

# KURT WEILL NEWSLETTER

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VIDEO BOUND: Casey Biggs (Bill Cracker) and Richard Bauer (Dr. Nakamura) in Arena Stage's production of *Happy End*, to be broadcast on PBS this spring. Photo by Joan Marcus.

## Foundation Awards Grants

Upon the recommendation of the Advisory Panel for Grant Evaluations, the Board of Trustees is pleased to announce the award of the following 1984 grants:

*New York University Musical Theatre Program*—To establish a Kurt Weill Fellow in the graduate program—tuition and partial living expenses.

*Prof. John Fuegi, University of Maryland*—Travel and research grant—topic: the personal and contractual relationships between Weill, Lenya, and Brecht.

*Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Department of Music*—Production grant—assistance in mounting a university production of *Street Scene*.

Prior to this first award of grants under formal procedures, the Board had awarded in 1983 a publishing subvention to Faber and Faber to assist in the publication of David Drew's forthcoming *Kurt Weill Handbook*.

The application schedule for 1985 grants has been changed in an effort to conform to the calendar year. Applications are due by 15 December 1984 and awards will be made by 1 February 1985. Please see the *Grant Guidelines* published in this issue for further information.

## EAM Moves

European American Music Distributors Corporation recently relocated to an all-new facility near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, outside Philadelphia. "This new facility," says Ronald Freed, President of EAM, "with its state-of-the-art technology, will make EAM the leader among serious music publishers in the United States."

EAM is the sole U.S. representative of Universal Edition and B. Schotts Soehne, the major publishers of Weill's European compositions. In addition, EAM publishes several of Weill's works in its own right (including the Cello Sonata, *Recordare*, and *The Unknown Kurt Weill*, the collection of songs featured on the recording by Teresa Stratas), also serves as the Foundation's American agent for stage rights in many of Weill's works. EAM also features works by Berio, Boulez, Henze, Hindemith, Orff, Penderecki, Paulus, Rands, Schwantner, Stravinsky, Takemitsu, and a number of outstanding young American composers.

Correspondence should be addressed to European American Music Distributors Corporation, P.O. Box 850, Valley Forge, PA 19482. Their telephone number is (215) 648-0506.

## PBS Films "Happy End"

This spring, the Public Broadcasting Service will air *Happy End* on "Great Performances" as part of the "America's Musical Theater" series. *Happy End* has been directed for television by Greg Harney from the stage production by Garland Wright at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and features the same cast. (See review in this issue.)

Producers of the broadcast are Greg Harney and Bunny Olnick of WGBH, the Boston affiliate of PBS. "America's Musical Theater" is underwritten by the National Endowment for the Arts, Mars Bars candy, and PBS. According to Olnick, the production will air sometime after May, 1985.

## Yale Produces Archive Register

The Yale University Music Library has announced the publication of a formal register of the papers in their Weill/Lenya Archive. The register, compiled and edited by Adrienne Nesnow, was made possible by a 15-month grant funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The register contains bibliographic citations and inventory listings describing the contents and organization of the papers. An alphabetical index of works refers the researcher to the proper location within the register and includes extensive cross-references for individual sections of larger works and variants in titles. Lys Symonette and Kim Kowalke served as consultants in the project.

The Weill/Lenya Archive was established at Yale by Lotte Lenya and the Kurt Weill Foundation in 1981. The table of contents of the register reflects the types of materials included in the collection and their subsequent organization: Music by Weill, Music by Others, Correspondence, Programs, Clippings, Photographs, Interviews, Writings, Biographical Material, Financial and Legal Items.

All of the holograph music has now been microfilmed, the clippings have been copied onto acid-free paper, and items which are in poor condition have been earmarked for conservation. The papers are stored in acid-free folders and boxes which are housed in a temperature and humidity controlled environment at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, conveniently located across the street from the Music Library.

The register will be published and made available for purchase in the near future.

# PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Kim Kowalke

My essay in the last issue of the *Newsletter*, "The Motto of Mahagonny: Du darfst!", concentrated on only one facet of the Foundation's mission, the protection of the integrity of Weill's music. This responsibility must be balanced with our other chartered goals: the promotion and perpetuation of Weill's and Lenya's artistic legacies through support of productions, performances, publications, and research projects. Although our grants program addresses these areas directly, the Foundation is undertaking other means to accomplish these goals on a wider basis.

Our staff is eager to assist performers, conductors, directors, producers, and publicists by supplying information and materials relevant to their performances of Weill's music. One of the most frustrating situations for anyone planning a performance of a Weill work is the seemingly mundane, but often perplexing and arduous task of obtaining published scores, rental materials, translations, and clearance of rights from assorted publishers and agents. When a composer's career spanned two continents geographically as well as the two increasingly disparate stylistic and marketing worlds of "popular" and "serious" music—and given the complicated and diverse laws governing "split" copyrights, renewals, extensions, and reversions throughout the world—it is not surprising that today more than 35 publishers and agents (not including any of their own foreign sub-agents) control or administer Weill's works in various territories. Re-assignments, reversions, and contract expirations create a constantly shifting maze for anyone on the elusive trail of performance materials for a given work.

*The Threepenny Opera*, perhaps the most often performed of Weill's major works, is a telling example. Restricting our discussion to the situation in the United States alone, stock and amateur stage performances of the Blitzstein adaptations are exclusively licensed by Tams-Witmark Music Library (until 1 January 1985, when a new licensing agent will be named). Also in the new year, for the first time, other English translations may be available, with agents to be announced. Stage performances of the original German version are licensed by European American Music on behalf of the Foundation. First-class professional productions can be authorized only by the heirs of the authors. Mechanical and synchronization rights and publication rights for individual songs in popular versions (and other "small" rights) are assigned to Weill-Brecht-Harms, a company administered by Warner Bros. Music. ASCAP licenses performances of excerpts on many concert programs and radio and television broadcasts, but, of course, it provides no performance materials. Sale in the U.S. of the original piano-vocal and full score of the German version published by Universal Edition is technically illegal, since U.E. lost its rights in 1958 at the time of copyright renewal, but the Foundation has permitted the practice to continue until new formal arrangements can be worked out. No piano-vocal score with

any English translation of the entire work has ever been published because of legal entanglements. All of this will change in 1985 because, under the termination provision of the new U.S. copyright law, the Foundation will recover all publication rights for the music (not the text) in the U.S. for the 19-year extension period. We are then free to re-assign, in collaboration with Brecht's heirs, any and all rights to different publishers and agents.

This labyrinth is enough to discourage any innocent soul at East Overshoe State College from pursuing hopes of mounting a production of the Mannheim-Willett version with Weill's original orchestrations. Only the most dauntless producer could be expected to penetrate the maze surrounding the piece, which all too often derails performances in the planning stage. The Foundation, however, stands ready to direct inquiries to the proper vendor, clarify the legalities of the license for the performer, and assist with program notes, photographs, and historical information. Next year we plan to publish, in cooperation with European American Music, a complete but

straightforward guide to Weill's music, specifically for performers, conductors, and producers. We're also encouraging revivals of Weill's American shows, and soon we hope to have all of the musicals available again through licensing agencies and reprints of piano-vocal scores.

Meanwhile, however, anyone who wants to perform the *Ballad of the Magna Carta*, *The Firebrand of Florence*, the Walt Whitman Songs, *Der Protagonist*, or even excerpts from *The Eternal Road*, not to mention *One Touch of Venus* in Tibetan, should just call or write the Foundation. We'll find a way to clear performance rights and to obtain the necessary performance materials. Our attempts at assembling a complete research archive in New York would be irresponsible were we to ignore the pressing need to assist performers in perpetuating Weill's legacy in the manner he would have most encouraged—current performances and productions which address new audiences and demonstrate that, despite his own disclaimers to the contrary, his music has much to offer posterity.

## 1985 GRANT GUIDELINES

The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, Inc., is a not-for-profit corporation which promotes public understanding and appreciation of the musical works by Kurt Weill. To this end, the Foundation solicits proposals from individuals and non-profit organizations for funding of projects related to the perpetuation of Kurt Weill's artistic legacy. For the 1985 funding period, the Foundation is accepting proposals in one or more of the following categories:

1. Research Grants
2. Publication Assistance
3. Performance and Production Grants
4. Dissertation Fellowships
5. Travel Grants
6. Translations/Adaptations

### Evaluation Procedures

After applications have been reviewed by the Foundation's staff, additional supporting materials, including recordings, recommendations, and samples of previous work may be requested for consideration by the Advisory Panel on Grant Evaluations, which will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees. The Advisory Panel on Grant Evaluations shall be composed of independent, prominent members from the musical, theatrical and scholarly communities. Grants will be awarded on an objective and non-discriminatory basis. Grantee selection criteria will include: 1) relevance and value of the proposed project to the Foundation's purposes; 2) quality of the project; 3) evidence of the applicant's potential, motivation, and ability to carry out the project successfully; and 4) evidence of the applicant's prior record of achievement in the field covered by the project. Applicants will be informed of awards by 1 February 1985.

