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Letters from America: Hans Weisse

OF all Schenker's pupils and disciples, none was as important for the dissemination of his teachings as Hans Weisse. Weisse seems to be at the forefront of every initiative to promote his teacher's work, whether as a private tutor, a public lecturer, or an ambassador of music theory. It was Weisse who created a little seminar in analysis at his home in the late 1920s, which Schenker himself was later to take over. He introduced American musicians to Schenker's approach to musical structure and gave the first public lectures in Schenkerian theory to the German and Austrian music-pedagogical establishment in the winter of 1930–31. His projected *Die Tonkunst*, a monthly periodical dedicated to Schenkerian concepts but authored mainly by Schenker's pupils, never got off the ground; nonetheless it provided the model for *Der Dreiklang* of 1937–38, edited by Oswald Jonas and Felix Salzer, a precursor of the *Music Forum*. And, famously, he was offered and accepted a teaching post at the David Mannes School of Music in New York (and, later, at Columbia University), and so planted the seeds of Schenkerism in America.

The correspondence shows that Weisse had a facility for engaging with people, something which his teacher could only have envied. He was on friendly terms with Wilhelm Furtwängler, and sometimes escorted the conductor to the theorist's apartment. He had enormous success in raising money and was able to keep Schenker from relying entirely on the patronage of Anthony van Hoboken in later years: it was as a result of Weisse's intercession that Furtwängler offered 3,000 marks toward the costs of printing the "Eroica" Symphony analysis, i.e. *Masterwork 3*; and this was soon followed by a second sizeable donation, from the husband of one of Weisse's piano pupils. He made every effort to ensure that the early success of Schenkerian theory in America brought some financial reward to its originator; and, as late as 1935, he successfully implemented a scheme whereby many of his American pupils contributed to a kind of pension fund for Schenker's widow.

The ease with which Weisse made friends is reflected in a number of his earlier letters to Schenker. In a letter of September 13, 1913, two years before being called up for military service, we read of a street-corner conversation with the baritone Franz Steiner (1876–1954) in the resort of Bad Ischl, from whom he learned that Richard Strauss had expressed an interest in Schenker's writings and in meeting the man himself. His thesis supervisor at the University of Vienna, Guido Adler, must also have recognized Weisse's interpersonal skills when he suggested the possibility of teaching at a school in India established by the Nobel prizewinning philosopher Rabindranath Tagore—this in spite of Weisse's lack of training in English at the time (letter of July 20, 1921). Most importantly, he struck up a friendship with the American cellist Gerald F. Warburg in 1925, which eventually led to his appointment at Mannes in 1931 and, several years later, to Oswald Jonas's

emigration to the USA. It was Weisse, moreover, who established the dispassionate, polemics-free tone of Schenkerian pedagogy in America; although his veneration of Schenker—his “dear, revered Master” and “spiritual father”—hardly wavered, he insisted that the teaching of Schenkerian concepts remain grounded in objective listening, never on blind faith in the canon of primary Schenkerian literature.¹

More than 200 items of correspondence from Weisse to Schenker survive; to date, none of the letters sent by Schenker has turned up, and only a tiny handful exist in draft form. As Weisse and Schenker lived in the same city until 1931, most of their intellectual exchanges were made face-to-face. Many of the numerous postcards dating from before his departure to America are concerned with such matters as arranging when or where to meet, and the supply of brief factual information that would have saved Weisse a trip to Schenker’s apartment.

As this selection of a dozen late letters indicates, Weisse’s veneration of his teacher did not prevent him from expressing criticism of many in his circle: Otto Vrieslander above all, but also Hoboken and Jonas, and Moriz Violin to a lesser extent. They also reveal a distancing in the relationship between pupil and master: as Weisse gains experience and confidence as a classroom teacher, so he becomes more sharply critical of the uncompromising nature of Schenker’s writings. His attack upon *Free Composition* as a weakly formulated expression of the final theory—reiterated in more than one letter of 1935 to Schenker’s widow—may have been tactless, but it is characteristic of the way he understood his position at the forefront of second-generation Schenkerism.

WILLIAM DRABKIN

¹ For a detailed account of Weisse’s teaching plans in America, see especially David Carson Berry, “Hans Weisse and the Dawn of American Schenkerism,” *Journal of Musicology* 20, no. 1 (2003): 104–56.

Weisse to Schenker (letter), October 15, 1931

OJ 15/16, [82] (Plate 6)

New York,
170 East 79th Street
c/o Mrs. Freeman

Dear, revered Master,

I am now so well settled in that I believe I may be allowed to report to you without my judgments going too far astray. Moreover, I must report first of all about my work and my working environment; and here I believe I am able to say that things could not have gone better. The spirit that has been instilled in the teaching staff by the two directors of the school, Mr. and Mrs. Mannes,¹ was the best preparation for that which I had to offer them.

Last week, before the school was in session, a gathering was arranged in my honor, and I gave my debut with a presentation of twenty-five to thirty minutes' duration about the relationship of a theory teacher to the other teachers in a music school—in English. The effect, apart from the personal success, was that ten teachers applied to work with me, and to get together once a week in order to learn the new concepts. Further: the second theory teacher, a man about fifteen years older than myself, receives regular tuition from me so that he can eventually teach everyone who must study theory as a subsidiary subject in the same way and from the same point of view as I do. I myself have two different classes with six pupils in each, a composition class with three pupils, and a further five or six private pupils who study with me for two hours: all in all about twenty-two pupils at present. Their faces all light up, even when I lay the foundation stones of the concepts “counterpoint” and “harmony”; and I am convinced that the news of the introduction of the new theory will spread like a brush fire.

Tomorrow I am meeting Mr. [George] Wedge, the Dean of the Institute of Musical Art, who has already been teaching from your books for a considerable time and who is keenly looking forward to meeting me, in order to find out more.

Everything else actually fits into place: anyone who lives strongly within himself will find that his external surroundings are not so bewildering. In any event, I felt at home from the first day; the only thing that I had to get used to was the street noise.

Everything else, however, I can bear; and above all I take joy from the friendship of Mr. and Mrs. Mannes, who look after me as parents, in whose home a thoroughly European atmosphere reigns, and with whom collaboration is an unalloyed pleasure.

So much for today. About Hamburg² you will have learned more than I, for I have not heard a thing. Please write soon.

To you and your wife, all good wishes from your
Hans

¹ David Mannes (1866–1959): American violinist. Together with his wife Clara (1869–1948), the daughter of the German-American conductor Leopold Damrosch, he founded the David Mannes Music School in 1916; later named the Mannes College of Music, it was to become the leading center of Schenkerian analysis in the United States.

² That is, news about the newly inaugurated Schenker Institute in Hamburg, established by Moriz Violin. Weisse gave a lecture there on September 17, 1931, the day before he set sail for America (see chapter 21).

✉ Weisse to Schenker (letter), November 28, 1932

OC 18/32–33

Dear, revered Master,

I intentionally held a bit back from my first report, because I thought I should see how things are unfolding before writing to you. Not much has happened yet, but I should like to express my delight in hearing that now [Joseph] Marx has found his way to you, and I am very curious to learn of the results to which your investigation has led. It is of course ludicrous, when one considers all that you have accomplished in the meantime, but it is only now that people have found that correct yardstick, so that one can imagine that those who today are propounding your *Theory of Harmony* will perhaps be able to read the “Eroica” (i.e. *your* “Eroica”!) in thirty years’ time.¹ The prospects do not seem so bad after all.

Regarding the gentleman from Brooklyn,² I recall that he attended my lectures last year. You wrote to me that you replied to him, on the advice of [Alfred] Kalmus; what you said is something I would only too gladly like to know, for the following reason:

Here, another pupil of mine (who just began this year) has written to say that he would also like to translate.³ Many things, especially the later terms like *Ursatz*, *Urlinie* and *Übergreifstechnik*, simply cannot be translated, and the danger arises that, the more people who are involved in translating, the more the interpretations, versions and technical terms could proliferate; this is something which, in my view, would not be good for the clarity of the theory and could have an unfavorable effect upon it. Now, I am the first person to teach your theory in public: would it not be better to arrange through the publisher that all those who appear with translation contracts be required to apply to me, so that we can come to an agreement, through reciprocal study, about the translation of specific terms in your theory, thus being able to secure the unity of the terminology also in the English language? That is something that seems very important for the translation of your writings.

