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978-0-521-87392-5 - Never Sang for Hitler: The Life and Times of Lotte Lehmann, 1888-1976

Michael H. Kater

Excerpt

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I

Childhood and Apprentice Years

Perleberg and Berlin

In no great hurry, the short, simple train rumbles across the flat North German landscape. “Today the small train of my childhood is still running,” writes Lotte Lehmann in her autobiography of 1937, from Wittenberge through the thinning pine woods of sandy Westprignitz County, straight to Perleberg, some twenty miles away.¹ It was still running when I was in Perleberg one misty autumn day, driving from there to the estate of Gross-Pankow, to interview Bernhard von Barsewisch. A retired professor of ophthalmology, Barsewisch had still known Lotte Lehmann as a young man. He was the grandson of Konrad Gans Edler Herr zu Putlitz, a baron who lived on the ancestral Gross-Pankow estate with his family and was an important patron of Lehmann in her youth. I wanted to ask Barsewisch not just about the singer, but also about the origins of his family, who were Prussian nobility, as well as about the origins of Perleberg and its environs, almost halfway between Berlin and Hamburg. As Barsewisch’s story unfolded, it turned out that the rise of Perleberg in the Mark Brandenburg was closely tied to the fate of the Putlitz clan, and that Lotte Lehmann’s development as a young singer was intimately connected with the history of both.

Perleberg and Wittenberge were founded in the twelfth century by Johann Putlitz, in the Stepnitz River region.² Perleberg soon prospered on the trade axis between East and West, dealing in salt and cloth, and joined the Hanse League. After Bismarck’s unification of Germany in 1871 it was a Prussian garrison town, with respectable businesses and schools.³ Among the former was the hotel *Deutscher Kaiser* in the center of town, which featured “dejeuners, diners, soupers” and had a midsize auditorium, where small plays, recitals, or cabaret could be performed.⁴ When Lotte Lehmann was born on February 27, 1888, the municipality had approximately 8,000 inhabitants.⁵

Since the High Middle Ages, the Perleberg region and the Putlitz family had been closely interdependent. Through feudal privileges, generations of Putlitz barons prospered as vassals of the Brandenburg Margraves, who by the eighteenth century were also the kings of Prussia. Members of the Putlitz family settled on several estates around Perleberg and served in hereditary ceremonial functions at the Berlin court. Eventually, they married into other Brandenburg regnant families; by the nineteenth century, the Putlitzes were related to the Hohenzollern kings through connubial ties.⁶

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Like most nobles of Brandenburg, the Putlitz barons subsisted on agriculture, on professional military service and positions in the Prussian diplomatic corps. Their hereditary estates at Gross-Pankow, Laaske, and Retzin, all in Perleberg's hinterland, were not vast, but through prudent exploitation of the soil a comfortable living could be made, with second homes maintained in Berlin. But what distinguished the Putlitzes from all the others was their interest in arts and letters. In the eighteenth century, one Gebhard zu Putlitz was prevented from joining the Prussian army by an injury and instead became a learned rentier. Having studied law, he possessed a large library of Latin, English, and French works. Far and wide, this disciple of the Enlightenment was known as the "Learned Baron." His grandson was Gustav zu Putlitz (1821–1890), who wrote novellas and plays and took an active interest in theater and opera.⁷ He served first as director of the Schwerin Theater and then of the stage in Karlsruhe, in the Grand Duchy of Baden, from 1873 to 1888. In between he stayed in Berlin, where as a member of the Prussian Upper House he also officiated at court. While there, he closely befriended the composer Baron Friedrich von Flotow, a fellow noble from neighboring Mecklenburg and famous for his opera *Martha*, for whose opera *Indra* he wrote the libretto. In Berlin, Gustav zu Putlitz also counted as his friends leading men of letters, such as Gustav Freytag and Theodor Fontane. During his years in Karlsruhe, he was host to Cosima Wagner, Franz Liszt, and Clara Schumann, who performed at soirées in his home, and he started and oversaw the professional career of the Austrian conductor Felix Mottl, who would move to Munich in 1903.⁸

