Biedermann and the Firebugs
composing contemporary music for live theater

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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:

**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?

*(a decision we had previously reached in answer to the question of style)

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.