I am most certainly not insisting that the translators must always adopt my expressions and translations; on the contrary I am conscious of having translated much only in a provisional manner. In any event, I would be happy if I could learn something from them—although I don’t expect that I will. But the cause would surely be served if, at the very outset, one could face the problem of unity of terminology also for the translation [of your work].

As to Vrieslander, I have in the meantime been in contact with him myself. After the ominous correspondence during the war (concerning the *Festschrift* planned for you), I had not heard anything more from him. His bitterness, which is palpable in every word that he writes, is only too understandable. He sent me a copy of his songs and *Ländler*.⁴

How things are going with *Free Composition* is something that I am most keen to learn.

Yesterday I heard the news that [Paul] Khuner died; I have not, however, heard anything from his family. I am truly very sorry for the dear, worthy man that he was. Have you already received the money from him?

It gives me great joy to be able to report to you that your flag has also been hoisted over university territory:⁵ I have a class of twenty there. The people are all intensely involved with everything; I mean that they seem quite attracted to it (as far as I can see), which is all the more impressive, given that they have already reached the diploma stage. (My class is a so-called “postgraduate class.”)

New York and America have changed radically since last year. The suffering is boundless, wherever one looks and listens, the same as with us.⁶ The collapse has affected the length and breadth of the country, and because of the previous state of prosperity the situation is much more brutal than it is with us. The number of pupils attending schools, everything is in a frightful decline—one can hardly compare things with the previous year.

And yet we are still faring very well. Hertha is beginning to acclimatize herself. Getting things done is so much more agreeable and easier. We have a nice German girl, who sees to the house in the morning and looks after the children in the evening. The children themselves are thriving and spend time every day, to their great delight, in the beautiful Central Park, where there are swings and slides, and similar things.

At Mannes, I shall not begin my official lectures until January. One of my courses is to be dedicated entirely to your theory: whether it materializes will, however, depend on the number of subscribers. My contractually agreed number of hours at the Mannes School is not full, but I am occupied approximately seventeen hours per week.

I hope I shall hear again soon from you. To both of you my most cordial greetings, also from Hertha!

Your

Hans

- ¹ Nearly thirty years had passed since Schenker's *Theory of Harmony* was first published; Weisse is hoping that, thirty years from now, people will have read and understood Schenker's analysis of the “Eroica” Symphony, recently published as *Masterwork 3*.
- ² Frederick E. Auslander (1910–81): a pupil of Weisse's at the Mannes School; in a letter to Schenker from January 5, 1933, Auslander offers to translate and adapt the *Theory of Harmony* for the English-speaking world. See Wason (2008).
- ³ Probably Arthur Waldeck (1899–1965), a keen advocate of Schenker's work, co-author (with Nathan Broder) of “Musical Synthesis as Expounded by Heinrich Schenker,” *Musical Mercury* 2 (1935): 56–64. He was one of the early translators of the *Theory of Harmony*.
- ⁴ Weisse was evidently never on good terms with Vrieslander. His unqualified opposition to a “Festschrift,” to be put together by Vrieslander in celebration of Schenker's fiftieth birthday, is articulated in a letter to Schenker of February 26, 1918. He was also harsh in his criticism of Vrieslander as a composer, as can be seen in his letters of February 15 and March 30, 1933; in this respect he took opposition to Schenker's adulation of Vrieslander's music, as expressed for instance in “Eine Anzeige und eine Selbstanzeige,” *Der Kunstwart* 46 (December 1932): 194–96.
- ⁵ i.e. Columbia University in New York City.
- ⁶ Weisse is referring to his (and Schenker's) homeland, Austria.

✂ Hans and Hertha Weisse to Schenker (two letters), February 15, 1933
OJ 15/16, [88]–[89]

My dear, revered Master,

I must thank you immediately for two letters. In the first, you sent me the announcement and the self-declaration.¹ With regard to Vrieslander, I have now received the songs from him and have written him a twelve-page letter about them.² I must confess that I cannot align myself entirely to your opinion of them; as much as I understand your praise, from your standpoint, and although I believe I have recognized the technical assets of his composition, there is nevertheless something very important that is missing, and I do not think that this is a question of “taste”—yet I would like to speak about it with you. I hope that Vrieslander did not take my letter badly; he ought to have gathered, from the comprehensiveness with which I wrote to him, how seriously and in what detail I studied his works.

Mr. Waldeck is coming to see me next Sunday. With regard to Auslander, I believe that he will still need to study for a good while before he can be contracted to prepare a translation of any of your works. I also have some doubts as to whether he is so competent in German that he truly understands what you write. But about all this I shall write to you at some later date in greater detail.

Today I should like merely to transmit to you one piece of news, in which I take great pleasure. From the enclosed announcement you will see that I have begun a series of twelve lectures about you, and I may be permitted to say, with honest pleasure, that they have had the greatest success. I have an audience of a little fewer than ninety, and I have taken them so far as to ensure that they will follow me through thick and thin. After a first introductory lecture, I began the second immediately, with the sketches to hand, with Bach's Prelude in C major. The success, the impression made by the analysis, was astonishing. I explained the sketch in terms of the title of my lectures, “Re-creation,” i.e. creating anew. I then played the piece and had recordings of two pianists that demonstrated how unwittingly the world has disregarded those things to which you have verily opened their ears. I am very happy about this fact, all the more so as there are nothing but musicians and teachers in my audience. That all of them have purchased the sketches³ will also contribute to the dissemination of your theory.

I am now living in a terrible hustle and bustle, and ask your forgiveness for closing this letter so abruptly. I just did not want to remain silent any longer, but will write to you again, in greater detail.

To both of you, our most cordial and affectionate wishes!

Your

Hans

Dear, revered Dr. [Schenker],

Whenever I hear Hans speak about your work, either at Columbia University every Monday or at the Mannes School every Wednesday, my heart swells with gratitude and contentment. How restorative, how comforting is the spirit that you have brought to life in these times and, I believe, for all times. Surely no one can lose his hold of this spirit: I see this in the listeners. There reigns an alertness, a

solemn peace, and the faces light up with joy and everyone has the need to express thanks afterwards. There are nothing but mature people—musicians, teachers, even concert artists—at the lectures, also at Columbia University. They are all deeply interested and want to make a start with it: not merely because it is new but because it is something interesting. I am delighted that your work has found a footing here, too. Knowing that nothing here has a permanent shape, and that all that is good can eventually gain a place, I love New York.

Our two little ones are also developing well here; they have joy and fun the whole day long. This year they will return to Europe, still as thoroughly German children. At home we speak only German. We employ a Swiss girl, and the children have learned rather more Swiss-German.

I often think with joy of the few occasions that I was invited to your place last year. Although I am not a musician, I am eager to know about your work, because it represents the spirit that should penetrate our whole life. I have even begun to re-study the piano, so that I might in time be able to get nearer to your work.

A part of this letter is also addressed to Lie-Lie, whom I greet most cordially. I hope that she, and you, are in very good health.

With deep respect,
Your
Hertha Weisse

- ¹ The article in *Der Kunstwart*: this short essay is in effect a review of songs by Vrieslander published by Emil Grunert in Leipzig in the early 1930s.
- ² Vrieslander had mentioned this letter, in passing, in a letter to Schenker dated February 1, 1933: "From Dr. Weisse I received a long letter of a highly idiosyncratic nature concerning my junk; to give an account of it would take up too much time and energy. With all respect for his personality: a strange pious man!"
- ³ The *Fünf Urlinie-Tafeln / Five Analyses in Sketchform*: the publication (1932) was overseen by Alfred Kalmus at the New York office of UE. The first Prelude from the *Well-tempered Clavier*, Book 1, is featured in this folder of graphic analyses.

