CHAPTER 5

The Rhythm of the Night: Abstraction and Sexuality as Destabilisers in Austrian Silent Cinema

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Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate how the notions of abstraction and sexuality in musical numbers of Austrian silent films can be read as destabilising agents of the films' narratives and ideologies. The first case study, *Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer* (*His Highness, the Gigolo*, 1927), serves to demonstrate how the editing, montage, and camera movements of a dance performance can lead to an abstract visual style that articulates the social anxiety of the post-war period in an otherwise conventionally shot film. My second analysis of the musical moments in the film *Ein Walzertraum* (*A Waltz Dream*, 1925) shows equally how the waltz in its use as a proxy for sexuality and erotic encounters, destabilises the form and narrative of the film by transposing musical features onto the filmic language. Two

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ostensibly opposing images of the city of Vienna form the background for these two case studies: Vienna as the nostalgic screen incarnation of the schmaltzy waltz dream and Vienna as the centre of social and moral decay during the hyperinflation of the 1920s. Both films contain musical numbers and dance numbers, whose sexual subtexts—especially regarding the waltz—become amplified through the ways in which the musical moments are visually stylised. Connected with this topic, but ultimately a separate issue, is the display of the performativity of gender roles in many of these numbers. Witnessing these phenomena at work in (Austrian) silent cinema emphasises the importance of studying these films as models for the bombastic musical spectacles of the early sound film, while reminding us that musical moments were essential elements of silent cinema.

Two closely connected aesthetic tendencies can be detected within the musical numbers in the two discussed films: (1) a dissolve into abstraction in general and ornament specifically and (2) the implied sexual connotations of music visualised as song and dance scenes. These tendencies can be found in many musical numbers in (Western) cinema in the late 1920s and early 30s, but this chapter outlines a specific tendency that emerged in Austrian cinema, owing to a particular cultural environment in Vienna during the 1920s.

To clarify some of the terminology used in this chapter, I consider 'musical numbers' as an umbrella term for song and dance scenes in a fictional film in contrast to 'musical moments', a term theorised by Amy Herzog to represent scenes in which the image-sound hierarchy of classical cinema is subverted, and the filmic style usually changes. Drawing on the work of Herzog and her post-structuralist, Deleuzian approach, we can see specific characteristics and differences in the visual mode of representation during musical moments in these films. Such moments in which 'the music takes over' are free from the tasks of narration and realistic representation and can be used to create independent and subversive structures, especially within song and dance scenes, but also in shorter instances (see Herzog 2010). Applying the theoretical notion of the 'musical moment' allows us to detect musical scenes in silent films even without knowledge about their live accompaniment. Not all instances of music in silent films are fully developed musical numbers as we have come to know them from sound films. However, as this chapter aims to show, silent films do include, often to great effect, musical moments despite the

lack of a technically synchronised soundtrack and thus without the guarantee of a standardised musical accompaniment. In fact, in many cases it is difficult to ascertain which music was played in cinemas to accompany these numbers. This variety of possible musical accompaniments in the films' exhibition meant that some musical moments only emerged in specific screenings (of the same film).

If we take the 'visual variations' and significant changes in film style during a musical moment as a starting point, we could argue that such scenes do indeed offer the possibility to be read differently than the rest of the film. In this sense, the notion of the musical moment as discussed by Herzog can help identify and analyse early examples of musical numbers in silent cinema, even for short moments that nevertheless feature basic characteristics of musical numbers.

The musical moment, Herzog writes, is 'at once one of the most conservative and the most irreverent filmic phenomena' (Herzog 2010: 8). It is a convention in itself, it repeats the structure and the ideological order of the film and is able to perpetuate hierarchies regarding race, class, and gender. But at the same time, musical moments are 'open to the interventions of difference' (Herzog 2010: 8). Free from the task of narration and representational repetition, they create their own musical patterns and refrains, and can thus be subversive and destabilise the established form and ideology of a film. The term 'refrain' is taken from Deleuze and Guattari (see Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 361ff), and not used in the traditional, musical sense, but metaphorically. Herzog describes the term as follows: 'The refrain is an act of expression, any act of expression, that creates rhythm and difference between milieus' (Herzog 2010: 82). Milieu, another term by Deleuze/Guattari, is not used in its common meaning but defined as 'coded blocks of space-time' (Bogue 2003 quoted by Herzog 2010: 81). The relation between refrain, milieu, and what Deleuze/Guattari call 'territory' are complex as Herzog explains: 'A refrain in film is an expressive element […] that serves to mark out a territory, or may even dismantle and take flight from those territories and boundaries' (Herzog 2010: 82).

