Cold War Berlin* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Maren Köster, *Musik-Zeit-Geschehen. Zu den Musikverhältnissen in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1952* (Saarbrücken: PFAU-Verlag, 2002); Marita Krauss, *Heimkehr in ein fremdes Land. Geschichte der Remigration nach 1945* (Munich: Beck, 2001); David Monod, *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945–1953* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Toby Thacker, *Music After Hitler, 1945–1955* (London: Routledge, 2007); Matthias Tischler, "Musik in der Ära des Kalten Krieges," in Andreas Meyer, *Was bleibt? 100 Jahre Neue Musik* (Mainz: Schott, 2011), 135–61.

[78]Applegate, *The Necessity of Music,* 301–2.

[79]Thacker, *Music After Hitler,* 30, 34, 75; Applegate, *The Necessity of Music*, 301.

course, it meant denying the other side that same victory. Kleiber seemed relatively unaware of being a potential pawn in a cultural-relations chess game. Or, rather, he was playing a different game, in which the stakes were neither national nor international but both highly local and universal at the same time—that is, Kleiber was playing for the Staatsoper, and for Europe's musical past.

Old Staatsoper colleagues began writing to the Kleibers in late 1950, inviting them to return to Berlin for a visit—with, of course, the sponsorship of the East German state, which was hoping to borrow from Kleiber's prewar fame and lure him back to his former home. The Staatsoper ensemble was playing nearby in the Admiralspalast on Friedrichstrasse, as the Staatsoper itself had sustained severe bombing damage during the war. The Kleibers came first together, in spring 1951, and then Kleiber returned that June, to direct a celebrated guest performance of *Der Rosenkavalier* and Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*.[80]

But clearly his hopes focused on more than a single performance. The morning after conducting, he picked his way across the battered city square where "his" Berliner Staatsoper had once stood and gazed into its ruins.

> Passers-by were intrigued to see a big black motor car draw up in the rubble at a quarter to eight in the morning and a small sturdy figure in blue beret and great overcoat clamber across to the indecipherable trough that had been the orchestra pit. The whole area was, of course, unrecognizable.

Kleiber was not the only person dreaming of a return to the Staatsoper, and greatness, during his visit. In a letter to his wife, he casually described meetings with officials at the highest ranks of East German power: a "minister" (most likely Paul Wandel, Minister for *Volksbildung* [Popular Enlightenment/Education]), Wilhelm Pieck himself, president of East Germany, and with Walter Ulbricht, General Secretary of the SED, whom Kleiber referred to as the "vice president," in a telling display of political nonchalance.

Kleiber's recollection of these meetings from that letter neatly encapsulates his indifference to the political present and his hopes of re-creating the Staatsoper of the past. He wrote:

> There's talk of pulling down what's left of the Staatsoper and the Hedwigskirche and building a "Forum" instead. I protested violently against this and in the end I got not only the Minister but also … the President's Staatsekretär to agree with me that the Staatsoper should be rebuilt exactly as *der alte Fritz* built it. That is really a great victory! And I believe they'll really do it.

His memory of meeting with Pieck and Ulbricht was similarly focused on his own goals of a renewed, not simply rebuilt, Staatsoper. In it, the savvy Moscow communist Wilhelm Pieck is transformed into a kindly old uncle: "Pieck is quite unaffected and might be the chairman of a bowling club. He was full of compliments and said, 'Perhaps if we could count on you to inaugurate the rebuilt Staatsoper …' So I said 'Not perhaps—if you really built it up *exactly* as it was—then "Quite certainly!"'"[81]

But that would be Kleiber's last contact with the unaffected bowling club chairman. Kleiber's trips back and forth to East Berlin, and his contacts with the East German

[80]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Ministerium für Volksbildung to Kulturelle Beziehungen mit dem Ausland, March 8 1951; Kulturelle Beziehungen mit dem Ausland to Deutsche Volkspolizei, "Prof. Erich Kleiber—Frau Ruth Kleiber," March 19, 1951.

