

KURT WEILL NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2 No. 1 Spring 1984

Foundation Initiates Grants Program

The Board of Trustees is pleased to announce the establishment of the Foundation's first grants program, designed to further its goals of promoting public understanding and appreciation of the musical works of Kurt Weill. In 1984, the Foundation is accepting proposals in five major categories related to the perpetuation of Weill's artistic legacy:

1. *Research Grants*
2. *Publication Assistance*
3. *Performance and Production Grants*
4. *Dissertation Fellowships*
5. *Travel Grants*

Preliminary applications should be received by April 30, 1984, and must

Firebrand Parts Found

In a surprise call from Eugene Moon of Theodore Presser Co., the Foundation recently learned of the existence of the orchestral material (parts, chorus parts) to *Firebrand of Florence*, Weill's 1945 musical with lyrics by Ira Gershwin and book by Edwin Justus Mayer. Presser had custody of the materials due to earlier contractual arrangements with Chappell & Co. Although the show had a disappointing run on Broadway, the operetta-like score contains some of Weill's most engaging music. The discovery makes possible the realization of revivals without the investment of thousands of dollars required for copying the orchestral parts. Inquiries regarding *Firebrand of Florence* should be addressed to the Foundation.

September Song

Walter Huston's 1938 recording of "September Song" was a Hall of Fame winner at this year's Grammy Awards.

contain a detailed description of the project, a current resume of individuals involved and/or a profile of purposes, activities and past achievements of organizations, and an itemized statement of how the amount requested would be utilized. After applications have been reviewed by the Foundation's staff, additional supporting materials may be requested for consideration by the Advisory Panel on Grant Evaluations, which will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees. Grants will be awarded on an objective and non-discriminatory basis. Selection criteria will include: the relevance and value of the proposed project to the achievement of the Foundation's purpose; the quality of the project; evidence of the applicant's potential, motivation, and ability to carry out the project successfully; and evidence of the applicant's prior record of achievement in the field covered by the project. Applicants will be informed of awards by July 1, 1984. Please address all proposals and correspondence to David Farneth at the Foundation's headquarters.

Early Weill Manuscripts Discovered

On November 5, 1983, during the last day of the Kurt Weill Conference at Yale University, Foundation President Kim Kowalke announced the discovery of 14 early Weill manuscripts dating from 1916-19, with one fragment composed possibly as early as 1911. Of the 14 manuscripts, 11 are of compositions unknown to have existed, or presumed lost. Dr. Hanne Weill Holesovsky, daughter of Weill's brother Hanns, informed Lys Symonette in November, 1981, that her mother, Rita Weill (now deceased), might possess a number of items relating to Kurt Weill. The Foundation was able to secure photocopies of the majority of the manuscripts and the copies are now available for study at the Weill/Lenya Research Center. The original manuscripts are safely sealed in a bank vault awaiting a probate settlement, after which the Foundation will begin negotiations for their purchase. Included in the discovery are an Intermezzo for piano (1917), an Orchestral Suite (ca. 1919) and portions of a song cycle, *Ofrah's Lieder* (ca. 1916-17).



Hutton Cobb and Linda Lou Allen share a tender moment in *Down in the Valley* on PBS' "Great Performances."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Foundation Sponsors Musicales to Introduce Young Artists

In collaboration with the New York Chapter of the Alumni Association of the Curtis Institute of Music, the Kurt Weill Foundation will begin its projected series of musicales on April 27 at 8 p.m. Ruth D'Agostino, soprano, Katherine Turner, soprano, Blair Wilson, tenor, and Reginald Pindell, baritone, will present a program of songs by Kurt Weill, Ned Rorem, Samuel Barber and Leonard Bernstein. All of these young artists are graduate students of the Curtis Institute, and have made appearances with major musical organizations in both opera and concert. Due to limited seating please call the Foundation for reservations.

Down in the Valley on Great Performances

PBS will present the Kurt Weill-Arnold Sundgaard folk opera, *Down in the Valley*, as part of its "Great Performances" series. Air time for New York City is 8 PM, April 16, but affiliates' broadcasts may vary, so check your local listings.

Produced by the Moving Picture Company, the film was directed by Frank Cvitanovich, co-produced by Cvitanovich and Nigel Stafford-Clark, and Carl Davis was musical director. Shot on location in England, art director Anton Furst transformed the local countryside into the Smokey Mountains.

Linda Lou Allen stars as Jennie; Hutton Cobb is her hapless lover, Brack Weaver; and Van Hinman is the preacher. Singer Judy Collins will host the broadcast. The production, originally aired last year on BBC Channel 4, will mark *Down in the Valley's* American debut on national television.

Yale Exhibits Weill Manuscripts

The Yale Music Library, which houses the Weill/Lenya Archive, will have an exhibit of archival materials this summer during June, July, and August in Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. On display will be a selection of autograph manuscripts of Weill's, correspondence with colleagues such as Milhaud, Ira Gershwin, Brecht, Georg Kaiser, Maxwell Anderson, and Ogden Nash, documents from the careers of Weill and Lenya, and a large display of iconography. Summer hours at the Beinecke Library are Monday-Friday 8:30-5:00, Saturday 10:00-5:00, and Sunday 2:00-5:00 (closed weekends in August).

Blatas Exhibition in Venice

Artist Arbit Blatas will be featured in an exhibition entitled *Impressions of The Threepenny Opera* at the Teatro Goldoni in Venice between August 30 and October 1. The exhibition will include oils, lithographs and bronzes and is co-sponsored by the Italian Commissioner of Culture and the City of Venice. The internationally renowned painter and sculptor has created a large body of work inspired by *The Threepenny Opera* and was a long-time friend of Lenya. Blatas' interpretation of Lenya in bronze is on display at the Weill/Lenya Research Center.