The notion of deterritorialisation is crucial for Deleuze/Guattari's view of music and their terminology as Herzog explains:

> Territories are formed when the codes that have certain functional qualities within one milieu are transcoded—decontextualized, or deterritorialized,

> in effect—such that they take on new qualitative or expressive qualities, qualities that allow them to mark out new ground. (Herzog 2010: 81)

Ronald Bogue further discusses the concept deterritorialisation:

> The process through which a refrain is deterritorialized is essentially one of *becoming*, a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming-animal or a becoming-molecular, a passage *between* milieus and territories that articulates the nonpulsed rhythms of an unmeasured time. (Bogue 2003: 23f)

Applied to my case studies, we could infer that musical moments in film are the start of the process of film—moving images—becoming music, not visualised music, not transferring or translating music into visuals, but morphing and deterritorialising. The musical moment creates a foreign body within the film it inhabits—with the potential to undermine and destabilise it. In short, musical moments disturb, subvert, and destabilise the form, structure, and sometimes the ideology of the film in which they appear. They can create new ground or territory by appearing in spaces and times where they are not 'supposed to be'. An avant-garde film style can pop up in the middle of a classical Hollywood film, for example. These moments are not always easy to grasp and to describe. Their fascination lies in their subversive effect as well as in their tendency to 'take flight'.

Austrian Silent Cinema's Sexual Moments

The musical moments I shall discuss in this chapter are drawn from Austrian silent cinema. These moments are characterised by their tendency towards abstraction as well as their sexual undertones, and the destabilising effect of these musical moments is partly determined by the historical context. Following centuries as a dominant, multi-cultural superpower, Austria became a small, democratically-ruled republic after the disintegration of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy during World War I. Political structures and institutions were fragile, as were traditional beliefs in gender roles, sexuality, nation, religion, and class. The destabilisation and rupture of film form through musical moments reflects these uncertainties in Austrian society of the interwar period.

In order to understand the importance of sexual subtexts in Austrian silent cinema, it is essential to point out certain particularities about

Austria's film history compared to international (western) developments. Although the exhibition of films in Vienna started at the same time as in other European cities, the first Austrian films were not produced until 1906 when the company Saturn Film, a company specialising in nude pictures, issued their short films for so-called *pikante Herrenabende* (piquant gentlemen's evenings). It is perhaps no coincidence that Austrian film production started with short pornographic films, feeding into the stereotypical image of Vienna as a hedonistic city in which men live according to the credo 'Wein, Weib und Gesang' (Wine, Women, and Song), a theme that the national film industry drew on recurrently. In addition, another influential factor for the production of films was the industry's strong relationship with the Viennese operetta, a musical theatre genre whose works were ripe with more or less hidden sexual subtexts and which constantly outsmarted censorship through its use of the waltz as a substitute for sexual encounters. As Rick Altman puts it: 'Part of the charm of Viennese operetta had always been its willingness to deal openly with society's favorite topic—sex' (Altman 1987: 140). Viennese operetta was an ideal model and fruitful source for the new medium; it delivered narratives that were easier to summarise than those of the legitimate stage and a large part of the audience was familiar with the plots of the many successful operettas. Apart from the familiar stories, operetta further offered the images with which to tell them, character-types, stars as performers, and, above all, popularity (see Bono 1998: 32). Austrian silent cinema's close connection to operetta can be considered the main reason for two aspects that became highly relevant for musical moments in film: sexual subplots (or forms of sublimated sexuality) and a considerable degree of self-reflexivity (see among others Bono 1998; Klotz 1991; Tieber and Wintersteller 2020).