### Funding Priorities

Although the Foundation does not have a long funding history from which to determine explicit funding priorities, two general inclinations may be observed:

1. Stock and amateur productions of *The Threepenny Opera* and cabaret performances of Weill's songs probably do not need Foundation support.
2. Proposals for local productions or performances should demonstrate a previous record of artistic excellence, evidence of community support, and a potential for influence beyond the immediate area.

### Application Information

Preliminary applications for the 1985 awards must be received by 15 December 1985, and should contain the following information:

1. A detailed description of the project.
2. An up-to-date curriculum vita or resume for individuals; or a profile of purposes, activities, and past achievements of organizations.
3. An itemized statement of how the amount requested would be used.

All applications and correspondence should be addressed to: Mr. David Farneth, Director of Programs, Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, Inc., 142 West End Avenue, Suite 1-R, New York, New York 10023. Telephone: (212) 873-1465



# AROUND THE WORLD

## German Democratic Republic

By Jürgen Schebera

Let me begin this informal survey by reporting on some of the "Weill-marks" in the G.D.R. Dessau was almost totally destroyed in World War II and therefore most of the Jewish quarter was lost, including Weill's birthplace (Leipziger Strasse No. 59), the synagogue, Weill's father's house (Steinstrasse 11-14), Weill's school (Fridericianum), and the palace of the Count of Anhalt. Only the former Friedrichstheater, now known as Landestheater Dessau, has survived, and you can still imagine the importance of this "Northern Bayreuth" as you stand in front of its imposing façade. In 1968, the city council of Dessau named a street after Kurt Weill and it is, to the best of my knowledge, the only "Kurt Weill Street" in the world today.

In Berlin, the former Theater am Schiffbauerdamm (home of the triumphant premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper*) is now the world famous Brecht theater, Berliner Ensemble. In the suburbs of Berlin you can find Georg Kaiser's house in Grünheide, (Waldeck No. 7), and the house in Kleinmachow which Weill bought with earnings from *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Käthe-Kollwitz-Strasse 7, formerly Wissmannstrasse). Both houses display commemorative plaques which pay tribute to their celebrated inhabitants of the past.

In Leipzig, many important landmarks also fell victim to the war. The Neues Theater (Where *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* were staged for the first time) and the dramatic play house Altes Theater (where *Der Silbersee* premiered) are lost, as well as the Jewish orphanage which Weill's father directed from 1921 (Pontiatowskistrasse No. 12).

### Major Performances

Weill's European works are often performed in this country but his American works remain virtually undiscovered. There are quite naturally, many productions of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in various theaters ranging from the Berliner Ensemble to small provincial theaters. In the last five years, productions have been mounted in Leipzig, Dessau, Greifswald, Bautzen and Altenburg. Schwerin and Karl-Marx-Stadt (formerly Chemnitz) have announced new productions for the fall of 1984. Berlin's Komische Oper staged a fascinating production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, directed by Joachim Herz (who had previously staged it in Leipzig in 1967), conducted by Robert Hanell, and featuring Tamara Lund as Jenny. This production was in repertory for five years and had 78 performances between 1977 and 1982. *Der Zar lässt*

*sich photographieren* was staged at the Staatsoper Berlin in 1977, billed together with two other modern operas: *Rufen Sie Herrn Plim* by Spoliansky and Hindemith's *Hin und zurück*. The production was revived every season until 1981 and reached 42 performances. For the first time in this country, theaters in Karl-Marx-Stadt and Gera (where Maurice Abravanel was conductor until 1933) have announced productions of *Der Silbersee* for 1984. Some important productions of *Die sieben Todsünden* were staged following Gisela May's 1967 recording: 1972 at the Berlin Staatsoper and in 1974 at the Landesbühnen Dresden. Naturally Weill's theater songs are often performed in all Brecht Recitals by Gisela May, Ekkehard Schall and Roswitha Trexler, among others.

### Concert Performance

Concert performances of *Der Jasager* and *Der Lindberghflug* were initiated by the Radio Orchestra Leipzig and the University Chorus Leipzig in 1978. When the new Leipzig Gewandhaus was opened in 1981, one of the first concerts featured *Das Berliner Requiem* with Orff's *Carmina burana* in an excellent performance with the University Chorus conducted by Max Pommer. On the occasion of Weill's 80th birthday, the Berlin Staatsoper presented an all-Weill concert with "Three Pieces from *Der Silbersee*," *Vom Tod im Wald* and *Der neue Orpheus*. At the same time the Berliner Rundfunk produced *Frauentanz*, the *Divertimento* and the String Quartet in b-minor. The last three years have also seen a few special radio programs on Weill: a four-part biographical program written by Jürgen Schebera, and a special program on Weill and the radio written by Stefan Amzoll. Lenya's recordings continue to be aired on major radio stations throughout the country.

Finally, there have been two television productions in recent years. Manfred Wekwerth, director of the Berliner Ensemble, produced a production of *Happy End* for the GDR-television in 1976. In 1981, the television also released the Komische Oper production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* directed by Joachim Herz.

When 1985 brings the celebration of Kurt Weill's 85th birthday, we look forward to many new performances. In addition, our national library, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek Berlin, will present a large exhibition entitled: "Kurt Weill: Leben und Werk" in March. The exhibition will feature a representative survey including photos, documents, music and recordings.

## Sinatra and King Kurt Record "Mack the Knife"

New albums by Frank Sinatra and the British punk band King Kurt offer novel interpretations of "Mack the Knife."

Sinatra's album, "LA Is My Lady" (Qwest 25145-1), aims at a more youthful audience than has been the singer's custom. MTV, the rock music television channel, regularly features a star-studded video of the title track; the album's producer, Quincy Jones, is a fixture in the popular music industry, having tailored hits for Michael Jackson, among others. Sinatra lends some of his own improvised lyrics to "Mack the Knife," for a jazzy, upbeat effect.

King Kurt's Stiff Records release (Stiff SEEZ 52) has taken "Mack the Knife" to the top of the British pop charts for the sixth time, according to press reports, and the album is now available in some U.S. stores. The group takes a fairly lighthearted approach to punk (lead singer Kurt sports Lederhosen and an upright coiffe), and it's not known if the group's name is an homage to Weill.

## FROM THE EDITOR

The Newsletter provides an open forum wherein interested readers may express a variety of ideas and opinions. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the Foundation's official viewpoint and the Editor welcomes the opportunity to publish opposing points of view. We encourage the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for inclusion in future issues. Letters to the Editor are also welcomed. The submission deadline for the next issue is 15 February 1985.

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# Life's "Progress": *Love Life* Revisited

By Charles Willard

In 1947 Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner collaborated on "A Dish for the Gods," a vehicle intended for Gertrude Lawrence. A year later, it became *Love Life*, a Broadway musical. Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton starred in the production which was directed by Elia Kazan, choreographed by Michael Kidd, and designed by Boris Aronson. Produced by Cheryl Crawford, it played for 252 performances at the 46th Street Theater.

I introduce this article as baldly as I do because relatively little is known about this work. Certainly the record is more complete on *One Touch of Venus* (1943) which, in addition to its recently anthologized text [Stanley Richards, ed. *Great Musicals of the American Theatre*, vol. 1 (Radnor, Pa.: Chilton, 1973)] and its reissued cast album [AEI 1136], receives generous space in a quartet of autobiographies by ladies of the theater no less luminous than Mary Martin, Agnes de Mille, Sono Osato, and Miss Crawford. These fascinating reflections of precisely the same saga intertwine in a kind of joyful *Rashomon* that greatly enriches one's appreciation of *Venus* as a superbly crafted musical comedy.

Even though *Love Life* was a major production (forcing *Death of a Salesman* to postpone rehearsals in order to accommodate Kazan's wish to do the new Weill-Lerner work), mounted every bit as prestigiously as *Venus* or *Lady in the Dark* (1941), no such record remains. It receives a single—if perceptive—paragraph in Crawford's memoirs and one terse sentence in Lerner's. Most of us can place three of Weill's popular standards, "Here I'll Stay," "Mister Right," and "Green-up Time," with this score. But how many other song titles can you recall? And actual melodies? What about the narrative line—care to take a stab at that? It is hardly surprising if your knowledge of *Love Life* is scant, because the afterlife of this show—that network of recordings, tours, stock productions that truly imprints most musicals on the public consciousness—simply never happened for *Love Life*. There was no tour, no London production, no movie; the stock and amateur rights went uncanceled, and the libretto was never published, not even in *Theatre Arts*.