[81]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 212–15. The SED had been considering rebuilding the Staatsoper even before Kleiber's involvement: see Paul Stangl, *Risen from Ruins: The Cultural Politics of Rebuilding East Berlin* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 110–12.

government, were managed mainly by the Stakuko, or the East German Staatliche Komission für Kunstangelegenheiten (State Art Commission), which among other endeavors brought some forty prominent West German musicians and conductors to the East. Kleiber and his wife developed a personal closeness to Maria Rentmeister, their Stakuko handler, who located potential sites for the Kleibers to build a home, worried fondly about their health, and reported diligently to the Ministry of Culture about Kleiber's fears and concerns.[82]

His apprehensions were on full display during a late 1952 concert tour to Leipzig, Dresden, Berlin, and Munich with some of East Germany's great ensembles, such as the Dresden Staatskapelle and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.[83] Maria Rentmeister worried that "Kleiber the horse is balking (*Das Pferd Kleiber ist scheu geworden*)," noting his open criticism of the DDR and his concern about what he perceived as poor working conditions for the musicians he directed. Kleiber believed art in the DDR was overly influenced by politics and that unqualified people were promoted, Rentmeister reported. Kleiber warned her that "it would be a shame and an international scandal were he to have to break a contract" over some unpleasant incident—presumably state interference with the freedom of art—if he took up his Staatsoper baton.[84]

The rest of the world believed Kleiber had already made a decision. A blunt *New York Times* headline from June 1952 read "KLEIBER CHOOSES REDS."[85] But in fact, negotiations were ongoing and were not concluded for at least another year.[86] Kleiber's most important stipulations, unsurprisingly, centered around the Staatsoper and his own artistic freedom as its director. He insisted that the Staatsoper be exactly reconstructed, on its original site, "just as Frederick the Great … built it."[87] Within the Staatsoper, he would brook no political interference: "In musical matters I have the first and the last word."[88]

This is not to say that Kleiber forgot his own comfort. He asked to be paid in deutsche marks, not in eastern marks; he expected the East Germans to subsidize at least some of his fees when conducting abroad; and he asked for a regular stipend involving, among other things, the ability to easily cross into West Berlin to attend performances there. The Kleibers requested to be lodged in the formerly grand Hotel Adlon until

[82]Thacker, *Music After Hitler,* 202–3; SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, from the Intendant der Deutschen Staatsoper to the Staatliche Komission für Kunstangelegenheiten, HA Darstellende Kunst und Musik, May 12, 1952; Maria Rentmeister, "An den Vorsitzenden," June 19, 1952; Stakuko became part of the Ministry of Culture in 1954.

[83]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, no author, "Bericht Gastspielreise Dr. Kleiber," undated.

[84]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, unsigned document, "Bericht Gastspielsreise Dr. Kleiber," December 11, 1952, 2, 4, 5, 6.

[85]"KLEIBER CHOOSES REDS: Conductor Will Live in East Germany and Lead Its Opera," *New York Times*, June 18, 1952, 30. The article quotes "Helmut Holtzhauer, chief of the East German government arts bureau" as stating that Kleiber had agreed to serve as music director of the East German state opera company for 1953.

[86]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Kleiber to Herr Minister P. Wandel, September 12, 1952. Kleiber requested information about the Staatsoper's renovation and about the possibility of a contract. Also see Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler*, 349–50.

[87]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 214–15. Various documents echo this: for example, SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, document titled "Informationen," undeated, includes the following: "Er erkundigte sich eingehend danach, ob der Aufbau der Staatsoper auf der völlige Restaurierung der alten Oper beruhe (Fridericus Rex)."

[88]Thacker, *Music After Hitler*, 204: quotation is from SAPMO-BArch DR 1/34, Kleiber to Rentmeister, June 25, 1954.

acceptable permanent accommodations were found. Kleiber's son Carlos was granted the opportunity to direct the operetta *Gasparone* in Potsdam; Kleiber himself personally negotiated the terms, including the monthly salary and the pseudonym under which Carlos would conduct. Maria Rentmeister recalled that Kleiber seemed to want to test his son's talent under somewhat anonymous conditions.[89] And Kleiber's Stakuko handlers worked to obtain musical scores for him from elsewhere in the Eastern bloc—a copy of a Mozart trio from Leningrad, original scores of *Freischutz* and *Figaro* from Poland.[90]