This remarkable man had four sons, three of whom were again much more interested in learning and the arts than in cultivating their sandy acres. One of these was Joachim, who eventually became director of the Stuttgart stage, until 1918 under the king of Württemberg. Whenever in Brandenburg, he resided on the family estate of Retzin. Baron Gustav's third-born was Konrad (1855–1924), who lived in Gross-Pankow. He too subsisted only nominally on the fruits of his soil, for his real interest lay in prose and poetry. Having visited Italy in his youth, he was at work on a translation of Dante's writings during the last decades of his life. Whereas he tended to his agricultural chores only hesitantly and with moderate success, he could afford to do so, for he had married Emmy Lürmann, the daughter of a banker from Bremen, who had supplied him with a rich dowry. Besides, Konrad zu Putlitz spent much time in Berlin as representative of a distillers' lobby.⁹

Such commercial activities are an indication that even the old sword nobility toward the end of the nineteenth century could not escape losing its privileges of political standing, economic advantage, and social superiority. For the Putlitz clan, as for their compatriot neighbors, those privileges had been considerable, commensurate with their dominance over the small-town folk and, especially, the peasants tilling the land. Although the aristocrats of the Mark Brandenburg were monarchist and politically conservative, the Putlitzes were more pronouncedly so by virtue of their family legacy. Their ancestors had founded settlements and defended them against Slavic Wends many centuries ago, and they were politically distinguished through their ceremonial high offices, because of their immediacy to the Prussian court. On the whole,

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it turned out well for the Putlitzes that the feudal overlord they served did not just remain a regional potentate in one of the many splintered German states, but became first the king of Prussia, which was the largest of those states, and, after 1870, the emperor of a united Germany.¹⁰ Although certain peers of the realm were decrying the gradual decline of feudal privileges in the nineteenth century relative to the pre-Napoleonic period, the Prussian representational system still guaranteed aristocrats like the Putlitzes sociopolitical superiority.¹¹ In the Prussian electorate they were doubly favored: first because of their inherited position in the Upper Chamber (Herrenhaus), which they used exclusively to further their class interests, and second because of their wealth, which they used to help control a surfeit of political power through the Lower House, the Prussian Landtag, again to benefit merely a privileged few.¹² The Putlitzes thrived on and drew capital from their personal acquaintance with members of the royal family; Kaiser Wilhelm I and the empress came to visit Gustav zu Putlitz's theater at Karlsruhe, and later Prinz August Wilhelm von Hohenzollern, a son of Kaiser Wilhelm II and interested in music and the arts, had a retreat at Retzin where he communed with Baron Joachim, the director of the Stuttgart Theater.¹³ The Putlitz family socialized (and tended to intermarry) with other nobles such as the Von Salderns and Von Jagows. Traugott von Jagow was head of Westprignitz County, with Perleberg at its hub, until in 1909 he became the police chief of Berlin; in March 1920 he would assist an ill-fated attempt to resurrect the fallen monarchy during the so-called Kapp Putsch.¹⁴ Siegfried von Saldern in 1888 was director of the Ritterschaft, a corporate credit union dating from the eighteenth century, based in Perleberg and servicing all the noble families in the area.¹⁵ One of his nieces was Elisabeth von Saldern, who as a young lady spent years at the imperial court as governess to Princess Viktoria Louise, August Wilhelm's only sister, until in 1910 she became a gentlewoman at the girls' school for aristocratic daughters, the Abbey Heiligengrabe near Perleberg.¹⁶

These conditions fostered conservatism and a belief in monarchist legitimacy not only among the aristocratic clans themselves, who stood to gain the most from such bearing, but also among the commoners who worked for them and whom they influenced. Perleberg's character as a garrison town intensified the public love of king and emperor; indeed, this was the predominant sentiment among its burghers. In this social and political setting, and geographically in the center of town, Karl Lehmann, Lotte's father, worked as the secretary of the Ritterschaft, where he answered to Direktor von Saldern. As manager of the credit union, he received a modest salary.¹⁷

If the lower middle class tended to be politically conservative, as a minor civil servant in expectation of a state pension Karl Lehmann was pronouncedly so, and the aristocratic masters he served only encouraged this attitude. As for his daughter Lotte, throughout her life she remained conscious of her small-town, lower-middle-class origins, and politically, she always leaned to conservatism. A photograph of her as a small child of perhaps six shows her with intense eyes and short brown hair framing a round face, clearly betraying the early influence in the family of Slavic Wends once resident in the area (Figure 1). Both parents had been born in Prenzlau in the Brandenburg region of Uckermark, Karl in

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FIGURE 1. Lotte Lehmann in Perleberg, ca. 1894. Courtesy Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB).

