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Alma Mahler and Vienna: The City That Loved Her

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF MUSIC

ALMA MAHLER AND VIENNA:
THE CITY THAT LOVED HER

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A Treatise submitted to the
College of Music
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Music

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2005

The members of the Committee approve the treatise of Angela Dilkey defended on March 18, 2005.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
<i>FIN-DE-SIÈCLE</i> VIENNA.....	1
ALMA MAHLER.....	9
Appendices	
A. ALMA'S LOVERS AND HUSBANDS.....	28
B. ALMA'S CHILDREN.....	29
C. ALMA'S SONGS.....	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	31
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	33

ABSTRACT

From the peak of the Habsburg dynasty, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna offered the Viennese *bourgeoisie* a unique place to broaden their intellectual and artistic creativity. Artists of such caliber as Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schoenberg flocked to this enticing city at the turn of the twentieth century. Alma Mahler was a strong woman and a product of her time. Other women wanted her in their circle of friends and men desired her. The list of her acquaintances, friends, and lovers includes some of the most brilliant artists of the twentieth century. Through her marriages to Gustav Mahler, Walter Gropius, and Franz Werfel, she influenced the creative output of three primary artistic figures in music, architecture, and literature. Her presence in the art world is documented in the work of Oskar Kokoschka. She used her influence throughout her life to further music, art, and literature. Although her biography reveals character flaws, such as egotism and anti-Semitism, Alma Mahler is illuminated as an important historical figure due to her consistently close proximity to genius.

FIN-DE-SIÈCLE VIENNA

Fin-de-siècle Vienna had a charm that endeared artists to her borders. At the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna was bursting with new ideas in art, literature, theater, and music. “It was a meeting place for north and south, for east and west, for a rich profusion of widely different ethnic groups and influences, all of which have contributed to the unique and vigorous blend of Viennese culture.”¹ A change in architecture gave Vienna a new look of modernism, *Kaffeehäuser* provided an environment for discussions and interactions among artists, the intelligentsia, and the literati, and the arrival of Gustav Mahler at the Staatsoper brought music to a level unimagined even in this famous city.

Revered as one of the most culturally active and diverse cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Vienna was consumed with lightheartedness, conviviality, and a love of celebration. The energy in the city was both captivating and enticing. In this cosmopolitan European city, Slavs, Germans, Hungarians, Spaniards, Italians, Frenchmen, Flemings, and Jews lived peacefully together.² This vast mixture of nations and races gave the city its unique character and atmosphere – a melting pot where cultures and ideas were fused together.

In order to understand how Vienna evolved into the extraordinary city that it was prior to the Second World War, it is pertinent to look at her history. At the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna was ruled by the Habsburgs. This great dynasty originated “with three marriage lotteries: with Mary of Burgundy in 1477, with Joanna of Castile in 1496, and with Anne of Hungary in 1515.”³ Each marriage turned out favorably for the Habsburgs as they served to consolidate the dynasty, which remained a “major European royal and imperial family from 1408 to 1918. It reached its peak as a world power under Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who reigned from 1519-55 and brought Spain into the Habsburg dominions. After Charles’s death in 1558, the

¹ Henry-Louis de la Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1.

² La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 2.

³ Mark Francis, *The Viennese Enlightenment*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 21.

Spanish line died out and the Austrian line remained in power, although varying its holdings, until 1918.”⁴

“Three rulers dominated the eighteenth century: Charles VI, his daughter Maria Theresa, and her son Joseph II. Under Maria Theresa Vienna became the administrative center for the Habsburg empire.”⁵ During her reign from 1740-1780, she supervised the building of a summer palace at Schönbrunn, founded the Burgtheater in 1741, and enabled the nobles to build baroque palaces in the city. Her love of music encouraged its promotion, especially through patronage of musicians such as Mozart and Haydn.

Joseph II ruled jointly with his mother from 1765 until her death in 1780, although he had little authority at this time. As Joseph had become impatient at the slowness with which his mother’s reforms were taking place, he was quick to implement his own improvements after her death. Joseph’s principles and philosophies mirrored those of the Enlightenment. Under his rule, he planned a series of fiscal, penal, civil, and social laws that established a greater sense of equality for the masses.

He founded numerous hospitals, insane asylums, poorhouses and orphanages; he opened parks and gardens to the public; and he legislated to provide free food and medicine for the indigent. In judicial affairs Joseph liberalized the civil and criminal law codes, abolishing torture altogether and removing the death penalty.⁶

Joseph himself felt that his most important piece of legislation was the abolition of serfdom and feudal dues. Within this new structure he enabled tenants to acquire their own lands from the nobles for moderate fees and allowed peasants to marry whom they wished. These reforms were the beginning of the change in social structure that would lead to the rise of the *bourgeoisie* in the nineteenth century.

After Joseph’s death in 1790, there were numerous struggles for the throne. In 1809, Clemens von Metternich was appointed Minister of foreign affairs. In the next six years, he gained so much power of persuasion throughout the Habsburg dynasty, that by 1815 Franz I became merely a figurehead.⁷ From 1815 to 1848, Metternich governed with an ultra-conservative hand. Censorship was rampant, extending to plays, foreign books, and even to

⁴ John B. Teeple, *Timelines of World History*, (New York: DK Publishing Inc., 2002), 540.

⁵ William M. Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1981), 15.

⁶ “Joseph II.” *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001-04. www.bartleby.com/65/. January 10, 2005.

⁷ Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 295.

conversation in coffee houses and theaters. Paid informants lurked in every public place, stifling opinions and ideas.⁸ Yet, even with his strict policies, the *bourgeoisie* of Vienna began attaining their own identity.

The *bourgeoisie*, a social group that fell between the aristocracy and unskilled wage earners, had begun to evolve into a more significant and educated group during the reign of Joseph II. In the Metternich era, this section of society became known as the *Biedermeier*,⁹ which was “a culture of people including lawyers, doctors, civil servants, teachers, professors, merchants, artisans, and, after the introduction of the steam engine, early industrialists.”¹⁰ This middle class of people did not rebel against the aristocracy. Instead, they emulated the aristocracy and thus became known as Vienna’s second society.

The *Biedermeier* adapted architectural motifs from the palaces of the aristocracy, creating a kind of scaled down baroque. Some even bought palaces that were built in the heart of the city during the reign of Maria Theresa. They were able to pursue hobbies that previously had been restricted to the aristocracy. Musical events were open to the public, and as a result, more amateur groups were formed. The *Biedermeier* were still excluded from civil duties, so they immersed themselves in learning. Recreational naturalists abounded and the Vienna Woods became a fashionable place to spend time walking, and collecting minerals, plants, and insects.¹¹

Another favorite *Biedermeier* pastime that mirrored the aristocracy was having one’s portrait painted. Again, the beloved Vienna Woods often provided the background for these works of art. If one could not afford to have his portrait done, then artists could supply lithographs of family gatherings.¹²

By the 1840’s the people in Vienna were growing increasingly weary of Metternich’s oppression, which they felt was stifling their growth and creativity. The introduction of a railroad into Vienna brought a flood of immigrants who were more apt to voice their opinions of dissent. On March 13, 1848 private citizens, students, and workers marched to the administration buildings of the Lower Austrian Estates and demanded changes to their civil rights. The commanding general of Vienna ordered an attack on the crowd and many people

⁸ Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 16.

⁹ Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 15.

¹⁰ Inge Lehne and Lonnie Johnson, *Vienna: The Past in the Present*, (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1995), 66.

¹¹ Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 15.