Meanwhile, Kleiber continued to raise questions of artistic freedom and political pressure in his correspondence with East German officials. In January 1953, for example, he worried that politics and propaganda might preempt *reine Kunstausübung* in the 1950s as they had in 1935; he also mentioned the many musicians he had met who lived in difficult material conditions, or in ongoing fear.[91] The Kleibers' correspondence with Berlin contains many clippings from West German newspapers, detailing efforts to censor supposedly "decadent" works in the DDR, such as Richard Strauss's *Salome*. "Are these reports true?" Ruth Kleiber inquired, in careful handwriting.[92] In July 1953, Kleiber mentioned conditions in Berlin during the infamous June strikes and their subsequent repression.[93] In December, he reminded the Stakuko bureaucrats that until the "cultural-artistic borders between East and West … are finally down" it would be impossible to have access to a high-quality ensemble of artists or to guarantee that neither East nor West would threaten absolute artistic freedom. More specifically, he warned that in his Staatsoper, "It would be utterly unthinkable to see any changes made to the libretto of an opera that implicitly changed the sources of a composer's inspiration."[94]

Throughout 1954, Kleiber waged similar preemptive battles with Max Burghardt, the Staatsoper's *Intendant*. He asked Burghardt to avoid politics in the new Staatsoper: "I hope you will allow to reemerge … the old spirit of 'desiring to make only Art' …"[95] He noted that interfering with his artistic vision would of course cause him to "step back"—that is, to quit:

> The nowadays unfortunately so "modern" mania for "Stylization" is especially … inappropriate here! And I cannot do Weber music like that. … if the entire "*Freischutz*-Matter" becomes suddenly difficult and due to an overly hurried preparation no truly artistic result can be guaranteed, I would rather step back. In that case it is really not my fault![96]

On a different topic, Kleiber struck a similar note insisting on his artistic autonomy—in this case on the primacy of German music—although he left the door open to music that would please the Soviets:

[89]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/34, "Angaben über einige Besprechungen mit Professor Kleiber," November 16, 1954. Kleiber had been shown several houses near Heinrich-Mann-Platz, which he rejected as too noisy a location. Regarding Carlos Kleiber, see SAPMO-BArch DR 1/9797, Maria Rentmeister to Jlse Weintraudt [sic], October 15, 1954.

[90]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, document titled "Wünsche von Herrn Prof. Kleiber," undated.

[91]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to "Sehr verehrter Herr Ministerpräsident," Zürich, January 12, 1953 (the second page of this letter is missing); the response, by P. Wandel to Erich Kleiber, March 17, 1953, offers little concrete reassurance.

[92]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, letter from Ruth Kleiber to "Herr Pötzsch," undated, includes newspaper clipping dated January 25, 1953.

[93]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Maria Rentmeister to Erich Kleiber, September 10, 1953.

[94]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to "Sehr geehrte Herr Holtzhauer," Zürich, December 1 1953.

[95]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to Max Burghardt, June 21, 1954, Dolder Grand Hotel Zürich.

[96]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to Max Burghardt, September 5, 1954, Lima, Peru.

> I am absolutely of the opinion that this newly reconstructed **German** Staatsoper above all must open with works by the four great **German** classics—Beethoven, Gluck, Mozart, and Wagner. That must be the first set of works (*Meister*) to resound there. And a Weber and a Richard Strauss should also be prepared. … **After** the four German classics, Italian, Russian, French operas can [be programmed]—and I comment, by the way, that it would interest me **very** much to conduct "Khowantschina" with a Russian director and stage designer![97]

In late 1954, the Kleibers finally came to settle in East Berlin. The Staatsoper's planned opening was scheduled for January 1955. Both Kleiber and the DDR administrators remained wary of one another for different reasons; both sides played for different stakes. The DDR cultural administrators cautioned one another as the Kleibers arrived: "I do not need to emphasize that this is of great importance for the entire artistic situation in Berlin and in the DDR …"[98] Kleiber, by contrast, remained concerned about artistic freedom, which he understood both as a personal concern and as a larger universal moral value. And yet while Kleiber hoped to return to the Staatsoper's podium, on the other hand, the East Germans had rebuilt the Staatsoper in its original form. His biographer summarized the situation with "It was a gamble, of course: but one in which the other side's stake (the rebuilding of the theater) would remain on the board even if he himself lost the game."[99]

Almost immediately, however, Kleiber found himself embroiled in a conflict the local newspapers termed the *Sängerkrieg*, or Singers' War. Max Burghardt, Kleiber's *Intendant*, had hired away important singers from Hamburg, Vienna, and the Städtische Oper (City Opera) in West Berlin, such as the *Heldenbariton* Josef Herrmann. Partly in response, the Städtische Oper refused to partner with Kleiber and the Staatsoper in creating productions or sharing singers. The West Berliners had other fears as well, specifically that the Staatsoper could pay singers more, charge less for tickets, and thus compete favorably for ensemble quality and audience members in a devastated city and country.[100]