☛ Weisse to Schenker (letter), March 17, 1933

OJ 15/16, [90]

Dear, revered Master,

With the greatest pleasure, I should like at least to inform you again here, in a few words, of the unbelievable success of my lectures, which are concerned only with your work, and thus with the immense success of your work. The people come, even in the worst weather—and that, for Americans, is saying a lot. They bring new people with them, and I am convinced that even more will come next year if I continue the lecture series. I am planning a cycle of ten or twelve lectures for next year, my preferred topic being "The 'Eroica' Symphony in Light of Schenkerian Theory." And so I shall ask you to answer the following question of mine as quickly and precisely as possible. We need the sketches for this. Is it

possible to have 150 copies of the sketches from your book¹ printed separately, for this specific purpose? And what should the price be? I have a feeling that it should be very cheap to reproduce them, so long as the original plates still exist. We could sell them here for 75 cents or \$1 each. I would advise you that we do this on our own, so that the net proceeds, however small they may be, immediately fall to you alone. Could you not in fact contemplate the possibility of doing this with other sketches from *Der Tonwille* and *The Masterwork in Music*?

In my seminar on criticism at [Columbia] University, my fourteen pupils, with whom I spent six hours working through the C minor fugue with reference to your sketch,² recently practised their criticism with reference to the way in which the work is played by Harold Samuel, who is regarded here as the “best performer of Bach.”³ I used a record player, and the result was: devastating! I play the role of a true agitator, and the record player is a wonderful aid: after people have learned to hear a piece as you understand it—and that is no longer so very difficult—and afterwards one plays it on the equipment, the result is usually: a success that makes everyone laugh! It is even my intention, therefore, to use this technique to make the celebrated piano virtuosos almost impossible [to take seriously]. Word will get around, and in the end they too (the celebrated piano virtuosos) will also come to these lectures.

Whether I shall have to arrange these lectures privately is, at present, an unresolved question. For Mr. and Mrs. Mannes, under the pressure of the financial situation, have offered me a poorer contract for next season, exactly \$1,000 less. Now I do understand their situation and will accept their contract—I have no other choice in these times—but I am not inclined to prepare twelve lectures for a fee of \$200. Here, it is easy to arrange lectures for a private circle, and I am considering this as a possibility.

The most important thing I am asking about is thus: to determine precisely whether, and at what price, 150 copies of the “Eroica” sketches could be produced. With regard to other sketches, I ask you to take these also into account and to name the possible sums of money involved. On the material side of things, I imagine that we could work out the costs of reproduction together, so long as they are not great, so that the net gain would come to you alone, and immediately after the sketches have been sold.

In my last lecture, I wrote out the sketch of the exposition of the Haydn sonata (No. 49 in the collected edition) on three large sheets, in different colors, and next Monday (that is already the seventh lecture) I will do the development section with reference to your sketch.⁴

The general situation here is very critical. Yet things appear to be turning toward the better. What can one, after all, foretell in these times? I am wondering whether, given the present conditions, there is any point at all in coming to Europe, as I had actually intended.

In your *Theory of Harmony*, so much seems to me to require such thorough revision that I ask myself: how can Vrieslander undertake this? The concept of scale-step belongs above all to the middleground and background. The scale-steps in the foreground (in fact, you yourself usually indicate these, in parentheses) are only illusory scale-steps. Your *Theory of Harmony*, however, makes no distinction

whatever in this regard.⁵ I would almost say that your *Theory of Harmony* is no longer yours. And precisely now, to invoke this very book for use in schools! It's a real tragedy. Only those in the know will be able to recognize, with a special emotion, the passages in *Theory of Harmony* in which the seeds of your entire theory took root.

All of us send you our most cordial greetings, and hope that you are both well.

Your

Hans

- ¹ *Masterwork* 3, which is in effect a monograph on the "Eroica" Symphony.
- ² The graph of the C minor fugue in Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier*, Book 1; Schenker's analysis of this piece forms the major part of the essay "The Organic Nature of Fugue" in *Masterwork* 2, 31–54 (Ger., 55–95).
- ³ Harold Samuel (1879–1937): English pianist, who was among the first soloists to make the keyboard works of Bach—in their original form, not arrangements—a major part of his concert repertory. From the mid-1920s he toured the USA regularly, with Bach dominating the programs; this may be the reason for his reputation in America as the "best Bach player."
- ⁴ The development section of Haydn's Sonata in E♭, Hob. XVI:49, first movement, appears in the *Five Analyses in Sketchform* of 1932. The graph of the exposition was evidently Weisse's own.
- ⁵ This is not quite true: in his analysis of the opening ritornello of the aria "Buss' und Reu'" in F♯ minor from the *St. Matthew Passion*, Ex. 119 (153 in the original Ger. edn.), Schenker made an important distinction between the C♯ major chords in measures 10 and 11, assigning the notion of scale-step only to the second of these because of its function in the perfect cadence.

✂ Weisse to Schenker (letter), March 30, 1933

OJ 15/16, [91]

My dear, revered Master,

To my deep dismay I have heard (from another source) that Vrieslander, from whom I have in the meantime received a letter that I find more than disappointing, has behaved like a schoolboy in spite of his fifty-three years (which he waves at me in his defense) and, when he feels attacked, cannot think of anything cleverer than to cry: "Please, Teacher, Weisse said . . ."

My observation, that your favorable judgment of his works may be explained by your considering the works of your pupils from a teacher's point of view and being inclined to pronounce them good, is something that I regard as appropriate and find neither regrettable for nor damaging to you.

Having been transmitted by him, you must have, admittedly, found this observation irritating, and one that put me in an unfavorable light; and I believe that it was Vrieslander's intention to shake your faith in me and my adherence to the cause, and I therefore regard his behavior as more than indiscreet: I regard it as almost dishonest.

In order, however, to clear up the matter between ourselves, I should like merely to remind you of one thing. When you wrote me a letter of recommendation for America,¹ you referred to me in it as a "Viennese master." And I returned your letter with the request not to misuse a word that has a special meaning when it comes from you. The purity of the concept of "master," in your unique conception of it, along with "the cause," meant more to me than any personal advantage. I believe that I convinced you of this. I recognized and treasured, from your original action, your goodness and friendship, and your obedience to your feelings, but it was also clear to me that you had gone too far. And this personal experience had certainly affected me in what I had to say to Vrieslander. I admit that, however much you might perhaps do so, I would never allow you to refer to any of my works in the way in which you have proclaimed Vrieslander's songs.² In my opinion, such an expression coming from you damages the world of ideas that you inhabit more than it can serve the one to whom it applies. You have done this, for sure, in complete conviction; viewed from the outside, however, it is and remains an expression that must appear self-conscious if one is aware of the relationship in which you stand to Vrieslander. What would you wish to make of such an opinion as voiced by Schoenberg about Webern? In addition, I remain thoroughly convinced that Vrieslander's songs, though you refer to positive traits and suchlike in them, have merely the value of imitations, not of original work; and so I find that such a far-reaching statement from you would already create a certain amount of confusion in your circle of adherents, to say nothing about how they will be interpreted by that circle which your work, I am most firmly convinced, is still destined to reach and access.

I blush at the mere thought that you could believe that envy or jealousy could have led me to make such a statement. Nevertheless, I cannot and will not believe that you could let any suspicion of this sort arise in you.

I believe that the entire course of my life and my artistic development demonstrate that I live for nothing else but your world, and for your cause which, by the grace of Heaven, has also become very much my own. Such a statement is to be understood not against you but rather for you, even if it is your opinion that I am, moreover, entirely wrong in my judgment of Vrieslander. The greatness of your work resides in the notion that your judgment, where it concerns the great composers, is irrefutable; I am thus all the more troubled by a statement by you to the effect that "these songs will soon be on the lips of every singer," which will simply be contradicted by the world of facts. If the unfortunate situation should arise whereby Vrieslander succeeds in arousing suspicion in you against me, then these few lines are intended neither more nor less than to convince you that nothing is more important for me than your work and your accomplishment.