But more than any of these ill fortunes, what cast *Love Life* into obscurity was the fact that the superior Weill/Lerner score was never recorded, due to the prolonged ASCAP strike of 1948, during which ASCAP members sat on all recording rights. Thereby, *Love Life* was deprived of the chance to enjoy, at the very least, the status of a cult musical. For while it is true that *Love Life* achieved only modest Broadway success, many considerably less successful—and certainly less note-

worthy—musicals have lived on in a glow of wider appreciation simply by virtue of their original cast albums.

Indeed, the cast recording is at the root of the entire cult musical phenomenon. No matter how grim the failure—200 performances, 80 performances, 9 performances—a musical with a provocative collection of songs enticingly packaged in an album with production photographs and generous liner notes will soon develop an almost mythic reputation. Indeed the grimmer the failure ("bigger" names, shorter run), the more grandiose the cult—which then inflates beyond usefulness any sense of the true merits of the work. And woe to those perennial re-producers of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *House of Flowers*, and *Anyone Can Whistle*, just three of those musicals whose albums of fine songs have created the mistaken impression that the shows in which they are entwined are unappreciated, workable gems.

*Love Life*, I hasten to add, is not such an artifact. Although it does have problems of its own, these are related more to its time than its techniques or, more precisely, the timing of its techniques.

## Tainted Americana

In the heady rush of optimism and confidence that swept over post-war America, the Americana musical, which Rodgers and Hammerstein had patented during the war with the highly chauvinistic *Oklahoma!* (the exclamation point in the title is as significant to an understanding of the cultural phenomenon of *Oklahoma!* as anything in the text itself), became all the rage, holding, as popular entertainments do, a mirror up to a national sensibility swollen with patriotism.

Such musicals were essentially Currier and Ives lithographs embellished with all the pretty colors and conceits of the musical stage: lilting melody and jazzy rhythm, graceful ballet and fancy hoofing, easy humor, warm sentiments, handsome people, extravagant period costumes, and lavishly painted picture-postcard drops. These musicals earnestly reflected a nation prideful of a victory that was nothing less than the natural outcome of a glorious past. That past could now be celebrated with the same gusto that enlivened the present and fired belief in the future. If *Annie Get Your Gun* could make something swell and boisterous out of a somewhat questionable exploitation of the Old West, then *Bloomer Girl* could certainly concoct something sweetly nostalgic from the American Civil War. Is it any wonder then, that at the end of the decade a rather modest new musical could ride higher than the rest on its depiction of the recent war

in the South Pacific as one great and grand romantic adventure?

*Love Life* certainly may have looked as if it were cut from this same voguish cloth. Its opening scene depicts a perfect American idyll crammed with music which could underscore any Currier and Ives print, the brimming confidence of "My Name Is Samuel Cooper" followed at once by Weill's caressing melody, bringing comforting assurance to the lyric of "Here I'll Stay":

For that land is a sandy illusion  
It's the theme of a dream gone astray  
And the world others woo  
I can find loving you  
So here I'll stay

But soon the colors darken, the insinuating tones of "Progress" drift into the orchestration, the painted drop of the first scene returns, belching factories now cover the Connecticut greens and glades. The flags slip to half-mast and it becomes apparent that, although Weill and Lerner may be trading in Americana, they do not intend to glory in it. By the time we have heard "Economics," "Women's Club Blues," "Is It Him or Me?," met the Hobo and Mr. Cynic, and watched a major ballet called "Punch and Judy Get a Divorce," we are drinking from a very different cup of tea, more Edward Hopper than Currier and Ives. *Love Life*'s stars may have come over from *High Button Shoes* and *Annie Get Your Gun* and it may have its cheery springtime echoes of *Carousel* ("Green-Up Time"), but *Love Life* is absolutely none of the above. Indeed by their own admission (Mr. Lerner in *The New York Times* [7 October 1948]), the authors sought to illuminate the "decline of American homelife in the past century or so and the resultant unhappiness and confusions of the average family." Does this sound like popular post-war America, those Baby Boom days that Norman Rockwell brought home to us every week on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*?

## Conceptual Innovation

I would be the first to move that the phrase "ahead of its time" be struck from the lexicon of acceptable critical terminology. Far too often the critical community offers this shopworn catch-all as a nod of appreciation to deficient works which belong to the oeuvre of artists who have moved up to the heights of acceptance and acclaim. And so one finds outright failures graciously excused with the proclamation that they were ahead of their respective times. More often than not, they were not ahead of anything, just plain, old-fashioned "no good."

Having set this down, let me move boldly to claim that Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner's *Love Life* was quite literally ahead of its time. The dark colors and bitter tonalities of *Love*

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*Life* are not rooted in character or heavy-footed narrative, but in the actual theatrical scheme by which the show makes its way across the stage. The technique that Weill and Lerner pioneered to shape their concept featured for the first time what has come to be known as the *comment song*: musical sequences, vocal or choreographic, which do not advance action or express character directly (as per the dictum of the Rodgers and Hammerstein "integrated" musical), but comment from odd angles to create a musical profile having more to do with tone and point than emotion and character. This technique has now, of course, become part and parcel of contemporary musical comedy and practiced by such conceptualists as Stephen Sondheim, Harold Prince, and Bob Fosse.

But in 1948 this was an innovation. Writing about the show during its Boston tryout [*Boston Post*, 19 September 1948], a somewhat awed Eliot Norton proclaimed that:

Only a young man could have written *Love Life*. An old fellow of 30 would have swooned away at the very thought of a musical play which dramatizes the American dream of romance from 1791 to the present...and if you told him it must all be done gaily in a series of vaudeville turns from magicians to minstrels, he would have cried, "Hold, enough!"...Alan Jay Lerner is only 29 and that makes all the difference in the world...to aid in the execution he has composer Kurt Weill whose mind is young though his talents are mature and director Elia Kazan, an old codger of 36, who understands youth and appreciates talent.

Indeed so innovative were the methods of *Love Life* that its youthful craftsmen felt obliged to package their invention with precise instructions and to include on the title page of all programs a careful note of explanation, not usually found in musical comedies. In Boston that note read:

*Love Life* is a vaudeville. It is presented in two parts, each consisting of a series of acts. The sketches, which start in 1791 and come up to the present day, are presented in the physical style of the various periods. The vaudeville acts which come between each sketch are presented before a vaudeville drop and are styled and costumed in a set vaudeville pattern.

By the time the show arrived in New York, the note had been expanded to include the following: "The four main characters, Susan and Sam Cooper, and their children Johnny and Elizabeth, who present the story, do not change in appearance as the time moves on." Clearly, in dealing with new machinery, one could not be too careful.

What remained unexplained were the effects created by this new technique of musical dramaturgy. For in intercutting traditional scenes with vaudeville comments, the authors brazenly short-circuited the foursquare energies of the Americana musical. They offered instead a crosspatch of electrical energies that were acerbic and dry, cool, and satirical. These methods placed detached observation before heartfelt involvement and mocking humor before the rushes of sentiment that the

Rodgers and Hammerstein methods so handily supplied. The comment song by its very nature is analytical, introspective, and distanced, and *Love Life*, with its two-part score shrewdly finding precisely these tonalities, emerged as no valentine to the institution of marriage or to American values at large. On those terms alone, it was a truly modern work.

### Fractured Ideals

The critical comments were predominantly love songs for the originality of Lerner and Weill's technique, counterpointed in some quarters by disaffection for the intellectual coolness it produced. Brooks Atkinson, however, found little to love even in the authors' innovations. Aside from positive comments about the music, he told readers of *The New York Times* [8 October 1948] that the show was not only "joyless, a general gripe masquerading as entertainment," but also that its self-styled vaudeville was a "pose" because "Vaudeville is not pale and wan but hearty." Clearly the colors of *Love Life* did not match Mr. Atkinson's rose-tinted views of American love-life circa 1948.

Nor, as it turned out, did they match the public's perceptions. After an initial rush of solid attendance, audiences dwindled sharply and the show's 252-performance run fell far short of early expectations. Theater-goers apparently did not take to having their ideals fractured, their institutions sniped at, their belief in "Progress" and "Mister Right" questioned. In 1948 the possibility of "Mister Right" was no illusion to be pursued haplessly for 150 years. Indeed, not two blocks and six months from *Love Life* audiences could see exactly such a "Wonderful Guy" easily won by a knucklehead named Nellie Forbush: all it took was a good heart and a willingness to do a little growing up.