The problems were also political; both East and West wanted singers to choose a side. The West Berlin Senate passed a resolution barring performers who had played in the East from appearing in West Berlin.[101] In a press conference, West Berlin senator Joachim Tiburtius warned would-be employees of the Staatsoper that "singers are also citizens"—that is, the glories of art would not trump Berlin's political circumstances and the commitments they demanded.[102] Burghardt felt a different sort of pressure at the Staatsoper, given that Berlin could provide East Germans with a convenient exit point. He recalled that singers from Leipzig, Weimar, or Dresden put emotional pressure on Burghardt to hire them. "A DDR singer … threatened suicide if I blocked his way to Berlin."[103]

Kleiber's intervention in this conflict once again demonstrates his political obtuseness. He visited the Städtische Oper himself to argue for openness and failed. Carl Ebert, the head of the Städtische Oper, was bound to obey the dictates of the West Berlin Senate for his

[97]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to Max Burghardt, "Sehr geehrter Herr Generalintendant," Tarma, Peru, July 30, 1954; emphasis in original.

[98]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Alexander Abusch to Dieck, Hauptverwaltung der Deutschen Volkspolizei, December 20 1954.

[99]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 216.

[100]"Der Berliner Sängerkrieg," *Musica* 9 (March 8, 1955): 56–58, esp. 56; Thacker, *Music After Hitler*, 204.

[101]Thacker, *Music After Hitler*, 204.

[102]"Der Berliner Sängerkrieg," 56.

[103]Max Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler. Erinnerungen eines Theatermannes* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1973), 342–43.

funding. Kleiber became irate, accusing the West Berliners of echoing Nazi efforts to control art, and positing East Germany as the supposed protector of freedom:

> The Staatsoper authorities … were delighted that I should build, in some degree, a music-bridge between east and west. From which side, therefore, can there be said to be "political interference in art"? It is grotesque that I should have to write to you in the same terms that I used to Herr Goering in 1935 and say that "Music is meant for one and all, like sunshine and fresh air" and that "I shall make music wheresoever I am allowed a free choice of programme and conditions in which serious work can be done."[104]

Soon Kleiber's bombast and the Singers' War faded. By early 1955, Ebert had lured back some of his singers to the Städtische Oper. Tiberius's mandate that artists had to choose a side of the Iron Curtain quietly became standard. At the Staatsoper, Max Burghardt and Johannes Becher, DDR minister of culture, bragged that singers banned by the West were actually seeking the "greater artistic possibilities" available in the East.[105]

Only a few months later, another problem arose. Kleiber had insisted as a condition of his return that the Staatsoper be rebuilt in absolutely identical form, including the gilded quotation by Frederick the Great over the entrance to the building: *Fridericus Rex Apollini et Musis (from Frederick the Great, for Apollo and the Muses)*.[106] But in late winter 1955, the DDR leadership suddenly ungilded the quotation, and Kleiber exploded. Cultural Minister Johannes Becher invited Kleiber for coffee, cognac, and complaint. Burghardt reported that after the meeting Kleiber had seemed to thaw and to have been charmed by Becher's humor. "The Frederick inscription was no longer mentioned."[107] The DDR cultural bureaucrats assumed a return to business as usual and continued their work on Kleiber's behalf, for example, writing to the head of the Plauen City Theater to request they hire Kleiber's son Carlos.[108]

But the thaw and charm were temporary. From a safe distance, Kleiber tendered his resignation in March 1955. Writing from Cologne, and once again drawing on a comparison to Nazism, Kleiber explained that the matter of the Staatsoper's inscription symbolized a much larger set of problems: the DDR's lack of honesty, predictability, and commitment to artistic freedom.

> I cannot see why this 200-year-old inscription, which was newly gilded only a few months ago, should not have been condemned years ago, if at all—at the time, in fact, when my conditions were accepted and it was agreed that the house would be rebuilt exactly as *der alte Fritz* gave it to the German nation … This incident—following, as it does, upon other notorious incidents of recent months—is for me a sign, sad but sure, that, as in 1934, politics and propaganda have made their way into this temple … I have had to acknowledge that the spirit of the old theater cannot reign in the new building.[109]

[104]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 217–21; Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler*, 359–60.