1849 as the son of a court clerk, a subaltern civil servant. Lotte's mother, Marie Schuster, born in 1850, was the daughter of a – somewhat better-off – master miller.¹⁸ Marie's beloved siblings lived in Berlin; she was particularly close to her youngest sister, Lieschen, who was proprietor of a household odds-and-ends stall at a Berlin market.¹⁹ The rotund Marie was simple and emotionally always on the verge of tears. Her schooling having been rudimentary, the letters to her children tended to be grammatically faulty, and her worldview was touchingly limited. When her then famous daughter embarked on a tour of South America in 1922, she warned her of strange people she would encounter there – “Negroes, Indians and however many wild folks, who can frighten you terribly – so do take care.”²⁰ The father, mustachioed, gaunt, and handsome, prided himself on his position as Ritterschaft secretary, and he aspired to greater heights. He liked to read popular literature, was fastidious in dress, daily tended to his small garden belonging to their Ritterschaft house, and collected postage stamps.²¹ The Lehmanns always had a maid and could send their children to secondary school. Most significantly, Karl Lehmann would take summer vacations, however modest, with his family in Warnemünde on the Baltic coast.²²

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It is said that Marie had married Karl only after her first fiancée – the true love of her life – had not returned from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. Be this as it may, the parents quarreled a lot because money was always scarce, and Marie suffered from stomach cramps and bad eyes – ailments that her husband dismissed because they were costly and he thought his wife a hypochondriac.²³ Although this family of four was close-knit, loyalties were unevenly spread. Lotte revered her mother (who cared less for her) and on the whole disliked her father, until his last years in life before he died in January 1925. Mother Marie preferred Fritz, who had been born in 1882, but father Karl loved Lotte, even though he seldom let this shine through his formal Prussian veneer.²⁴ Fritz adored his younger sister, and she admired him back. The mutual devotion of sister and brother would become one of the main themes in Lotte Lehmann's biography.²⁵

Music was in the family. Marie Lehmann had a beautifully dark contralto voice and in her youth would have had formal training, had her father not forbidden it. The highlight of every Christmas Eve for the family was when she sang, without accompaniment, the German seasonal song “Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen aus einer Wurzel zart.” Karl Lehmann had a resonant tenor and was a member of the Perleberg men's choir. Family legend had it that one of his forbears had been the Paris Opéra soprano Sophie Arnould, who had enjoyed her greatest success as Telaira in Jean Philippe Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, with which she delighted Madame de Pompadour. Arnould had borne four illegitimate children to Count Louis de Lauraguais, one of whom, a soldier in Napoleon's army, had been stationed in Frankfurt an der Oder, east of Berlin.²⁶ Until his vocal cords were ruined by careless teachers, who had him sing soprano while his voice was breaking, Fritz was believed by all to show the greatest promise as a singer, and it was he who had to demonstrate his talent in the modest living room when visitors arrived. But the whole family often joined in song together, especially traditional German folksongs like “In einem kühlen Grunde,” which father Karl would accompany on his zither. Lotte's voice was not deemed promising until she participated in a school play entitled *Königin Luise*. On this occasion the teacher commended her and told her father that she should receive singing lessons, but Karl Lehmann thought a regular job with a guaranteed pension like his own more sensible.²⁷

Much of this musical activity, on Fritz's and Lotte's part, was inspired by occasions on which popular-culture events took place in town. Musical recitals, mostly on the stage of Hotel Deutscher Kaiser, often were of a military stamp, such as when the trumpet corps of the resident infantry regiment gave a fanfare recital.²⁸ But the town also had its own band, and itinerant theater companies staged operettas and even operas, however simply, such as Albert Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied* in 1902.²⁹ Other exotic things occurred to spur the imagination of the impressionable Lotte. She must have seen the children's play *The Christmas Fairy* by one Werner Heim, staged at Deutscher Kaiser on December 25, 1898, when she was ten; yet she was certainly too young for a variety show by African-American singers directed by “Mister Harry Cliften,” in August of 1892.³⁰ Perhaps Fritz told her about it. Gypsies passed through, and so did Slovak youths with interesting traps for rodents; there was a man

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FIGURE 2. Lotte Lehmann, Karl Lehmann, Marie Lehmann, and Fritz Lehmann in Perleberg, ca. 1900. Courtesy Special Collections, Davidson Library, UCSB.

with a contraption fixed upon a barrel organ, showing images of a murderer and his flaxen-haired female victim, the organ grinder cranking out the horrible tale young Lotte delighted in. She was particularly impressed by a theater troupe composed of husband and wife, where he played all the leading roles and she various mistresses, of which the girl understood little. When later Lotte met the haggard actress off stage, she struck her as a woman already broken by life. But how she fascinated her! “I thought nothing more desirable than the life of this tired, run-down woman in need of peace and quiet, who must have buried many, many dreams.”³¹