But if *Love Life* failed to reach the American sensibility circa 1948, it was only a matter of time before a connection would be made. Not surprisingly, when the upheavals of the 1960s unraveled the national fiber on just about every front, the popular musical stage brought forth a number of extravagantly praised works that capitalized on the techniques pioneered in *Love Life* and featured many of its same conceits. Gymnastic displays of fractured American dreams now flew high on glistening sinews of irony and ambiguity; vaults of angst and cynicism hit self-absorbed audiences where they lived. The irony here is that the work that traded in *Love Life*'s techniques with the most assured hand was the Sondheim/Prince collaboration *Company*, also a distinctly unsentimental exploration of marriage.

And so the question lingers: would *Love Life*, if offered today alongside the works whose techniques it pioneered, finally achieve a greater measure of critical and popular acclaim than it did nearly four decades ago? Tough to say, but without adjustments, probably not. Time has not only caught up with *Love Life*, it has passed it by, leaving it shy of freshness and urgency. I suspect, at least on the commercial stage. Yes, there is a bit of paradox at work here: *Love Life* is one of those musicals that invest absolutely everything in

technique—witness a kind of Platonic dialogue the authors conducted in *The New York Times* [3 October 1948] as a pre-opening feature—at the considerable expense of character. *Love Life* is truly about getting itself told, more about the theater as theater than it is about Sam and Susan Cooper. And since what lasts in the theater, what truly endures, is character, that's an unlucky spot for *Love Life* to be in. Writing in retrospect, producer Cheryl Crawford echoed this truth: "Its theme was fresh, the form unusual...but it had no heart, no passion. The audience could not get emotionally involved with the marital problems of the couple." And technique by itself, unharnessed from the service of character, can only drive a show so long as it is fresh; once imitated or simply employed elsewhere, its strength is greatly reduced.

### The Missing Link

*Love Life*'s technique and conjoined conceits have certainly been employed elsewhere. The comment song was exploited with notable effect in *Cabaret*, *Company*, and a host of lesser works. *Hallelujah, Baby!* marched a couple blissfully free from the restraints of aging through a hundred-year cavalcade of Black America; the exorcism sequence set to a quartet of Ziegfeld-esque routines climaxing no less a work than *Follies* perhaps owes not a little something to the minstrel show exorcism that brings the Coopers face to face with their illusions at the eleventh hour of *Love Life*. As for the vaudeville frames, *Chicago* set them to the task of its even darker social commentary. No doubt about it, *Love Life* has been done and done again, which would not affect the work's durability a whit if only the character of Sam and Susan were a bit more substantial. Despite the richness of "This Is the Life," "Is It Him Or Me?" and the lovely "I Remember It Well," the Coopers stubbornly remain at the service of the concept, never quite coming into focus as people we can care about.

A comfortable claim can certainly be made that *Love Life* is a vastly important artifact of the American musical theater, indeed the "missing link" in the evolution of the modern concept musical. Moreover, it is clear that its stagecraft was valid, workable theatrical machinery, only awaiting a time when it was at one with the popular audience's self-perceptions. Even now, in text, the show projects a sharp contemporary texture. But even with these acknowledgements, as heady as they may sound, *Love Life* would emerge on the stage today, I suspect, a work on which, ironically, "Progress" has played a few of its own tricks. Irony itself.

Is there a possible fix, a way to invest the show with additional character? Perhaps the vaudeville/comment sequences could be gathered around a character, a kind of "Mr. Progress" figure. The Coopers might then seem to do battle with a presence, something of human dimension, thereby sparking the fires of emotional involvement that only blaze in the theater when character meets character. In short, such an adjustment would make precisely the advance that *Cabaret* made over

*Continued on page 8*

# Nor In the Singer Let the Song Be Lost

By Michael Morley



MADISON

Some twenty years ago one might have found two types of Weill singers: those with both feet in the Brechtian camp and those with their feet on Broadway and their hearts and voices in Musical-or Cabaret-land. (Lenya, of course, was a special case, combining as she did stylistic elements from both worlds.) Nowadays the range is more international, and the musical approaches are at times an uneasy mixture of the New World and the Old. Gisela May, for example, was trained as an actress and her performances of Weill are very much in the Berliner Ensemble vein; direct, no-nonsense, even aggressive. Robyn Archer, on the other hand, had a considerable career as a rock and country-western performer in Aus-

tralia when she first turned to Weill's songs, and her familiarity with the more popular forms has left its mark on her approach to Weill's music. And the performances of the Italians, Milva and Laura Betti, swing from the smoky intimacy of the cabaret to the declamation of the political platform. In a very real sense, each of these approaches is partly suitable for some of Weill's theater songs, but none is by itself wholly appropriate.

Too often the cabaret/theatrical approach leads to an over-stressing of the text's formulations at the expense of the music's own, less obvious emphases. Any performance of Weill's songs which ignores the notes and delivers the text as a type of *Sprechgesang* against a distant, often doctored, orchestral obligato will always miss the irony which is so crucial to the balance of words and music in the settings and will disregard the dialectic of tough text and seductive strains. Yet is this not the established and sanctioned Brechtian style where the word takes primacy over all else?

It is high time this particular chestnut was consigned to the flames once and for all. First of all, the Song-style itself is only one component in Weill's musical array, and singing actors the appropriate performers for a very limited portion of the Brecht-Weill repertory. Of course Brecht insisted on the audibility and intelligibility of the text; of course he demanded that the music's shape follow the flow and stress patterns of the text, not vice versa. But the Good Brechtian Seal of Approval should no longer be reserved for and stamped on all those renditions of pieces from the Brecht/Weill repertory which sound as if the performer needs either a radar set to find the melody or a remedial course in voice production. It is false historically and aesthetically to seek to justify musical inadequacies by referring to some mythical imprimature of Brecht's for unmusical singing. One has only to listen to his own rendition of two songs from *The Threepenny Opera* to realize that though he would not win any competition with McCormack or Josef Schmidt for Golden Voice of the Century, he does pay close attention to note values, melody, and musical as well as textual phrasing. And although many of the original performers had a background in cabaret and popular performance, some were also skilled performers in operetta and related forms of popular musical theater. In 1928 "singing actors" were considerably more skilled in *singing* than their present-day counterparts.

## Diva

If singers from the theatrical side of the tracks leave themselves open to criticism for a sometimes cavalier and approximate attitude to the music, those with operatic or classical training often display different yet equally dis-

turbing flaws. Shakespeare might well have been thinking of them when in *As You Like It* he has Jaques observe, "I can suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs." (For "melancholy" read "joy," "expressiveness," "sweetness," or whatever.) Even Teresa Stratas, for all the persuasiveness of her advocacy on *The Unknown Kurt Weill*, does not entirely avoid the implications of Shakespeare's words, although she goes further than many a singer one might name in eschewing the Voice Beautiful in favor of the Song Sensible. Occasionally however, she vocalizes more than the simplicity of the vocal line might suggest, and a slight tendency to over-emote (as in "Nanna's Lied" and "Wie Lange Noch") suggests the world of Puccini rather than that of the Weill who is here hovering between the French cabaret and the German Lied. But these are minor criticisms. Compared with, for example, two other classically-trained sopranos—Elise Ross (*Seven Deadly Sins*) and Meriel Dickinson (on the DGG set), Stratas' textual clarity and fidelity to the music are admirable.

Perhaps the major disappointment of the recent Weill recordings is the EMI version of *The Seven Deadly Sins*. The quartet of men acquit themselves well, and Simon Rattle's shaping of the rhythms and attention to textures suggest a sensitive hand. But Elise Ross, though she sings the numbers at the correct pitch, sounds uncomfortable and often forced, with the textual nuances lost because of clouded delivery. Even though Gisela May's recording for Eterna shows its age in places and is, of course, transposed down throughout, she is more in command of both text and music than Ms. Ross.

## Disease

But with May, the "Socialist Nightingale" as she is sometimes known, we are a long way from the world of sound of the previous performers. If they might be said to approach Weill's music from the "higher" levels of musical culture, May comes to it from the "lower," more popular, more immediately and openly theatrical. The classically-trained singer's tendencies to linger on notes or to seek to emphasize nuances of meaning through vibrato vowels and discarded consonants are not for her. Like all the adherents of a Brechtian or Berliner Ensemble house-style, she delivers the text so directly, with such clearly enunciated consonants, that one might almost take dictation from her delivery.