¹² Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 16.

were killed.¹³ That evening Metternich resigned and fled to London in disguise. This event, later known as the Revolution of 1848, resulted in the lifting of censorship and the founding of a National Guard, and gave Vienna a free press for the first time. The Revolution launched Vienna toward a new greatness; however, it would not reach its fulfillment for another fifty years.¹⁴

The last great emperor of the Habsburg dynasty was Franz Joseph. He reigned from 1848 to 1916, and had the “distinction of having reigned longer than any other monarch in Europe.”¹⁵ When Franz Joseph first ascended to the throne, he was only eighteen years old. In his first years, he lifted much of the censorship imposed by Metternich, and put Vienna on its course to becoming a major metropolis. This greatly affected the *bourgeoisie* as they were again granted freedom similar to the aristocracy, allowing this section of society to flourish.

Vienna was growing quickly due to the large number of immigrants moving into the city. The rise in numbers of both the *Biedermeier* and the ruling class resulted in “a more permissive society, a more luxurious style of living and a tremendous increase in the size of the musical and artistic public.”¹⁶ This growth was reinforced by Franz Joseph in the 1860’s when he ordered the old ramparts around the city to be demolished and replaced by a broad boulevard, called the *Ringstrasse*.¹⁷ This circle of avenues was fringed with monuments, grandiose mansions, and public buildings, giving Vienna the appearance of an imperial capital for the first time. Lands that were made available by the demolition of the walls surrounding the city were dedicated to public parks, gardens, and streets. Further urban development included public buildings, new stores, factories, banking houses, and theaters. City dwellers also benefited from the many new cafes, restaurants, and elegant hotels.¹⁸ With so many places for people to gather and converse, Vienna became a thriving metropolitan city that seemed to invite intellectuals and artists.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna offered musicians and artists a richer and more varied palate of activity than did other cities.

At that time, life in the hospitable, luxurious, and sensual city was elegant and cultured, while in the German principalities it remained narrow, provincial, and crude. In Vienna, artistic talent was

¹³ Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 29.

¹⁴ Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 30.

¹⁵ Johnston, *Vienna, Vienna*, 91.

¹⁶ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 2.

¹⁷ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 10.

¹⁸ Arthur J. May, *Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 33-34.

carefully nurtured, along with the arts of knowing how to please and how to converse, good taste, moderation, tolerance, and courtesy.¹⁹

As a result, many emigrated there, wanting to take part in what was becoming a grand musical heritage.

Of the nineteenth century's great tradition of Viennese musicians, only Franz Schubert was Viennese by birth. Throughout her history, there were many composers, later to be counted among the elite, who became Viennese by choice.²⁰ Among these talented men were Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, and Mahler. With such a large number of musical masters living and working there, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna became the music capital of Europe.²¹

As Vienna secured her grand musical heritage, other artistic areas blossomed. Vienna was establishing herself as a power in art, architecture, and literature. The Viennese second society had evolved into a conglomeration of artists, musicians, architects, philosophers, and writers. Much of the success of this stratum of society can be attributed to their freedom to exchange ideas. These people often gathered in the numerous *Kaffeehäuser* to discuss art, music, and philosophy. *Kaffeehäuser* offered people a place to relax on their own, or have critical and often heated conversations. "There was an especially strong and particularly Viennese interest in cultural matters: Richard Wagner's controversial operas, Mahler's operatic productions, and Klimt's nudes."²²

There is one other important aspect of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna that needs to be understood in order to see her in the truest light. Vienna and the Habsburg dynasty have a long tradition of anti-Semitism. Although varying in degree under different monarchs, an undercurrent of anti-Semitism always existed. Inconsistent policies for Jewish people existed before the seventeenth century, but Empress Maria Theresa set mandates. Her policies

... wavered between the mercantilist desire to exploit the benefits of Jewish participation in economic life – which found expression in a special decree of 1749 encouraging Jews to establish manufacturing establishments – and harsh restriction legislation which reflected a deep religious antipathy. The total expulsion of the Jews after the Second Silesian War clearly contradicted the more general policy of her government to encourage commerce and industry, though it was consistent enough with her Catholic prejudices.²³

¹⁹ May, *Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, 2.

²⁰ Lehne, *Vienna: The Past in the Present*, 59.

²¹ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 1.

²² Lehne, *Vienna: The Past in the Present*, 97.

²³ Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 15.

Maria Theresa considered Jews her ‘tolerated subjects’ and imposed special taxes on them. Her harsh and unfair policies prevented any rapid growth in the Jewish community during her reign.

It was not until her son, Joseph II, set his enlightened policies that the number of Jewish residents in Vienna increased. There were two reasons for his immediate action in favor of Jewish people: Joseph did not share his mother’s contempt for Jewish people, and he was not willing to wait for popular opinion to change on its own after her death.²⁴ He implemented his new policies in the *Toleranzedikt* of 1782, which removed existing restrictions from Jews.

He admitted Jews to public education, agriculture, industry, and the professions once they had proper training. The objective of the Josephinian policy was to make his increasingly numerous Jewish subjects more useful to the State.²⁵

Under this new policy Jews no longer had to wear a yellow badge or pay a separate tax. They were also allowed to join the army. However, even with these new freedoms Jews were not granted citizenship of the State. “They had all of the duties, but not all of the rights of a citizen.”²⁶

Although they were not officially recognized as members of society, Jews in elite stations became more integrated into the Viennese community; thus it became common for these people to convert to Christianity.²⁷ This practice continued into the twentieth century with influential men such as Gustav Mahler and Sigmund Freud. Men in the upper echelon knew that being Jewish was not good for their careers.

Not until the Revolution of 1848 and the ascension of Emperor Franz Joseph to the throne were Jews allowed to live freely in Austria. During his reign, anti-Semitism declined and Jews lived among the Austrians, playing an important part in the city’s cultural life and activities. It was during this time that Vienna saw her first great influx of Jewish people. The breakdown of legal barriers, such as the emancipation of the Jews written into the constitution in 1867, granted Jews more concessions. Franz Joseph was tolerant, open-minded, and he hated anti-Semitism. His political and religious views greatly altered those of the general public in Vienna by the turn of the century. “Thanks to the absence of anti-Semitism ... in Franz Joseph, a seemingly happy symbiosis existed between the Austrians and the Jews.”²⁸

²⁴ Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, 16.

²⁵ Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, 18.

²⁶ Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, 20.

²⁷ Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, 23.

²⁸ Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, 22.

Fin-de-siècle Vienna became a safe place for Jews, provided that they learned to blend into society. “The Jewish *bourgeoisie* accomplished this by taking over a substantial part of the aristocracy’s role as patrons of the arts and artists. They became part of the spirit of Vienna, and at the end of the nineteenth century were to produce a range of creative talent that included Mahler, Schoenberg, Goldmark, Freud, Schnitzler, and Max Reinhardt.”²⁹

Jews enjoyed tolerance and freedom but could always sense the undercurrent of anti-Semitism that permeated Viennese life. The press became a tool that spurred this sentiment when it suited its needs, especially when discussing politics. For the most part, Jews lived among Viennese elite without incident. It was not until the press focused on an event or a person with a particularly Jewish aspect that people began taking sides and revealing their underlying anti-Semitic feelings.

Despite this societal shortcoming, Vienna had become a thriving metropolis by the turn of the twentieth century, attracting intellectuals and artists from all over the world. Throughout the long history of the Habsburg dynasty, the middle class in Vienna grew to become its own energetic entity which added a unique dimension to Viennese society. Artistic disciplines began moving in new directions and intellectual curiosity shaped controversial ways of thinking. Vienna became a mecca for artists, philosophers, and musicians, and all those intellectually elite for whom the city provided a source of learning and expanding knowledge and creativity. It was into this society that Alma Schindler was born.

²⁹ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 4.