Weill/Lenya Research Center Hosts Music Library Meeting

On April 28, the Greater New York Chapter of the Music Library Association will hold its spring meeting at the Weill/Lenya Research Center. Topics on the program include the Foundation's history and programs, the archive collections and policies, and the recently discovered Weill manuscripts. The meeting will conclude with a musical presentation by Curtis Institute of Music students and a tour of the Research Center.

Weill Surveyed at Two Universities

Courses on Kurt Weill are currently being planned at two American universities. Dr. Alexander Ringer of the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, reports that, "by popular demand," he is working to schedule an intensive four-week summer course on Weill's operatic and theatrical works. The lecture course for graduate students would begin early in July, 1984. Prof. David Laurent of Brown University, Providence, RI, is working on a Weill course for undergraduates, in conjunction with Brown's German Department. This course, if approved, would also focus on stage works, and would be taught during the 1984-85 school year. Previous "composer courses" at Brown have examined Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Verdi; Weill would be the first twentieth century composer to be studied in recent memory.

The editor welcomes submission of news items, reviews, and articles by readers for inclusion in future issues of the Newsletter. Submission deadline for the next issue is August 15, 1984.

The Kurt Weill Newsletter
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William Madison, Assistant to the Editor

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THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The Motto of Mahagonny: "Du Darfst!"

by Kim Kowalke

Mahagonny has always had an identity problem. Whenever I hear of a new production, my first question is always, "Which *Mahagonny*?" The *Songspiel* or the opera? the Paris version or the Cujel version? the Berliner Ensemble's "Kleine Mahagonny" or some other, new concoction? Since there are only two versions of *Mahagonny* authorized for performance throughout the world (the *Songspiel* [UE #12889] and the full-length opera [UE #9851]), one might think that concern would center on such challenging textual issues as the most workable translation, the placement of the "Crane Duet," the choice of "Havana Lied" or the inclusion of "Benares Song." Not so; since Weill's death there have been more presentations of bastardized mish-mashes of *Mahagonny* than productions of either the *Songspiel* or the opera!

"Do whatever you want" seems to have become the motto not only for the people of Mahagonny after their night

of horrors, but also for many producers and directors of *Mahagonny* who create their own horrors night after night. Like the city of nets, the opera needs no hurricanes or typhoons for its destruction—men can do as well. As Jimmy Macintyre advises in Scene 11, "Now's the time to indulge in forbidden acts . . . no laws will stop it!" Apparently not. The last year has witnessed no fewer than five blatant and willful infringements of *Mahagonny*'s copyright. Following Jimmy's instructions to ignore the law, five theatres on both sides of the Atlantic have kicked down Mahagonny's walls. And in the process, "the one who gets kicked" is Kurt Weill.

Infringements Worldwide

Since Lenya's death, the Foundation has attempted to rescue *Mahagonny* from such devastation—largely without success. Last year the Odyssey Theatre in Los Angeles staged a *Mahagonny*, directed jointly by Ron Sossi

and Ina Wittich, without any license whatsoever. When I attended a performance of this "Brechtfest," I found an hour-long burlesque of the two *Mahagonnys*, accompanied by piano, croaked by non-singers, with a Scott Joplin rag interpolated and most of the lyrics of the opera rendered as spoken dialogue. In December 1983, the Foundation learned of a similar production at the San Francisco Repertory Theatre, again performed without license in a version entitled, "Mahagonny . . . City of Nets," but passing itself off to an unsuspecting audience as the 1927 *Songspiel*. The same month our clipping service picked up reviews of a *Mahagonny* staged by the Schauspielhaus in Bochum, West Germany: the headline read "Weill on the Floor"! Again this was a mish-mash "version for actors," defended by the theatre's management as a reconstruction of the "lost" (!?) 1927 *Songspiel*. The theatre had obtained a license and score for the

continued on page 4

Weill Conference at Yale

Scholars from three continents gathered in New Haven, Conn., Nov. 2-5, 1983, to share research, ideas and opinions at the first international Kurt Weill Conference. Co-sponsored by the Yale University Music Library and the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, the conference celebrated the establishment of the Weill/Lenya Archive at Yale, the result of Lenya's bequest of Weill's manuscripts to that institution. 31 participants, including musicologists, critics, composers and directors, presented lectures to over 100 registrants. David Drew, the eminent Weill scholar, delivered the keynote address which focused on the musical and historical considerations of *Der Kuhhandel*, the pivotal work in Weill's oeuvre. Program chairman Dr. Kim Kowalke organized the presentations into thematic sessions: the context of the European operas; Weill-Brecht collaborations; American works; reminiscences by collaborators of Weill and Lenya; Weill's relation to the cabaret idiom and the works of Berg and Schönberg; and Weill's stature in twentieth century music and theatre. Summarizing the

diverse and sometimes controversial scholarly contributions, John Rockwell wrote in *The New York Times*, "... one of the most striking things about the papers . . . was their pervasive tone of cool-eyed evaluation."