Now a bit more about Vrieslander. My amicable relationship with [Viktor] Hammer acquainted me with a generosity in the exchange of opinions that places objectivity over all things personal. There is nothing that we cannot say to each other, even the strongest, most severe criticism. Criticism that is concerned with the subject is indeed the only sort that is useful in the world. When I wrote to Vrieslander, I cherished the hope that here it might be possible to effect an exchange of viewpoints, one that could unite two musicians from the same school to a common purpose. In conclusion, I need not tell you how lonely I feel among

all who call themselves musicians. You have experienced this yourself, and will know that this loneliness is a legacy of my adherence to you. It was no other thought than this that guided me when I began writing Vrieslander a fourteen-page letter. The opinion that I expressed awaited an expression of opinion, in return, that should have been concerned with the object alone; instead of this, I received a reply in which every word was used in order to wound me personally. This intention was so obvious that it had to fail to have any effect. I am only sorry for him, for anyone who has so little faith in an amicable criticism that concerns an objective matter suffers from an intellectual and spiritual calcification, from which nothing genuine can any longer emanate. Anyone who answers active participation with poison, inner openness with small-minded suspicion (as if I were arrogant or conceited), will be unfruitful in the roots of his being. Moreover, I know that my personal opinion of Vrieslander is entirely worthless in your eyes; I spell this out because I want you to know (even if he cannot understand) the grounds that motivated me to discuss his work with such thoroughness.

To my last letter I must still add what I forgot to say: Would it perhaps be possible to consider the reproduction merely of the graphs of the Urlinie of the "Eroica"? The other sketches³ I could easily arrange to have written on large sheets.

With the most cordial and heartfelt greetings to the two of you, from all of us, I remain, in old and immutable faithfulness,

Your


Hans

¹ In a letter of April 15, 1931, Weisse had asked Schenker to change the wording "famous Viennese master of music" in a letter of reference to the David Mannes Music School. Schenker evidently obliged: on the same day, he drafted a new letter of reference:

The musical youth of America can consider themselves fortunate in being able to undertake their studies under the direction of the well-known Viennese musician, Dr. Hans Weisse. Dr. Weisse is, in spite of his youth, a true personality, creatively and pedagogically an artist of the highest rank. His musical works justify his teaching composition most particularly; and as an exponent of my new theory, I can think of no one better.

² Schenker did indeed express his admiration for Vrieslander's songs, not only in his article "Eine Anzeige und eine Selbstanzeige," but also in private (see Federhofer (1985), 215–16).

³ i.e. the forty-nine *Figuren*, which were published on loose sheets. Weisse is asking only for additional reproductions of the four graphs (*Bilder*) which were published as a thirty-five-page booklet.

 Weisse to Schenker (letter), March 15, 1934

OJ 15/16, [94]

Dear, revered Master,

It pains me endlessly when I consider that you have heard absolutely nothing from me this year, all the more so because, all appearances to the contrary, I have felt myself tied to you in thought so very much, and so often. Not only have I thought much about you during the unrest and in the face of the political and financial situation—no, I have you to thank, as always, for my best hours; whenever I was granted no more than a deeper insight into the essence of music, I was aware of your worth and your significance. That I, nevertheless, was unable to bring myself to write a letter now seems almost incomprehensible to me, and can only be explained in connection with the deep depression that gripped me after returning to New York City from the country last fall.

I had enjoyed a great success the previous year with my twelve lectures about you and your world of ideas—and of hearing—and when the new academic year began I expected a reaction, in the form of a new audience. The School had undertaken to make it easier for the people and announced that courses would be organized, at especially reasonable prices, that would introduce those who were interested in a deeper and more comprehensive study of your way of hearing music. Not a single person subscribed. This was my first great disappointment, and I admit that the first three winter months were thoroughly ruined for me as a result. I began to hate this land and my surroundings, and felt extremely unhappy. That which brought me back, gradually, into equilibrium was simply the joy in my own work, and the satisfaction that I felt as I rehearsed my Variations and Fugue for two pianos. There followed my new lectures, and an efficient piece of work that I had to get through as a result. The last of the six lectures takes place next Monday; I shall speak about my variations, in the expectation of having them performed there. The idea that motivated me to speak about a piece of my own was the question that constantly arises: How does the knowledge gained from you apply in practice for a composer? In five lectures, I therefore showed how the notion of *semper idem sed non eodem modo*¹ affects the attitude of a composer, and I now want to draw the conclusions, as I have raised the knowledge gained to the level of a credo for a creative musician.

In the same post, I am sending you a copy of my Violin Sonata, which has finally reached its conclusion in the form of a private publication after a great deal of trouble and in spite of very high costs, which I had to pay for from my own pocket. Here, too, the indolence of the circle of people who were involved dealt me a hefty blow. I have sold at the school, which announced the publication in 250 printed cards, a single(!) copy to date. On top of all this, the reduction in my income from the Mannes School, brought about by the general financial situation, has placed me in circumstances that I had never before experienced: it was not possible to put away a sufficient amount of money to sustain me during the following summer, so that I could dedicate myself to my work. I see myself obliged to appeal to the conscience of other people and to ask for money. As little as I perceive this as a humiliation, which it in fact is, it is sufficient to put one in a

bitter frame of mind. And I hope that you will forgive my reluctance to write, now that you know the reasons.

From what I have heard, you have received the article about you by the young American composer Israel Citkowitz.² He is now working with me. And I count it as the major success of this year that your theory has broken through the front of the radical-modern American youth. It is a beginning that promises much. At any rate, however, I believe that it is more important to win over the youth than to convince the older generations, who are so wrapped up in their own prejudices that they simply are unwilling and unable to understand.

My lectures at Columbia University, into which I "smuggle" your theory, so to speak, are things I regard as very important. Every year I make a hundred more people prick up their ears—for the most part with my lectures, of course—and I bury their false sense of security. And however unsatisfactory that may often appear to be, I do not give up the hope that the effect will, in the long run, not be lost.

Susi³ had the measles. The children were not at all well this winter, but now they are better.

With deep regret, I must accept the decision once again to abandon a trip to Europe. Apart from the political uncertainty, my finances can on no account permit me to undertake such a costly trip. I will thus stay in America again this summer and, if it is at all possible, strive to continue my work somewhere at the seaside. I plan the completion of a string quartet, of which I wrote the first half in score last summer; the scoring of a chamber cantata on a text by Hölderlin, of which I have completed a draft; and a work for orchestra.

I now come to the most important point of my letter, and this concerns the abbreviated schools version of your *Theory of Harmony*. Recently I received a message from Associated Music Publishers Inc., a branch of Universal Edition,⁴ from which it is clear that Universal Edition is disposed towards the publication of your *Theory of Harmony* in abbreviated form (in English), for school purposes.

The story behind this is not entirely clear to me; and I would gladly know what you make of it and, above all, what you think about an abbreviated schools edition. Moreover, I do not understand why two people should be undertaking the same work at the same time, especially as Vrieslander, as Universal Edition reports, is occupied with this work.

Would it not be simplest for Vrieslander to take care of the work and simply to have it translated here? He has, for certain, placed himself in complete agreement with you about this, and he understands your intentions in the most precise way. It is entirely unclear to me how Universal Edition can assume that I am occupied with such a task, or that I have ever expressed the intention of incorporating parts of *Counterpoint* into the *Theory of Harmony*.

The misunderstanding seems to have arisen from a certain Mr. Cobb,⁵ who was briefly a pupil of mine and who has been in touch with Associated Music Publishers without saying anything about this to me, by proposing to you the idea of Americanizing the *Theory of Harmony*. The person concerned is no longer my pupil, and the little that he showed me had so little to do with your work that I would never have allowed or advised him to undertake this task. About his relationship to the publisher, I know absolutely nothing.

Can you even imagine that I would take on this sort of thing on my own, without first having spoken to you personally about it? Kalmus never spoke to me about it directly, and I can only remain speechless about this publication house wheeling-and-dealing, regarding which—if I understand the correspondence that was sent to me yesterday—I am at an utter loss to explain how the honorarium that is accruing to me ever existed, as I have never given this slightest suggestion about a translation on which I was working!! Or, for that matter, on an assignment of any sort.