And yet...and yet. Or, as *Mahagonny* puts it, "Aber etwas fehlt."

The earlier reference to a Berliner Ensemble house-style is not arbitrary. What was

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once a departure from and a reaction against conventional cabaret-type performance and the crooning of songs through a haze of smoke and sentimentality has now become "the accepted mode of discourse." One has only to look at the record sleeves—not only of May's recordings, but also those of Archer, Betti, and Milva—to find that the images are there to help us judge the book by its cover. What do we see? Black leather (jackets, not underwear) (May); a deliberately androgynous mannequin in top hat and tails, with Brecht in black leather for good measure (Archer); a head shot of a performer with eyes in shadow against an austere black background (Betti); a black-clad vamp astride a suitcase, aggressively presenting two reasonable lengths of thigh to the viewer (Milva); Brecht's name in large capital letters on a black background over a scene depicting episodes from "Seeräuber-Jenny" in a style combining *Alice in Wonderland* with Bosch and Grosz (Sonja Kehler). The style in all these cases may well be the woman, but is it the composer?

Although it may sound heretical to some Brechtians, I must confess that after listening *en bloc* to these emphatic and direct ladies, I began to long for a little subtlety, an ability to use the text as a scalpel rather than a broadsword, a departure from the frontal address to the listener which all too readily slides into an ossified pattern of hectoring and aggressive insistence. It may seem odd in this context to quote Wagner, but one of his observations on performance sprang to mind: "A singer who is not able to recite his part according to the intention of the poet cannot possibly sing it according to the intention of the composer." Too often it sounds as if each of these singers, in their different ways, has decided in advance that the text must be *declaimed* in a style which combines blank objectivity with an insistent challenge to the listener; and too often, the objectivity slides into facelessness, the challenge into empty aggressiveness.

This is not to say that individual numbers do not come off well: Archer's "Epitaph 1919" with its beautifully shaped instrumental accompaniment nearly catches both the song's elegiac and cautionary mood. So too, Milva's rendition of the "Tango-Ballade" allows the ironic nostalgia in the music to color the dialogue between the two partners as they view the past through black-tinted spectacles. Laura Betti's choice of Weill's Broadway songs is praiseworthy and her singing persuasive; but there are also moments—especially in "September Song"—when the overall effect is odd to say the least: a little like a Mafioso moll seeking to get the lead in a show by making the Broadway producer an offer he daren't refuse.

There is a similar unevenness about Sonja Kehler's interpretations of Weill's songs: for example, in the case of "Bilbao Song," it's as if it's being sung by a barmaid who has a nodding acquaintance with a downmarket German equivalent of Bette Midler. Weill's careful musical pointing of the text is here nullified by an expanded dance-band-derived accompaniment which is itself blousy and coarse without the necessary humor or sharpness.

This is a real problem in performances of Weill and clearly relates to the tough, female-macho (facho?) mien of some of the performers. After all, you can't really sing Weill's songs in their original higher keys if you cultivate a manner of leather and leaden impassivity. Toughness, especially if it hovers around middle C, with a top note of A a sixth above and an occasional dark bottom E, sounds more convincing in a higher key which makes more demands on the singer's vocal flexibility.

Although Weill, in his Broadway period, was prepared to transpose his songs to suit a performer's vocal timbre, surely he would have hesitated before approving the practices of Gisela May, who often sings his numbers a sixth below their true pitch, and Sonja Kehler (sometimes as much as an octave below). Such transpositions inevitably cloud the musical texture and obscure the relationship between melody and accompaniment; the voice hangs heavy or plods along underneath the accompaniment instead of floating on top of it. This practice too frequently goes hand in hand with an interpretative approach which accepts the primacy of the message over the musical vehicle for conveying it, instead of insisting on the interdependence of the two. Taken to its logical conclusion, it leads to a semi-rhythmical speaking of the verses over an instrumental accompaniment which often highlights the melody as well. This surely cannot be what Weill or Brecht envisioned.

#### Early Models

So, in Roy Campbell's words, "Where's the bloody horse?" For a start, performers contemplating singing Weill might well go back to the early *Dreigroschenoper* recording and the Pabst film just to rinse out their ears. What strikes one most of all about the young Lenya's rendition of "Seeräuber Jenny," for example, is its lightness, its deftness, its grace. Odd terms perhaps, but instead of the unrelieved somberness of so many renditions of the song, we have here an interpretation which accentuates the youthful, almost fairy-tale optimism of the "they'll get their comeuppance one day." Listen to how she sings the refrain: the first two times almost crisply and matter-of-factly, with a slight portamento, the last time legato with the notes held to their full value. The effect is one of innocent, *not* knowing menace, and all the more disturbing for that. The voice itself recedes with the ship as it sails off towards an ambiguous, even negative, Utopia, and, like the Song of the Sirens, invites the listener along for the trip.

This is a long way from all those performers who deliver it as a throaty and guttural statement of intent and attack on anything appropriate—society, male chauvinism, exploitation of the working class, etc. And singers who feel that a totally dispassionate, undifferentiated and untheatrical delivery of the songs is a *sine qua non* for the conveying of their message should listen again to Ernst Busch's ballad singer in the film, Brecht's own rendition of "Mackie Messer," and Erich Pontow's wonderfully blasé and world-weary Peacum who combines the toughness of the performer with the engaging cynicism of the

character in his rendition of "Das Lied von der Unzulänglichkeit menschlichen Strebens."

If, however, one moves to the present, where should one look for possible alternatives and models? Well, not, I would suggest, in Sarah Walker's rather arch drawing room versions of the Auden/Britten cabaret songs. To these she brings all the vocal equipment of a fine singer but little of the personality and theatrical immediacy the songs demand. Every nuance of phrasing is realized, every note examined for its potential yield, and yet along the way the songs get lost. Weill's European theater songs call for a clear voice with character and color, well focused and preferably without a wide vibrato. Clear diction is important, as is a feel for the cadences of speech, and the singer should sing when necessary and tell the story when the song calls for it. Above all, the need to project character and personality through the song should not prompt the performer to overblown characterizations where the music is milked or the words wrung for every last drop of significance.

Are such requirements too difficult? Where are the singers who might fill them? Well, I would suggest that Roberta Alexander, for one, comes close. In her recent recording of some Charles Ives' songs, she displays all the above qualities as well as a clear understanding of the implications of Ives' subtitle to his song "In the Alley": "After a session at Poli's—not sung by Caruso, Jenny Lind, John McCormack, Harry Lauder, George Chappell or the Village Nightingale." It is hardly coincidental that she has an outstanding reputation in, and affinity for Mozart; for there too, less is often more—though it never means singing or playing only fifty per cent of the notes. The Weill who was such an admirer of Mozart's clarity and precision is surely entitled to expect something similar from performers of his songs. Such concerns, far from being equated with musical pedantry or academic over-scrupulousness, are simply an attention to the basics.

#### List of recordings

- Roberta Alexander. *Charles Ives Songs*. Etcetera 1020.
- Robyn Archer. *Robyn Archer sings Brecht*. EMI ASD 4166.
- Robyn Archer. *Robyn Archer sings Brecht, vol. 2*. EMI DS 38062.
- Laura Betti. *Kurt Weill 1933-50*. Orizzonte ORL 8020.
- Documente. *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Telefunken 6.41911 AJ.
- Sonja Kehler. *Brecht Portrait*. Wergo WER 60078.
- Gisela May. *Brecht/Weill*. Philips 843783 PY.
- Gisela May. *Die sieben Todsünden*. Eterna 825732; Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft DGG 139308.
- Milva. *Brecht, vol. 2* RCA PL 37423.
- Elise Ross. *The Seven Deadly Sins*. EMI ASD 4402; Angel DS-37981.
- Teresa Stratas. *The Unknown Kurt Weill*. Nonesuch D-79019.
- Sarah Walker. *Cabaret Songs*. Meridian E77056.

## Love Life, con't.

*Love Life* in the use of the vaudeville/comment technique.

### Pursuing the Dream

But the final irony of *Love Life* remains with Weill. From all accounts, Weill was immediately drawn to Lerner's idea, for it seemed to offer him at last the opportunity to compose a full-scale piece of Americana. This abiding, deeply felt ambition had some expression in *Knickerbocker Holiday*, the settings of the four Whitman poems, and for *Railroads on Parade*, but had remained frustrated since the *Ulysses Africanus* project failed to reach fruition. Lerner's concept sounded ideal. One wonders

if and when Weill realized that *Love Life* would result not so much in a slice of Americana served alongside, say, one of the great Rodgers and Hammerstein works, but in a kind of sliced Americana of a texture and taste that would not find its adherents for another two decades. It is interesting to watch him, in the adjoining Platonic dialogue, clinging a bit anxiously to the Americana colors of the work:

Man: Vaudeville?