ALMA MAHLER

Alma Mahler was one of the most captivating women in the twentieth century. She was a beautiful young woman whose personality and vivacity enthralled all with whom she came into contact. Her charm and flirtatious manner easily earned her favor. Throughout her long life, she was privileged to know many great men. During her childhood, Alma was constantly surrounded by the most influential painters and architects of the day, as her father and step-father were well-known artists. Vienna's leading composers and performers were also frequent visitors in her home. Alma Mahler's unique position in Viennese society afforded her influence and proximity to some of the greatest artists and musicians of her time, and allowed her to experience first hand monumental changes in several artistic fields.

Born in Vienna on August 31, 1879 to Anna and Emil Jakob Schindler, Alma enjoyed a privileged and secure life, though she did not begin her life in comfort. When her parents met, Emil was a struggling artist and Anna was embarking on a stage career. For two years they lived in extreme poverty, but Emil devoted himself to his painting and soon found success. In 1881, Emil earned recognition, winning the *Reichel-Kunstpreis* for one of his landscapes. He would become the most celebrated landscape painter in the Austrian empire.

In the same year he took on a talented young student, Carl Moll, who became a close friend and confidant of the family. Carl rarely left Emil's side, constantly traveling and working with him. The significance of this acquaintance for the Schindlers would be discovered a few years later, as Moll would marry Anna after Emil's tragic death on August 9, 1892.³⁰

Alma adored her father, and particularly enjoyed traveling with him and listening to him read Goethe to her before she went to bed. She was almost thirteen years old when he died suddenly due to an obstruction of the intestinal tract.³¹ After the appropriate period of mourning,

³⁰ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 421.

³¹ François Giroud, *Alma Mahler or the Art of Being Loved*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13.

her mother married Carl Moll, whom Alma never respected as a father figure. Alma would spend the rest of her life searching for a male role model who possessed tremendous creative potential and influence.³² This is evident in her many high profile love affairs.

Even as a child, Alma was immersed in the culture of her city. She took lessons in painting, piano, dress making, and composition. At the age of thirteen, she began counterpoint lessons with Joseph Labor, a blind organist. It was at this point in her life that she developed an insatiable passion for Wagner's operas. She so admired his music that she ruined her voice singing through the Wagner roles one after the other.³³ In her diaries, Alma professed music as her one true passion, while at the same time admitting that she needed to take a more serious approach to her work to be successful.³⁴

Many famous artists and musicians were guests in the Schindler home. One of the most frequent was Max Burckhard, director of the Burgtheater until 1897. Like many men who became close to Alma, Burckhard fell in love with her. At seventeen, Alma was by her own account "...very innocent; people call me beautiful; I read a great deal; I compose...".³⁵ Burckhard was captivated by her physical temptations. "Long, flowing hair, piercing eyes, a determined mouth...tantalizing, independent, and provocative" is how others described her at this time.³⁶ Alma's curiosity was aroused by his display of affection, but as she contemplated taking the relationship beyond one of friendship, she realized that she did not return his feelings. Burckhard soon became Alma's mentor, taking the place of Moll as father figure. Burckhard exposed her to classical and contemporary literature, including Nietzsche and the poetry of Richard Dehmel. He escorted her to concerts and operas, and often gave her tickets to plays at the Burgtheater. Unfortunately, he also imparted his anti-Semitism to Alma.

As her relationship with Burckhard resolved into one more appropriate to their situation, Alma directed her attention toward another equally influential man. In 1897, Carl Moll aligned himself with a group of renegade artists who formed the Secession. As founding members, Carl Moll, Gustav Klimt, and Joseph Engelhardt organized this group for the purpose of breaking with Vienna's tradition-bound Imperial Academy of the visual arts. These young artists,

³² Susanne Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind: The Life and Times of Alma Mahler-Werfel*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992), 28.

³³ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 423-424.

³⁴ Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, Selected and Translated by Antony Beaumont, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 242.

³⁵ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 30.

³⁶ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 30.

although they held widely varying opinions, joined together and rejected “the classical realist tradition of their fathers in the search for modern man’s true face.”³⁷ Klimt assumed leadership of this group and was elected president in 1897. The mounting of the first exhibition required Klimt to make frequent visits to the Moll household. The activity surrounding this event allowed Alma to become well acquainted with Klimt. In 1899, she declared her love for Klimt in her diaries. This relationship was doomed from the start as Klimt could not commit himself to one woman. Alma’s mother and step-father disrupted their relationship before it escalated into a love affair, although Klimt does have the special distinction of having given Alma her first kiss. On April 29, 1899, while her family was vacationing in Genoa, Klimt stole a kiss from her when they were alone for a moment in her room.³⁸

Alma’s infatuation with Klimt lasted for a year and a half, until the up-and-coming composer Alexander von Zemlinsky entered her life. On February 26, 1900, Alma was invited to dinner at the home of Daniel Spitzer and his wife, where she spent most of the evening in conversation with Zemlinsky. They discussed music at length, including Wagner’s operas, Mahler as a conductor, and his incredible efforts to produce Zemlinsky’s new opera, *Es war einmal*.

Shortly after meeting Zemlinsky, Alma began composition lessons with him. Her early lessons were based on the traditional aspects of composition, but they marked Alma’s introduction to the innovative, controversial group of composers known as the Second Viennese School which included Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern. This school of musical thought revolutionized the ideas of traditional harmony and tonal theory, resulting in the complete abandonment of tonality and the creation of a new organization of harmony in twelve-tone serialism. Although Zemlinsky himself remained committed to tonality and did not explore atonality and serialism in his own music, he did encourage Alma to keep an open mind when approaching her own compositions and when listening to new compositions.

This period of study heightened Alma’s dedication to music, and after the affair with Klimt was finished, she spent less time with the Secessionists and more time on her composition exercises. Alma was one of the very few female students of Zemlinsky, and she was determined to prove herself. Before she turned twenty-two, she composed more than one hundred songs,

³⁷ Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 214.

several instrumental pieces, and the beginnings of an opera. Unfortunately, only fourteen of her songs survived.

Alma realized that studying with Zemlinsky was a privilege, whose teachers included Robert Fuchs and Fritz Krenn, both of whom had been teachers of Gustav Mahler. Early in his life Zemlinsky received encouragement from Johannes Brahms and became a recognized pianist, composer, and conductor. In his early twenties, he was already known as one of the foremost pedagogues of his time. The only teacher credited by Arnold Schoenberg, he had direct influence on the music of Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Ernst Krenek, and Egon Wellesz. At the young age of twenty-five, he had already gained the necessary credentials to earn respect among the Viennese musical elite.

As Alma progressed with her composition lessons, she realized that her feelings for Zemlinsky ran deeper than those of a student toward her teacher. They began a tumultuous love affair despite ambiguous feelings on both sides. Zemlinsky never thought he was worthy of so beautiful a young woman and Alma did not think it would be sensible for her to attach herself to a man who was not only ugly but also a Jew. They exchanged many passionate letters, but Alma finally left him for the famous conductor Gustav Mahler.

On December 23, 1901, Alma became engaged to Gustav Mahler, a man twenty years her senior. She had known and respected Mahler's conducting from afar for several years before they met, yet she went out of her way not to meet him, having heard reports of his exploits with the women of the theater. When Berta Zuckermandl, a close friend of the Schindlers, invited her to dinner on the evening of November 7, 1901, Alma accepted initially because Burckhard and Dr. Friedrich Spitzer were going to attend. Gustav Klimt was also there, and in her diaries, Alma congratulates herself on maintaining her composure and rarely speaking to him.³⁹ Contrary to this account, in her 1939 memoirs, she describes it as a perfectly amiable evening with Burckhard and Klimt. Alma observed that Mahler watched her closely from the very first moment.⁴⁰ They did not speak until a controversy arose over Zemlinsky's new ballet. As Alma defended her lover and his work, she became increasingly enthralled by Mahler's passion and energy. That evening she wrote about him in her diary:

³⁸ Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, 125.