Can you, perhaps, shed any light on this matter?

All that Kalmus mentioned to me was the abbreviated schools version planned for the Conservatory,⁶ and he mentioned at the same time that Universal Edition could not provide the necessary funds for such an edition. This he explained when he visited me, and I was merely struck by the fact that he was so certain that he could not undertake this, at a time when I could gather from the comments in your letters that you were sure that a schools edition would come about.

How things stand with *Free Composition* is a burning question for me, and I hope to hear from you that we will soon have it before our eyes.

On account of the enormous copying costs here, I shall have to make the fair copy of the Variations myself, and I hope that I can send them to you next autumn.

In conclusion, I should like to thank you also for the kind, touching words you sent me on the occasion of the death of my father,⁷ which was the last direct sign of life from you to me.

Hertha and I send you and your wife our very best and most cordial greetings and hope that you both enjoy the best of health.

In old devotion and faith,
Ever your
Hans

¹ “Always the same, but not in the same way”: Schenker’s artistic motto, which was placed at the head of most of his publications from the 1921 onward.

² Israel Citkowitz (1909–74): American composer, author of “The Role of Heinrich Schenker,” *Modern Music* 11 (1933): 18–23.

³ Susannah, the Weisses’ first child.

⁴ Associated Music Publishers, described here as a branch of UE, was acquired by the music publishing house of G. Schirmer in 1964.

⁵ The name of Cobb is not known to appear elsewhere in the Schenker correspondence.

⁶ That is, the Vienna Academy for Music and Performing Arts.

⁷ Adolf Weisse (1856–1933): distinguished character actor and theater director in Vienna.

✂ Weisse to Schenker (letter), September 23, 1934

OJ 15/16, [95]

Tenants Harbor [Maine]

Dear, revered Master,

I have, unfortunately, received no reply to the letter I sent you from here this summer. I could only gather from your letter to Lytle,¹ who visited me here, that you stayed in the vicinity of Gastein,² and I hope that you and your wife have had a good summer and replenished the necessary reserves of strength and intellect to survive the coming winter.

How much I thirst for the publication of *Free Composition* is something I surely do not have to emphasize: it has now become a necessity, I believe, for every one of the many people who follow your work and want to put it into practice themselves. I imagine that you have been swamped by questions of this sort and are now yourself quite impatient to see them answered by action. Are you already correcting the proofs? Yes, I dare to ask you: What are you planning to do next, after *Free Composition* is published?

The receipt of Jonas's book, which arrived last week, was a cause for celebration, even though I feel that it does not fully deserve the subtitle "Introduction to the Theory."³ It reproduces too much, instead of introducing things in a preparatory and explanatory way. It does not sufficiently smooth the path of access for the average musician, which I think it was especially intended to do. My feeling is that it has too little inspirational value, which could have documented your creative achievements by enlightening and explaining them. I believe that I shall later be in a better position to explain what I mean. Yet I can hardly imagine that you do not understand precisely what I mean; I am sure that similar thoughts went through your head. It goes without saying that I shall express myself in this way about it to no one but yourself. And, to be sure, Jonas has been successful in a number of respects.

I have an especially happy summer behind me. Seldom have I enjoyed such peace, such isolation in splendid, unspoiled nature, looking out on to the infinite from the immediate vicinity of the sea. The air is as pure and as strong as mountain air. Bathing in the sea is, every time, a new elixir of life. The coast, which is elevated to a Romantic quality by the rocks and fir tree forests, gives the illusion of a mountainous region, and one thus feels that one is enriched by the harmony of several types of landscapes, in a way that cannot be expressed. I shall bring two completed scores back to New York with me: a cycle of five madrigals for six voices, on epigrams and elegies by Goethe; and a new four-movement string quartet.

I was deeply overcome by the news, which reached me by telegraph yesterday, of the death of my mother, from whom I had received a letter two days earlier which spoke of her suffering from inflammation of the gall bladder. I wrote my string quartet in memory of my father, and was so deeply gripped by the conception of death. At the time I was writing it, it seemed to me like a memory; and now I am to understand that it was also a premonition!

I can still hardly comprehend it: and as little as the concept of death means something inimical to me, yet there dawns within me that uncanny feeling that

informs everyone when, from the death of both parents, all bridges to the past are severed; and with the expiration of the mother's womb as the beginning of life, the "whence," comes the start of one's "being alone" in the world, as a foreboding of one's own death.

That I should write these lines to you this very day, still under the numbing effect of reality, should come as no surprise to you, whom I have often called my spiritual father. It is to you that I owe my entry into a real world; and it is thanks to you that this moment appears to "have become ingrained" in me.

My children have developed magnificently, and Hertha, too, has found a new home in this wonderful landscape. To be honest, the world here makes it in part more difficult, in part easier, to return to New York. For we rejoice in the time that is granted us to gaze at all this magnificence. Can one even contemplate returning to Europe, under the given circumstances? How glad I would be to see you again, and to talk about so many things which can hardly be expressed clearly in letters!

We shall return to New York at the end of next week, where my address will be the same: 1 West 64th Street.

From the two of us, our love and good wishes to you both!

Most cordially,
Ever your
Hans

¹ Victor Vaughn Lytle (1884–1969): American organist and academic, who came to Vienna to learn about Schenker's theories and spent two years studying with Weisse.

² Bad Gastein: a resort in the Gastein Valley, about 60 miles south of Salzburg.

³ Oswald Jonas, *Das Wesen des musikalischen Kunstwerks: Einführung in die Lehre Heinrich Schenkers* (Vienna: Saturn Verlag, 1934). For the second edition of this work (1972), the title and subtitle were reversed.

✉ Weisse to Jeanette Schenker (letter), February 21, 1935

OJ 15/16, [97]

Worthy, revered, dear Lie-Lie!

Your two letters distressed me greatly; from the second of these, in particular, I gathered that the beloved master cannot have been in good health for some years. I can only marvel at the expenditure of all his life's strength, which thus enabled him to bring to a conclusion what, I suppose, is his greatest work. He, who was able to grasp the heroism of the great composers as no one before him, was himself a hero, a great man. I had always understood what it meant for you to live with him and through him. And only now can I gauge what it means for you to live after him, to survive him. May it be granted to you to find the strength to do so, and may the day dawn for you, and for all of us with you, on which he begins to live again in the consciousness of those to whom he spoke, as the man that he was.

It comforts me greatly that you, having been trained in collaboration over a period of many years, and being the person most trustworthy to carry out his

intentions, wish to, and will, undertake the correction of *Free Composition* and the music illustrations that belong to it. Do I even need to say that, whenever you need my help, you may be sure to have it? The proofreading of the text, and the reading of the examples against the text, are things that I would be only too glad to take on, if you are not deterred by the great distance between us and can put your faith in the postal service. I am convinced that Jonas will do his best and prove to be very conscientious and trustworthy. But if it would give you greater peace of mind, why should not the three of us—you, Jonas, and I— undertake this together? You can deal with me alone, if you feel that this is necessary.

When you, dearest Frau Lie-Lie, consider what it means to me to have lost in the past two years not only both parents but also my spiritual father, you will then understand that nothing draws me back to Europe, specifically to Vienna. Nevertheless, I feel obliged to stress that I would have come for your sake if it were in any way possible. But I cannot contemplate it because—this must of course be kept entirely between ourselves (I have written to nobody in Vienna about it)—the Mannes School has halved my guaranteed employment, in consequence of which I am compelled to seek further employment elsewhere for next year. If I am unable to find any, then I must seek to win the trust of those concerned by new artistic production. I must, therefore, devote the summer entirely to my own creative work. For two reasons, then, the way to Europe is blocked for me, and I am unable to offer my modest assistance in the form of personal attendance.

If I ask you now for something from the master's possession as a memento, then you will understand what moves me to do so, without my having to justify it at length. What I would most like would be simply a modest article, used by the most beloved and revered man. Things are of course nothing in themselves, but the emotions they arouse in us make them so much more than what they are.