Although the genre of the Viennese film (Wien Film) is generally said to begin in 1933 with *Leise flehen meine Lieder* (*Gently My Songs Entreat*), Vienna and its cultural and musical histories were the topic of many Austrian and German films of the silent and early sound period. The comparatively late start of Austria's national film production, the film industry's close connection to Germany and—perhaps the most important point—a reciprocal and often symbiotic relationship between cinema and operetta, characterise the output of Austrian silent and early sound cinema. This cultural tradition and the intermedial connections created a fertile environment for musical moments in films. The musical form that is the basis of every Viennese operetta exemplifies the sexual subtext: the

waltz. To quote Rick Altman again: 'To dance is to love' (Altman 1987: 136).

Abstraction and Sexuality

Very often, sexual connotations in musical moments of Austrian silent films are connected with the other characteristic I mentioned at the outset of this chapter: a tendency towards abstraction. The integration of a musical number can change the visual style of a film, thus subverting the modes of representation, inverting the sound-image hierarchy, and creating what Steven Pustay calls 'visual-music' (2015: 173). Busby Berkeley's visually elaborate production numbers are the most famous examples for this tendency in cinema. But even before Berkeley, comparable solutions to visualise music cinematically were found around the world. Drawing on Deleuze's terminology, Pustay refers to this transformational process from film to visual music as 'becoming music' (2015: 181).

Within this process the mode of representation in the film changes and can create abstract and ornamental images. As a further visual distinction, I use the term 'ornament' to describe small, repeating patterns as a specific form of abstraction. Historically speaking, ornamentalism is closely connected to sexuality. In 1908, early twentieth-century Austrian theorist and architect Adolf Loos, penned the manifesto 'Ornament and Crime', in which he wrote: 'The urge to ornament one's face and everything else within reach, is the origin of visual arts. It is the babbling of the arts. All art is erotic'.[1] (Loos 1908, n.p.) Loos regarded ornamentalism as a pre-form of art, motivated by sexual energy. The association of ornament and sexuality is also reflected in Siegfried Kracauer's writings who was a fierce critic of Berkeley's film musical extravaganzas, as well as of the German cinema's versions, exemplified by the British show dance group Tiller Girls. Observing the close connection of ornament and sexuality, in Kracauer's reading the ornamentalised musical numbers of the Tiller Girls represented merely a 'plastic expression of erotic life' (Kracauer 1995: 76). He remarked: 'The mass movements of the girls, by contrast, take place in a vacuum; they are a linear system that no longer has any erotic meaning' (1995: 76f). For Kracauer the abstractness of the musical number can be related to the capitalist system that generated these products of mass consumption. Pustay interprets the ornamentalist numbers of Berkeley in a similar way, although he reaches a different conclusion.

For him, these numbers 'reveal the strong sexuality inherent within the sonic patterns that structure his cinematic spectacles' (Pustay 2015: 173). The abstract visualisation of the music, Pustay argues, exposes the music's underlying sexual energy: 'Bodies in motion that expand and contract, break apart and restructure, undulate, dilate, and rotate, become concrete objects and dissolve into abstract patterns, all held together by movement and rhythm' (Pustay 2015: 180). He sums up: 'The visual-body of the film takes up musical forms rather than the music imitating the image' (Pustay 2015: 181). It is in these moments that the music 'takes over', as we shall see in my two case studies.

Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer

One of the most interesting musical numbers in Austrian silent cinema can be found in *Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer* a.k.a. *Das entfesselte Wien* (*Vienna Unleashed*). The film was written by Walter Reisch, who is known for the invention of the Viennese Film as a genre, together with actor-director Willi Forst. Reisch famously integrated a lot of music in his screenplays, both in silent and sound films (see Tieber and Wintersteller 2020). The film's female lead is played by Czech actress Anny Ondra, who later worked with Alfred Hitchcock (i.a. *Blackmail*, 1929). The film takes place after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The aristocratic class is impoverished and some of its members are forced to work in degrading jobs to make a living.