There was plenty of opportunity to compare the discoveries expounded upon in the lecture hall with the sound of the music itself. The evening of Nov. 2 featured a performance by Yale students and ensembles of *Sonate für Violoncello und Klavier, Die Bekehrte, Das Studienbuch: Orchesterlieder nach Texten von Rilke, op. 13 und 14, Vom Tod im Wald, Frauentanz* and *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. The following night the Sequoia String Quartet performed Weill's *String Quartet no. 1, op. 8* and *Quartet in B Minor*, while rounding out the program with Haydn's *Quartet, op. 20, no. 2*. On Friday, a cheering audience recognized conductor Otto-Werner Mueller and the Philharmonic Orchestra of Yale for an outstanding performance of the *Second Symphony*. Late night enthusiasts were treated to screenings of films for which Weill wrote the soundtracks: *Salute to France*, a 1944 U.S. Department of Defense propaganda film; *You and Me*, a 1937 Paramount release directed by

Fritz Lang; a filmed concert presentation of *Der Lindberghflug*; and the new Moving Picture Company production of *Down in the Valley*. Saturday night's closing banquet featured guest speaker Burgess Meredith sharing some remarkable reminiscences of his long association with Weill and Lenya. Later, the New Amsterdam Theatre Company performed excerpts from *One Touch of Venus*.

The conference provided a unique forum for scholars and musicians to dissect Weill's musical contributions and to remind each other of the far-reaching influences of Weill's and Lenya's productive lives. Throughout the event-packed week, new discoveries unfolded as the participants shared and combined their individual knowledge. Again quoting from John Rockwell, "More important even than any . . . specific revelations was the sense of community the conference provided to Weill scholars, and the opportunity to share information, opinions and sources for further research. That sense of community may eventually extend to warring camps of Brecht and Weill scholars . . . which have battled one another more vociferously than Brecht and Weill ever did themselves."

"Du Darfst" continued

Songspiel; the Foundation stopped all further performances in Bochum despite entreaties for mercy based on an innocence-by-virtue-of-ignorance plea.

In December, archivist David Farneth attended a performance of "Mahagonny" in Paris at the Bouffes du Nord Theatre, directed by Hans Peter Cloos. Again it was a nearly unrecognizable travesty of the opera, with "Surabaya Johnny" and "Bilbao Song" from *Happy End* stuck into the lip-synched, synthesized soundtrack—all under the guise of a license for only the *Songspiel*. (Mr. Farneth's review appears on page 11). Finally, Michael Feingold (whose translation of *Mahagonny* is quoted in this essay) reported a production by the Remains Theatre in Chicago directed by Warren Leming. After applying for and receiving a quotation for a license of the *Songspiel*, the Remains Theatre informed the Brecht-Weill agents that their production had been cancelled because the modest fee was beyond their means. A few months later we obtained a program of their unauthorized and unlicensed performances of "Bertolt Brecht's *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*," featuring a new musical score by "A. F. Wittek, Warren Leming, and the Cast," a one-man band, a ten-member cast, and a text "drawing on" the translation of Auden and Kallman. The director included the following manifesto in the program:

The current production marks the premiere of a NEW *Mahagonny*... Our *Mahagonny* stands at the beginning of a new super highway leading out of the past. The old *Mahagonny* has been attracting the "wrong" sort of clientele for too many years; and the town has always been much too expensive. In documenting this production we make accessible to other companies, a *Mahagonny* at an affordable price. The new *Mahagonny* is now open for business and available, at last, to those of "limited means."

Ordinarily one might "look the other way" and ignore such pathetic attempts to reduce one of the few twentieth-century operatic masterpieces to naive agit-prop theatre. But when a major German repertory company also operates under the illusion that "Everything Is Permitted" in *Mahagonny*, there must be more at work here than meets the eye.

Question of Identity

But why *Mahagonny*? Although many operas from Monteverdi through Verdi have widely varying textual versions requiring case-by-case solutions for each new production, *Mahagonny* appears to be unique among operas still protected by international copyright statutes in that it is consistently mutilated by radical attempts to rewrite it as another of Brecht's "plays with music." Surely the reasons for the continuous tampering with the fundamental elements of *Maha-*

gonny stem from both the current stature of the librettist as a playwright and Brecht's own attempts during his lifetime to convert the original opera into something more in keeping with his later political ideology and aesthetics. As late as 1979, one of Brecht's stalwart apologists, Eric Bentley, wrote the following for the premiere of the opera at the Met:

In maintaining that the great opera *Mahagonny* is, in the last analysis, a great play. I intend to take nothing away from Kurt Weill... (But) a single vision, a single mind, controls all, and it is not that of Kurt Weill... Is it an opera? Is Brecht's text a libretto? Is it not, as I have been saying, a play?

With such calculated rhetoric emanating from someone who has the requisite factual information and theatrical savvy to know better, who could resist the implied invitation to strip *Mahagonny* of most of its music and convert the remainder to "Misuk" so that it becomes just another play in the sanctioned Brecht canon? One hears rumors of similar plans for a Joseph Papp *La Bohème* starring Linda Ronstadt, but Puccini's opera is in the public domain and as "fair game" as *Carmen* was for Peter Brook. But how can such a thing be perpetrated on *Mahagonny* time after time when it is a merged work, with Weill's contribution to both text and music fully protected by law? To understand this situation is to understand the history of *Mahagonny*.

A Troubled Past

In 1927, Weill set Brecht's previously published "Mahagonny Gesänge" and a new finale-text as a *Songspiel* with instrumental interludes (but no dialogue) to fulfill his commission for a one-act opera at the Baden-Baden Festival of New Music. Without plot or real characters, this thirty-five minute dramatic cantata for ten instrumentalists and six singers in evening dress created a sensation. As Heinrich Strobel noted, "the philistines greeted the aggressive songs of this highly non-bourgeois piece with hoots, whistles and rotten apples. The keen of hearing recognized that something new had been founded here. Declaring that the *Songspiel* had been nothing more than a stylistic test for the full-length opera, which had already been started, Weill withdrew the *Songspiel* and never attempted to publish it during his lifetime. Later in 1927, he reported to his publisher that he and Brecht were working daily on the *Mahagonny* libretto, "whose total plan and scenario were being worked out together in all details according to musical considerations." After the text had been finished under his supervision, Weill began the score, which was completed in April 1929, despite an interruption for *Die Dreigroschenoper* and several incidental theatre scores.

