

“Mein geliebtes Almschi . . . ” George Perle

The following article describes a highly important collection of letters from Helene Berg to Alma Mahler, discussing numerous aspects of her relationship with Berg with a frankness not found in the public utterances of this very private woman. Regardless of how we may view the conclusions drawn by Dr. Perle from this correspondence, these letters give us an invaluable glimpse into the complex and perceptive character of the woman who most shared Berg's life.

In 1969 the University of Pennsylvania Library announced its acquisition of the private papers of Alma Mahler Werfel, consisting of over 5000 items and including letters from many of the leading figures in the artistic and cultural life of the first half of the twentieth century. The donation was a gift from Anna Mahler, daughter of Gustav and Alma Mahler, and was accomplished through the good offices of the late Dr. Adolf Klarmann, Professor of German and General Literature of the University of Pennsylvania. A segment of the collection of special interest to our members — the letters of Alban and Helene Berg to their “geliebtes Almschi” — was kindly made available to me shortly after its acquisition. It would have been unthinkable to discuss this correspondence while Mrs. Berg was still alive, but there was another reason as well for postponing a report until now. Much that was puzzling and even incomprehensible in some of the most interesting and obviously significant of these letters is no longer so, since the discovery two years ago of the annotated miniature score of the *Lyric Suite* and of Berg's relationship with the woman for whom that work was written, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin.¹

The special place that Alma Mahler Werfel held in the lives of both Alban and Helene is well known. The composer dedicated *Wozzeck* to her in gratitude for her assistance in raising the funds for the privately published first printing of the piano score, and he composed his last work, the Violin Concerto, as a memorial for her daughter, Manon Gropius. The earliest reference to Mahler's widow in Berg's *Letters to his Wife* is dated July 13, 1914, and thereafter she is mentioned more frequently than any other friend of the Berghs, with the possible exception of Schoenberg. In her memoirs she described the couple as her “closest friends”: “Our contact dated back to shortly after Gustav Mahler's death, for in his lifetime they had been too shy and modest to approach me. Now we were together almost daily. Alban and Helene Berg were difficult people, oversensitive, self-sacrificing to the nth degree, and both so beautiful! Alban looked like Oscar Wilde, youthful to the day he died, and Helene was a creature of seraphic loveliness, inside and out.”² Alma Mahler Werfel's central role in the story of the *Lyric Suite*, a work that would never have come into existence but for the relationship between Alban Berg and Franz Werfel's sister, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, was suggested in my article on the annotated score.³ That their fateful meeting was, in fact, arranged by Mrs. Werfel seems to be confirmed by a note from Alban in the present correspondence. And both she and Franz acted as Berg's secret emissaries in this affair, delivering his letters in person on their visits to Prague.⁴ The essential part she played in the history of Berg's masterpiece continued after the composer's death, for it was only

through her intercession that her sister-in-law was eventually prevailed upon to cede the manuscript to Mrs. Berg.⁵

The Berg-Werfel correspondence consists of 38 items. The earliest, dated September 17, 1926, is the only one, apart from a picture postcard bearing greetings from Alban and Alma, addressed to Franz Werfel. Berg expresses therein his enthusiastic appreciation for the writer's recently completed drama *Paulus und die Juden*. With the exception of five pieces of correspondence whose closing salutation joins the names of Helene and Alban, and two that are signed by Berg alone, the remaining items bear only Helene's signature. The last letter, written after the Zurich premiere of *Lulu*, is dated June 24, 1937. Seventeen undated letters clearly belong within the same time-span, and most of these can be more or less accurately dated from their content. During these years, the Werfels divided their time between Vienna, Semmering, and Venice. There is no mistaking the sincerity and depth of Helene's affection for Alma, though the fervency and frequency with which she affirms the intensity of her friendship will seem exaggerated and excessive to a present-day reader. The more interesting and significant excerpts from this correspondence are described below, with the letters from which they are taken listed in chronological sequence.⁶

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June 17, 1927. A short note from Alban to Alma, written during his return trip from Leningrad to Vienna [after the Leningrad premiere of *Wozzeck*]. He will be passing through Czechoslovakia, where Alma is at the moment [probably visiting her sister-in-law], and he cannot refrain from once again referring to that which had its beginning there and which is decisive for his whole future life.