Lotte walked to school from the Ritterschaft house on Berliner Strasse along a picturesque path, past the Roland statue, the medieval town hall, and the imposing St. Jacobi Church, a redbrick Gothic building. The advanced girls’ school (Höhere Mädchenschule), where she could learn some English and French and the rudiments of German literature, was nearby.³² Impulsive, open, and with a pleasant disposition, which included a pronounced love of animals, Lotte made friends easily and got along well with her teachers. She was not difficult to like. In the 1950s Elisabeth Brünig, who had a walking disability, remembered how Lotte had, without much ado, helped her up the staircase, actually carrying her up many times.³³ Lotte’s favorite teacher was the young singing instructor Konrad Strey, “Konny” to his pupils, on whom she developed a crush at twelve. Lotte was devastated when later he took as his bride a “very beautiful girl” from her own class.³⁴

Even then, her relationship with brother Fritz, who visited the Realgymnasium facilitating a university entrance examination, cannot be overestimated.

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Lotte idolized her brother and wanted to be like him, share his friends and their rough-and-ready games. Highly intelligent, Fritz was difficult and unruly, often making a nuisance of himself in public. Because he did not have to study hard to pass in class, he was lazy. But endowed with charismatic leadership qualities, he was always surrounded by followers; his sister, although similarly gifted, in this phase of her life was much more demure and accommodating.³⁵ Hers was the comportment of Prussian teenage girls at that time.

The political culture of Perleberg, in which Lotte, in the bosom of her caring family, was socialized, was as thoroughly conservative as was the landed gentry. The period in which Lotte was born, late winter and early spring of 1888, was one of high alert in the capital, with reverberations throughout Perleberg. On Lotte's day of birth, February 27, members of the court along with all loyal Brandenburg subjects were anxiously watching out for signs of deterioration in the health of Kaiser Wilhelm I as well as his son, the Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm. The Kaiser was getting weaker by the day and was expected to die soon, while the crown prince was suffering from terminal throat cancer. Every news item was immediately transferred to the Prussian provinces, and in Perleberg was printed by the local paper. Wilhelm I died on March 9 and was buried a week later; the funeral was covered in detail by the paper.³⁶ The health and habits of Kaiser Friedrich III, who would reign only for ninety-nine days, after which his oldest son was crowned Kaiser Wilhelm II in June, were then monitored and reported on very closely, such as details of his daily diet.³⁷ As Lotte Lehmann was growing up, news about Kaiser and court, about the royal Prussian regiments stationed in the little town, and about the local royal servants to whom her own father, Karl, owed his livelihood, dominated everyday life. Perleberg's citizens celebrated the anniversary of Germany's victory over France and the subsequent founding of the empire in 1871, and sided with the Boers against the British in South Africa in 1902 – collecting relief money for them.³⁸ Military conscription, promotions, and the awarding of medals and distinctions in the region, even as weekly routines, were extremely well publicized.³⁹ Some political events even infiltrated popular culture, so that the public, and no doubt as curious an adolescent as Lotte Lehmann, could participate enthusiastically. This occurred, for example, one week in January of 1902, when Hotel Deutscher Kaiser put on a display of moving pictures, with scenes from the Boxer Rebellion in China, as it was mercilessly subdued by the troops of Wilhelm II.⁴⁰

Present at many of the official functions was County Commissioner von Jagow, whose villa stood next to the Lehmanns' house.⁴¹ Lotte hated him because he had shot her beloved tomcat Maunzi, but nonetheless, he was a person deserving of respect. She also was in awe of the aristocracy, loved playing games of "Countess" with the maid, and approved of the maid's admiration of all soldiers.⁴² When Lotte moved to Berlin in the summer of 1902, she saw more of pomp and circumstance, but serious study soon left her little time to regard them with more than a passing glance.