[105]"Der Berliner Sängerkrieg," 56–57; Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler*, 360.

[106]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, document titled "Informationen," undated, includes the following: "Er erkundigte sich eingehend danach, ob der Aufbau der Staatsoper auf der völlige Restaurierung der alten Oper beruhe (Fridericus Rex)."

[107]Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler*, 363.

[108]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Maria Rentmeister to Herr Stoschek, Stadttheater in Plauen, March 12, 1955.

[109]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to Max Burghardt, March 16, 1955, Köln. Russell (who along with Kleiber's son Carlos worked to spirit Kleiber's belongings out of Berlin), *Erich Kleiber*, 227–28.

When Max Burghardt offered to meet with Kleiber, hoping to persuade him to return, Kleiber self-deprecatingly acknowledged that his artistic absolutism meant "I would be for the government an … '*enfant terrible*' which would become unbearable sooner or later for both sides."[110]

Kleiber was, in fact, criticized from—and himself criticized—both sides. East German voices accused Kleiber of singlehandedly damaging the possibilities of East and West German reconciliation.[111] In his memoir, Max Burghardt called Kleiber "rootless"—using language associated with antisemitism, though not quite echoing the old allegation that Kleiber was Jewish—and implied that Kleiber's wartime emigration had led him to a retrograde position of historical ignorance. "Not an enemy," Burghardt concluded, "rather a friend [deep in] error."[112]

Observers expected Kleiber to take work in West Berlin, but Kleiber haughtily refused, making yet another unforced political error: "I hereby declare that I shall not raise my baton in west Berlin while the present authorities remain in control. These people showed themselves small-minded, chauvinistic, and opposed to any understanding when I tried to build a musical bridge between east and west. My 'case' is unsuited to, and useless for, political propaganda of any kind in either direction."[113]

Kleiber escaped any consequences from this second Berlin episode. In fact, other offers had come his way, and the East Germans muttered grimly among themselves that the fuss about the gilded inscription had simply been a pretext for him to accept them. Kleiber was planning to take the Vienna Philharmonic on a North American concert tour for the fall of 1956. He made some marvelous recordings with Decca, including one of Strauss's *Rosenkavalier* in Vienna 1954, and was in discussions to record Beethoven's *Fidelio* and *Missa solemnis* with them. He was also in negotiations about conducting *Parsifal* with Maria Callas at La Scala, and he led concerts in Stuttgart and Cologne.[114]

On January 27, 1956, Mozart's two-hundredth birthday, Kleiber was found dead in the bathtub of his Zürich hotel suite. He most likely died of a heart attack, despite later rumors that both Kleiber and his son Carlos took their own lives (Carlos died in 2004). Both Ruth and Erich Kleiber had complained of frequent ill health throughout the 1950s; they wrote Maria Rentmeister often from Swiss sanatoriums, such as the Bircher-Benner sanatorium near Zürich.[115] The couple's health problems as they aged had not been made easier by Kleiber's demanding postwar performance schedule, involving near-constant travel between Europe, the United States, and Latin America.[116] Kleiber canceled a string of Latin American concerts in the summer of 1953, citing unspecified health problems.[117] In October 1954, Burghardt recalled Kleiber mentioning that his heart was "not quite

[110]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to Max Burghardt, April 3, 1955, Köln.

[111]Thacker, *Music After Hitler*, 204; Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler*, 346–66, his open letter to Kleiber on page 364.

[112]Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler*, 364.

[113]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 228–29.

[114]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 232–33, Barber, 21. Although Kleiber had promised his DDR interlocutors he would never work with Americans, Max Burghardt was convinced the North American tour was the reason Kleiber had left. See SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Max Burghardt to Maria Rentmeister, August 26, 1955.

[115]For example, SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Maria Rentmeister to Erich Kleiber, May 13, 1954.

[116]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, as described in Ruth Kleiber to Maria Rentmeister, May 14 [sic], 1954.