I would most particularly like to know, after you are able see things more clearly for yourself, which of the master's [unpublished analytical] sketches you intend to have published. There will certainly be a great deal of this available, which should not be withheld from all of us who live in the master's world of ideas.

I must of course leave to your own judgment how far you wish to rely on me in such matters.

I think of you often, very often, in affectionate and intimate friendship.

Your faithful and true
Hans Weisse

✉ Weisse to Jeanette Schenker (letter), May 26, 1935

OJ 15/16, [98]

Dear, revered Frau Lie-Lie,

Your letter made me feel very sad, since it confirmed the thoughts that had already occurred to me frequently about your financial situation. Your comment, that there is no publisher who would give you 200 shillings per month, soon awakened in me an idea that I immediately turned into a reality. This letter will communicate the result of it.

My idea was the following: Why should it not be possible, with the assistance of my pupils here, to secure for you, for one year in the first instance, the sum of 2,400 shillings, i.e. 200 shillings per month? As a matter of principle, I approached only those pupils of mine who were thoroughly conscious of the worth of our beloved, irreplaceable master. My thoughts did not deceive me: every one of them followed the example I set, committing themselves in writing to a monthly contribution, and considered the fact of my proposal as a commendation of me. The collection from the twenty-two subscribers resulted in the desired sum of \$489, which at the current exchange rate is somewhat higher than 2,400 shillings. Murmurs about possible inflation led me to suggest to my pupils that they come up with four months' payment immediately. Some paid the full amount; some could pay only the first two months initially; but most were able to agree to my request. I now have a sum of \$182 set aside, whose value in shillings I have had my bank make out to you in the form of checks and which I am enclosing with this letter. If the sum is somewhat more than four times 200 shillings, that is because one female pupil paid the full amount at once, another paid half the sum indicated. The money that I send you will not, therefore, always be exactly the same. I will, of course, arrange to send you the next two or three months' worth in October, if possible, so that you do not lose too much in the event of a further fall in the value of the dollar. But I have not approached two of my pupils; they have been excused from this round, so that their possible contribution at a later date might restore balance to the full in the event that inflation results in a shortfall.

The collection will cover the period from June 1935 to June 1936. What happens after that is something I cannot say at the present moment. You too will understand that, given the uncertainty of the financial situation here in this country, it would have been a psychological mistake to bind people beyond the duration of one year. And yet I hope that you will have faith in my conviction and goodwill: I will then strive once again to do what is in my power. I am glad thus to have dispatched the business part of this letter. I have of course been a bit ponderous and hope that you do not take that amiss.

Concerning the commentary to C. P. E. Bach's thoroughbass theory,¹ I would be very interested to see it and would like to know whether making a copy of it would give you too much trouble. I spoke recently with a musician by the name of Kirkpatrick, who is planning a translation of the *Essay* into English;² and I wondered whether a commentary from the master might not make a particularly desirable appendix to it (in English, of course). The lack of English translations of Schenker's books is already being lamented in wider circles; something will surely have to be done about this. I hope that, when *Free Composition* appears, you will not have forgotten to instruct the publishers to have a copy sent to me. Not only am I burning to see the work at last, but I cannot carry out and realize my plan of writing an account of Schenkerian theory in the English language, for use in schools, until I have seen and studied the definitive theoretical formulation of the basic principles in the original language.

Regarding your kind intention of passing on to me the master's inkwell, I thank you from the bottom of my heart—likewise the sheet of paper you sent me in which I could only sense the play on words "erlauben—erleben" without actually understanding its ultimate meaning. Mrs. Jella Pessel Lobotka will look you up on

my behalf and, in the event that the inkwell is not too large, bring it back to New York for me. Please be so good as to entrust it to her.

We have experienced the most frightening things concerning our children. Both underwent operations: Monika on her middle ear, Susannah on a difficult abscess resulting from chicken pox. Moni has not yet recovered; she has been in the hospital (for the second time) for three weeks now, and the worst is now to come: we will be leaving for the country and will have to leave her in the hospital. For how long is something we do not know. Hertha will not be able to collect her from New York until she is completely recovered.

Our summer address remains the same: Tenants Harbor, Maine, USA. We plan to leave on the 29th, so your next communication will reach me there.

Hertha sends her most heartfelt greetings. You know, dearest lady, how very much we think of you and how very much we imagine your loss. Hertha is currently so occupied that, at this moment, she cannot write; but she will certainly write to you later.

Please accept the most cordial greetings from the two of us. I hope to hear from you soon.

Your faithful
Dr. Hans Weisse

- ¹ Part 2 of Bach's *Essay on The True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*. In the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection is a manuscript entitled "Generalbasslehre. Prepared by Felix Salzer from a manuscript work by Schenker." One part of Salzer's work is described as a typewritten "commentary on the *Essay*."
- ² Possibly the American harpsichordist and Scarlatti scholar Ralph Kirkpatrick (1911–83), who had recently returned from periods of study in Europe. (An English translation of Bach's *Essay* prepared by Weisse's pupil William J. Mitchell did not appear until 1949.)

✉ Weisse to Jeanette Schenker (letter), July 14, 1935

OJ 15/16, [99]

Dear Frau Lie-Lie,

It is only today that I affirm receipt of your lovely letter of June 9, and thank you cordially for sending *Free Composition*. We had so much more anxiety here concerning Monika's ear (she was operated on twice, and was released from the hospital only yesterday evening, finally—we hope—on the way to complete recovery), that I was unable to do anything.

I have already read through *Free Composition*, but will now only begin to work through it properly. For now, I should like to refrain from making any further comments about the work. Its conception is magnificent, the fullness therein is enormous; and if on first reading there is much that appears unclear or confusing to the reader, or contradictory or questionable in any way, then the problem is more likely to lie with the reader than with the author. Precisely because of this, I would like to keep silent for now. When I have succeeded in working through

the material thoroughly, I will send you a precise account of my impressions and a detailed list of mistakes, of which I have already encountered a large number. The only thing that I would add here, apart from noting the awesome impression made by the work as a whole, is that the end of the Foreword is more than a little alienating, in that it gives the illusion that the publication of the book was due entirely to Anthony van Hoboken; and [Paul] Khuner does not get so much as a syllable's worth of thanks. I must admit that this touched me most painfully.

I am very curious to learn what Saturn Verlag has decided with regard to the collection of aphorisms that they were thinking of publishing.¹

Your idea of leaving the master's scores and books to the [Photogram] Archive seems to me to be right and laudable. For the photograph I give you my heartfelt thanks; I find it very beautiful and I like it better as a portrait than the one that I received from Hoboken immediately after receiving your letter. Your intention, to give each of my pupils who contributed to the collection a copy of it, is touching and will certainly bring the greatest joy to each of them. If you wish to fulfill your intention, I thank you for this in advance and I ask you to send the pictures at such a time that they will arrive at my address in New York (1 West 64th Street) at the beginning of October.

In sending me the photographs of Schenker's death mask and hand, you will give me only the greatest joy.

Regarding my own work, I can, unfortunately, report absolutely nothing at present, other than that my many concerns about my child and my future have occupied me until this moment. How much Hertha has had to suffer is something that you can easily imagine. The child was in the hospital four times in the space of four months! And she has gone through three operations under an anesthetic.

I am not sure whether you are still in Hofgastein, and so I am sending you these lines to your Vienna address instead, in the hope that they will be forwarded to you immediately.

With my most cordial wishes, also from Hertha, and with the assurance of our continued interest in all that concerns you, and with our most amicable thoughts, I remain

Your

Dr. Hans Weisse

¹ Some of Schenker's aphorisms were indeed published in *Der Dreiklang* (1937–38), edited by Oswald Jonas and Felix Salzer and published by Saturn Verlag.

Weisse to Jeanette Schenker, September 18, 1935

OJ 15/16, [100]

Dear Frau Lie-Lie,

The death mask moved me most deeply, and I thank you for sending me the photographs of it. The slight, almost youthful features seemed very strange, and I will not deny that a shiver runs down my spine every time I look at them.