Weill: Why not? If you want to tell an American story, isn't that the most typical form of American theatre?

Man: I suppose so.

Even though Weill finally got to see his notion

of a minstrel show reach the stage (minstrel show sequences had been outlined for *Ulysses* and actually completed for *Lady in the Dark*), I imagine *Love Life* left his passion for Americana still unsatisfied. Perhaps it was this frustration that eventually led him to that most American of American works, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. One has only to listen to the easy, joyful strains of *Huckleberry Finn*'s "Come in Mornin'" (actually a kind of companion piece to *Love Life*'s "My Kind of Night") to know that one has found a composer doing what, as far as his work in the Broadway musical is concerned, he did best: setting character and situation, time and place, to music of the heart.

## Collaborators Stage a Scene Aimed at Explaining Their Musical Play

By KURT WEILL and ALAN JAY LERNER

Composer and Librettist, respectively, of "*Love Life*"

SCENE: In front of the Shubert Theatre, Boston. Lerner and Weill are standing breathing in the morning air. A man comes by and stares at the theatre marquee.

MAN: Pardon me. Do either of you know anything about this show?

LERNER: Yes, we saw it in New Haven.

MAN: What is it? I am a little confused. It says here on the sign it's a vaudeville.

WEILL: That's right, it is.

MAN: You mean it has vaudeville acts?

WEILL: Lots of them.

MAN: That's fine. Then I don't have to worry about following a plot. That's a relief.

LERNER: No. There's a plot.

MAN: I thought you said it was a vaudeville.

LERNER: It's a vaudeville with a plot.

MAN: How does that work?

WEILL: Well, the sketches and the vaudeville acts have a continuity and supplement each other.

MAN: (Scratching his head) Did you understand?

WEILL: I did.

LERNER: So did I.

MAN: Well, I guess it must be a very simple story.

WEILL: It is. It not only tells the saga of 150 years of American home life but also the love life of two people and the gradual changing of their personalities as life becomes more complex.

LERNER: Not to mention the disintegration of their home until divorce separates them.

WEILL: You see, it's very simple.

MAN: What holds it together?

LERNER: Vaudeville.

MAN: Vaudeville?

WEILL: Why not? If you want to tell an American story, isn't that the most typical form of American theatre?

MAN: I suppose so.

LERNER: After the minstrel show, it certainly is the most native form.

WEILL: Isn't that true?

MAN: (His brow tightening) I suppose so.

WEILL: Is it all clear now?

MAN: No. Let me ask you something else. If the play goes over a 150 years, in what generation does Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton appear?

LERNER: In all of them.

MAN: You mean they live 150 years?

WEILL: That's right. And not only that, they don't grow any older.

MAN: But how is that possible?

LERNER: With vaudeville.

WEILL: Isn't that simple?

MAN: (Wiping his forehead) I don't know. Is it like a lot of little plays strung together?

WEILL: Not exactly. One sketch is a musical play, one is an American ballad, one is a straight comedy, one is satire, one is danced, one is musical comedy, one is dramatic. All different styles.

MAN: How do they all fit together?

LERNER: With vaudeville.

WEILL: Isn't that simple?

MAN: No. You mean it all has a form?

WEILL: Yes, in a formless way.

LERNER: That gives it a very real form.

MAN: Now, look. Wait just a minute. You say that there's a lot of vaudeville in the show. Is there a comedian?

LERNER: No. But there is a lot of comedy.

MAN: Is there a crooner?

WEILL: No. But there are a lot of songs the crooners will sing.

MAN: But no crooners? That's a promise?

LERNER: It's a guarantee. You see, singing is an integral part of the development of the nation. As the plot of the play progresses by way of words and scenes, the music, too, progresses through the ages, so that, at the beginning, there are tunes reminiscent of the folksy home life.

MAN: Dances, too, the square dance, etcetera?

LERNER: Yes, dances, too. Songs and dances.

Which change with the mood of the play, from the simplicity of 150 years ago, through the frenzy of the prohibition era and on into the frenetic and zany torchiness of today.

WEILL: Isn't that simple?

MAN: (Looking around wildly for a road to escape). I suppose so. But, anyway there are no comics and no crooners but there IS vaudeville.

LERNER: That's right.

MAN: For instance?

LERNER: There's a magician.

WEILL: And a trapeze artist.

LERNER: And a male quartet.

WEILL: And a female trio.

MAN: And all this has a plot?

WEILL: That's right.

MAN: And it is easy to follow?

WEILL: It was for us.

MAN: This I've got to see! (He walks to the window to buy a seat. Lerner and Weill shake hands and walk down the street.)

## ARCHIVES

### NYU Intern Program

Five students in the New York University Musical Theater Program are serving as interns in the Weill-Lenya Research Center. The program is being coordinated by Deena Rosenberg, Chairman, and Robert Chapel, Coordinating Director. Working in conjunction with the Foundation staff, Sarah Ackerman, David Fletcher, Erik Haagenen, Richard Isen, and Robert Lawson (Kurt Weill Fellow), will be preparing performance and demonstration materials for *Love Life* and *Firebrand of Florence*, assisting in the cataloging of recordings, and conducting Oral History interviews.

### New Acquisitions

Major acquisitions of the last several months include photocopies of Weill's manuscripts which are held by his publisher, Universal Edition of Vienna. The collection includes copies of 14 major works and five songs, including *Die Dreigroschenoper*, *Die Bürgschaft*, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, and *Der Silbersee*. The Research Center has also obtained photocopies of all correspondence between Weill and Universal Edition spanning the years between 1924 and 1950. The letters, which have never before been available in this country, probably provide the most valuable extant primary source material concerning Weill's life and work while in Germany.

Arrangements have been made to obtain copies of all materials related to Weill's American works from the Institute of the American Musical in Los Angeles. The Institute's holdings include a wide assortment of scripts, sheet music, recordings, playbills, production photos, reviews, movie cue sheets, radio broadcasts and films.

### Oral History

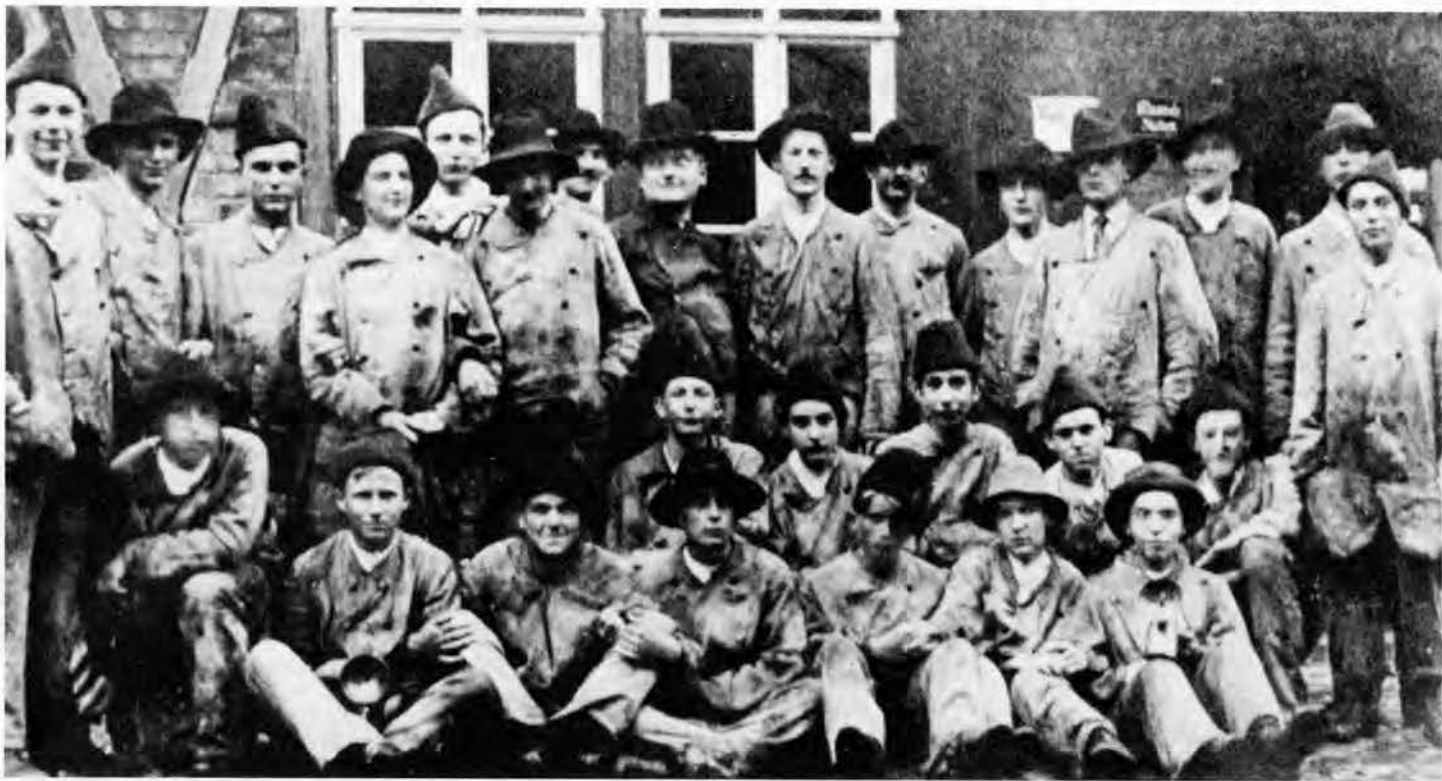
In August, Lys Symonette and David Farneth conducted an Oral History interview with Maurice Abravanel at the Tanglewood Festival, where Maestro Abravanel was in residence this summer. The first of a multipart interview was also conducted with Hanne Holesovsky, daughter of Weill's brother Hans. The program will be accelerated in the coming year and investigations are underway to determine the feasibility of videotaping selected interviews.