July 25, 1929. Helene, writing from the Berghof [the Berg family estate in Carinthia, which had been sold some years earlier, but where the Berghs were now again spending their summers]. She is much moved by the news of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's death, a deliverance such as is granted only to those who are not too firmly bound to this world by what is material. [On July 15th the newspapers had reported the suicide of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's son. His father suffered a stroke as he was preparing to leave for the funeral.] His estrangement from Richard Strauss was inevitable, since Strauss, probably because of his wife, had developed in the opposite direction. Alban has completed his concert aria [*Der Wein*, the scoring of which was completed on August 23].

Undated. [Evidently written soon after July 7, 1930, Gustav Mahler's 70th birthday.] Helene refers sarcastically to “our dear Vienna,” which recognized the anniversary of Mahler's birth in shameful fashion with nothing but a miserable radio performance of the Tenth Symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde*. Alban is planning to buy an auto, but the one he has in mind will not be ready before the end of July. Tomorrow they leave for the Berghof, where hopefully Alban's work will go well. She

is determined to be very strict with him and to see that he never leaves the house before 5:30 in the evening, even if the auto should tempt him to do so.

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August 2, 1930. [Berghof. Though this and the following letter bear final salutations from Alban as well as Helene, both were written by Helene.] Helene reports that Alban has earned a good income during the past year. In view of this and their expectations for the coming season, she feels that the automobile will be less of a pretense. Alban is working well, and Helene is deeply involved in her occult books.

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August 29, 1930. [Berghof.] Birthday greetings to Almschi. Helene is grateful for the trouble she has taken on behalf of Frank [Helene's younger brother, a schizophrenic. Helene and Alban were deeply concerned with his deteriorating condition during this period, as we know from Berg's *Letters to his Wife*.]. Through Alma's intercession, Helene expects to secure the advice of Dr. Tandler [the Socialist commissioner of health for Vienna, a longtime friend of Alma Mahler].⁷ Frank is happy since his "sacrifice" [he had cut off a finger as a "sacrifice"] and looks like a saint. They have finally acquired the auto. Alban is radiant and goes out for a drive every day at 5 o'clock. Numerous performances of *Wozzeck* are scheduled for the coming season. They hope they will be able to count on continuing productions of the opera.

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Undated. [Written shortly after the *Wozzeck* premiere at Mannheim, June 28, 1932.] Helene comments on Alma's news that Werfel is working "only" on his volume of poems and he is unhappy because he isn't bringing out another colossal work.⁸ She finds his industry and drive almost inhuman. From what she knows of him the fortunate man will sooner or later "explode." Alban works in a very different way, with an uncanny stillness and contemplativeness. He too is making progress, but the neighboring lakes and mountains are teeming with acquaintances, and this is a disturbance and distraction. They plan to drive to Trahütten [Helene's family home], where his work will not be interrupted by people, but where there is always a possibility that the climate will bring on an attack of asthma. They've had some charming pictures, accompanied by witty comments, from Malipiero. The Mannheim premiere of *Wozzeck* was a great success. The production is to be repeated next season, but this will probably depend on the Nazis, whose overwhelming power can only be explained by the love of the Germans for firearms. Warsaw is supposed to do a production of *Wozzeck*, in Polish, a pleasing but not a profitable prospect, since the theatre is very poor and has already approached U.E. and Alban for special advantages. In the last six months there has been an alarming reduction in Alban's income, due to the influence of the Nazis. Formerly he received 8000 schillings [from European performances] in a six-month period, but this time only 3000. In the fall they will have to put the auto aside for a time, and they are therefore making all the more enthusiastic use of it now. [Berg did, in fact, suffer an attack of asthma at Trahütten. He drove back alone to the Berghof, while Helene stayed on at Trahütten to look after her sick brother.]⁹

