

# REVIEWS

**The Silverlake.** Abbey Opera, London. 30 March - 4 April 1987.

Readers of Alan Rich's review of recent Weill productions in Great Britain (Vol. 4, No. 1) will know that he awarded the prize to the first performances in this country of *The Protagonist* and *The Czar Has His Photograph Taken* at last year's Camden Festival by the Abbey Opera. This admirable young English company can now add another premiere to its credentials — the first professional staging here of *Der Silbersee*. Under the title *The Silverlake*, it was given six performances in the Bloomsbury Theatre in London between 30 March and 4 April.

The first thing to be said about these performances is that they were indeed professional, both in presentation and in attitude. Kaiser's text was subjected to a few small cuts, but in essentials, it was given complete and in a translation by John Eaton, the director, which was accurate and made no apologies for the original (even if it missed a trick or two in Baron Laur's dialogue, for example). All the music was there and in the right places. The only "adaptations" I could detect were an extension of Weill's percussion part at the opening of Severin's delirium scene and some cheap "sliding around" on the trombone in the tango of the Lottery Agent. What Kaiser and Weill actually wrote was respected. In other words, John Eaton is one of a select number of young English directors who take as their starting point the proposition that the authors of a piece know what they are doing and do not require the assistance of a director's adolescent fantasies. This was so manifestly true of Eaton's fluent, unfussy, and consistently inventive production that his shock tactics at the end were barely credible. Admittedly, we had been warned by a scene of concentration camp brutality (happily almost invisible) imposed on the overture and by the conversion of the off-stage chorus into on-stage representatives of the deprived and dispossessed. But this hardly prepared one for the final scene: the gas chamber, with stage smoke, a collapsing group of Jews, and the "escape" of Severin and Olim, all, as we were led to believe, the original intention of Kaiser and Weill. What can be said about that? Perhaps Eaton felt that the real ending of the work, Severin and Olim clutched from the jaws of death and lifted into the dawn of hope by the sounds of a woman's voice and through exquisitely beautiful music, was too glib or too sentimental. Maybe that remains an open question. But it was a pity the question was not posed.



Meriel Dickinson (Frau von Luber), Kate Flowers (Fennimore) and Roger Bryson (Baron von Laur) in Abbey Opera's *The Silverlake*. Photo: Roger Morton

I do not want to concentrate on this aspect of the production for it was not at all characteristic. A hysterical section of the first-night audience turned the banquet scene, with the "Ballad of Caesar's Death," into something of a farce. But that was not Eaton's fault, for he had caught its tone admirably and had shown all along how expert a man of the theater Kaiser was and how the particular demands of *Der Silbersee* can be met perfectly well. How, for example can you get an actor to sing Severin's "Vengeance Aria"? The answer is that you cannot and therefore you get a singer to do so, assuming of course you can find a singer willing to work at their acting. Eaton has assembled and trained an excellent cast which played all the parts, the minor as well as the principal ones, with equal expertise and conviction. Nigel Robson was especially impressive, making the rather two-dimensional character of Severin entirely plausible, singing and acting with real power. The part of Olim is for an actor and Michael Heath is in fact an actor; but he can also sing and in his one duet there was no suggestion that he might be upstaged by Robson. The reconciliation scene between Severin and Olim, potentially rather embarrassing (and for which, surprisingly, there is no music), was staged especially well. Kate Flowers is a resident operatic soprano with a penchant for singing final consonants like rifle shots. Accordingly, her Fennimore had more of the slattern about it than the mystery redeemer, but in the part she was asked to play she was excellent. So was Meriel Dickinson as

the odious Frau von Luber. A fine singer, not least of Weill, she has only a unison duet. In this she was splendid (as was her partner, Roger Bryson) but the focus remained on the quality of her comic acting. My only regret was that she was not asked to inject more menace into it. The shopgirls' scene was brilliantly done by Christina Collier and Margaret Perry and the playing of the four "Comrades" was another indication of the professionalism running through the whole company.

The designer, Lez Brotherston, produced a set which accommodated Kaiser's fifteen scene changes rather well. It is a camp, forest, castle, and with the addition of a shuttlecock gallery and a kind of drawbridge (whose supports looked like gravestones, tree stumps or whatever), it enabled Eaton to stage the realism of the original and to keep the drama moving. He was particularly successful in transitions and overlaps between scenes, such as the nice idea of turning Olim's desperate knocking on the attic door into the throbbing accompaniment of Severin's "Ulysses" song. This was symptomatic of the neat synchronization between stage and pit where Antony Shelley conducted with admirable precision and panache. While his musical performance occasionally showed how difficult it is to balance and mold Weill's brass and to fix and sustain his tempi, it was nevertheless extremely good — more than good enough to pinpoint the main problem presented by *Der Silbersee*. This is simply the disparity, marked but not extreme, between the

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music and the text. Kaiser's dramatic technique, his construction and juxtaposition of scenes, is that of a master of the stage. But his language and interior pacing sometimes plods and generally lacks the sharpness and concentration which would give it an urgency matching that of the music. What it is saying (and its political content seems, alas, to be eternally relevant) tends to lose out to the manner in which it is said. This is not to suggest that Abbey Opera's production has turned up a white elephant. On the contrary, it has shown *Der Silbersee* to be a moving piece of music theater with red blood in its veins; and for this we can have nothing but gratitude. But it is still, perhaps, in search of a style.