The opera was already in trouble. Emil Hertzka, the director of Universal Edition, convinced Weill that the piece would never

be accepted by the state-supported opera houses and persuaded the authors to tone down the brothel scene. The magnificent setting of the "Crane Duet" was Weill's solution. After Otto Klemperer reneged on a premiere at the Krolloper in Berlin, Gustav Brecher accepted *Mahagonny* for Leipzig. It had always been conceived for opera singers, and now it was to have its premiere in a major house under a first-rate conductor. Because the score had been published before the Leipzig premiere in March 1930, and the rehearsals affected a number of changes, the published score presented a version that was never performed intact. More revisions preceded the seven performances in Kassel which commenced three days later under Maurice Abravanel. Each

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of the other productions in 1930 (including Prague under Szell and Frankfurt under Steinberg) incorporated additional minor revisions and reordering.

Weill's Revisions

The carefully orchestrated Nazi propaganda campaign against the work culminated in violent demonstrations at a Frankfurt performance and virtually wiped *Mahagonny* from the schedules of all other state-supported theatres. As Weill put it, "Other theatres tried to hide their fear behind all kinds of excuses. They voluntarily capitulated to censorship that didn't really exist, and which, if it really does come, will be attributable primarily to such cowardice." After all other hopes for a Berlin production had been extinguished (including one by Max Reinhardt), Weill accepted Ernst Joseph Aufricht's proposal to capitalize on his success with *Die Dreigroschenoper* by mounting *Mahagonny* in a commercial run at the Theater am Kurfürstendam. Weill once again revised the score, this time to suit the vocal capacities of Lenya and some of the other Berlin "names" in the cast. He cut the "Crane Duet," simplified Jenny's vocal line for Lenya, deleted the "Benares Song" and streamlined the whole with other cuts. That this was a matter of one-time, expedient compromise rather than a definitive recomposition for "singing actors" is reflected in his insistence that Alexander von Zemlinsky (rather than Theo Mackeben) conduct the original orchestration and his hope that the great Marie Gutheil-Schoder would sing Begbick. T. W. Adorno's high praise for the musical values of the Berlin production is confirmed on a recording of members of the cast (including Harold

Paulsen and the soprano-Lenya) with the Orchestra zum Kurfürstendam (HMV-EH736), conducted by Hans Sommer (a pseudonym for Zemlinsky?). Even though it ran fifty performances in a commercial house in a much-compromised version, *Mahagonny* was most definitely still an opera.

During the December 1931 rehearsals, Caspar Neher's and Weill's insistence on the dominance of musical considerations had driven Brecht (now a "born-again" Marxist) from the theatre to direct *Die Mutter*. The differences between Weill/Neher and Brecht had already been documented in their published statements concerning the opera. Brecht's famous "Anmerkungen" of 1930, written without consultation with Weill or Neher, camouflaged and ultimately sabotaged the true nature of the opera. Brecht's notes are in direct conflict with Weill's views and have no validity for performances of the opera. A new, definitive edition incorporating Weill's best solutions was to have been published by UE, the the events of 1933 killed the project.

Post-war Productions

Mahagonny was not heard again in anything approaching its full form until 1957. There was an hour-long studio production in Vienna with Lenya in April 1932, and in December, at the invitation of Marie-Laure, the Vicomtesse de Noailles, *Mahagonny* appeared on a double-bill with *Der Jasager*. This was the "Paris version," comprising the *Songspiel* plus several "Songs" from the opera adapted for smaller ensemble by Abravanel and directed by Hans Curjel. Despite Weill's earlier statement that "the thing I wish to prevent above all else is that *Mahagonny* should be cut down to the basis of Songs or song-like pieces," he approved this temporary arrangement as a vehicle for Lenya that would also serve as a predictable and strongly contrasted counterpart to *Der Jasager*. The ecstatic reception for this patchwork helped pave the way for his move to Paris a few months later, and it was this version that toured to London and Rome in 1933.

When Universal Edition resumed business in its pre-Anschluss style following World War II, the full extent of its wartime losses was still unclear, and for some while it was thought that the entire orchestral material for the *Mahagonny* opera had been confiscated or destroyed. But the "Paris version" of the *Songspiel* had survived, and it provided the basis for the 1949 production in Venice, directed once again by Curjel. The discovery in 1953 or thereabouts of an intact full score and set of parts for the entire opera prompted the complete recording featuring Lenya as Jenny (with her music now transposed and further altered). This in turn inspired the Darmstadt Landestheater to mount in 1957 the first post-war staged performance. Like its immediate successors, the production was based on the unrevised pre-premiere material (apart from the sub-

stitution of the 1921 "Havana Lied"). The 1963 London production conducted by Colin Davis was the first since 1930 to be determined from the outset by *musical* considerations, and also (partly for that very reason) the first to make use of those authentic pre-and post-premiere revisions that David Drew had been able to trace. Universal Edition published David Drew's new editions of both the *Songspiel* (1963) and the opera (1969), which incorporated all the alterations with detailed annotations. *Mahagonny* was finally precisely mapped; there was no longer any reason to get lost on the way.