I believe I can definitely say that Dr. Salzer has no knowledge of the initiative taken by me and my pupils. In any event, I have said nothing to him about it.

Your idea of selling the master's surviving papers is something that I can understand; yet I hope that you will not take offense at the observation that I should like to add here. It is a different case if the manuscripts of a deceased composer are sold. They come into the possession of foreign hands as something complete and, where sketch-like ideas are concerned, no longer to be completed. The situation appears different with our beloved master's papers: the material gathered here is entirely usable, and the question arises as to whether intellectual property may be sold. After serious reflection, it seemed to me more purposeful to sell his library, but to add the unpublished music illustrations and writings to the [Photogram] Archive as a single collection, not to be dispersed.¹

You wrote, among other things, in your last letter: "It would be a pity if the surviving papers were assessed not by their value but by my needs." Well, it is unfortunately only too true that intellectual treasures cannot, in this world, be harmoniously reckoned in monetary terms. It is difficult enough to assign a value to intellect by intellectual means, but impossible to put a monetary value on them. Yet these are surely thoughts that have already occurred to you and I probably do not need to fear that you will regard my remarks as a tiresome meddling into things that are of no concern to me.

During the summer I have immersed myself thoroughly in *Free Composition*, and I have studied it as thoroughly as I could, given the limited musical material here. I shall of course work once again through all the examples that I did not have to hand here. Especially with regard to the music examples, there are unfortunately numerous disturbing mistakes in the book, which will cause many readers to rack their brains when working through it. I shall send you a detailed list of mistakes later. In one case the supplementary volume [of music examples] is missing the example that is referred to in the text.

Whenever I take the book in my hands, two things pain me most deeply in my soul. One of these is the formulation of thanks to Hoboken, which is something you already know about; and its verbal formulation marks it out as an alien element in the book, which it in fact is.² The expressions "idealistic" and "for all time" indeed betray the fact that the words do not come from the pen of an author who would have compromised the awareness of his own importance in the formulation of an expression of gratitude by pairing words of thanks with expressions of self-esteem.

This brings me now to the subtitle of the book, "the first textbook about music": It is simply and utterly inconceivable to me that Schenker could ever have come up with this. You will surely agree with me that anyone who catches sight of it will lay the emphasis of its meaning on the word "first": in which case one would have to rule out Schenker's *Theory of Harmony and Counterpoint*, and C. P. E. Bach's *Essay* (which, indeed, also have to do with music) as belonging to the category of textbook. Apart from the fact that the [sub]title does not correspond to the truth, it is so damaging, which is something that the truth should never be permitted to be in order to be able to assert itself. What was probably intended was that the autocratic operation of music, as an art form, had never before been explained in a written work in this way: in this case, the title is most unfortunate and disastrous,

because of its ambiguity. "A textbook of music" or "music's first textbook" (for sure that would not be proper German) would already have allowed less uncertainty to arise. But now:

Any book, if it is to qualify as a "textbook," must be understood as presenting its material methodically in such a way that the user, having thought through and grasped its contents thoroughly, can use the material in its entirety as the author understood and conceived it. It follows that all so-called harmony textbooks are true textbooks; it is just that *Free Composition* is not one. For even the most understanding readers of *Free Composition* will be at a loss to know what to do when it comes to the explanation of a new work of music, in spite of the innumerable terms introduced in *Free Composition*, knowledge of which will not be nearly enough to enable them to be put it into practice. Explaining music is a creative process, and no textbook can fathom the mysteries of creativity. For this reason, *Free Composition* is neither the first textbook of music, nor a textbook at all. You will ask: Okay, then what is it? To which I answer, neither more nor less than "Free Composition," which did not need a subtitle: a subtitle by which the author exposes himself, in the eyes of ignoramuses, to the suspicion of a conceitedness bordering on megalomania; by which the world of facts is distorted; and by which the entire work hinges on a single point, the defense of which even the most convinced Schenkerian will find impossible.

This is not, as one could easily assume, merely word-collection. It is very penetrating and far-reaching, for precisely because *Free Composition* announces itself as a textbook, which is something it can never be, it offers those who will criticize it the easiest points from which it can be attacked. That the master can have made such a disastrous mistake in his most treasured work is something that I regard as one of the most regrettable things.

With this last sentence I have already indicated to you that I have a high regard for *Free Composition*, though I must, for the sake of the truth, add this qualifying remark: that one is more likely to be intuitively conscious of the greatness of the work than to be able to grasp that greatness in every sentence and thought process. This may, in large part, be explained by the fact that language cannot adequately account for listening processes. The supplementary volume, with its aids that appeal to the eye and the ear, is a much more convincing document than the text itself. As a literary accomplishment, *Free Composition* is the weakest of all of Schenker's works; as an auditory accomplishment it is his greatest. Almost none of the many concepts is actually defined; they are merely introduced and illustrated; and so it comes about that, in spite of the subdivision into paragraphs, the whole makes an imprecise impression, and the whole, as well as the individual parts, seem forever to be knocking the reader off course. Contradictions in the use of technical terms contribute to this lack of clarity. I doubt that the book can, on its own, convert intelligent people to adherents of the theory.

Everything that I am merely referring to here I will, first of all, attempt to present, in a thoroughly comprehensive manner, in the form of objective criticism. A commentary is certainly indispensable, but this should surely not follow the style and argument of Jonas's book. Anyone who seeks to make this book his own will, like myself, not escape being tossed and turned about between the two opposing emotional poles of "praising it to the sky" and "feeling saddened to the

point of death" ... It is perhaps an immutable law of fate that the whole truth will be revealed to no mortal being, and the Veil of Maya³ is our inescapable destiny.

What I have to say in the way of "free sentences about Schenker's *Free Composition*" will probably be directed in the first instance only to my pupils and those most interested in the matter, and is not intended for publication. I intend thereby no more than to retain answers that will spur people on to read and think through. It is only as a result of a seminar that I intend to give on *Free Composition*⁴ that the guidelines for a commentary will become clearer.

Monika is now fully recovered, and we have been living in peace for the last month and a half. From October 1 we are in New York (1 West 64th Street). The number of photographs for my pupils amounts to twenty-one.⁵

With most cordial greetings from the two of us,

Yours faithfully,
Dr. Hans Weisse

- ¹ Schenker's books on music, and separately his scores and sheet music, were sold c. 1936 by an antiquarian dealer: see *Musik und Theater, enthaltend die Bibliothek des Herrn Dr. Heinrich Schenker, Wien* (Vienna: Heinrich Hinterberger). Of the remaining materials, including his diaries, correspondence, analyses, and sketches, unpublished works, some scores, copies of his own music, photographs, and other items, a portion was purchased from Jeanette by Felix Salzer in 1936, and the remainder passed for safe keeping by her to Ernst Oster and Erwin Ratz before she was deported to Theresienstadt. The first two of these were eventually deposited at the New York Public Library, as part of the Felix Salzer Papers and as the Oster Collection, and the Ratz materials went to the University of California at Riverside as the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection.
- ² "That a work as idealistic as this could have made its way into the world at all, in these godless times, is something for which the author, and indeed anyone who is interested in music, is grateful to the generous act of patronage on the part of an inspired musician, a true and convinced disciple and friend of the new theory. His name, *Antony van Hoboken*, will for all time be inseparably connected with this work; and the [music] lover for whom Philipp Emanuel Bach once wrote his *Essay* will celebrate his resurrection in that man." — This paragraph appears on p. 10 of the original German edition. It was cut from Jonas's revised edition of *Free Composition* and does not appear among the "Omissions from the Original German Edition," Appendix 4 of Ernst Oster's 1979 English translation.
- ³ A concept of Hindu philosophy: to "pierce the veil" of Maya is to gain a glimpse of transcendent truth.
- ⁴ A "seminar on Schenker's *Free Composition*" is, indeed, announced in the Mannes College prospectus, but not until the academic year 1937–38; see David Carson Berry, "Hans Weisse and the Dawn of American Schenkerism," *Journal of Musicology* 20 (2003): 104–56.
- ⁵ The pupils who contributed to an annuity fund for Jeanette were each to receive, as a token of thanks, a photograph of her late husband.

