



# The Women of Viennese Musical Modernism

Student Researchers Alice Belshaw and Jana Michalik  
Faculty Mentor and Assistant Professor of Voice Dr. Kerry Ginger



## Hypothesis

During and immediately following the modernist Second Viennese School of music (ca. 1910-1930), women were excluded from participation in modernist compositional practices due to a lack of education, conservative and/or stigmatizing gender norms against women composers, upper-class cultural values associated with women, and the censure of modernist music by the Nazi party.

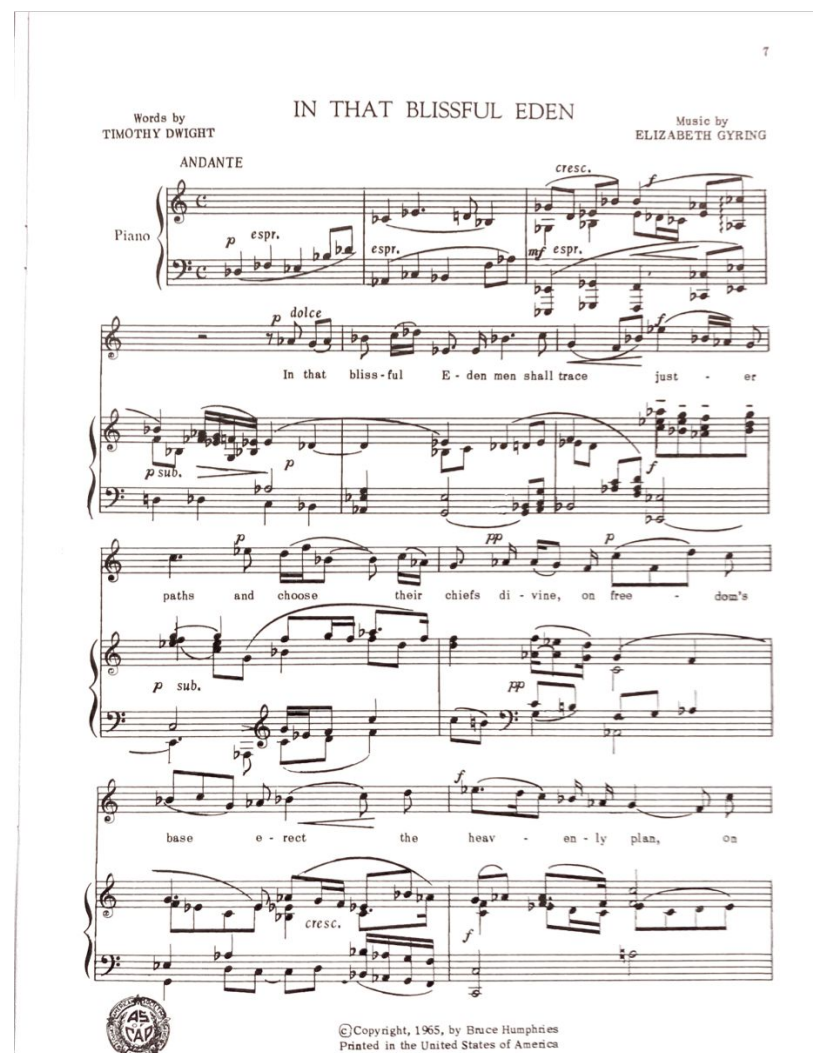
## Abstract

The celebrated composers of music's Second Viennese School (circa 1905-1935) undoubtedly had connections to female associates, including musical colleagues and students, but the mainstream historical narrative is oddly silent on these women's activities. We tasked ourselves with unearthing the reasons for this silence. We explored the scholarship on well-known Viennese modernists such as Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern, and cross-referenced those sources with numerous databases, books, and encyclopedias on women composers. As a result, we were able to identify a multitude of female musicians closely associated with the Viennese modernist sphere but excluded from prevailing histories. These composers include Elizabeth Gyring, Charlotte Schlesinger, and Grete von Zieritz, who had a vast modernist output ranging from operas to string quartets. Of the seventy-plus additional women composers we identified with connections to the Second Viennese School, many chose a more conservative or non-modernist musical idiom.