The location of the sequences I shall analyse is the fictional night-club Grand Café Parisien, clearly modelled on the famous Parisian clubs Moulin Rouge and Folies Bergère. The whole film is more or less shot and edited in a classical, traditional manner and without characteristic features or signs of auteurism in terms of style. This changes abruptly, however, with the musical numbers in question. The nightclub sequences, which occur in the middle of the film, consist of three short parts, including a short introduction, in which we see (1) a jazz band in radically fast editing, (2) a dance number by a half-naked woman whose entrance onto the stage is significantly mirrored by the male protagonist later on, and finally (3) a song-and-dance number by a female performer accompanied by chorus girls. The beginning of this sequence is marked by an inter-title that introduces the audience to the Grand Café. A very hectic and quick montage of close-ups and medium shots then shows the members of a jazz band; the camera is deliberately moving and shaking. A shot

of the entire band—a delayed establishing shot—appears only after the rapid montage. The scene bears all the relevant characteristics of a musical moment à la Herzog: even if we do not know which music was played for the various screenings of this film, it is obvious that the camera position and movement, the editing and the whole filmic style are now determined by the implied music and not the other way around. The film manages successfully to represent a still relatively novel type of music at the time, namely jazz, as fast, hectic, and rhythmic. The visuals communicate clearly how jazz was viewed, and the sudden change in film style articulates the radical break with hearing traditions this music must have entailed in mid-1920s Vienna.

The band portrayed in the film—consisting of saxophone, tuba, banjo, drums, and piano—was a typical depiction of a jazz band, but not necessarily something that could be heard in a Viennese cinema.

After the brief montage that opens the sequence, the camera reveals the interior of the nightclub. The place is depicted as the dark side of modern life, the underbelly of bourgeois society. Everything that is novel and that might trigger anxieties in the (male) bourgeois—and in this case also aristocratic—class, converges in this nightclub: changing gender roles, erotic display of (female) bodies, drugs, and modern music.

After this short exposition, a half-naked woman enters the room and starts to dance. An intertitle informs us that the name of the dancer is Diana Manetta. Diana is presented as a real person and after her dance performance, she does not appear in the rest of the film. The dance number is filmed in wide shots from relatively far away; the camera seems to shy away from the half-naked dancer. The dance is intercut with reaction shots of men gazing lustfully and grotesquely at the dancer. This unambiguity of the sexes and their social division into empowered, heterosexual, male spectator, and objectified, passive woman sets up the context for the third and last part of the sequence, the musical number in which the gender binary is subverted. But before the nightclub guests get to witness the much-anticipated musical number, the male protagonist, Prince Otto, enters the stage of the nightclub. The female audience members gaze at him in a similar fashion to the way the men stared at the half-naked woman in the previous scene. After the fall of the monarchy, even a Prince is exposed to the female gaze just like a female dancer is exposed to the male gaze. The whole sequence is structured in a dualistic and almost symmetrical manner, akin to how Altman (1987: 28ff) describes the overall structure of film musicals. The entrance of the Prince

is the only part of the sequence in which music is not visually foregrounded. This changes once Otto starts to dance with one of the female guests. During the last, short part of this dance, the camera shows only the moving feet of the dancers, which imply the rhythm of the music.

The third part of the nightclub sequence follows a little later after the storyline continues outside the nightclub. Back in the Café Parisien, the evening's main number starts with a wide shot of the band. A dozen women dressed in lingerie and with flowers in their hands prance onto the stage. The camera switches to a bird's eye perspective (never seen before in this film), creating ornamental forms à la Busby Berkeley (see Fig. 5.1). The dance rhythm slows down and Steffie (Anny Ondra) enters. She is wearing a top hat, a monocle, and a tuxedo jacket; she is cross-dressing except for very short pants and high heels, mixing male and female signs in her costume as well as in her behaviour. Before the dancers and Steffie leave the stage, she kisses one of the girls, cementing the depiction of the space as amoral and sinful.