[117]SAPMO-BArch DR 1/19797, Erich Kleiber to Herr Holzhauer, July 16, 1953.

right."[118] And Kleiber had apparently been ill at a poorly reviewed, problematic performance of Verdi's *Requiem* in Vienna in November 1955. Kleiber was buried in the Hönggerberg graveyard outside Zürich, wearing the poncho given him during the war by the players of the Chilean national symphony orchestra.[119]

Conclusion

Kleiber's life and struggles—or his relative lack thereof—allow historians to use the details of a single experience to refine our general understanding of his place and time. His itinerant career, his complex affiliations, and his problematic choices remind us of many things we already knew. That Germanness has never spoken with one voice, or developed in a single place, or meant a single set of things. That even in eras and places we consider in hindsight to have been overwhelmingly political, it is possible for people to pretend politics do not exist, and act accordingly.[120]

Centrally, Kleiber's life was migratory, a pattern he both chose and mourned. The world of art music is inherently mobile, with career incentives encouraging musicians and conductors to move from ensemble to ensemble, develop touring careers, and so on. As Kleiber's fame grew, offers to conduct came from across the world, making him all the more peripatetic. The Kleibers' lives were thus supra- and subnational at once: they were at home everywhere and nowhere, at upscale tourist towns on the French Riviera and mountain retreats in the Andes and spa hotels in the Swiss Alps. Their lives were, as Michael Geyer has termed it, "crazy quilt" twentieth-century lives, functioning beyond the limitations of the, or a, nation-state.[121] We might also think of this mobility as something of a Habsburg hangover, given that the world Kleiber had been raised in was lost; the war left him again politically and culturally homeless, despite his Argentine citizenship. Kleiber's lifelong yearning to return to Vienna was just one manifestation of his attachment to a foregone place and time.[122]

Kleiber's affiliation to an idiosyncratic central European identity accompanied his lifelong transnationality. This article's title, "Citizen of the Staatsoper," describes his sense of civic belonging to an artistic and political world that made theaters like the Staatsoper possible. He found aspects of that world in idealized visions of the Vienna of his childhood, in Weimar Berlin, in the Darmstadt princely court where he had begun his career: he "regard[ed] Frederick the Great, Knobelsdorff, Weber, Spontini, Nicolai, Richard Strauss, Berg, Busoni, Milhaud and himself as part of a continuous historical process called the Berliner Staatsoper, which must be kept in being by whatever means."[123] This cultural

[118]Burghardt, *Ich war nicht nur Schauspieler,* 349.

[119]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 243–45.

[120]The polyvalent nature of *Deutschtum* is by now a vast literature. One of its most important statements can be found in James Sheehan, "What Is German History? Reflections on the Role of the Nation in German History and Historiography," *Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1 (March 1981): 1–23. A more recent iteration of the problems and opportunities can be found in Celia Applegate, "Senses of Place," *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49–70. Important recent contributions to this discourse have been made by Benjamin Bryce, Benjamin Goosen, Jennifer Jenkins, Pieter Judson, Kris Manjapra, Stefan Manz, H. Glenn Penny, Tara Zahra, and many others.

[121]Michael Geyer, "Die Bratus: Sketch for a Minor German History," in *Modern Germany in Transatlantic Perspective*, ed. Michael Meng and Adam R. Seipp (Berghahn Books, 2020), 247.

[122]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 31, 190, 212, 240.

[123]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 215.

loyalty to the assemblage of aesthetic and intellectual values associated with bourgeois central Europe was overtly cosmopolitan and universalist, based on the power of music, art, and ideas, expressed in almost any language. We might also read it as a romanticized version of late-Habsburg cultural life, with the work of German-speakers at its heart, but still embracing multiple languages, ethnicities, and eras joined together in art.[124]

Kleiber's life motto may as well have been *ars gratia artis*: in practice, this led to a problematic willingness to negotiate with authoritarians or to try to ignore them, which might lend itself to being read as collaboration. Kleiber's initial responses to Nazi and East German socialist political pressure were focused far more on what he wanted than on those regimes' efforts to pressure him or on whether his presence might be used to whitewash over horrors. He was of symbolic and cultural value to these regimes, and he knew it. Kleiber experimented to see whether he might be able to carve out an area of autonomy and aesthetic exploration, placing his own power against the power of these young states, testing whether he might shape them. Too often he simply dismissed the dangerous. Kleiber's biographer wrote of him, "It was, for example, natural to him to regard persons in high office as grotesques and their blandishments as part of a charade which it was easy to enjoy and essential to discount."[125] Too often Kleiber condemned the wrong side with outsized rhetoric, likening the Havana orchestral *Patronato* and the West Berlin Senate to the Nazis.