³⁹ Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, 442.

⁴⁰ Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, (Washington University: Viking Press, 1968), 4.

I must say that I liked him *immensely* – although he is dreadfully restless. He stormed about the room like a savage. The fellow is made *entirely* of oxygen. When you go near him, you get burnt.⁴¹

After this meeting, Alma seemed to be drawn to Mahler as much as she previously was repelled by the thought of meeting him. The next day, Alma and the Zuckerkandls were Mahler's guests at a dress rehearsal of *Les contes d'Hoffmann* at the opera house. His kind and gentlemanly demeanor was not at all what she had expected from this infamous man. Mahler began courting Alma and soon won her affection. Over the next two months, Alma and Gustav fell in love.

She first mentions her love for Mahler in her diaries on November 20, 1901, a mere thirteen days after meeting him. Throughout the next month, Mahler was able to diffuse several of the character flaws he perceived in Alma. Because she was so beautiful and had grown up in comfort, he was aware of her tendency to be vain and jealous when attention was not paid to her. In fact, she felt that marrying Gustav would require an exceptional sacrifice on her part because she was too beautiful for him, and because he was a Jew.⁴² However, his stature as a prominent musician in society helped suppress these thoughts. By reprimanding her cruel behavior toward Zemlinsky, who was still in love with her, Mahler squelched her jealousy.

Her letters from this time reveal her inner turmoil as she pondered thoughts of life with him. As late as December 3, 1901, she labored over the choice she must make between Mahler and Zemlinsky. While admitting she did not believe in Mahler as a composer, she wondered if Zemlinsky would rise to greatness. She voiced her foremost concern in the final lines of this letter:

There's one thing that tortures me: whether or not Mahler will encourage me to work – whether or not he'll support my art – whether he'll love it as Alex does – for *he* loves it for itself.⁴³

Within the month Alma would have her answer. She soon realized that she would have to make the ultimate sacrifice for this love.

On December 20, 1901, Alma received a devastating letter from Mahler. In it he declared all the expectations he had for his future wife, reminding her of her previous avowal

⁴¹ Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, 443. [italics Alma Schindler's]

⁴² Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 103.

⁴³ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 436. [italics Alma Schindler's]

that she “wanted to become the kind of person he wished and needed”.⁴⁴ In this letter, he stated his response:

What you are to me, Alma, what you could perhaps be or become – the dearest and most sublime object of my life, the loyal and courageous companion who understands and advances me, my stronghold invulnerable to enemies from both within and without, my peace, my heaven, in which I can constantly immerse myself, find myself again and rebuild myself – is so unutterably exalted and beautiful, so much and so great, in a word, my wife.⁴⁵

His deep love for Alma is obvious in this statement, yet in this same letter, he delivered his deepest blow. Mahler did not want the two of them to live as rivals.

One thing is certain and that is that you must become ‘what I need’ if we are to be happy together, i.e., my wife, not my colleague. Would it mean the destruction of your life and would you feel you were having to forgo an indispensable highlight of your existence if you were to give up your music entirely in order to possess and also be mine instead?...You have only one profession from now on: to make me happy.⁴⁶

Although this letter seems cruel, his intentions were honorable. Mahler wanted to be sure that Alma understood his position on marriage before they entered into the sacred bond.

Before we talk to each other again, things must be absolutely clear between us. You have got to know what I desire and expect from you, what I can offer you and what you must be to me. You must ‘renounce’ all superficiality, all convention, all vanity and delusion (as far as personality and work are concerned). You must give yourself to me unconditionally, shape your future life, in every detail, entirely in accordance with my needs and desire nothing in return save my love! What this last is, Alma, I can’t tell you – I’ve talked of it too much already. I can tell you one thing more, however: I could sacrifice both my life and my happiness for the one I loved as I would love you if you were to become my wife.⁴⁷

Alma’s initial reaction was to abandon Mahler altogether. After careful thought, she realized she was indeed in love with him and began to romanticize the idea of giving herself up to live entirely for him. Ultimately, Alma chose Mahler over her music, and this decision changed the course of her life. Though she secretly did not give up composing altogether, she later stated that “the wound inflicted by Mahler’s ban long continued to fester and never completely healed.”⁴⁸

On December 23, 1901, Alma and Mahler were engaged in the presence of her mother and Carl Moll. She expressed her emotions in her diaries on December 24:

I can neither think nor act clearly. Everything begins and ends with Gustav. My longing is infinite. I would give everything for him – my music – *everything* – so powerful is my longing!

⁴⁴ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 448.

⁴⁵ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 449.

⁴⁶ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 451. [underlining Alma Schindler’s]

⁴⁷ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 452. [underlining Alma Schindler’s]

⁴⁸ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 454.

That's how I want to be his – I am *already* his – I belong to him and Justi (Mahler's sister), who I love, because she's of the same blood.⁴⁹

Mahler had one other issue to sort out with Alma before their impending nuptials. He confided in her that his own sexual inexperience was a source of great anxiety for him. Alma did not understand this, but she decided to give herself to him without delay, “out of regard for his physical and mental health.”⁵⁰ Alma recounted the unhappy event in her *Diaries* on January 1, 1902:

What I have to write today is terribly sad. I called on Gustav – in the afternoon we were alone in his room. He gave me his body – & I let him touch me with his hand. Stiff and upright stood his vigour. He carried me to the sofa, laid me gently down and swung himself over me. Then – just as I felt him penetrate, he lost all strength. He laid his head on my breast, shattered – and almost wept for shame. Distraught as I was, I comforted him.⁵¹

Irritated as she was, Alma continued to reassure Gustav of her love. Two days later, she entered only one sentence in her *Diaries*: “Bliss and rapture.”⁵² Her happiness soon gave way to her own anxiety when she realized that she had become pregnant before her wedding. This was a source of much torment for her which had to be concealed at all costs.⁵³

Mahler had to divert his attentions from Alma for the Viennese premiere of his Fourth Symphony on January 12, 1902, which also marked the crucial debut of Alma Schindler as Mahler's fiancée. Alma recalled the rehearsal process in her memoirs:

It was the first time I had ever heard any work – let alone a work of his – rehearsed day by day from the first reading-rehearsal onwards. A work which was new and strange to me, very strange at the outset, became by degrees so familiar that I soon knew its every beauty and how each instrument came in. After that I shared this experience with Mahler of hearing each of his works from the sounding of the first note up to the last time he conducted it. They were the most unforgettable and exalted hours of my life.⁵⁴

The premiere itself was not a happy one for Alma. She was painfully aware of all eyes on her as she sat in the director's box. Mahler's friends made it more difficult by giving him false reports of her outrageous flirting throughout the performance. These vicious men underestimated Alma's tenacity. According to Alma, they realized that they could never be separated. Alma and Gustav's bond was solidified on their walk home.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 464.

⁵⁰ Giroud, *Alma Mahler or the Art of Being Loved*, 41.

⁵¹ Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries*, 467.

⁵² Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries*, 467.

⁵³ Giroud, *Alma Mahler or the Art of Being Loved*, 43.

⁵⁴ Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, 28.

⁵⁵ Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, 29.

On March 9, 1902, Alma and Gustav were married in a small ceremony attended only by her parents and Gustav's sister, Justi, and her future husband. On November 3rd of the same year, Alma gave birth to their first child, Maria Anna, whom they called Putzi.