Around the turn of the century, newspapers in the German capital frequently printed stories extolling upward mobility as a function of social success – and

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a sensible alternative to emigration to America.⁴³ Signally, when in Berlin, Karl Lehmann was promoted to senior secretary. Although his actual position is not clear, he was probably put in charge of the Berlin headquarters of several combined Ritterschaften of the Brandenburg province, including those of Westprignitz and Uckermark. His pay could not have improved significantly, for the family resided in one of the grubby apartment buildings on Hochmeisterstrasse in Berlin's proletarian North. "The structures resembled military quarters in their monotonous utilitarianism and disregard for basic human comforts. Typically five stories high, they filled entire blocks in a dense honeycomb of apartments built around inner courtyards just large enough (5.3 meters square) for a fire engine to turn around in. The innermost dwellings, accessible by long passageways from the street, received virtually no sunlight."⁴⁴ Here, the Perleberg garden was sorely missed.⁴⁵

As a by-product of modern industrialization, of which the Hochmeisterstrasse tenements constituted particularly repulsive examples, Berlin with its two million inhabitants was then feverishly growing into the Second Reich's capital, and in the genteel parts new sandstone buildings were being erected and elegant streets and broad avenues built. Kaiser Wilhelm II was culturally ambitious, yet lacking in taste; what he had of it was arch-conservative, cheap, and overblown. As a sailor-buddy of his uncle Edward in England, he drew ship models, and he composed a play entitled *Sardanapal*, featuring a naïve, fictitious king.⁴⁶ His increasing hubris showed in the way he allowed his tasteless sense of style, which bespoke grandeur without refinement, to be imposed on all major objects of construction. Hence the Siegesallee, a broad avenue leading from the Rolandsplatz near the Tiergarten to the Königsplatz with its Reichstag, was studded with thirty-two white marble monuments of princes of victory. "The monument of each prince was surrounded by a low semicircular wall which was further enhanced by busts of two of the prince's advisers who were considered worthy of the honor." Throughout the capital, there were monster monuments celebrating the main heroes of German unification: William I, Bismarck, and Field Marshall Count Albrecht von Roon. The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church was built at the entrance to the Kurfürstendamm, commemorating the first Kaiser. A picturesque mark of modern Berlin only after its partial destruction in World War II, it had originally been done in a fake neo-Gothic style toward the end of the nineteenth century and – like the Siegesallee – was the butt of jokes by the usually irreverent Berliners. Other churches and official buildings were neo-Gothic, neo-Baroque, and neo-Romanesque, like the new Kaiser Friedrich Museum, featuring huge staircases and marble lounges.⁴⁷

For the benefit of military parades or the reception of foreign luminaries the huge avenues were closed to traffic, including pedestrians, by the new Police Chief von Jagow, Karl Lehmann's former neighbor, who now resided in the "grim, red Police Presidium," as novelist Alfred Döblin dubbed it.⁴⁸ Normally, Berliners and a growing mass of tourists traversed the city by streetcar, strolled on the showcase avenue Unter den Linden on weekends, and frequented outdoor picnic places, such as those on the many lakes in the Southwest, or listened to brass bands in beer gardens. They could get themselves lost in the huge new

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department stores such as Wertheim's and have pea soup, bacon, and beer at the Aschinger chain's fast-food place on Alexanderplatz.⁴⁹

In culture, Berlin was conventional in literature, the just-deceased Theodor Fontane and the rising naturalist playwright Gerhart Hauptmann excepted, as well as in art, save for the works by masters of the so-called Berlin Secession, under the patronage of museum director Hugo von Tschudi, such as the Impressionists Max Liebermann and Lovis Corinth. Sterile, painstakingly representational academy art reigned in the galleries and affluent homes, dominated by the Hohenzollern-craven Anton von Werner, who was beloved by the court.⁵⁰ In theater, Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theater was just beginning to make significant inroads after 1905; members of the military were forbidden to attend it.⁵¹ Expressionism had yet to struggle against the gaudy taste of Wilhelm II, who thought himself an expert in everything from automobiles to opera. He tried to dictate from above: "Art which transcends the laws and limits set by me ceases to be art," he declared publicly in 1901.⁵² In 1898, Richard Strauss had succeeded Felix von Weingartner, as kapellmeister extraordinaire and was conducting opera in the capital alongside the older Karl Muck. In fact, Strauss had barely been appointed against the protests of the Kaiser. In 1903, one year after Lotte Lehmann's arrival in the capital, Strauss wrote a euphoric letter to his parents about how enthusiastically the audience had recalled him to the stage "after every act" during a performance of Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*. But in 1905 he had to have his new opera *Salome* premiered in Dresden, the capital of the Kingdom of Saxony, because Empress Auguste Viktoria, who was as prurient as she was dim-witted, disapproved of it.⁵³ Nevertheless, and not least because of Strauss's presence in Berlin, foreign musicians continued to flock to the metropolis and prospered there: the violinist Joseph Joachim, originally from Budapest, the singers Julia Culp from Groningen and Geraldine Farrar from Boston. Young, beautiful Farrar, who was engaged at the Berlin Opera from 1901 to 1906, was smitten with imperial Germany as "a magnificent country," not just because she was managing to have a dalliance with the pleasure-seeking Crown Prince Wilhelm. In her judgment, Berlin "quite measured up to one's earliest dreams of royalty and picturesque glitter."⁵⁴