This musical moment, in which again all visual elements follow the (rhythm of the) music, is rather short for a song number (only 90 seconds). Present-day audiences might even overlook that this is a song and not just a dance number. Yet this triptych of small musical moments (jazz band, naked dancer, and song number) is put into a clear dualist and symmetrical structure that constantly highlights the binaries in the construction of gender, class, and space. The highlight of the whole sequence is the song, which includes everything that characterises a musical moment. The elements relevant to this musical number may be brief and underdeveloped, but nevertheless, some tendencies can be clearly detected: the overall theme of the sequence highlights sexuality combined with changed gender roles and indecency after World War I. The nightclub functions as a space representing the absence of the old order, and the new reality is unstable and precarious. A naked female dancer signifies moral decay, while a former aristocrat dancing for money points to the elimination of class boundaries and social hierarchies. A shocking new music serves as the soundtrack for this new space. The filmic representation emphasises the erotic and sexual contents of the scene with brief moments where the realistic images shift into abstraction during the rapidly edited band montage, the top shots of the chorus dancers, and an 'unchained' camera.[2]

Comparable scenes can be found in a number of European and American films (e.g. *Das Spielzeug von Paris* (*Red Heels*, 1925) and *So this is*

Fig. 5.1 Ornament and sexuality in *Seine Hoheit der Eintänzer* (1927) (Courtesy of Filmarchiv Austria)

Paris, 1926). When the filmic representation of music tends to abstraction, the resulting 'visual music' is often connoted with sexuality. The reason lies in the nature of music itself: it is at once abstract and sexual. As Elizabeth Grosz writes in her book *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*: 'There is an obvious but indirect link between the enjoyment of music (whether performing, participating, or simply listening) and sexual or erotic pleasure' (Grosz 2012: 27). One way of visualising music during a musical number is to create rhythmically moving, changing, and dancing bodies and forms. The link between music and sexual or erotic pleasure, as Grosz argues, allows us to read organised bodies along these lines. It is also a way to represent sexual energy in the context of socially conservative conventions and strict legal frameworks like censorship.

Starting from an analysis of Esther Williams' films, Herzog reflects on the relation between the female body and the ornament in these (and

other films): 'Femininity is exposed as conflicted and performative, a masquerade that can be adopted at will' (Herzog 2010: 176) The female singer in *Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer* performs a male identity, although she can clearly be identified as a woman. The film thus undermines and subverts binary gender norms and emphasises the performativity of gender.

Herzog continues to sum up the ornaments in the musical water spectacles of Esther Williams:

> The Berkeleyesque spectacle obscures the distinction between motion and stillness, surface and depth, object and living being. Space, time, and scale are unhinged from an axis of linear causality and become a playground for free associations. The female form in the musical spectacle is a sheer surface, an abstraction and an empty mask. The gestures it offers are decidedly contradictory, appearing to be obsessed with the female body as a sexual object yet eradicating any sensuality or eroticism through abstraction. (Herzog 2010: 176)

The abstraction of the female body may eliminate their eroticism, according to Kracauer, but the process of 'becoming music', the transformation of narrative film into visual music, is itself sexual according to Pustay's argument as discussed above. Comparable phenomena can be found in another silent film: Ludwig Berger's *Ein Walzertraum*.

Ein Walzertraum

The 1925 film version of the operetta *Ein Walzertraum* offers a different example of how music inspired the creation of abstract filmic forms despite its absence in a silent film. Officially a German production, *Ein Walzertraum* features music, a setting and an overall topic that are unmistakeably Viennese; more precisely, the film adapts the Viennese operetta of the same name by Austrian composer Oscar Strauss. The international ensemble consists of German, Austrian, and Eastern European actors and actresses.

The operetta *Ein Walzertraum* premiered in 1907 at the Carltheater in Vienna and had a very successful first run. Not long after the premiere, some arias and duets from the operetta were turned into '*Tonbilder*', short films that were synchronised with music using gramophone records. The sheer number of these *Tonbilder*—around 20—reveals the success and

popularity of the operetta in Austria and Germany.[3] After the work's first feature film adaptation in 1925, Ernst Lubitsch's based his *Smiling Lieutenant* (1931) on the operetta, which even included additional music by Oscar Strauss himself.