At the time Alma and Gustav were married, Mahler was a conductor at the Vienna Hofoper. He had assumed the position of Artistic Director in October of 1897 after leaving Hamburg. Mahler's tenure at the Hofoper was tumultuous from the start. From the initial announcement of his appointment, the anti-Semitic press began their attack. "The *Deutsche Zeitung* and the *Deutsches Volksblatt* never stopped attacking Mahler in ways and in terms that later became typical of Nazi anti-Semitism."⁵⁶ Alma was unmoved by these attacks on his Jewish stature because Mahler fell into what she considered "the highest category of human being – the creative artist".⁵⁷

Alma did keep her promise of making his music hers after they were married. They often played through new scores together and she took on the task of copying his music. Mahler's Fifth Symphony was the first work in which Alma took part from its inception to its completion. She describes the moment when she first heard the symphony.

In the autumn he played me the Fifth Symphony. It was the first time he had ever played a new work to me and we climbed arm in arm up to his hut with all the solemnity of the occasion. When he had done, I told him of all that won my instant love in this magnificent work, but also that I was not sure about the *Choral* at the end.⁵⁸

Mahler eventually conceded and removed the *Choral*. He was learning to trust Alma's ear for his music.

Mahler wrote two movements of the Fifth Symphony in the summer of 1901, coinciding with the beginning of his orchestral song cycle, *Kindertotenlieder*. On February 24 of that year, Mahler had a severe hemorrhage resulting from hemorrhoid complications, in which he lost a considerable amount of blood. A statement Mahler made to his brother-in-law foreshadowed the years to come. He remarked, "I lost a third of my blood that night. I shall certainly recover, but the illness will still have cost ten years of my life."⁵⁹ There was no way for Mahler to know the weight of the truth wrapped in his statement. The Funeral March and the Scherzo of the Fifth

⁵⁶ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 5.

⁵⁷ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 76.

⁵⁸ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 45.

⁵⁹ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 799.

Symphony can be attributed to these months in which he was so consumed with thoughts of mourning and death.

After two reading rehearsals with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, he realized the Fifth Symphony had some defects. Alma agreed, and according to her memoirs, she came home sobbing after she heard it. She claimed he had written it for percussion and nothing else. Mahler laughed as he produced the score on which he had crossed out over half of the percussion parts.⁶⁰

The Fifth Symphony was premiered in Cologne on October 18, 1904, after Mahler's revisions in September, and was well-received. Ill from nursing after the birth of their second daughter Anna Maria on June 14th, Alma was not able to attend this momentous work's first performance.

While in the process of writing the Fifth Symphony, Mahler decided to write a song for Alma. Intended as a gift, he wrote *Liebst du um Schönheit* in 1903. Alma recalled the presentation of this song to her in her memoirs:

I used to play a lot of Wagner, and this gave Mahler the idea of a charming surprise....he slipped the song in between the title page and the first page of *Die Walküre*. Then he waited day after day for me to find it; but I never happened to open the volume, and his patience gave out. "I think I will take a look at *Die Walküre* today," he said abruptly. He opened it and the song fell out. I was overwhelmed with joy and we played it that day twenty times at least.⁶¹

Throughout the next few years, Alma and Gustav traveled, cared for their children, and spent their summers in Maiernigg so Mahler could continue his composing. Alma's life became increasingly stifled and monotonous until it was interrupted by one of the great tragedies in her life, the death of her oldest daughter. In 1907, Maria Anna contracted scarlet fever and died in June, the same month that Mahler discovered he had an acute heart condition.

The year 1907 proved to be historic for many reasons. Having been offered a long term engagement at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Mahler conducted at the Vienna Hofoper for the last time on October 15th. Within two months time, the family left Vienna and Mahler made his American debut with a performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Alma's favorite opera.

Mahler's work continued to preoccupy his time, leaving Alma feeling neglected by her husband. In 1910, she spent two months at the health spa of Tobelbad where she encountered a man who gave her his undivided attention. The young architect, Walter Gropius, fell in love

⁶⁰ Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, 67.

⁶¹ Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, 56.

with Alma so much so that he was prepared to ask Gustav's permission to marry her. He sent a letter to Alma clearly addressed 'To Director Mahler'. The revelation of her infidelity crushed Mahler to the point of impotence and self-denial. Such a debilitating blow was something to which he did not know how to react, so he turned to famed psychologist Sigmund Freud for advice. Freud describes the process of the meeting as an expedition through Mahler's life history wherein he discovered Mahler's mother fixation.⁶² Freud could not help but admire Mahler's genius and capability for understanding Freud's new and controversial theories of psychology.

The exact consequence of Mahler's meeting with Freud cannot be known, but Alma decided to stay with Mahler and he endeavored to be more lenient with her. For eight and a half years, Alma had kept her word to her husband and accepted his music as her own; however, she never was able to forgive him for depriving her of her own artistic endeavors. One summer day while still attempting to solve their marital problems, Alma went for a walk. Upon her return, she heard Gustav playing through her Lieder. Every summer Alma would take the folder containing her Lieder back and forth to Maiernigg; she could not let them go. Mahler met her at the door with joy in his face.

"What have I done?" he said. "These songs are good – they're excellent. I insist on your working on them and we'll have them published. I shall never be happy until you start composing again. God, how blind and selfish I was in those days!"⁶³

Mahler kept his promise and oversaw the publication of five of her songs in 1910, which he chose and edited, restricting himself solely to dynamics. Mahler encouraged Alma to compose again, but unfortunately he had very little time left to promote her success.

Constant stress, both in his personal life and at work, caused Mahler's heart inflammation to grow persistently worse. On February 21, 1911, Mahler conducted his orchestra for the last time. Fatally ill, he and his family began their last journey home to Vienna. On May 18, 1911, Gustav Mahler died, and was laid to rest in Grinzing Cemetery next to his daughter Maria Anna.

Even during her months of mourning, Alma continued to fend off admirers. Within the year, she turned down marriage proposals from neurologist Joseph Fraenkel and biologist Paul

⁶² Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1991), 237.

⁶³ Mahler, *Gustav Mahler*, 159-160.

Kammerer. She also attempted to rekindle her relationship with Walter Gropius, but to no avail. He was determined not to live under the eternal presence of Gustav Mahler.

On the evening of April 12, 1912, at a dinner party given by Carl Moll, she was introduced to the wildly passionate artist, Oskar Kokoschka. They immediately began a tumultuous love affair, and Kokoschka asked her to marry him a mere three days later. Although they did not marry, their frenzied love affair lasted for three years. It was a difficult and stormy time, as each yearned for different things. Oskar wanted Alma as a wife and the mother of his child, and Alma, after enduring such a strict relationship with Mahler, wanted a love affair with no strings attached. Neither one's desires changed over the course of the affair which was a source of anguish for both. Outsiders added more trouble to their relationship. Oskar's mother detested Alma and Alma was known to have thrown other women out of Kokoschka's studio.⁶⁴ Oskar had an extreme personality, as is evident from his drawings and letters. He desired Alma in a way in which she was not able to reciprocate – he wanted to possess her. Unfortunately for him, Alma had no intention of entering a relationship with a controlling man again.

Even though they wanted different outcomes from the relationship, they became inseparable. Alma became the subject or inspiration for numerous paintings and drawings by Kokoschka. Early in their relationship Alma became pregnant, but the thought of having a child with someone other than Mahler threw her into a frenzy. She would not be silenced until Kokoschka gave his permission for her to abort the child.⁶⁵ “The abortion, so devastating to Kokoschka, was for Alma, a release.”⁶⁶ Their torrid love affair is thoroughly documented in his artwork, and Kokoschka refers often to this painful time in his subsequent drawings.

Kokoschka completed numerous drawings and paintings of or for Alma Mahler, each one expressing his feelings for or about her at the time. One of Kokoschka's most important paintings was *Die Windsbraut* or *The Tempest*. This painting, originally titled “Tristan und Isolde” after Alma's favorite opera, was what Kokoschka thought was his strongest and most important work, a masterpiece of expression.⁶⁷ It portrays the lovers calmly holding each other's hands, resting their bodies against one another amidst the strong forces of nature and the sea. Alma described it as Kokoschka's most beautiful portrait of her.