Alterations in Berlin

No sooner had the 30-year confusion surrounding the various *Mahagonnys* been sorted out than the Berliner Ensemble, founded by Brecht himself, staged "Das Kleine Mahagonny" in celebration of the author's sixty-fifth birthday. Once again, it was a mixture of the *Songspiel* and the opera. This play-with-Misuk was allegedly based on the recollections of Elisabeth Hauptmann and Helene Weigel, who had attended the opening of the 1963 London pro-

duction and made no secret of her dislike for it. With music arranged by Hans Dieter Hosalla, it had been accomplished without Lenya's knowledge, much less her consent. She learned of the new *Mahagonny* from a knowledgeable and trusted friend who saw the production and wrote her:

I must tell you that it is the most disgraceful thing I have heard and seen in all my life. In my whole experience of the *musical* world I have never met or heard of anything so utterly unprincipled. It is announced in the program as "Das kleine Mahagonny. Nach dem Songspiel von 1927. Musik: Kurt Weill." To start with, this is a downright lie. "Nach" indeed! Do you know what they have done? They have arranged a potted version of the libretto of the opera, which is produced as a short one-act play. . . . The whole musical "score," such as it is, has been arranged for a small band by the musical director at the Schiffbauerdamm (though there is no mention of this in the program). As far as I can remember, there is not a single absolutely authentic bar of Weill from start to finish. He is simply *annihilated*. As for what they do to the meaning of the work, that too is beyond description. But in so far as that concerns Brecht, it is their funeral. Yet it affects Weill since he collaborated on and supervised the original libretto throughout. . . . Remember all that pious stuff Brecht wrote about the artist versus commercial interests with regard to the 1930 case of the *Threepenny Opera* film? Here a 100% commercial slaughter has taken place, such as only the lowest Broadway producer would contemplate—and then have to reject simply because it is illegal.

**"... the thing I wish to prevent above all else is that Mahagonny should be cut down to the basis of Songs or song-like pieces."
—WEILL**

After an initial protest to Universal Edition, Lenya was eventually persuaded to allow the Ensemble to keep this travesty (in every sense of the word) of *Mahagonny* in its repertory. It is still performed and passed off as "echt" Brecht in East Berlin and occasionally on tour. Although a live performance was recorded and released (Litera 8/60/034-035), Lenya instructed Universal Edition that "Das kleine Mahagonny" was to be restricted without exception to the Berliner Ensemble alone.

In a recent letter to me, Universal Edition stated that the firm had not knowingly li-

censed any other performances of the Berliner Ensemble text. It has gone underground, turning up in only slightly mutant strains—unfortunately more frequently than the full-length opera—in London, Zürich, Los Angeles, the Edinburgh Festival, and the Yale Repertory Theatre (after its successful and authentic productions of both the *Songspiel* and the opera)—all without permission and in most cases without payment of royalties. Lenya's files are filled

“... despite and because of its primitive facade, Mahagonny must be counted among the most difficult works of today.”

—T. W. ADORNO

with correspondence dealing with the recurring problem. At UE's urging, she reluctantly allowed an experimental “middle-sized” *Mahagonny* to be patched together in Düsseldorf in 1976; but otherwise she steadfastly resisted all attempts to reduce the operatic metropolis of *Mahagonny* to a bowdlerized hamlet. Since her death, the Foundation has forbidden performances of any “mish-mash” *Mahagonnys* and specifically denied permission for a “new” version in Göttingen that had been scheduled for production later this year. But apparently to no avail.

Misunderstood Morality

Again, why *Mahagonny*? When Adorno reviewed the Frankfurt production in 1930, he asserted that “despite and because of its primitive facade, *Mahagonny* must be counted among the most difficult works of today.” It still is. Its inherent theatrical and musical challenges, its “loose” structure, and its conflicting levels of meaning and manner have been compounded by its own mythology and irrelevant theoretical/ideological baggage. Even when staged in “untainted” form, as Andrew Porter has aptly observed, *Mahagonny* tends to have a somewhat different musical text in each production. The tension between its aggressive text and decidedly “culinary” music precipitates as much disagreement among its re-creators as it did among its creators. *Mahagonny* is still located somewhere between Atsena and Pensacola—it hasn't found a secure place in the standard operatic repertory, and most theatre companies simply cannot cope with its musical demands. Since institutions and their audiences tend to change very slowly, it's been more practical for producers to alter the piece to fit the institution. Coincidentally this “revisionism” has been condoned by those who are uncomfortable with the real *Mahagonny* for very different reasons. On the musical side, conservatives like critic Harold Schonberg wish it could be turned into another *Threepenny Opera* and thereby

excluded from their domain altogether. Theatrical admirers have adopted the same approach, but as substantiation for their squatter's claim on the territory of *Mahagonny*. Those more concerned with political message than artistic medium have tried to proselytize the manifesto they find in *Mahagonny* without concern for “elitist” aesthetic considerations. Their opponents react by dismissing the piece as “anarchist and communist,” just as reactionaries in Germany did after the Leipzig premiere. Weill himself answered such attacks: “They misunderstood the whole thing in Leipzig. They thought it was a satire, which it isn't; and it has nothing to do with communism. It's the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Brecht and I had a moral idea as the background of the opera, namely, that a society given to materialism must perish—which is hardly cynical.” Misunderstandings of this morality play seem even more entrenched today than in 1930.

Other Works “Revised”

Mahagonny is not the only victim of such “revisionism.” After Brecht's conversion to Marxism, Weill helplessly watched him turn *Der Jasager* upside-down into *Der Neinsager*. *Die Dreigroschenoper* was politicized first in the Pabst film and then further in Brecht's *Die Beule*, the vestiges of which still cling erroneously to the original play. After Weill's death, two little words, “der Kleinburger,” were surreptitiously appended to the title of *Die sieben Todsünden* as ideological window-dressing. *Der Lindberghflug* was posthumously purged to a more “collective” *Ozeanflug*. Lenya fought the trend as best she could. A telegram sent to UE in 1968 is representative of her frustration:

Enough damage was done to *Little Mahagonny* and appalling changes to *Lindberghflight* by Schulze-Rohr. Under no circumstances will I ever allow anyone to destroy the *Jasager* by making it fit the Marxist *Neinsager*. *Jasager* will remain in its original conception. I am horrified by your attitude toward Weill's music.

