Biedermann and the Firebugs
composing contemporary music for live theater

Max Frisch’s “(Biedermann and) The Firebugs” is an eccentric German play with many nuanced directions. One such direction calls for a chorus of firemen (and/or women), functioning as a typical Greek chorus.

Upon discussion, Dr. Rick Jones and I decided to treat the chorus’ lines as lyrics, setting them to music. This decision allowed us to investigate three challenges that come with setting text to music:

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**Style**

How to align musical style with the style of the play?

*What we landed on:*

Kurt Weill

+ Oompah band

with a sprinkle of Broadway

**Function**

How does the music interact with the play? What interpretation does it bring?

*What we decided:*

Primarily helps to establish mood

(incredibly useful for the audience in interpreting a particularly bizarre narrative)

+ Further separates the chorus from the characters, highlighting their position as commentators

+ Heightens dramatic irony

**Meter**

How to integrate text with irregular meter and music with regular meter* without obscuring line and meaning?

*How we solved the problem:*

fragmenting form – keeping each line of text in tact creates a collection of musical phrases with contrasting lengths and contour. Each phrase independently has a unique style, together creating a mosaic that captures our overall style choices while still delivering lines clearly.