Lighter forms of entertainment were also beckoning in the capital at that time. The soprano Frida Leider, who was Lotte Lehmann's age and enrolled in a commercial high school, remembers – along with the lieder singers Julia Culp and Elena Gerhardt – Yvette Guilbert from Paris, "a piquant figure with reddish hair and long, green gloves, the mistress of French chansons," who performed regularly in Berlin. And she also remembers the Danish star Asta Nielsen, one of the pioneers of silent movies, as Berliners admired her in films that were just now maturing after their mechanical slapstick and street-ballad phase. In 1909, when the Union Theater opened on Alexanderplatz, in the center of Berlin's entertainment industry, it was the first free-standing, upscale movie house.⁵⁵

In the little spare time she had, Lotte Lehmann enjoyed much of Berlin and its culture, both high and low. She joined her family for outings on the wholly electrified streetcars, or the brand new subway line, to the open-sky beer gardens where one could eat a hearty meal and sing along with the um-papa bands. And

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she was impressed by the broad avenue Unter den Linden, though she missed the linden trees that actually did exist in Perleberg. The side streets from Unter den Linden to Friedrichstrasse, heavily frequented by prostitutes, she would avoid. But she visited the Opera, sometimes in the company of Fritz, where they were standees in the fourth gallery. Wagner's *Lohengrin* she savored there, with Wilhelm Grüning, a well-known Bayreuth heldentenor, in the lead role. She listened to *Mignon* with the Czech soprano Emmy Destinn, and Farrar, who was not older than her brother, very much impressed her.⁵⁶

All the same, during the first two years in Berlin Lotte was less concerned with opera and, for that matter, singing than with her standing in the new school, which was to segue into a seminary for public school teachers. This was according to the wishes of her practical-minded father, who continued to believe that his daughter should be trained in a sensible skill guaranteeing her job tenure and a pension. Although Lotte agreed in principle, she thought it more likely that she would marry her newfound boyfriend, Willy Hilke, the blond, practical son of a neighbor. But she also developed yet another kind of puppy love for Principal Ulrich of the girls' school. He alone and another teacher made her school life worthwhile, not because of music, but because Lotte excelled in literary composition, especially the writing of poetry. Indeed, she kept sending her poems to Berlin newspapers for publication, until *Der Tag* accepted one and paid her ten marks for it. (This was when a goose cost around five marks and visiting a public swimming pool fifteen pfennigs.)⁵⁷ So she saw herself more as a future writer than as a singer, especially since all the other subjects she was taught bored her, notably mathematics. Her teacher Frau Vogel encouraged her writing, and the man she affectionately thought of as "Ulli" found it difficult to believe that the polished pieces of prose she delivered were really from her own pen. The other subject she loved was declamation – reciting the parts of plays that were analyzed in class. So could she perhaps become a stage actress? When she did sing folk songs and the hits of the day at home, accompanying herself on the piano, she dreamt of a future at the side of her husband Willy, although she found not thinking of "Ulli" difficult.⁵⁸

Her career concept appears to have changed shortly before she was to graduate, a few months before entering the seminary. For in February 1904, just before her sixteenth birthday, she wrote to her old school pals in Perleberg, "I do not wish to become a teacher any more, it's actually terribly boring, don't you agree? I think I shall devote myself to song, for music delights me endlessly."⁵⁹ In the same year, the Lehmann family moved to the Berlin suburb of Gross-Lichterfelde, where the air was cleaner and there was yet another, albeit smaller, garden. Karl Lehmann had resigned his position with the Ritterschaft, was working in the suburb's communal service, and, as a side job, had taken on managing the airy apartment building they lived in. Rent was free.⁶⁰

Lotte was successful in convincing her father that she was not born to be a teacher. Instead, he now wanted her to enroll for commercial schooling (of the kind that Frida Leider was then taking) so that she could become a middle-range administrator, perhaps to serve the Ritterschaft. This would still afford her security and a pension, in case she could not depend on a level-headed husband such as Hilke.⁶¹