After surveying the literature on women composers with substantial links to Viennese musical modernism, we conducted preliminary case studies on Gyring, Zieritz, and a number of other contemporaries. We concluded that the lack of representation of female composers in musical modernism of this era can be attributed to limitations on women's education, social pressures and oppression stemming from stigmatizing gender norms, and the later blockage of modernist composition, publication, and study by the Nazi party. To illustrate the musical world of these women, we also developed a voice recital program showcasing music by many of the composers we uncovered in our research, including Alma Mahler-Werfel, Johanna Müller-Herrmann, Vally Weigl, and Gyring. By shedding light on their historically shadowed musical contributions, we hope to retroactively correct the wrongs visited upon these composers and bring them back to the public consciousness, thereby giving them their deserved place in the musical canon.

## Elizabeth Gyring

Elizabeth Gyring was born in Vienna, Austria in 1886. Gyring's musical training began largely at the Vienna Academy of Music where she studied counterpoint and harmony with composer Joseph Marx, and piano with Ludwig Czazekes (Sadie and Rhian 205). In 1910, she moved on to study composition with well-known modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg (Hamao 291). The styles of Schoenberg appear to have impacted Gyring's own creative process, as her music is frequently described as angular and highly dissonant, often taking the listener by surprise with unexpected harmonic and rhythmic movement. Despite her eccentric compositional choices, most of Gyring's works were traditional in structure. She largely produced operas and symphonies, alongside various chamber works, solo works for piano and organ, and songs (Elizabeth Gyring Papers). In 1939, Gyring and her husband, Otto Geiringer, emigrated to the United States where she gained citizenship and continued her career in composition (Smith).