But she herself also unwittingly contributed to some of the “revisions.” Her legendary and authoritative interpretations preempted any question about either the legitimacy of the musical texts themselves in her later recordings or the ramifications of her vocal limitations for the works themselves. Today, many admirers of Weill's music (including one so distinguished as Ned Rorem,

There is a definitive text for each of the two Mahagonnys . . . that sets the boundaries for the construction of the city.

Weill reported to his publisher that he and Brecht were working daily on the Mahagonny libretto, “whose total plan and scenario were being worked out together in all details according to musical considerations.”

see 21 January 1984 *Opera News*) view beautiful singing of Weill's music as a corruption of sacrosanct tradition. In automatically assuming that everything Weill wrote was intended for Lenya-like voices, Mr. Rorem, of course, missed the fundamental difference (which Weill constantly emphasized and Lenya also recognized) between his music intended for singing actors (*Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Happy End*) and that for operatic singers of the highest caliber (*Mahagonny*, *Die Burgschaft*). With Mr. Rorem's opinion so widely accepted as truth, it is not surprising that *Mahagonny* is usually populated by pop singers, chanteuses and retirees without much voice left.

Suggested Remedies

What can be done? It must be possible to cultivate a balanced appreciation for both Brecht's and Weill's contributions to their varied collaborations without distorting the works themselves. Surely the first step is a restoration of the authentic texts of the works, both on new recordings and in authorized performance materials. With such solid bases, a full range of interpretations can be encouraged, with each new production seeking imaginative solutions to the challenges inherent in the works. Creativity can then be channelled toward its proper role—the re-creation of the authors' intentions in a manner most meaningful to the particular circumstances of the production. There can be no definitive staging of *Mahagonny* for all times and all places. But there is a definitive text for each of the two *Mahagonnys* (with many choices still left to the individual production) that sets the boundaries for the construction of the city. The Weill Foundation has been entrusted with the responsibility of patrolling the outskirts of *Mahagonny* for trespassers. Let it be known that poachers and other copyright infringers will be prosecuted with the same vigor with which the Foundation will assist honest revivals of the work. There may be “nothing you can do to help a dead man,” but Weill's music is still very much alive. It will be protected.

I REMEMBER

The First Scandal of Lenya's Career

by Lys Symonette

In each issue of the Newsletter, we will feature an excerpt from our Oral History interviews. For the first column in this series, Lys Symonette, the Foundation's Musical Executive, retells one of Lenya's favorite reminiscences.

—Ed.

While impressions and influences during their young years were oceans apart, Lenya and Weill shared one early cultural experience: a heavy dose of Wagnerian indoctrination. This is easily understood in Weill's case, having been born in Dessau, 'The Bayreuth of the North.' But Lenya?

It so happened that she started her professional career at the Stadttheater in Zurich, an institution with which Wagner himself had held close personal ties. As Karoline Blamauer she joined this theatre's Corps de Ballet, first as an apprentice and then as a full fledged member.

It was then—as it is now—the custom of all German speaking Stadttheaters to use members of the Corps de Ballet as extras whenever the occasion called for it. Consequently young Blamauer frequently had to put away her ballet slippers in order to change into the disguise of a Nibelungen dwarf, hauling gold from the depths of the Rhine, or—as a page boy—carry the train of the trailing gowns of a long line of Wagnerian heroines, be it Elsa, Eva, Elisabeth or Bruennhilde—either role necessitating a long and patient presence during endless stretches of music. (Lenya once sang the entire 'Elsa's Dream' for Gottfried Wagner, the composer's great-grandson, who remarked that he never heard it sung so innocently and simply).

It did not take long for her superiors at the Stadttheater to discover Karoline's innate musicality. Always it was she who knew the exact musical moment when certain steps or movements had to coincide with the music. She could always be relied upon to give the correct cue to the other extras. The highlight of the theatre's 1913-14 season was Zurich's premiere performance of *Parsifal*, and it was therefore decided that Blamauer was the only page boy with whom to entrust an important piece of the stage action.

The scene in question is famous: the Knights of the Holy Grail are gathered before their ailing King Amfortas, who steadfastly refuses to administer his sacred duty of unveiling the Holy Grail. In front of Amfortas stands an open coffin containing the mortal remains of his father Titurel. The old King's body is fully covered by a white shroud. At a certain dramatic moment in the music a page boy (Blamauer) has to draw back the shroud enough to let Amfortas see his dear father's face. For a few frightening moments the page has to hold up the shroud, then drop it ever so slowly and carefully to cover the King again.

All through rehearsals Blamauer had done this piece of stage business to perfection. Then came the event of the premiere. Totally caught up with the general heroics, with everyone's attention focused on her for the first time in her career, Karoline decided to take advantage of this unique opportunity in true Wagnerian style. At the crucial musical cue she grabbed the lily-white shroud with such dramatic passion that Titurel's royal beard got caught in her iron grip. Thus—when she lifted the shroud as high as possible—she unknowingly clasped the old man's beard firmly in her fist, while the King's

papier-maché head dangled merrily at the other end. As yet unaware of the situation, she held up the shroud (along with the appendage!) for the allotted amount of time. Only as she was about to drop it again did she become aware of its heaviness. In terror, she loosened her grip and the bearded head fell down with a thud. Not in the coffin, but smack onto the floor. Once there, Titurel's head started an action all of its own: ever so slowly it started to roll and roll and roll—gaining speed with every turn—finally making its royal exit right into the prompter's box.