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# I REMEMBER

## Weill's Classmates Share Their Memories



Kurt Weill (lower right, front) and his classmates on a field trip to Anhaltian Salt Mines near Stassfurt, 1915.

### By Jürgen Schebera

After the March 1984 publication of his book *Kurt Weill: Leben und Werk* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1983), Jürgen Schebera received correspondence from two of Weill's high school classmates who still reside in Dessau. Dr. Schebera shares excerpts from his interviews with them:

#### *Dr. Willy Krueger, Chemist*

Our school was the Herzogliche Friedrich Oberrealschule, located in the Dessau Friedericianum. I attended classes with Kurt Weill from 1909 to 1917. He was a very talented boy, but he never pushed himself. He was satisfied with his class rank, which was usually between fourth and sixth in the class. Most of the boys played sports after school, but not Kurt. He would practice for hours at the piano or at the organ in his synagogue. Kurt was already a musical expert at school, and the music teacher, August Theile, quickly recognized his talent. I remember a school concert in 1916 when the choir sang some war choruses which Kurt had composed. His brother Nathan conducted.

In the 10th grade we all had to participate in public speaking (*Rede-Akt*) where we would address the class for about 30 minutes on a selected topic. Kurt chose to speak about the

composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Theile arranged for him to speak for a whole hour before the entire student body. Everyone was very impressed with Kurt's lecture and his performance of Mendelssohn's music at the piano. It was at this time, about 1916, that Kurt sent his first compositions to a music publisher in Leipzig. The publisher (I don't recall his name) responded that the music was very interesting but suggested that, because of his young age, it would be better to wait a few years before publication.

Kurt was also very knowledgeable on the subject of literature and knew most of the books in his father's library. One literature teacher was an avid collector of rare books and we used to encourage Kurt to divert the teacher's attention when we had a scheduled exam. When class began, Kurt would rise and innocently ask a question about rare editions. The teacher would launch into a long discussion with Kurt, and we didn't have to worry about the exam!

Sometimes Kurt would invite us to the synagogue and I remember spending many hours listening to him practice the organ. One visit in particular impressed me very much. We obtained permission to attend a Jewish festival, the *Laubhütten-fest* (Succoth). Another vivid impression I have is that of the entire Weill family together in one of Dessau's large parks. It was a very peaceful scene: the cantor—he always wore his hat—his wife, and four children walking and talking together.

#### *Dr. Max Spielmeyer, Physician*

Yes, it is true that Weill composed war choruses. As you know, World War I inspired a great nationalist wave in Germany. As boys of fourteen, we were strongly influenced by the surge and wanted to do anything we could to be involved. All of our studies in school were focused on nationalist themes. Everything German was emphasized: language, literature, art, and even nationalistic music. We were being prepared to serve the Emperor and the army.

We all joined the Dessauer Feldkorps, the German equivalent of the Boy Scouts. We were issued uniforms and assigned rankings such as *Hilfskornett* (Flag carrier), *Feldwart* (Field Lookout), and *Kundschafter* (scout). Kurt Weill was a *Kundschafter*. In addition to weekend exercises, we organized public evenings where we presented special sketches, songs, and recitations. In January of 1915, we held one of these programs at the Zentrale, a Dessau restaurant. Kurt Weill played the piano for one of the war songs "*Für uns*." This certainly must be one of the earliest programs to include the musician Weill.

In 1915 or 1916, the boys from our school had to join the army, and soon we received word that some of our schoolmates had been killed in action. At the school commemoration services, Kurt Weill usually spoke on behalf of the students. He always found the right words.

# NEW PUBLICATIONS

## ARTICLES

Corleoneis, Adrian. "Ferruccio Busoni: historia abscondita." *Fanfare* (January-February 1984): 90-116.

Kowalke, Kim. "Kurt Weill's First Stage." *Keynote* (August 1984) 6-13.

Rorem, Ned. "Notes on Weill." *Opera News* (21 January 1984): 12-19.

## BOOKS

Drew, David. *A Kurt Weill Handbook*. London: Faber & Faber, [Forthcoming in 1985].

Jarman, Douglas. *Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Biography*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983 [Citation for American publisher omitted in last issue].

Nesnow, Adrienne, comp. *Register of the Weill/Lenya Papers*. New Haven: Yale University Music Library, [Forthcoming in December 1984].

## RECORDINGS

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. (Album title: "Music from Berlin in the 1920's".) Canadian Chamber Ensemble; Raffi Armenian, conductor. (CBC SM 5010, half speed mastered).

*Lady in the Dark*. Gertrude Lawrence, MacDonald Carey, with supporting cast. (AEI 1146, mono). [Theater Guild of the Air, 1950].

*Die sieben Todsünden*. Milva; Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin; Bruno Weil, conductor. (Metronome 0060.558, stereo).

*String Quartet in B minor. String Quartet No. 1, Op. 8*. Sequoia String Quartet. (Nonesuch 79071, digital).

*Robyn Archer sings Brecht, Vol. II*. Robyn Archer, voice; London Sinfonietta; Dominic Muldowney, conductor. (EMI DS 38062, digital).

*Mack the Knife and Other Berlin Theatre Songs of Kurt Weill*. Sextet of Orchestra U.S.A. (European reissue; RCA PL 42413).

*L.A. Is My Lady*. Frank Sinatra with Quincy Jones and orchestra. (Qwest 25145-1). [Includes "Mack the Knife"]

*Ooh Wallah Wallah*. King Kurt. (Stiff Records SEEZ 52, stereo). [Includes "Mack the Knife"]

*Two to Tango; The Tango Project II*. William Schimmel, accordion; Michael Sahl, piano; Stan Kurtis, piano. (Nonesuch 79057, digital). [Includes "Matrosenlied" from *Happy End*]

## RESEARCH

Huber, Eugene R. "Stephen Sondheim and Harold Prince: The Development of the Concept Musical." Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, [In progress].

Hinton, Stephen. "The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik: A Study of Musical Aesthetics in the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) with Particular Reference to the Works of Paul Hindemith." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1984.

Schilling, Taro. "Kurt Weill und seine beiden Sinfonien: Ihr Charakter als Selbsterkenntnis und Zeitdokument." Ph.D. dissertation, Universität Köln. [In progress as of 1982].

Lecture: John Fuegi will deliver a lecture on the contractual arrangements between Brecht and Weill in Berlin at the Brecht-Zentrum, October 1984.

Lecture: Gottfried Wagner will deliver two lectures at the *Brecht sulla Scena* conference in Bergamo, Italy in February 1985. The first will be on Kurt Weill and the second on the relationship between Brecht and Weill.

## SCORES

Hennenberg, Fritz, ed. *Das grosse Brecht-Liederbuch*. 3 vols. Berlin: Henschelverlag; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984.

*One Touch of Venus*. New York: TRO. [Vocal selections forthcoming in December, 1984. Distributed by Songways Service, 170 NE 33rd St., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33334; \$6.95 + \$1.00 handling].