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Undated. [Evidently written during the civil war days of mid-February 1934, after the bombardment of the Karl Marx Hof, a socialist housing unit in Vienna, and the destruction of the Austrian socialists by the Dollfuss government. Alma remained in Vienna, though she lived "in a zone of imminent danger."¹⁰ Helene understands Alma's decision to remain in Vienna where she can be helpful. How little an individual fate matters in the context of the events that are unfolding. Helene believes in the future of this people and in its mission, provided it can free itself from materialism and find its way back to God. It is sad that the socialists lacked faith. Their shamefully, but cowardice is a Jewish speciality. [That such an opinion could have been addressed in all friendship to Alma Mahler Werfel, herself married, for the second time, to a Jew, is an indication of the pervasiveness and respectability of anti-semitism in Austria at the time. As for Alma herself, her close acquaintances and friends included not only well-known Jewish socialists like Tandler, but also the leader of the fascist *Heimwehr*, Prince von Starhemberg.]¹¹

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Three undated letters, in which Helene expresses her profound concern for Alma's daughter, Manon Gropius, who had been taken ill with polio in April 1934, and her sympathy for Alma.

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September 28, 1934. Alban writing from the Waldhaus in Auen am Wörtersee, in response to a letter in which Alma had criticized Clemens Krauss. [Krauss had recently resigned his posts as conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and director of the State Opera.] Neither will Alban shed any tears at his departure. He is critical not only because of Krauss's treatment of him, but also because of his *lack* of character, so that even a comparison with Schalk (his predecessor), who had at least a *bad* character, is to his disadvantage. It is all the more regrettable because it had seemed at the beginning of his directorship that there would be an improvement after the "low-water mark" of the Schalk period. Will the future be better, in view of the role that political considerations will play in the appointment of a successor? He mentions the names of Böhm, Kleiber, and Busch, but in the end the most likely candidate is Bruno Walter. Or perhaps some secondary provincial will be put over Kabasta. He hopes that he is wrong and that Alma will be able to intervene.¹² They expect to be back in Vienna soon, but nothing draws them there except the hope that they will see the Werfels.

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April 23, 1935. ["Mutzi," Alma's daughter, had died of polio the day before.] A letter of condolence from Helene to her "ever beloved Almschi." Mutzi was an angel and God has called her back to him. We must be grateful that for eighteen years we were blessed with her presence. The bright spirit that she brought with her can never again be taken away.

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Undated. [Though Alban signed this as well, Helene is the author of this letter, written on August 30, 1935, the day before Alma's birthday, following the death of

Manon.] Tomorrow is Alma's birthday. Helene begs her to give up her grief. We are in darkness here and don't know why our fate is what it is. Only much later will we understand the spiritual background for everything that happens. Perhaps their beloved angel had something more important to accomplish yonder. Alban and Helene should have liked to have given her some small pleasure today, but how is this possible? Perhaps Alban will succeed, with that which for weeks now he has been preparing for this day. [The Violin Concerto, composed in memory of Manon, had been completed on August 11.] It is at least an outward sign of what he has thought and felt about Manon and Alma during the past months.

December 22, 1935. Rudolfsspital [the hospital in Vienna where Berg had been taken on December 17]. The Bergs' Christmas greetings to the Werfels will not arrive in time [the Werfels were in New York for Max Reinhardt's production of *The Eternal Road*], but the preceding days have been so terrible that Helene hasn't been able to give thought to anything. Alban has been suffering from boils for four months. His condition suddenly became so grave that the doctor ordered him to hospital to have more incisions and a blood transfusion. The doctors suspect a boil in the region of the kidneys, since his condition isn't improving. He is very weak and is being given drugs to strengthen his heart. In spite of everything his mind is clear and he joins Helene in sending his love and best wishes for the New Year.