⁶⁴ Alfred Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1996), 9.

⁶⁵ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 22.

⁶⁶ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 194.

⁶⁷ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 36.

Many of Kokoschka's works after 1913 expose his profound sadness relating to Alma's abortion. One such work is his *Still Life with Putto and Rabbit*, in which a small, male child with Alma's features is banished to the edge of the canvas while the rabbit and cat stare at each other in the middle of a barren landscape.⁶⁸ This darkness is a recurring theme throughout Kokoschka's oeuvre.

By 1914, Alma was growing weary of Oskar's continual pressure to marry him. Her thoughts began wandering to Walter Gropius, and in May 1914 she wrote him a letter asking to renew their relationship. She wrote:

After struggles and confusion – I have found myself again! – I am maturer, freer – and above all I know that there is nothing I need search for – because I have found – so much – everything....If you want my friendship – then it is yours. – I have the strongest desire to talk to you. – Your image lives in me, pure and dear – and people who have experienced such strange and beautiful things together should not lose each other. – Come – if you have the time and if it would make you happy – come. – It is not resignation that leads me to write all this, it is enlightenment, newly-won perception.⁶⁹

At the same time that she was trying to renew her relationship with Gropius, she was attempting to end her relationship with Kokoschka. On July 28, 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, resulting in the call for men into military service. According to her daughter Anna, Alma had "gone on calling Kokoschka a coward until in the end he had 'volunteered' for military service".⁷⁰ He was called to service on January 3, 1915. While he was away, Alma contacted Gropius and began to rekindle their relationship.

Gropius was also serving Austria in the war. While stationed in France, he and Alma exchanged many letters declaring their feelings of love for one another. In February while he was on leave, they met in Berlin. Alma wrote that there was "much mutual soul searching, with 'days spent in tearful questions' and 'nights in tearful answers'."⁷¹ They were secretly married on August 18, 1915. Two days later he went back to the front line.

Although his relationship with Alma was finished, Kokoschka continued to find inspiration from her. His final homage to Alma is probably his most bizarre. In July 1918, well after their relationship had ended, Kokoschka ordered a life-size doll as a substitute for his lost love. Throughout its production he frequently enumerated the exact dimensions of the doll, and

⁶⁸ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 51.

⁶⁹ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 70.

⁷⁰ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 79.

⁷¹ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 204.

even provided many detailed drawings to assist the doll-maker. On February 22, 1919 he asked to have the doll sent to him.

The ensuing disappointment was huge. The doll could scarcely fulfill Kokoschka's erotic and sexual desires and in the end became no more than a kind of still-life model. The artist then took the place of the unhappy lover and by means of a painterly metamorphosis of the doll he breathed new life into Alma as a 'figure of art.'⁷²

The intimate process of painting and drawing was the only thing that brought this doll to life for Kokoschka. This catharsis resulted in thirty pen and ink drawings which can be divided into three groups of poses for the doll: sitting in a chair, lying on a sofa, or with a dog or rabbit.⁷³

When Kokoschka had gotten all of the inspiration he could from this doll, he threw an enormous party and, when everyone was drunk, he beheaded it.⁷⁴

Alma influenced Kokoschka throughout his long career. The two finally made amends after a chance meeting in Venice on October 8, 1927. They each wrote letters of apology and forgave the other for the torment each had inflicted.⁷⁵

Alma's reasons for marrying Gropius involved more than the desire to have a husband. Alma wanted a union with a man of purity, and Gropius afforded her that opportunity. Gropius satisfied her intense desire to have a purely Aryan child. Their five year marriage produced a daughter, Manon. Even at the time of Manon's birth, Alma's feelings for Gropius were in their twilight. By providing her with Manon, he had fulfilled his purpose. Alma was unable to sustain a long distance relationship with Gropius, with his continual years away in service to his country.

The war brought hardship to many in Vienna. During this time Alma assisted her friend, composer Arnold Schoenberg. He had lost all of his pupils at the outbreak of the war, and with his wife and young children at home, he was in financial distress. In 1914, while Alma was struggling with Kokoschka and Gropius, she secured the Gustav Mahler Trust for Schoenberg, a fund with interest allocated for a needy composer for up to a year. Along with this, she produced a large-scale benefit concert for needy musicians to be conducted by Schoenberg. Unfortunately, many problems leading up to the concert caused dissatisfaction for both Alma and Schoenberg, resulting in a strained friendship between them.⁷⁶ Fortunately, Alban Berg was eventually able

⁷² Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 90-91.

⁷³ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 91.

⁷⁴ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 92.

⁷⁵ Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler*, 93-94.

⁷⁶ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 205-207.

to help mend the relationship between Alma and Schoenberg, as he was both Schoenberg's most devoted student and a close friend of Alma's.

Though Alma was preoccupied with these events, the unhappiness in her personal life was wearing on her. With her feelings for Gropius fading, she needed the stimulus of a new attraction. In the autumn of 1917 she was introduced to the famous writer, Franz Werfel, a man eleven years her junior. Already in love with his poetry, she was pleased to learn of his ardent admiration of Gustav Mahler's music. This revelation of intelligence and good taste solidified her attraction. Werfel became a frequent visitor to the household, even when Gropius was on leave from his war duties. Unfortunately, Gropius was more concerned with erasing the images of Mahler and Kokoschka from Alma's past and was therefore blind to the present danger. Aware of Alma's anti-Semitic tendencies, he did not consider Werfel a threat. Alma would succumb to her desires for Werfel on New Year's day, realizing a month later that she was pregnant again.

This was a difficult pregnancy for Alma, resulting in a premature birth followed by ill health. The outlook for her sickly baby, Martin, was bleak. During this difficult time, Gropius came home to surprise Alma and overheard a telephone conversation between her and Werfel. From the soft and sensuous sound of her voice, and her use of the informal 'Du', Gropius knew immediately that the relationship between Alma and Werfel was one of an intimate nature. A bitter custody battle over their daughter Manon ensued. At one point, Alma was so frustrated with the arguing that she told both men she would give them up and keep all of her children.⁷⁷ Above all, Alma would never give up her Aryan, pure-blood child, Manon. This constant battle took its toll on Alma's health, and at the urging of her doctor, Gropius conceded to the divorce and her custody of their daughter. Subsequently, they developed an amicable relationship and came to an agreement about Manon. Unfortunately, no argument was necessary for Martin's custody. On May 15, 1919, while Alma was visiting Gropius, Martin died.

Alma and Werfel did not marry until 1929. While Alma encouraged Werfel with his writing, she also acted as a musical advocate by helping advance the careers of her friends, once again aiding Schoenberg. In May of 1920, Alma attended a Mahler Festival celebrating Willem Mengelberg's twenty-five years as conductor of the *Concertgebouw*, where she spent considerable time with Schoenberg and his wife. By that time, the public was used to

⁷⁷ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 224-226.

Schoenberg's avant guard style and his music was becoming more acceptable. Alma herself claims to have grasped the intent in his music at a performance of the *Gurrelieder* on June 13, 1920.⁷⁸ This experience served as a moment of clarity for Alma, who became a champion of his new musical style. She began actively to promote Schoenberg at that very concert when she encountered Giacomo Puccini. Unfortunately, she could not convince Puccini to stay for the second half of the concert as he did not appreciate Schoenberg's music.