What a Scandal!

But for Blamauer the worst was yet to come. The morning after the disaster she was called into the Director's office. There she was told that she had to pay a fine of 50 Swiss Francs (an entire month's salary)! Insisting it was no fault of hers but that of a careless prop man who failed to secure Titurel's head sufficiently, the tale of her misfortune fell upon deaf ears. Irrevocably every month a part of the fine was deducted from her meager salary, until the entire 50 Francs had been paid off.

Lenya always felt that this fine was a far greater scandal than the one she had created!



Lotte Lenya in Zurich:

*En pointe and en route
to stardom.*

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Eve Hammerschmidt Collection

by David Farneth

Eve Hammerschmidt, the daughter of Weill's sister Ruth, donated a valuable collection of early documents to the Foundation in April, 1979. Ruth Weill, born one year after Kurt in 1901, and her husband, Leo Sohn, emigrated from Germany to Palestine and subsequently to the United States. Mrs. Hammerschmidt is responsible for preserving the two musical manuscript sketches, 17 pieces of correspondence and three miscellaneous items. The music includes the only extant autographs of two early works which David Drew has identified as: *Sulamith*, a cantata for soprano, female chorus, and orchestra (8pp.), probably composed in Leipzig in 1920; and *Psalm VIII*, a work for six-part a cappella chorus (SSATTB) (1 pp.), probably composed in Berlin in 1922. The 17 pieces of correspondence include ten items from Kurt to Ruth (1920-1926 and undated), four letters from Weill to his parents (1920 [2], 1924, 1945), a postcard from Nathan (Kurt's eldest brother) to their father and a postcard from "Aron" (possibly Aron Hirsh, a family friend) to Albert (Kurt's father).

The correspondence sheds light on many of Weill's early experiences such as his relationship with and devotion to Busoni and his tenure as Kapellmeister at the Stadttheater in Lüdenschied. In a letter from Florence, the 24-year-old composer describes in wonderful detail his first impressions of the beauty and culture of Italy. In a 1945 letter to his parents, he discusses his reaction to the critical response to *Firebrand of Florence*, relates progress on the *One Touch of Venus* film, and synthesizes his feelings about World War II and Germany. Completing the collection are two school schedules which give revealing insights into Weill's musical training, teachers, and academic studies.

Inventory of the Eve Hammerschmidt Collection

Musical Manuscripts

Three Fragments of *Sulamith*, cantata for soprano, female chorus, and orchestra, 1920.

Fragment of *Psalm VIII*, six-part a cappella chorus, 1922?

Correspondence

Kurt Weill to Ruth Weill Sohn

Lüdenschied, 16 January 1920, postcard

Lüdenschied, 28 January 1920, 2 pp., incomplete

Firenze, 8 March 1924, 8 pp., complete

2 April 1926, 2 pp., complete

Undated, 2 pp., complete

Berlin, undated, 4 pp., complete

Undated, 2 pp., complete

Undated, 4 pp., complete

Undated, 2 pp., incomplete

Undated, 2 pp., incomplete

Kurt Weill to Parents

Berlin, 29 November 1920, postcard

Berlin, 10 December 1920, postcard

Davos, 27 November 1924, postcard

Los Angeles, 30 April 1945, 2 pp., complete

Kurt Weill to Leo Sohn

Undated, postcard

Nathan Weill to Albert Weill

Frankfurt, 3 July 1914, postcard

"Aron" to Albert Weill

26 July 1904, postcard

Miscellaneous

Handwritten class schedule, adolescent studies

Handwritten class schedule, presumably for his first semester at the Hochschule für Musik, 1918

Published text by Emma Weill for the hymn, "Niederländisches Dankgebet"

Kurt Weill and New Music Theatre

by Eric Salzman

Wagner once said, "Having created the invisible orchestra, I now feel like inventing the invisible theatre. And the inaudible orchestra."

One cannot imagine Mozart making such a statement. Or Verdi or Weill.

Wagner actually managed to inoculate opera with the virus of Central European philosophic idealism. The image in the composer's head is the real music. Any actual performance is only an approximation, even a degradation, of the original, pure idea. A few chosen performers can serve as priests to this religion; the rest are only fit to be servants or cogs in the machinery. Works of art, even operas, are fit only if they strive, without concession, toward the ideal.

Such a view of art has, of course, a class basis. It is art for connoisseurs, for an elite. It has come to dominate our classical musical life almost entirely. It is extraordinary how this idealism has established itself even in the theater. It is present in the operas and music theater works of Schönberg and Berg, of Henze and Stockhausen, even of Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson.

In fact, idealism is very difficult to maintain in the rough-and-tumble of a living theatre. Its effect has meant, by and large, the dying off of grand opera as a living art.

Of course music theatre did not die. It has survived and even flourished in its popular forms: the musical play, the operetta, the musical comedy. Popular music theatre preserves the old, conventional, closed forms and the folk melos—pentatonic, modal or diatonic singing expressing points of view about emotional issues and states or about people, events and situations. In these musical plays, the musical numbers stop the action for reflection or commentary. Music theatre of this type is messy, stylistically and aesthetically impure. It is a mixture of elements taken from lower class and folk sources which are then tarted up with art values and techniques and then exploited for sentimental and comic entertainment. As with the operas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there is often no score at all, no idealized total picture but merely a series of sketches, arrangements and rearrangements which may even be reworked, reordered or replaced according to convenience and need. The work has no ideal form at all; it is merely a series of actual, roughly polished events taking place in the real world.