February 28, 1936. Helene is disturbed about a recent conversation with Alma, in the course of which Alma had complained that Helene permitted other people to look after things for her, instead of taking care of her own affairs. Helene would never have asked for Alma's assistance in gaining an audience with Minister Neumayer had she supposed that this request would have given Alma so much trouble. As for the disgrace of her not having at once paid the funeral expenses herself, she will try to explain this. When she first asked about this she was told not to worry about it. Her lawyer said that since the grave was an honorary one the burial costs would likewise be the responsibility of the community. She subsequently learned that an application has been made in respect to this. As for Alban's illness, no one suspected the danger. Dr. Friedmann had examined him three times and put the thing down as a small matter; the boils could be lanced another day. He reproached Helene for her "anxiety." (In fact, she was always anxious about Alban, as when he drank too much, because she knew how delicate his health was.) They went to the hospital the next morning, having been told by Dr. Friedmann that they could return home after the boils had been lanced. At the hospital she was told that Alban would have to spend the night, so that he might be examined. They [the hospital authorities] wanted to give him 3rd class accommodations at first, because Helene wasn't able to lay out 200 schillings at once. Thenceforward it was hell for both of them. If this whole fearful event really depended on individuals and their actions, these people would have to be held responsible and they would deserve to be put to death. As for the grave, the cross is there only provisionally, until Helene can afford a bust. She asks Alma not to initiate a collection for this, because she wants this to be her cause and only hers. Höllensteiner [a

priest, Alma's close friend] is to give whatever may already be in such a fund to his poor and ailing. Helene now turns to the final topic of their conversation. When she looks over Alban's hundreds of letters, one thing is striking — how much of the time they were separate, something he constantly complains of in his letters. Helene will draw up a cursory tabulation so that Alma may have some idea of this. [There follows a long list of places and periods of separation, beginning with "Prag 1912 (Alban 12 Tage)" and concluding with "1935 Alban Waldhaus 2X4 Tage."] The fable of "never being left alone" can't be proven even with the best of will. [Cf. the assertion of Berg's authorized biographer, Willi Reich, that Helene "accompanied her husband on most of his journeys."] Even when they were both in Vienna, he went out alone far more frequently than he did with her — to concerts, the theater, meetings, parties, receptions, dinners. She preferred to retire with a book, or to listen to the concert on the radio. In recent years she had usually spent forenoons with her brother Frank; in earlier years she was with Alma or in the city while Alban was always alone at home with his work. There is only one interpretation: Alban invented an excuse to keep his poetic passion within *those* boundaries which he himself wanted. [This sudden change of subject to Berg's involvement with Hanna Fuchs-Robettin is made without transition and without mention of Hanna's name. What Helene evidently means to say here is that her husband was away so much of the time that his love for Hanna need not have been that tragic, unfulfilled passion symbolized by the quotation from *Tristan und Isolde* in the *Largo desolato* of the *Lyric Suite*.] Alban himself invented obstacles and thereby created the romanticism which he required. Perhaps it was also subconscious caution: he didn't want too close an association with this woman, as he imagined her in the unheard-of florescence of his artist's fantasy, for fear of disappointment. For he was spoilt both mentally and physically. He avoided her. A friend of Helene's who now and then would go for a drive with Alban when Helene herself was too tired to accompany him told her that he had stopped in Velden for a coffee while she waited in the car, and that immediately after entering the cafe he had rushed out again, in a state of consternation. [Velden is a town near the Waldhaus, the country home which Berg bought in 1932. Hanna Fuchs-Robettin and her two children sometimes spent their summer holidays in the same region.] Another time he met her by accident in Velden and spontaneously exclaimed, "Helene is coming!" though Helene had remained at the Waldhaus, an hour away. It all comes to one thing — a flight from reality. Only in this way could the *Lyric Suite* have come to be. Helene must therefore acknowledge the sense of all that has happened, and remain silent. And therefore she can also say that there is no trace of bitterness in her, only emotion and melancholy. Nothing at all can ever dim her love for him. Helene will some day stand with her before God. [In a postscript she mentions that 200 shillings are enclosed, a debt which she can at last repay.]