The following year, Alma decided to introduce other foreign musicians to Schoenberg's work. She invited Maurice Ravel and Alfredo Casella to a performance of his music, but she was unable to convince them of its value. Ravel thought it sounded as if it had come from a test tube.⁷⁹ Alma made another attempt in 1922, by hosting two performances of *Pierrot lunaire* at which Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud were in attendance. Despite her efforts Alma could not convince these French composers of Schoenberg's genius.

While dedicating her efforts to furthering Schoenberg's career, Alma did not neglect Franz Werfel. She was constantly encouraging his writing, waiting for the moment when he would unveil the great masterpiece she believed him capable of producing. Over the next two years, she and Werfel traveled between his periods of writing. By 1924 Alma was growing discontented with the relationship, and with Werfel's slow progress in his writing. That summer they moved into a new home, 'Casa Mahler', which inspired Werfel and allowed them to renew the vitality of their relationship.

Alma's friends had welcomed Werfel into their circles, especially Alban and Helene Berg. Alma was instrumental in furthering Berg's musical career. Her financial assistance allowed him to finish and produce his opera *Wozzeck*. To show his appreciation, he dedicated *Wozzeck* to her.⁸⁰ The Staatsoper in Berlin had not staged a new work in many years. After witnessing a grueling rehearsal process, she attended its premiere on December 14, 1925. It was a triumphant success for Berg.

Although Alma and Werfel were happy together, their diametrically opposed political views were a constant source of dissent. This was especially evident in 1927 when riots broke out between two political factions: the conservative, anti-socialist, and anti-Semitic group known

⁷⁸ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 237.

⁷⁹ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 237.

⁸⁰ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 241.

as the Heimwehr (Home Defense Movement); and the paramilitary socialist organization known as the Schutzbund (Defense League), an off-shoot of the Christian Socialist party. The flare of tempers in Vienna extended into the Werfel home.

They maintained their relationship despite these differences and two years later Alma agreed to marry Werfel. Alma herself could not explain why, after so many years, she finally accepted. Alma constantly worried about being older than Werfel. She felt as though her body was beginning to fail her; her eyes were weak, her hands were not as deft at the piano, the chills and shudders in her body responded only to drink.⁸¹ These things did not concern Werfel and they were married on July 6, 1929.

Anna Mahler stated that the years between 1930-1939 brought out the worst in Alma.⁸² Her delusions of Vienna's continued social grandeur and her belief that Austria would be spared from German attack were shared by many. Like Alma, people believed that Austria's Chancellor Schuschnigg and even Mussolini could protect Austria from the rising German threat, Adolf Hitler.

Alma was drawn to the power of the fascist dictator and she did not hesitate to vocalize her low opinion of Jews. Her prejudices and the beliefs that she had learned from her "childhood idols Wagner and Nietzsche"⁸³ influenced her political leanings.

Between 1930 and 1931 the Nazi party was growing rapidly. Hitler had enthralled millions, and his dangerous power was far reaching. In 1932 Alma and Werfel were in Germany for the last time. "By chance, they caught a glimpse of Hitler and Alma was surprised that such a small, adolescent looking man had enthralled millions."⁸⁴

When they returned to Vienna, Alma's relationship with Werfel became strained. She was pushing him to produce a great work, and she kept a tight reign on him. Wanting him to spend all of his time working, his slow progress was an irritant to her as she believed he was wasting too much of his time.

The constant struggling in their relationship wore on Alma, causing her vulnerability for intelligent men to resurface. Upon returning to the Catholic church in 1932 she met thirty-eight-year-old Father Johannes Hollnsteiner, professor of theology. The two formed a bond and he

⁸¹ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 246.

⁸² Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 248.

⁸³ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 248.

⁸⁴ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 251.

became a frequent visitor to the household. Their fondness for each other led to an affair of which her daughter Anna and Werfel were aware. Anna was disgusted by it and Werfel, wanting to maintain his quiet lifestyle, said nothing. Alma never admitted to the affair, but Anna's documentation is proof of its existence.⁸⁵

Alma's incessant desire to be the center of attention resulted in friction between her and her daughter Anna. Alma believed that Anna was not discriminatory enough in her decisions to marry. Throughout the course of her life, Anna was married five times. Alma believed she needed to set her sights on loftier men. What she did not realize was that Anna was searching for someone to give her the love that Alma had not. When Anna did something of which Alma disapproved, Alma called her a 'miscegenation.'⁸⁶ Manon was spared such treatment from Alma because she was 'pure-bred'. Alma had a much closer relationship with her as a result.

By 1933, Alma could no longer ignore the dangerous political currents that were surfacing. German persecution of the Jews was now out in the open and Werfel's writings were a prime target. Other outstanding Jews were being publicly criticized, among whom were Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Franz Kafka, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein. Their writings were symbolically burned to 'protect' German people. Artists were also targeted. Paintings by Kokoschka, Nolde, Picasso, and many other artists were being displayed as degenerate art.⁸⁷ No Jew, no matter what his position in society, was safe. Alma had to admit to the danger facing her husband.

In April 1934, Alma had a devastating distraction from Werfel's plight. Her beautiful, seventeen-year-old daughter Manon became ill. She had developed poliomyelitis, and her decline came swiftly. Over the next year Manon fought bravely for her life, but on Easter Monday, April 22, 1935, she lost her strength and died. Professor Hollnsteiner presided over her funeral services. Alma was distraught, for she was able to love Manon without the strife that entered into her relationship with Anna.

Numerous people were touched by this exquisite child's premature death, including Alban Berg. Having been a close friend of the family for years, he dedicated his Violin Concerto, which was commissioned by Louis Krasner, to Manon – 'To the Memory of an

⁸⁵ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 254.

⁸⁶ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 246.

⁸⁷ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 255.

Angel.’⁸⁸ Berg did not realize that this piece would also act as his requiem. He developed an infection soon after its completion and died on December 24, 1935.

These two tragedies occurring in the same year brought Alma and Werfel closer together, although Alma did not desist in her defense of Fascist leaders. She caused Werfel considerable pain with her unadulterated opinions, but the two were bonded by a shared grief and would not be separated. Alma soon realized the mistake of her loyalties. Over the next two years, Nazis infiltrated the Austrian government by making promises to keep war out of Austria.

In January 1937, after a particularly somber holiday, they took a trip to Capri to lift their heavy hearts. Werfel read disturbing news in the paper one morning; Austria was in peril. Alma left for Vienna immediately, alone, because she feared it would be dangerous for Werfel to travel. A trip to her mother and step-father’s house convinced her she had been correct.

Carl Moll had become an ardent supporter of the Nazis. His fanaticism persuaded her to set her affairs in order and leave Vienna. She emptied her bank accounts and had to smuggle the money out of the country sewn in the clothes of Sister Ida, Manon’s former nurse.⁸⁹ Her friends did not understand her anxiety. On March 12, 1938, Alma and a reluctant Anna packed only two suitcases and left Vienna.

For the next two years, the Werfels lived in exile which adversely affected the health of them both. Werfel became seriously ill, but he recovered. However, Alma suffered the loss of her mother that year, and was surprised at how her mother’s death affected her. Though she had never been close to her mother, Alma felt a deep sense of loss and sadness.⁹⁰

Exile continued to take its toll on their health and their nerves; however, they were given a respite in 1940. That year they found old friends in Paris who had also fled Austria. Among them were Berta Zuckerkandl, Bruno Walter, Franz Lehar, Otto von Habsburg, and Emil Ludwig. Reconnecting with French acquaintances such as Gustave Charpentier and Darius Milhaud also helped to alleviate some of their anxiety. For a short time they were able to regain some sense of normalcy in their lives.

Alma had been trying to convince Franz to emigrate to America for two years, but he was convinced that there were a few places left in Europe that offered safety to Jews. His views

⁸⁸ Anthony Pople, *The Cambridge Companion to Berg*, (United Kingdom; Cambridge University Press, 1997), 223-224.