In these efforts and failures, Kleiber had prestigious company. Arturo Toscanini was famed for his run-ins with Mussolini, but these "mainly had to do with the latter's attempts to infringe on the conductor's prerogatives at La Scala, where Toscanini was ensconced by 1922 as a veritable potentate. It was from the beginning a set of symbolic trifles, like playing the *Giovinezza* before performances, or displaying the Duce's portrait in the foyer. … the sticking point, it seems, was … that the God would have to render unto the Caesar."[126] In 1936, the musicians of the New York Philharmonic—many of whom were Jewish, some of them refugees from Nazism—protested Wilhelm Furtwängler's engagement as a guest conductor. He canceled his New York work with a dodge echoing Kleiber's own phrasing: "Am not politician but exponent of German music which belongs to all humanity … propose postpone my season … until … public realizes that politics and music are apart."[127]

Kleiber's tin ear for politics is reminiscent of insights about "national indifference" that have helped historians rewrite central European history over the past decade.[128] Tara Zahra and others have demonstrated that the majority of people ignore politics until they are forced to confront them by a centralizing state. Although artists and intellectuals have long been seen as the exception to this rule, Kleiber and his colleagues illustrate the difficulty of generalization—and the professional fact that musicians shift status and worlds, both artists and technicians, often blind to anything outside their chosen sphere. Bronislaw Mitman, the Warsaw-born concertmaster of Peru's National Symphony Orchestra, was infamous for his

[124]Malachi Ha-Cohen, "From Empire to Cosmopolitanism," 118.

[125]Russell, *Erich Kleiber*, 215.

[126]Richard Taruskin, "The Dark Side of the Moon," in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 207ff.

[127]Wooldridge, *Conductor's World*, 184. For a brief summary on Furtwängler, see Applegate, *The Necessity of Music*, 307–9, 312.

[128]Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

casual response to visiting Machu Picchu, then as now regarded as one of the world's greatest cultural heritage sites: he gazed on it and said in Yiddish: "*Nu? Alte Steine* (So what? Old stones)."[129] Not all artists are sensitive to art other than their own.

The final lesson from Kleiber's microhistory is the striking consistency of his career and concerns over the course of two world wars and three continents. The standard chronology of the twentieth century understands both world wars as sharp ruptures with the prewar eras. The literature of exile focuses on the distances, both geographical and cultural, between Europe and the Americas. Habsburg Vienna, Weimar Berlin, mid-century Buenos Aires, and early Cold War East Berlin are drawn as utterly distinct. Yet supported by his wealth, connections, and prestige, Kleiber's life and work in fact changed relatively little from Darmstadt to Berlin to Mexico City. Kleiber's wartime work in Latin America echoed almost exactly his European tasks and habits. Everywhere, he shaped and taught ensembles, mentored individual musicians, programmed newer music (whether Janáček or Revueltas) alongside "classics," worked to shift audience expectations, insisted on the same exaggerated number of rehearsals, and picked fights with administrators. His story highlights the connectedness and similarity of these seemingly disparate places and historical moments; it illustrates surprising transnational commonality in art music across the world. Celia Applegate has termed this continuity "persistence, not sameness"—but it underscores the surprising steadiness of Kleiber's circumstances.[130]

Kleiber never quite regained his Staatsoper; he believed he had at least brought it back into being. But more than a physical place, the Staatsoper for Kleiber was an eloquent signifier, representing not just the world of elite art music but also a particular German-speaking cultural climate that enabled its creation and sustenance, moving easily from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, led by Kleiber himself, perhaps more a benevolent autocrat than a citizen. Kleiber's life was devoted to the values embodied by the Staatsoper, whether in Santiago, Havana, or Covent Garden. H. Glenn Penny has written of German-speakers in Latin America, "[Theirs] is not only a tale of German history happening elsewhere. It is a tale of simultaneous histories … [and] transnational lives."[131] In Kleiber's case, his devotion to *Ernste Musik* and *música erudita*, uniting Frederick the Great, Mozart, Alban Berg, and Silvestre Revueltas through his professional and aesthetic *idées fixes*, translated easily across national borders and an ocean. Despite decades of near-constant movement, we might also argue that Kleiber never really left the Staatsoper—and that his life was devoted to building and rebuilding it, wherever he was.

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[129]Eva Lewitus interview, Lima, Peru, December 15, 2009.

[130]Applegate, *The Necessity of Music*, 313.

[131]H. Glenn Penny, "Diversity, Inclusivity, and 'Germanness' in Latin America During the Interwar Period," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 61 (Fall 2017): 85–108, esp. 108.