Undated. Hotel Bristol, Barcelona. [Helene was in Barcelona for the premiere of the Violin Concerto, which took place on April 19, 1936.] Helene hopes that Alma is not angry with her because of the suddenness of her departure after their last meeting. She could not do otherwise because she did not wish to weep before Alma. She was so sad that Alma, who has known her now for more than 20 years, can believe that in her marriage with

Alban she "sinned against the Holy Ghost." Before her marriage she lived only for art. She had loved Alban too much and gave up everything. How then can Alma really believe that the price of butter and potatoes could suddenly have been so important to her that she could have burdened him by her enthusiastic interest in such things? No one had such need of domestic comfort as Alban, so that all these seemingly laughable trivialities for which she is now reproached had a purpose: namely, to create the environment that this great and valuable man and artist needed for his work. Some day his letters will prove this. She has, in fact, except during their good years, been "penny-wise" so that he might thereby be able to afford many small pleasures, such as a visit to the movies, or to a coffee house. Besides, there were many little expenses for the house and apartment, and after all, every now and then one needs to buy a book, or some pretty flowers. Were it not for her petty bargaining, which outsiders who knew nothing about their more or less difficult life so falsely judged, such things would not have been possible. Those well-to-do people in Prague [undoubtedly a reference to the wealthy Fuchs-Robettin family] can never imagine themselves in such a situation and don't know what they are doing when they now indulge in this malicious gossip about her marriage. All this miserable calculating and haggling was hard enough, and she was brought to it only by the thought of some little future pleasure she could thereby create for Alban. He knew this also, and was often irritated or sad when he saw her returning heavily laden after a trip to the market. He worried about her health, which was never robust, and it was because of this concern that he asked Alma to influence her not to be so frugal. She has so many notes and letters which he wrote to her during his travels, in which he entreats her to eat properly and to look after herself. But he nevertheless beamed like a child whenever there was some pretty new thing in their home. His ever more difficult life during the past two years, with relatives ever more boldly and oppressively trying to fleece him, his worry about having to give up his auto and the Waldhaus, his despair over artistic life when so many who had once been loyal distanced themselves from him, and finally, the grinding work (during the last two years he had not *once* permitted himself to take time off for recreation) — of all this she will remain silent. That is a chapter in itself and she must come to terms with it, in the realization that it was his unalterable destiny and that he endured it. The good Lord loved him and took him, so that he should no longer have such a difficult time of it. As for the donation of the [manuscript of] the *Lyric Suite*, Helene has found the following solution, now that Alban's intention to sell it hasn't materialized and she can freely dispose of it: Hanna Fuchs can keep the manuscript during her lifetime, and place it on her piano where everyone can see it. But after her death it must go to the Alban Berg-Stiftung, to whom his books and manuscripts will also belong. This is Alban's wish.¹⁴

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June 19, 1936. Waldhaus. Helene thanks Alma for her letter and for "the 100 schillings." She is grieved that Alma may have had to stint for it, because of her expenses in connection with the purchase of a new house. Unfortunately, Helene needs the money so urgently, in spite of every retrenchment, that she is forced to accept it, but she hopes to earn enough in time to be able to repay it. As for Krasner and the Violin Concerto, Helene had not meant to "slight" Alma. She had tried to bring Krasner and Alma together, in that she had asked Alma to hear the records at Mr. Brunswick's. However, Alma had

given Helene the impression that she didn't desire this, and Helene didn't wish to seem importunate. [The Concerto had evidently been privately recorded, though Mr. Krasner tells me that he has no knowledge of this.] Krasner would very much have liked to have visited Alma, but after the way in which she had let the whole matter drop, there was nothing more that Helene could do. As for the many people with whom Helene has become friends and whose names Alma doesn't even know — surely Alma knows that she and Helene were sisters to one another and that no one else was so close to her with the exception of Alban. Helene herself is surprised and moved that in her misfortune people who were more or less distant from her should have emerged as loving and self-sacrificing friends. But this in fact has happened and she is since bound to them in gratitude. Alma knows from her own experience these deep wounds which are so painful and how much good a kind word can do. Helene simply cannot forget that so many people were so good to her when she lay shattered on the earth. She wonders how long Alma will remain in Vienna. She will probably return at the end of June and would like very much to see her. At the Waldhaus life is difficult and sad. Only when Alban comes is there a ray of light. He comes frequently — to his place at the piano and writing table and chair, where he taps out his replies. He comes regularly in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. He visits Helene at night and counsels her in everything. Nothing more can happen to her. She knows that life here below is only an illusion and that a "real" life will begin yonder, with him. Her love for Alma also belongs to "reality" — that is, to eternity.