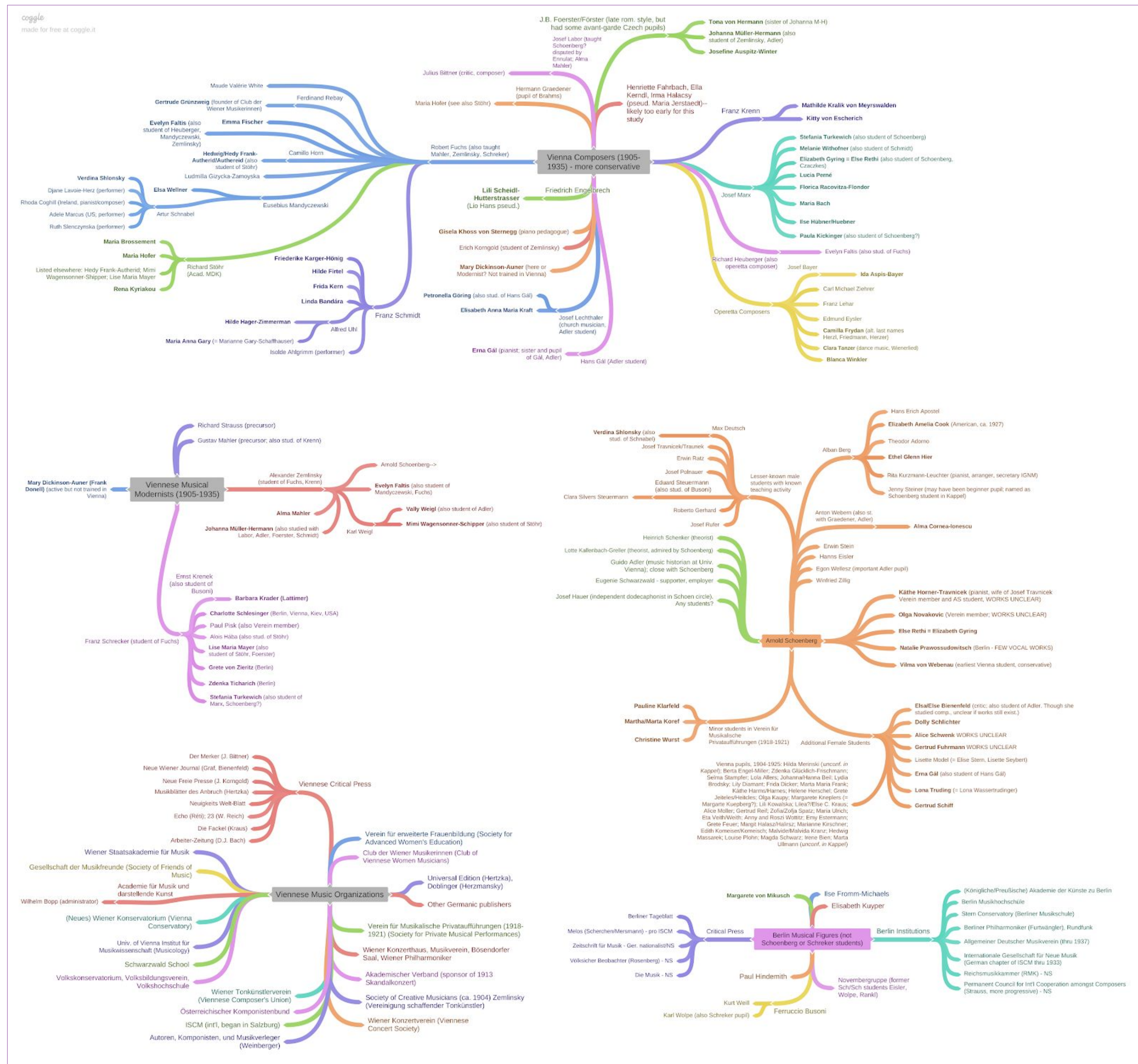


## Grete von Zieritz

Composer and pianist Grete von Zieritz was born in Vienna in 1899 (Marciano). Zieritz began her musical education around the age of 13 studying piano and composition at the Styrian Conservatory in Graz, Austria (Cohen). Her composition studies continued in Berlin with Franz Schrecker, a pupil of Schoenberg, at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik (Pendle 265). Eventually, Zieritz taught piano herself at the Stern Conservatory, a private music school in Berlin (Sadie and Rhian 511). Considered to be more traditional in style, Zieritz's music often has a consistent tonal center and clear structure. It is possible that she was steered into this compositional style in order to be respected as a woman in a male-dominated field (Porter 118). This conservative



approach was deemed acceptable by the Nazi regime, making Zieritz one of only twelve female composers permitted to compose in Vienna during World War II (Porter 117). Around half of Zieritz's output was vocal music, the other half consisting of orchestral and chamber works. Much of the vocal works were politically driven as she felt inspired by the wars and connected to the marginalized (Pendle 266). Highly praised during her time, Zieritz received many awards and honors throughout her career, including the Mendelssohn Prize for composition in 1928 (Marciano). Zieritz died in Berlin in 2001, at the age of 102, after a long life of celebrated composing and performance.




## Contact Information

Kerry Ginger: kaginger@sewanee.edu  
Alice Belshaw: belsham0@sewanee.edu  
Jana Michalik: michaj10@sewanee.edu

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## Recital Program



SEWANEE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH  
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

THE WOMEN OF VIENNESE  
MUSICAL MODERNISM

DR. KERRY GINGER, mezzo soprano  
ALICE BELSHAW, curator

Alma Mahler Werfel (1879-1964), Lieder	Alban Berg (1885-1935), from <i>Sieben Frühe Lieder</i>
Laue Sommernacht	No. 1 Nacht
Licht in der Nacht	No. 2 Schilflied
Waldseligkeit	No. 4 Traumgekrönt
Bei dir ist es traut	No. 5 Im Zimmer
Lobgesang	No. 7 Sommertage

--PAUSE--

from 4 Lieder op. 14.....Johanna Müller-Herrmann (1878-1941)

No. 1 Landschaft

No. 2 Sonnenuntergang

No. 3 Den Lenz laß kommen

"All Day I Hear the Noise of Waters".....Vally Weigl (1894-1982)

from *Blissful Eden*.....Elizabeth Gyring (1886-1970)

No. 1 The American Flag

No. 2 In That Blissful Eden

5 Songs for Soprano and Piano.....Charlotte Schlesinger (1909-1976)

No. 1 Morgen, morgen wird es besser sein

No. 2 Es ziehen die Reihel lang

No. 3 Wie hell das Licht mir scheint

No. 4 Was hör ich

No. 5 Es ist aus tiefer Nacht

"One Kiss for Tomorrow".....Camilla Frydan (1887-1949)

## Next Steps

- Identify subjects for case studies (ongoing)
- Translate key German-language resources
- Read, analyze, and code existing sources (ongoing)
- Identify and travel to relevant archives for score manuscripts and other primary documents
- Acquire greater variety of scores; engrave select manuscript scores; record read-throughs of select scores for musical analysis
- Prepare abstract and recital performance for presentation in 2021-22

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Select additional encyclopedias/databases consulted: American Composers Alliance Archive, American Music Center/New Music USA Archive, IMSLP, Library of Congress, *MGG Online*, *Naxos Music Library*, *Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon Online*, *Österreichisches biographisches Lexikon*, *Oxford Music Online*.