⁸⁹ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 270.

⁹⁰ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 274.

changed on May 28, 1940 when Belgium fell to the Germans. For the next three months Alma and Franz tried desperately to acquire passports to America, while staying a step ahead of the Germans. After much anxiety and a perilous hike to the Spanish border, Alma and Werfel were on their way to America and freedom.

The couple lived in New York for three months before moving to Los Angeles. Werfel was called upon as a speaker at universities while he continued his writing. In May 1942, Werfel completed his novel, *The Song of Bernadette*. Inspired by the hospitality of the people of Lourdes when they were fleeing the Germans, this turned out to be the great work of art for which Alma had been waiting. Werfel had made a name for himself in America.

Though she supported her Jewish husband through the months and hardships of exile, Alma persisted in making anti-Semitic statements regardless of who was present. Her friends simply overlooked this habit because of all she had given of herself. It is interesting to note that these remarks had no lasting effect on Alma and Franz's marriage, though they were always a source of great distress for him.

On September 14, 1943, Werfel suffered a heart attack. For months Alma cared for him, and in July 1944 he seemed to be markedly improved. Over the course of the next year, he regained strength and was able to complete his last novel, *The Star of the Unborn*. His work drained much of his energy, causing Alma to continually worry about a relapse. Alma's fears were realized on August 26, 1945 when she found him lying on the floor in his studio with a 'smile on his face'.⁹¹ Alma, in her grief, did not attend his funeral.

In the years following Werfel's death, Alma took care of his affairs and tried to contact old friends. Unfortunately many had died, so Alma had to find new geniuses with whom she could spend her time, such as the painter W. E. Wiedermann and composer Benjamin Britten.

Perhaps the most important reconnection for Alma was that with her estranged daughter Anna. After her divorce from her fourth husband, Anna went to live with Alma, whom she had not seen for several years. Anna provided her a source of comfort and strength when Schoenberg died on July 13, 1951, and she continued to support Alma through her final years.

In 1952, Alma decided she needed a change and moved to New York City. It was in these final years that she had her autobiography published and that Benjamin Britten dedicated his *Nocturne* for tenor and small orchestra to her. She tried to stay active, but her health was

⁹¹ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 295.

declining. Sister Ida returned from Vienna to care for Alma. On Friday, December 11, 1964, after fighting heart and lung disease, Alma died.

Alma Mahler-Werfel lived a full eighty-six years. She was a determined, charming, and often self-centered woman who, with the aid of her alluring and beloved Vienna, fulfilled her quest to surround herself with men of genius. She was not content to be on her own, nor was she satisfied with her own artistic creation after she married Gustav Mahler. Of all the compositions she wrote early in her life, only fourteen songs survive. Even though Mahler lifted his ban on her budding creativity before he died, her artistic desires seem to have changed direction. The remainder of her music was destroyed in the war as she was forced to leave almost all of her belongings behind when she fled Vienna.

Her will to create also seems to have been destroyed. Some would say that Mahler's unbending forbiddance squelched her desire to compose. Others argue that Alma could and did make her own choices. However, having lived with a man as great as Mahler might have caused her to realize her talents were limited and she would be better off aligning herself with men who had both the talent and the determination to distinguish themselves.

Alma's eternal search for a father figure and male role model led to three marriages and several affairs. Early lessons in anti-Semitic thinking resulted in her frequent stinging comments about Jews. However, in her actions, Alma never hurt a Jewish person simply because of his faith. Her marriages to Mahler and Werfel reveal the ambiguity of her feelings. She overlooked their Judaism because of their enormous creative potential. Her support of Werfel in their treacherous flight from Vienna demonstrated her love for him.

During her lifetime, Alma saw her beloved Vienna rise to the height of intellectual and artistic creativity at the turn of the century as a result of the previous *Biedermeier* culture. She became an integral part of its society and perhaps a legendary woman of her time. Unfortunately, Alma was forced to witness firsthand Vienna's painful fall from grace leading to the Second World War.

Alma Mahler-Werfel was a unique woman. Her lofty goals of acquiring men and recognition were unusual for a woman of her time. More unusual was her ability to achieve her goals. The list of her acquaintances includes some of the most brilliant minds of late nineteenth and early twentieth century music, art, and literature. Alma has earned her place in history as one of the most sought-after and admired women of her time.

APPENDIX A

ALMA MAHLER'S LOVERS AND HUSBANDS

1. Gustav Klimt	Artist	Alma's first love
2. Alexander von Zemlinsky	Composer	Alma's lover
3. Gustav Mahler	Composer/ conductor	Alma's first husband
4. Walter Gropius	Architect	Alma's second husband
5. Oskar Kokoschka	Artist	Alma's lover
6. Franz Werfel	Writer	Alma's third husband
7. Johannes Hollnsteiner	Theology professor/ priest	Alma's lover

APPENDIX B

ALMA'S CHILDREN

1. Maria Anna Mahler (1902-1907)
2. Anna Maria Mahler (1904 - 1988)
3. Manon Gropius (1916-1935)
4. Martin Carl Johannes Werfel (1918-1919)

APPENDIX C

ALMA'S SONGS

TITLE	DATE PUBLISHED	DATE COMPOSED
<i>Fünf Lieder</i>		
1. Die stille Stadt	1910	between 1899-1901 ⁹²
2. In meines Vaters Garten	1910	1901 ⁹³
3. Laue Sommernacht	1910	between 1899-1901 ⁹⁴
4. Bei dir ist es traut	1910	between 1899-1901 ⁹⁵
5. Ich wandle unter Blumen	1910	January 7, 1899 ⁹⁶
<i>Vier Lieder</i>		
1. Licht in der Nacht	1915	unknown
2. Waldseligkeit	1915	unknown
3. Ansturm	1915	unknown
4. Erntelied	1915	unknown
<i>Fünf Gesänge</i>		
1. Hymne	1924	unknown
2. Ekstase	1924	March 23, 1901 ⁹⁷
3. Der Erkennende (Werfel)	1924	autumn 1915 ⁹⁸
4. Lobgesang	1924	June 16, 1900 ⁹⁹
5. Hymne an die Nacht	1924	unknown

⁹² Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 60-61.

⁹³ Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, 441.

⁹⁴ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 60-61.

⁹⁵ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 60-61.

⁹⁶ Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind*, 59.

⁹⁷ Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, 391.

⁹⁸ Alma Maria Schindler-Mahler, *Sämtliche Lieder*, With a forward by Herta Blaukopf, (Austria: Universal-Edition, 1910).

⁹⁹ Mahler-Werfel, *Diaries 1898-1902*, 294.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Angela Dilkey is a native of New Orleans, LA. After completing her undergraduate degree in Chemistry at Tulane University, she earned a Master of Music degree from New England Conservatory in Boston and a Doctor of Music degree from Florida State University in Tallahassee. While teaching voice and vocal literature at the State University of New York in Fredonia, she continues to pursue a performing career. Her favorite opera roles include the Composer (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Romeo (*I Capuleti e i Montecchi*), Baba the Turk (*The Rake's Progress*), and Zweite Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*). Dr. Dilkey spent a summer at the Tanglewood Music Festival where she performed Bach cantatas under Seiji Ozawa. While studying in Rome, she performed La Zia Principessa in *Suor Angelica*, and sang in several recitals. After a recent change of *fach* from mezzo to soprano, Dr. Dilkey has performed the Governess in the *Turn of the Screw* with Ethos New Music Society and the Mother in *Hansel and Gretel* with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Her future engagements include performances as the soprano soloist in Mozart's *Requiem* and *Coronation Mass* and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Dr. Dilkey continues to collaborate with her colleagues in recitals.