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January 8, 1937. Vienna. Helene has just returned from the Waldhaus and found Alma's letter waiting for her. She hastens to reply to Alma's reproaches, that "for the sake of new friends she has forgotten old ones." Surely Alma knows how few true friends she has had in her whole life. Who have they been? Alma and Mutzi and Anny [Alma's older daughter, Anna Mahler]! The others were and remain more or less good acquaintances. If Tilde Z. and Fr. v. Müller have emerged as dedicated friends during the past year, she accepts this with feeling and gratitude as a gift. There are no new friends in her circle of acquaintances who stand close to her! No one is of great importance to her, or she wouldn't live so much of the time in complete solitude. That which is of consequence to her, that for which she is searching, people cannot give her. This she can only achieve in solitude, and in her silent and compassionate comforter, nature. Thus she slowly finds her way and prepares herself for that which will come. She will never forget that she and Alma once were bound to one another and that their true relationship can only be temporarily troubled. These are only trials, which can alter nothing of the eternal values, like faith, love, goodness. In her eternal bond with Alma she embraces her with sisterly love.

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February 3, 1937. Hof-Gastein. Helene is deeply disturbed to learn, from her last letter, that Alma is so full of cares that she can no longer sleep, and in her wakefulness is afraid. How much Helene should like to help her. She has often yearned to come to her, but Alma never had time for her. Helene wished to come to her because she sensed that things were not well with Alma. In this year of painful trials Helene has received more

grace than she deserves, and grace should be passed on, where there is need. Helene is sure that this day Alma will sleep peacefully and will not be afraid while she is awake. God has tested both of them with the most dreadful trial that can be found on earth. They have been downtrodden so that they might be lifted up. In their deepest despair there lay a mysterious power — the power of love and faith, which overcomes everything and leads them out of the darkness into the light. Perhaps Helene can once again, in this life, be of some use to her beloved sister, with whom she is profoundly bound in a better, more beautiful realm. She will always be ready if Alma should call her, even if it should be only for a moment.

June 24, 1937. Waldhaus. Helene hopes that things are going better with Werfel. It is good that he has finished his book [the novel, *Hearken Unto the Voice*], so that he can finally rest. Just the thought of having completed another new work should make him well again. In Zurich it [the *Lulu* premiere] went astonishingly well, against all expectations. Once more it was proven that in performance nothing can ruin Alban's operas. But this performance was really at a high level, and now and then even outstanding. At the theatre they were unsure about how she might find their work and what her attitude toward it would be. After the first rehearsal, however, a good relationship was established and she won their confidence. They listened attentively to her wishes and took everything she said with good will. Denzler [the conductor] is a fine musician, Schmidt-Bloss a splendid director, the singers young gifted people, of good cheer, and full of respect for the work. How much industry, devotion, faith, love were given to it. One can say nothing of the music, one must hear it. It has a beauty and truthfulness which effaces everything hateful and repulsive in the text and leaves only an unquestionably great masterpiece. When she heard it sounding for the first time, it seemed so deeply familiar to her, as though it came from her and was her own speech. There are places in it where one feels that one is no longer on this earth. Alban has grasped the depth of two things and has understood how to give it back again: the mystery of love and of death. The beginning and the end of our earthly existence. It is also noteworthy that Helene was always prejudiced against the Wedekind, but that since she has heard this music everything is different. *Lulu*, like *Wozzeck*, is dear to her now. She loves it and trembles for it, as for a child. It is a fearful thing and people don't like it, when one illuminates their depths; but when Alma sings of *Lulu*, in tender ecstasy, "A soul, rubbing the sleep from its eyes in the next world," she knows now that this dream also had to be written, for it has its own profound meaning. She is not surprised that the opera is stageworthy as a torso. She has learned to trust in that

which is Higher; it has all happened according to a plan. How could Alban, who had so much to say and to give, been called away if his last work, which nothing else can touch, had not been, in some possible way, "completed." Even those who today face his work without understanding or with misgivings — for he was so far in advance of them — will gradually grow into it, until a time comes when people will at last know who Alban Berg was.