✉ Weisse to Moriz Violin (letter), December 21, 1935

OJ 70/46, [12]

Dear friend,¹

As I have been so overwhelmed by work in the past months, it is only now that I find the time to answer your November letter. Thus I should like to declare at the outset that the delay in my reply is in no way the result of any sensitivity on my part. On the contrary your letter, on account of its sincerity, touched me only sympathetically, as a faithful proof of your friendship; I regret only that, apparently as a result of my imprecise intimations, misunderstandings of this sort have had to surface.

I therefore shall stress here, before I go into the details of your letter, that I—then and now, and more than ever—am convinced of the greatness of the Schenkerian idea,² that I regard the principal mission in my life to disseminate it, and that I am doing everything that appears necessary to me in this respect. I am giving two seminars here about *Free Composition*, in which a total of thirty-seven persons are taking part. On December 31, in Philadelphia, I shall make the Music Teachers' Association of America aware of the epochal significance of Schenker in an address that, in my opinion, will be among the strongest I have ever uttered.

In view of these facts, it appears to me highly unjust of you, and also of Mrs. Schenker, to express doubts about my intentions at all. In particular, the suggestions in Mrs. Schenker's letter about the "immutable faith" of Oppel, Vrieslander, etc., are highly inappropriate, as they harbored concealed references to my "change of heart." I am conscious of the full import of the situation. It is up to us to pass on Schenker's work in its fullest purity and clarity. I can only tell you that, since *Free Composition* arrived in my hands, I have put everything else to one side and have taken possession of this work alone, in six to eight hours of daily study. I have not merely "read" each of its sentences, but rather thought them through; I have not merely "looked at" every one of its examples, but rather listened to what they were saying. That which I have gained in understanding and absorption from this exhausting study of *Free Composition* is something that I alone know. The clarity toward which I advance is for me the best proof of my thorough study and understanding, and I must rebut all accusations about my judgments that are related to this, if they should be attacked—as for example by you here, or by Mrs. Schenker—as being premature, over-hasty, or imprudent. I am addressing my reply only to you, because I do not believe that Mrs. Schenker has the competence to take an objective position with regard to the work. It is clear that Mrs. Schenker can only be emotionally disposed, and I can understand that my comments may have hurt her; and I shall not hold this against her any more; but I have no intention of getting involved in an objective discussion with her, since the matters in question can be thoroughly appreciated, understood, and objectively considered only by a musician.

Whether you, dear friend, have made *Free Composition* entirely your own is something I do not know; I do not know how deeply your study of the work has progressed; that is something that you must account for yourself. I only believe that you must grant not only yourself, but everyone who occupies himself with the

work intensively, the right to demand complete clarity of the work. Of course, it cannot only be the fault of a book that this or that reader does not understand it. But precisely in my case you should not have drawn this easy-going conclusion, i.e. if you took me and my efforts at all “seriously.” Your letter mentions a letter from me to the Master,³ and Mrs. Schenker’s letter quotes it verbatim: it concerned my complete recognition of basic concepts. This very letter should have been the guarantee for the two of you that I had made these basic concepts my own (I could say even much better things about them today), and that my criticisms could never refer to these principles. Instead, the two of you assumed (how could you have done so?) that I had become “regressive” and are treating me like a small immature boy, whom one has a right to warn with raised index finger: “You didn’t understand then, perhaps you misunderstand again now! Let this be a lesson to you!” That, my friend, is decidedly too complacent—I hope that you too will not take my candor amiss. Instead of merely being angry, you ought on the contrary to have invited me to speak out, and to bring out all of my arguments, for the sake of the idea that we cherish. Instead of this, Mrs. Schenker has outspokenly declared that it would now be better for me to write “nothing yet” about *Free Composition*, as if she would gladly spare me humiliation.

If I should really now desist from making observations about *Free Composition* that seem to me extremely important, I do so not because I fear being “exposed” but rather because I gather from your reaction that the time for this is too soon. I deduce from this reaction of yours that you yourself, and probably all those whom you say stand with you 100 percent, have not gotten so far in your work on the material as to realize that Schenker’s exposition is self-contradictory in many places, leaves much that is unclear and imprecise, and cannot be used in its present form as the basis of a teaching method. I know that the time will come in which concerns will be made palpable, even in your circle, that are inevitable for anyone who attempts to penetrate to the ultimate depths of the Schenkerian idea. Only one who suffers from the imperfections of *Free Composition* will understand the urgency with which much needs to be said in order for the full greatness and the momentousness of the work to achieve its purest effect.

I therefore stress that it was not my intention to offer a superfluous critique of the book, to somehow attack or cast doubt upon the basic concepts of *Ursatz* and prolongation. All I wanted—in the interest of the idea and the unification of the theory, which has become our most sacred legacy—was to refer to all those points that needed to be clarified and made precise. (And there are many of these in *Free Composition*.) By comparison, the translating of Schenkerian terms into English is a secondary problem; and yet I believe I have solved it as well as possible.

To your comment about Kant, I can only add that it supports precisely what I intend: that Kant decidedly did not call the *Critique of Pure Reason* “the first textbook of philosophy”! To explain why he did not do so would be beyond the scope of this letter; but I ask you to reflect on this a bit before you apply it to the case of Schenker.

What I intend with these lines is simply to make my standpoint clear to you: that Schenker means everything to me—as he does to you—and that I most willingly put everything on the line for his idea; that nothing is further from my mind than to flirt with the notion that I would be able to “develop his theory

further”—as if it needed this!!; but that as a teacher of this idea I must strive for a clarity that does not always find expression in Schenker’s verbal and conceptual formulation. What I must perform is to clarify meaning, but to do so without in the least departing from Schenker’s ideas and concepts—that is all!

You are thus making a fatal mistake in criticizing me as an apostate, where I am most deeply conscious of my apostolicism. Faithfulness to the Master today is even less than ever a “personal” affair; it consists of the deepest grasp of his idea and in the feeling of responsibility with respect to this idea. The idea itself cannot and will not succeed in gaining general recognition of its own accord, it is not disseminated. It is up to us to work out how and to what extent we help it rally to victory. And because it is up to us, we must appropriate the idea uncorrupted. It has not been placed in the world by Schenker faultlessly, even though I, like yourself, know that inwardly Schenker heard and saw it in its pure form. In this way I have, I hope, clearly outlined our own mission; and I hope, for my sake and yours that you might be agreed upon it. In this letter I have intentionally avoided enumerating the individual points that I believe require clarification; I would like to postpone that discussion until the moment in which they force themselves upon you. That you will then find me willing to elaborate on each of these points, down to the last detail, is something that I surely need not say outright.

And now, farewell, and once again thanks for your letter! Accept my most cordial wishes for your Schenker Institute.

If you have become convinced that I, too, am in all modesty doing my part over here, then these lines will have fulfilled their purpose.

Happy New Year. With most cordial greetings from my family to yours, in old and unaltered friendship,

Ever your
Dr. Hans Weisse

- ¹ Though he is not named, and the salutation is uncharacteristic (Weisse normally addresses him as “lieber Herr Professor”), the recipient can only have been Moriz Violin: a marginal comment is in Violin’s handwriting, and there is a reference to the Schenker Institute in Hamburg; moreover, it is one of eleven letters and postcards that survive among Violin’s papers. — Later in the letter Weisse seems unaware, or to have forgotten, that Violin had fled Hamburg soon after the Nazis seized power in Germany and that the Institute, provisionally left in the care of Felix-Eberhard von Cube, had closed in 1934. — The letter from Violin to Weisse to which this responds is not known to survive.
- ² Here, and throughout the letter, Weisse refers to the *Idee*, i.e. Schenker’s concept of musical structure, as opposed to *Sache*, the term most often found in discussions of Schenker’s mission, including those in Weisse’s letters to Schenker. This seems a deliberate change of tack, from crusading for an ideological cause to promoting a concept of musical understanding in a rational, pedagogically accessible manner.
- ³ Probably the letter of March 30, 1933.