The film plays with the dualism of German and Austrian/Viennese clichés, which allows it to construct Vienna as an imaginary city, living in its own mythical past. The city is strongly connected to the themes of music and love. Since the heydays of the Viennese operetta and up until the *Schlager* and *Heimatfilme* of the 1950s, Vienna—much like Paris—was represented as a frivolous city. *Ein Walzertraum* is an early example for portraying the former capital of the Habsburg Monarchy in a specific fairy tale-like way that became highly popular with the genre of the Viennese film, cemented by Walter Reisch and Willi Forst with their first collaboration *Leise flehen meine Lieder*, a film about the love affairs of Franz Schubert. One of the most typical spaces shown in many Viennese films is a *Heurigen*, a wine tavern where people come together to drink, eat their (own) food, and sing to the music—all under the open skies of Vienna. The space of the *Heurigen* is significant in depictions of turn-of-the-century Vienna as a hedonistic city, and it is also the location relevant to my analysis of the musical moments in this film, albeit that the second musical moment takes place in a beer garden, the German version of a *Heurigen*.

The story takes place in the fictional, but unmistakably German monarchy of Flausenthurn (*Flausen* means 'silly ideas'). Count Eberhardt XXIII wants his daughter, Princess Alix, to marry the elderly Prince Peter Ferdinand. Alix, however, is attracted to his adjutant, Nikolaus Count Preyn, nicknamed 'Nux'. Nux is a happy-go-lucky man, who flirts with Franzi, the violinist and conductor of a Viennese female salon orchestra. After seeing this, the German Princess Alix wants to become more 'Viennese', so that Nux might fall in love with her. Nux shows the German princess the Viennese way of life. They stroll through the city, past the statue of Johann Strauß Jr., the Waltz King, and take a *Fiaker*—a horse-drawn carriage—to a *Heurigen*. 'To the Heurigen? What's that?' reads an intertitle. Alix then takes lessons in 'Vienneseness' with Franzi and after some misunderstandings and conflicts the couple find their happy ending.

At the *Heurigen* couples flirt and dance; old and young folk, Viennese people and foreigners become integrated into a singing, dancing, and drinking community. The tavern is presented as a utopian place in which differences and opposites are exposed and suspended with the help

of music and alcohol. After the filmic introduction of this important cinematic space, which bears elements of a musical moment in its first shots of a *Schrammel* band,[4] the couple arrives. An unknown woman approaches their table, praises Nux and his charm ('Nux has got it!') and starts drinking with them. The two musicians that introduced the sequence are now seen singing again and the intertitle reads: 'See, that's Viennese, holladeroh!'.

The combination of alcohol, music, and promiscuous women is here presented as typically Viennese. The scene closes with Nux sitting between two women, singing, a frivolous *ménage à trois,* the visitors of the *Heurigen* clapping their hands to the beat of the music. Nux asks the princess for a dance, explaining: 'A Waltz, your Highness, the most beautiful thing in Vienna'. Alix is obviously not very good at waltzing, disturbs the other dancers, is also a little drunk and finally rests her head on Nux's shoulder upon which he kisses her. Alcohol, music, and dance have worked their magic. 'What was that?' she asks him deliriously. 'See, that was Viennese!' he answers sheepishly.

This scene introduces the connotation of waltz and sexuality. The waltz leads to a kiss, the kiss then leads to marriage. The waltz is presented as 'an expression of erotic desire' Alexandra Seibel writes (2017: 273). Altman states that the cliché 'to dance is to love' was born with Franz Lehar's operetta *The Merry Widow* (1905) and it is clearly implied in this scene. The film uses the waltz as a surrogate for sex, or, as Seibel again puts it: 'Once the woman is willing to waltz, she indicates her consent for the sexual encounter' (2017: 280). What Nancy Schwartz notes about Lubitsch's adaptation of *The Merry Widow* (1934) also applies to *Ein Walzertraum*:

> All of this erotic tension is beautifully translated into the metaphor of the waltz, which becomes the ultimate, perfect vision of surrogate sex, coupling without consummation: the couples in an embrace, whirling around in circles within circles, generating a dizzying energy that mounts and mounts in exhilaration. If the film wasn't censored more than it seems to have been, it is because the Hays Office didn't understand the meaning of the waltz. (Schwartz 1975: 13)