Here then is a neat dialectical situation. It can be used to describe the historical moment in which Kurt Weill and Bert Brecht found themselves when they created the anti-Wagnerian, anti-ideal *Mahagonny Songspiel* for Baden-Baden in 1927. And, with hardly any change in terms, it can be used to describe the situation which is forming a new music theatre—neither opera nor musical comedy—today. In both cases, it has been necessary to reject the idealism and purism of classical esthetics in favor of messy practicality, fun and more than a bit of conscious questioning and confusion!

This new music-theatre, already foreshadowed by Weill, Hindemith, Milhaud and others in the *Zeitoper* of the 1920s, requires choice on the part of the creators as well as a desire to awaken self-consciousness in the public. One of the most curious characteristics of modern aesthetic idealism is that it requires—even demands—naivete and a lack of self-consciousness on the part of the artist even as it asks for self-conscious connoisseurship on the part of the critics and art-consumers. Weill and Brecht, to the contrary, demanded idea and style consciousness of themselves in order to engender participatory awareness on the part of the public. In fact, they were recapitulating a historic relationship between artist and public, a relationship that had become obscured in the anti-intellectual aftermath of romantic idealism and its modernist descendants.

German-American Tri-Centennial at Wayne State

Wayne State University sponsored a Tricentennial Celebration of German Immigration last fall, presenting a number of events in recognition of the German-American experience. A concert in September by the orchestra of the University of Bonn, Collegium Musicum, got things to an early start, and on November 16 began a weekend of activities. His Excellency, Dr. Peter Hermes, West German Ambassador to the US, gave an opening address; Dr. Marta Feuchtwanger was featured speaker at the Symposium on the Contribution of German/Austrian Women to America; the Detroit Institute of the Arts extended "An Alle Kuenstler," its German Expressionism exhibit; and Phil Marcus Esser presented a cabaret-style revue of the songs of Kurt Weill, dedicated to the memory of Lotte Lenya. The Celebration was coordinated by Foundation Trustee Guy Stern and Uwe Faulhaber, with events on campus and throughout Detroit.

I have suggested the historical dialectic that helped bring the Brecht-Weill musical theatre into being. Within Weill's music there is an internal dialectic that comes from the use of closed, popular forms together with an on-going participation of the music in the dramatic action. Weill deliberately sets style against idea, emotional catchphrase against verbal expression, musical impurity against compositional technique. Ideas arise from the clashes and discontinuities as much as from the verbal or formal articulations. No moment is merely suspended or reflective; each musical gesture or form participates in the on-going movement of ideas and developing situations.

The importance of the Weillian music theatre to the contemporary situation can hardly be overestimated. If Wagner and Central European idealism are rejected, there is an inevitable tendency in America to look back at the closed form, dialogue-and-song traditions of our musical theatre. The old revue type of popular musical with its interesting synthesis of European art, salon and theatre music, Yiddish theatre and black music had hybrid vigor; but it only intended to amuse and was artistically inco-

herent. Alas, the improvements of the so-called book musical—Rodgers-Hammerstein, Lerner-Loewe, *et al.*—tended to take out the dialectical and class elements—the jazz, literally and metaphorically—which gave the old musical its distinctive vitality. What was left was American operetta.

While the new music-theatre will take what it needs from those traditions, the fact is that new solutions require new problems. These were propounded already by Weill and his collaborators both in Europe and America, and they are connected with the "other" American music theatre, that of Gershwin, Virgil Thompson, Blitzstein, Bernstein and Sondheim. The essentials have not changed a great deal: closed form must be reconciled with action and idea, stylistic diversity and popular roots with coherence, questioning and search with entertainment and fun, reflection and intimacy with the need to oppose and overcome passivity. All these issues go back to Monteverdi and Mozart, but they have been restated most forcefully in our century by Kurt Weill and his collaborators, and they are again the top items on our music theatre agenda.

NEW PUBLICATIONS RECORDINGS

Kleine Dreigroschenmusik, Canadian Chamber Ensemble, CBC SM 5000 label

String Quartets, Sequoia String Quartets, Nonesuch Records, scheduled for fall release

Lyrics by Lerner, with Kaye Ballard, Billy Taylor, including 7 songs from *Love Life*; DRG Records MRS-903 (available by mail only from DRG until September 1983; DRG Records, 157 West 57 Street, New York, New York 10019)

Tryout, with Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin singing their songs; DRG Records MRS-904 (available by mail only from DRG until September 1983)

BOOKS

Gottfried Wagner. *Weill und Brecht: Das Musikalische Zeittheater* (München: Kindler, 1977) 338 p.—reprint (Tokyo: Ongaku No Tomo Sha, 1984).

ARTICLES

Elizabeth Farmer. "Kurt Weill" *Humanities* iv/5 (November, 1983) p. 16-17.

Josef Heinzelmann. "Weill kommt postum zu seinem Recht" *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (2 February 1984) p. 38-39.

Horst Koegler. "Von Kudamm nach Yale" *Stuttgarter Zeitung* 262 (12 November 1983)

John Rockwell. "Posterity Weighs Kurt Weill's Stature" *New York Times* (13 November 1983) p. C 1.

Edward Rothstein. "The Subject Is Kurt Weill" *New York Times* (16 October 1983)

TV/FILMS

Seven Deadly Sins, BBC-2, aired 19 November 1983, Elise Ross; Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rattle, conductor.

Berlin Requiem, BBC-2, aired 25 November 1983, The Ballet Rambert; Christopher Bruce, choreographer