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In the last issue of the *Newsletter* was published a letter from Alban Berg to Hanna Fuchs-Robettin in which the composer himself passed judgement on the picture of his personal and domestic existence that has been repeatedly painted by Berg's official biographer and faithfully reproduced by other writers: "Everything that you may hear of me, and perhaps even read about me, pertains, insofar as it is not completely false — as, for example, this, which I read today by chance in a Zurich program: 'A completely happy domesticity, with which his wife has surrounded him, allows him to create without disturbance' — pertains to what is only peripheral." The same judgement is now passed by Mrs. Berg herself: "Das Märchen vom 'Nicht-allein-lassen' ist, beim besten Willen, nicht nachzuweisen." But it was this remarkable woman herself who, with indefatigable energy and complete success, perpetuated this and related myths about her husband's work and life for 41 years after his death; who more than anyone else was responsible for the superficial and featureless portraits we have been given of a man — to quote again from Berg's letter — "who might for a time be fulfilled with the joys of motoring, but could never be able to compose *Lulu*"; and who made every effort to perpetuate these myths forever after her death through her last will and testament and through the Alban Berg-Stiftung which she founded. As for her being "the most faithful guardian of his works" after her husband's death,¹⁵ only those who are willing to accept her own opinion that she was fulfilling his own intentions as directly communicated to her by the composer himself after his death can believe this, after reading her letter on the *Lulu* premiere. Her opposition to the completion of the scoring of Act III she always explained as due to the recommendations against this that she had had from Schoenberg, Webern, and Zemlinsky, but the final letter in the above correspondence makes it clear indeed that her decision was a unilateral one and had nothing whatever to do with recommendations of these or any other musicians.¹⁶ And now we have in Mrs. Berg's own words a description of her husband at his work, of his character and personality, of his personal life and his relation to his time and place that is far deeper and richer and more complex than anything we have ever had from his biographers.

¹See Perle, "The Secret Program of the *Lyric Suite*," *The International Alban Berg Society Newsletter* No. 5 (June 1977): pp. 4-12.

²Alma Mahler Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), p. 140.

³Perle, p. 6.

⁴We know this from Berg's letters to Hanna, in the possession of her daughter, Dorothea Robettin.

⁵Perle, p. 4.

⁶My own interpolations are enclosed in brackets. I am indebted to Jordan Mejias and Ursula Beitter for their assistance in transcribing the letters.

⁷Mahler Werfel, pp. 209-211.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁹Alban Berg, *Letters to his Wife*, trans. and ed. Bernard Grun (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 392.

¹⁰Mahler Werfel, p. 219.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹²In January 1935, Felix Weingartner became Director of the State Opera. In the autumn of 1936, Bruno Walter was engaged as artistic advisor to the Opera. Walter shared the conducting of the Vienna Philharmonic with Wilhelm Furtwängler beginning in 1933.

¹³Willi Reich, *Alban Berg*, trans. Cornelius Cardew (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1965), p. 34.

¹⁴Upon Alma's insistence, her sister-in-law finally ceded the manuscript to Helene. Cf. note 5, above. As to how Mrs. Berg could have known her husband's intentions respecting the manuscript, see the following letter.

¹⁵Reich, p. 35.

¹⁶Mrs. Berg's recollections of the advice given to her by Schoenberg, Webern, and Zemlinsky is the only source we have for the views she attributed to them as to the feasibility of the scoring.

Then and Now

Any necessity to strive for the completion of the third act as it exists in the *particell* seems pointless after the February 6, 1966 production. In this version, Berg's opera requires no epigonic completion, a project which incidentally no less than Schoenberg, Webern, and Zemlinsky abandoned after studying the materials because it seemed impossible to them to complete the opera in Berg's style.

— Erich Alban Berg
on the Stuttgart
production of *Lulu*
Melos 33 (March 1966) p. 98

The elderly gentleman has often been greatly upset by the turmoil of discussion surrounding the controversy about the completion of the unfinished final act. Nevertheless, his zeal is undiminished. "My uncle composed the work through to the last bar of the third act. All that remained to be finished was the instrumentation, but in the *particell* and the piano score, all necessary instructions are inserted."

— Erich Alban Berg
on the upcoming Paris premiere
of the complete *Lulu*, from an
interview in *wien aktuell*, (#10,
1978) p. 26