This *Heurigen* scene represents Nux's Vienna, his cultural and social environment. Only the beginning of the scene and the waltz itself can be considered types of musical moments, yet the whole sequence works as

the utopian ideal, which will be contrasted with another musical number later in the film. Having danced with and even kissed the Princess, Nux is now 'forced' to marry her, which means he has to leave his beloved Vienna to follow her to Flausenthurn. As the husband of a princess, he also has to submit to her and become her subordinate. The constitution of Flausenthurn says that 'the prince consort is in every aspect under the commanding authority of her Highness!' Alix and Nux's wedding is not the happy ending of the film. In fact, Nux loses interest in Alix and sneaks out during their wedding night. After roaming the streets of Flausenthurn, he finally enters a *Biergarten* (beer garden), in which a Viennese ladies' orchestra called 'Die Donaunixen' (The Danube's Mermaids) led by Franzi as a *Stehgeiger* (standing violinist) is performing waltzes. The film then cuts to the lonely princess in the castle; 'Viennese love music! You have to play something for him!' she is told by Franzi. The double sense of the German word *vorspielen* is stronger than in English; it means both to perform something and to deceive someone. Cut back to Nux in the beer garden who scribbles his musical request for the orchestra on a beer mat: 'Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald' ('Tales from the Vienna Woods'), the famous waltz by Johann Strauß, Jr. Franzi, the orchestra's violinist, first reads the wrong side of the beer mat: 'Only beer can give German love and German strength'. The Viennese violinist and her female musicians laugh about the unsophisticated slogan. Nux's request is on the other side of the mat. The film once more plays with the oppositions between German and Austrian/Viennese culture. The sexual subtext of the phrase is hardly to be ignored—its praise of male sexual potency is salient.

The orchestra starts to play the requested waltz upon which the film's style changes. The location of the Vienna Woods is connected with a nostalgic utopia, a male version of free sexuality. The musical number that follows is a visualisation of Nux's longing dreams of the Vienna Woods. Cross-fades and double exposures dominate the visual style of the scene. Franzi is depicted as 'larger than life', alternating with scantily dressed girls dancing through the Vienna Woods, reminiscent of nymphs from fairy tales. In a parallel montage, the film cuts back and forth between the princesses inside the castle now practising the piano and Nux dreaming of Viennese girls in the woods. The camera then pans away from Nux and changes to a bird's eye perspective. Flowers are raining down on him, the whole picture climaxes into abstract forms that rhythmically form

kaleidoscopic shapes. The number ends with Nux fondly gazing at Franzi, the Viennese violinist.

The visual refrain of this number, to use Pustay's terminology, is dominated by abstract forms, dissolves, cross-fades and double exposures. This tendency towards abstraction significantly differs from the rest of the film. The famous waltz—in this case we know which music was played at least at the film's premiere and likely in many subsequent showings—sets the rhythm to the musical refrain of the number.

The difference between this number and the realistic part of the film is of course motivated by the circumstance that the number represents a dream. One might argue, drawing on Deleuze, that every number in a film musical is a dream number (see Deleuze 2013: 63ff). On the other hand, as Pustay writes, most musical numbers are 'not structured like a dream, they are structured like music' (2015: 178). Musical structure and form, Pustay continues, resemble sexuality. Drawing on Grosz's work (2012), he argues that Berkeley's choreographies 'actively reveal […] how music, just as the natural sound from which it springs, is fundamentally "sexual in nature". […] Music connects the human animal to the sexuality of the natural world, in turn providing assemblages between the body and the vibrations of the cosmos' (2015: 182) He further notes that this connection of musical structure, rhythm and vibrations to sexuality is made visible in the musical numbers of Berkeley.

In the case of *Ein Walzertraum*, produced at a time when Berkeley was still working as a choreographer on Broadway, sexuality is not only connected to the structure of musical moments, but also to the settings and traditions of Viennese music. Everything in this film points towards sexuality (dancing, intoxication, the ironic reference to impotence), based upon Viennese stereotypes that connect music, waltz, and sexuality. In this type of 'sexualised environment', abstract film images are merely a different way to represent music and its connoted meanings.