*Berlin to Broadway*. New York: Hal Leonard. [Collection of popular Weill songs forthcoming in December, 1984. Hal Leonard Publishing Corp., 8112 West Bluemound Rd., Milwaukee, WI 53213].

*Threepenny Opera*. English Adaptation by Marc Blitzstein. New York: Warner Bros. [Forthcoming in December, 1984. First collection with English lyrics].

*Ho, Billy, O!* [Madrigal from *Love Life* S.A.T.B. with divisi]. New York: TRO, 1984. [Distributed by Songways Service, 170 NE 33rd St., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33334].

## WNCN Spotlights Weill

WNCN-FM, a New York City radio station specializing in "concert music," featured the work of Kurt Weill in its programming for the month of August. *Keynote*, the station's monthly magazine, devoted its cover and lead story to Weill with "Kurt Weill's First Stage," an article by Kim H. Kowalke, President of the Weill Foundation, and a generous sampling of photographs of the composer and his family.

## Yale Displays Manuscripts

Yale University's Music Library displayed a selection of papers from the Weill/Lenya Archive at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library from 30 May to 16 September 1984. Entitled "Melodious Tears," the exhibit occupied twenty cases and offered a wide selection of holograph music, librettos, correspondence, photographs, programs, and memorabilia. The curators, Harold Samuel,

Victor Cardell and Adrienne Nesnow, arranged the materials chronologically, to allow viewers an opportunity to reconstruct a comprehensive view of the lives and careers of Weill and Lenya. Museum personnel report that the exhibit has been one of the most popular ever presented at Beinecke.



## "Sprechen Sie Brecht" or "Singen Sie Weill"

By Lys Symonette

This past July, the White Barn Theatre in Westport, Connecticut, presented an evening of cabaret entitled *Sprechen Sie Brecht*. Ironically, given the title, Brecht's poetry and dialogue are supplemented only by music of Kurt Weill, omitting the Dessau and Eisler settings that might indeed have been appropriately subsumed under the title. The lion's share of the evening was given over to the best known songs from *Threepenny Opera* and *Happy End*, with "The Soldier's Wife" and "Nannas Lied" (the latter sung-spoken by a male dancer!) thrown in for good measure.

Notwithstanding the fact that Weill never wrote a single note expressly for a German cabaret, presentations such as *Sprechen Sie Brecht* are constantly being patched together. Like Ole Man River, they just keep rolling along—ever since *Brecht on Brecht* achieved success at the Theatre de Lys in the Sixties. But it has been rare for any of these "paste-up jobs" to achieve a theatrical impact commensurate with the raw materials themselves. Sadly, *Sprechen Sie Brecht* reflected the lower end of these efforts: performers unable to deal with the demands of the material, embarrassing musical renditions, worn-out staging clichés, and no overall conceptual thread.

The poet usually fares better than the composer in such a context since words badly spoken can seldom be as painful as songs badly sung.

Revue such as *Sprechen Sie Brecht* raise much larger issues, including the one which nourished the demise of the collaboration between Brecht and Weill: the struggle between text and music for supremacy in musical theater. Although virtually every major composer—from Monteverdi to Puccini—has lamented his frustrations with librettists for their general lack of understanding of the structural requirements of a libretto, I can think of no collaboration in which both creators were individually as prominent in their own right as Weill and Brecht. Indeed, Brecht's renown has at times even elevated him to "co-composer" status: witness the Metropolitan Opera's billing of *Mahagonny* which listed the composers as "Brecht-Weill" with Brecht's name printed first! Certainly neither Metastasio nor da Ponte could claim Brecht's independent stature as either dramatist or poet—nor could Boito nor even Hofmannsthal. Yet the Strauss-Hofmannsthal correspondence documents analogous disputes that achieved immortality in Strauss's *Capriccio*, where the plot centers on the resolution of the fundamental rivalry between *Wort und Ton*.

"Prima le parole — doppo la musica," says the poet.

"Prima la musica — dopo le parole," retorts the composer.

Strauss himself subtly settled the impasse both on stage and off by having the Countess hum the composer's melody as she leaves the stage. When Brecht called Weill "a phony Richard Strauss" during their arguments over the music's primacy over text in *Mahagonny*, he unwittingly encapsulated the issue. In fact, Weill had functioned much like a Strauss during the creation of *Mahagonny*. He wrote to his publisher, Universal Edition in Vienna, on 18 November 1927: "Every single day I am working with Brecht on the libretto, which is being shaped entirely according to my directions. This type of collaboration, whereby the libretto is being molded totally according to musical points of view, opens up entirely new possibilities."

Richard Wagner, of course, solved the problem in the only possible way: he was both poet and composer. And there is more than a little evidence that Brecht at least hoped to approach that same control over text and music. In fact, he often acted both contractually and artistically as if he *had* written both text and music. A case might be argued in support of a few other parallels:

1. Both established their own theaters to produce revolutionary works that were intended to change society as much as contemporary theatre.
2. Both were total men of the theater, insistent on their will to the smallest detail of production.
3. Both expounded their theories, principles, and systematic views in voluminous discussions, lectures, and essays.
4. Both surrounded themselves with worshipping disciples who were to carry on the *Meister's* intentions—the Wagnerians and the Brechtians.
5. Both left behind widows to accomplish their unfulfilled visions (in fact, Helene Weigel was even dubbed "Cosima Brecht" in Germany).
6. Both men now have been mythologized to the point that officially sanctioned "performance traditions" often subvert the original intent of the author himself.

And what about Weill? In his correspondence with Lenya we find evidence that he, too, had thoughts about a theater of his own. He actually came close to this goal when he joined the Playwrights' Company, a producing body which hardly would have dared to present either *Street Scene* or *Lost in the Stars* as a commercial venture on Broadway if it had not been for Weill's determined efforts. These efforts took a heavy toll on Weill's emotional and physical well-being, and he never achieved the artistic control necessary to surmount all the commercial compromises. Weill,

too, left behind a widow who was to become a cult figure, a model performer of his music and high priestess of his art. However, unlike Cosima or Helene, Lenya hesitated to assume that role. It was her second husband, George Davis, who fought her every inch of the way to bring her back to the stage at all, and who contracted the now legendary recordings for her. At the time of these recordings, Lenya was in her fifties and no longer able to sing in the original keys; certain mannerisms and musical liberties crept in—all of which remain fascinating because of her own personal charisma. Yet—as in the case of the entire *Seven Deadly Sins* recording or the *Mahagonny* "Crane Duet"—the lowered keys rob the pieces of orchestral brilliance and proper balances.

Contrary to common perception, Weill did not write the part of Jenny in *Mahagonny* for Lenya. He conceived it for opera singers; although he didn't want the drama sacrificed to the delicate vocal chords of the prima donna. In initiating a new operatic style, as he told his publisher, "I am replacing the former bravura aria with a new kind of 'popular song'."

And here we come to the crux of the matter: the words versus the music. What opera singer would like to replace the fireworks of the bravura aria with a "popular song"? One notes here the very few operatic stars who perform with equal brilliance in Lieder recitals, and the Lied is the closest to Weill's concept of "popular song," which in itself evolved from the German *Singspiel* (to be modernized as *Songspiel*). It is this basic Lied form, with the same popular infusions found in Schubert, that characterizes much of Weill's theater music and which—as in the case of all great Lieder—is based on superior poetry. "Surabaya Johnny," "Barbara Song," "My Ship," or "The Little Gray House" seem simple; yes, they can be sung by singing actors, if their names are Lenya, Gertrude Lawrence, Mary Martin, or Todd Duncan. But they simply cannot and should not be sung by actors who *think* they can sing and certainly not by the legion of "Brechtians" who believe they are serving their master by giving the words such predominance that they not only destroy the music in the process—and this is the irony—the poetry as well.

A significant breakthrough in the question of words and music in Weill's performance has been Teresa Stratas' recording, *The Unknown Kurt Weill*. Not only were audiences made aware of a new dimension to Weill's output, but here for the first time a famous opera singer, who combined vocal beauty and musicianship with high intelligence and understanding of the proper mixture of tone and word, really *sang*. The great international success of this recording points the way to a new forum for Weill's music outside the theater: namely the concert hall, far removed from cabaret and cabaret singers.

Already some of Weill's "Lieder" are beginning to appear in recitals next to Schubert, Brahms, Ravel, and Poulenc, and we look forward to an evening someday of *Singen Sie Weill* at Tully Hall, which will also illuminate poetry of Brecht far better than amateurish attempts like *Sprechen Sie Brecht*.