Musical numbers are, as Herzog writes, 'freed, at least to a certain degree, from the burden of signification, motivation, and logical development' (2010: 51). Using such abstract images is only possible within a musical number—sometimes marked as a dream—according to the conventions of the fictional feature film. But again, musical moments in which the mode of representation shifts towards the abstract, are 'becoming music'. If we follow Pustay, this visual music is already sexual in its form. In its Viennese variation, these musical moments are already embedded in an implicit erotic context.[5]

Conclusion

The theoretical notion of the 'musical moment' as an instance in fiction film when the visuals, the camera work, and the editing of a scene are dominated and structured by music, is extremely helpful to determine the specificity of musical moments and numbers in silent cinema. As I hope to have shown in the two case studies, music can function as a trigger to influence, infiltrate, undermine and subvert the organisation of the images as well as the overall structure and ideology of the film. The analysed musical moments reveal tendencies for abstraction that are closely connected with the sexual subtext of the films. These tendencies are intricately bound to the music, its structure, and its meaning: sexuality as a notion that can be described in abstract terms such as rhythm, movement, pauses, and refrains. In the case of Vienna, the waltz and the narrative settings it is connected with, are as sexually charged as the censors allowed them to be. The stereotype of Vienna as a musical city, its *Heurigen* culture and the famed Viennese girls, create the male utopia of a world in which women are willing to dance and more.

Austrian silent cinema contains many solutions for the visualisation of music and the use of musical numbers as more or less sublimated sexuality. The city's cultural environment in the 1920s was a fertile context for music films that sometimes produced extraordinary musical numbers. Comparable film scenes can be found in American film musicals, in French silent and early sound films, and probably in many more national cinemas. European and American cinema influenced each other from the days the film industry became international in the late nineteenth century. Especially in the 1920s and early 30s, not least because many filmmakers had to flee Europe, this reciprocal impact grew even stronger. Filmmakers were searching for ways to cope with (diegetic) music in film and to create musical numbers, which were viewed as an additional attraction. In this respect, Vienna proved to be a fruitful place for developing various treatments of musical moments in film, due to its cultural history and its theatrical and musical traditions, to paradigmatically display abstraction and sexual subtexts as two significant tendencies of musical numbers at the time. The musical numbers of these films function as destabilisers of the film's form and sometimes its ideology. An otherwise conventionally narrated film is driven to the fringes of abstraction and avant-garde cinema, gender roles are often displayed as performances that are changing. In the context of a world in which empires collide and

disintegrate, in which established conventions are no longer to be trusted, these musical numbers give a glimpse of a (cinematic) world to come, of a cinema 'taking flight' (Herzog 2010: 82) from its boundaries.

Notes

1. English translation by author; lower case in original.
2. The term 'unchained camera' (*entfesselte Kamera*) was used in the late 1920s to describe a free moving camera, its invention is credited to cinematographer Karl Freund.
3. For an example of a *Tonbild* of the duet 'Da draussen im duftigen Garten' see https://www.filmportal.de/video/ein-walzertraum-walzertraum-nr-92-1908 (accessed 15 May 2021).
4. *Schrammel* music is a type of Viennese folk music named after Johann and Josef Schrammel. A Schrammel band or quartet usually consists of two violins, one contra guitar (a.k.a. Schrammel guitar), and a clarinette and/or button harmonica.
5. *Ein Walzertraum* was remade in Hollywood by Ernst Lubitsch in 1931 under the title *The Smiling Lieutenant*. Although the sexual subtext remains strong in Lubitsch' version, there are no comparable instances of visual abstraction, the musical numbers are presented in less extravagant and stylised ways.

Filmography

Blackmail, 1929, Alfred Hitchcock, UK.
Das Spielzeug von Paris, 1925, Michael Kertész (Michael Curtiz), Austria.
Ein Walzertraum, 1925, Ludwig Berger, Germany.
Leise flehen meine Lieder, 1933, Willi Forst, Austria.
Seine Hoheit der Eintänzer, 1927, Karl Leiter, Austria.
The Smiling Lieutenant, 1931, Ernst Lubitsch, USA.
So this is Paris, 1926, Ernst Lubitsch, USA.

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List of Song

'Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald' ('Tales from the Vienna Woods') 1868. Johann Strauss Jr. (comps.) op. 325.