IAN KEMP

University of Manchester

## L'Opéra de Quat'Sous.

Théâtre Musical de Paris, Châtelet, Paris. 31 October 1986 - 8 February 1987.

From the very beginning, everything attending the new production of this famous Brecht-Weill collaboration roused considerable excitement. And yet, from the very beginning, many things went wrong. Of the originally announced cast, some members walked out even before starting rehearsals: Nastassia Kinski, who was to play Polly, and Guy Marchand, MacHeath. Others walked out later: Heinz Bennent, who had been assigned the role of Peachum. Of course, some important members of the troupe remained: Milva (Jenny) and Denise Gence (Mrs. Peachum), and some new names were added: Michael Heltau (Mackie) and Yves Robert (Peachum).

The essential idea of director Giorgio Strehler and his assistant Myriam Tannant was to transfer the play from Victorian England to Brooklyn in the 1920's. Herein originated a sort of struggle between the established work and its "re-organizers." The primary endeavor of Strehler and his co-workers seems to have been to mold the play into a form fitting their particular conception. One might assume that the play would, and should, fight back. And it did.

The production was visually superb with beautiful scenery by Ezio Frigerio and magnificent costumes by Franca Squarciapino, Strehler's usual collaborators. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the production seemed heavy and ponderous (evidently, considerable backstage maneuvering was necessary to accommodate the requirements of the set). In short, the whole production was "too much" — too elaborate, too long, and

too complicated, with too few moments in which the theatrical elements fit together well. For one who has seen and admired a number of plays directed by Strehler, this production came as rather a disappointment. As we say in French, "La montagne a accouché d'une souris" (The mountain has given birth to a mouse).

The mish-mash of casting led to an amalgamation of styles, resulting in an ensemble performance which lacked rhythm and the requisite humor. We missed Kinski, but I suppose we fared well with Barbara Sukowa (star of several German films by various directors including Fassbinder and von Trotta). She may have underplayed the role slightly, but at least she acted *and* sang — which could not be said of most of the others. Michael Heltau did his best to sing, but there was an evident strain upon the Austrian actor to perform in French. He was a bit too proper as Mackie, the man



Milva strikes a worldly pose as Jenny in Giorgio Strehler's production of *L'Opéra de Quat'Sous* at Théâtre Musical de Paris - Châtelet. Photo: Mireille Legobien.

for whom nice and not-so-nice girls fall. Yves Robert — the noted actor and director — assumed the role of Peachum, and though I shall continue to admire his work, my esteem did not grow as a result of his portrayal of Peachum. He seems to have confused Brecht with Labiche and Weill with Offenbach; moreover, he *refused* to sing. At least, Denise Gence tried; the celebrated actress, for many years a reigning queen of the Comédie-Française, had a good start on smaller stages in the same role. Though her singing was uneven, she, at least, did her best. Jean Benguigui (Tiger Brown) overdid his role somewhat, yet he certainly did not "sing" — the "Kanonensong" sounded more like a duet of shouts than anything resembling a song.

But, of course, Milva did sing, and it was musical and pleasing. However, her acting left me with mixed feelings. I am not sure that the role of Jenny requires such conspicuous over-acting, continuing the tradition of the so-called "boulevard" actors of pre-war times. Nonetheless, it was a pleasure to watch this beautiful actress perform.

What about Kurt Weill? The Ensemble Musique Vivante, which was led by Diego Masson, did an excellent job. Masson, who recently led performances of some of Weill's concert works with the London Sinfonietta, seemed at home among the harmony and dissonance of Weill's idiom. The orchestra sounded superb, full of life and spirit. The musical excellence, however, only served to underscore the contrast between what one heard and what one saw, again illustrating the struggle between the elements of this production.

It is clear that Weill's contribution has endured the almost sixty years since the play's creation with far greater success than Brecht's. In a word: the music is more vital, the score has established itself as a classic, and most people have long forgotten the text on which it was composed. We know that both authors wrote the work quickly, nonetheless, Weill's tunes have become perhaps the most popular music in our century (along with Ravel's *Bolero*, for instance). It is an archetype of lively and bold music, whereas Brecht's play seems much more closely bound to his political ideology of the Thirties. It remains very difficult to regain the spirit of Berlin in the Twenties and of the Brechtian spirit and humor which was then free of the dogma later attached to his work.

If we missed the spirit and humor, could it be because of the French translation? Much of the work's inherent charm comes from Brecht's play on words and Weill's musical settings. The established French translation by Jean-Claude Hémery has never been consid-



ered very good. Still, I am not sure that the new one made by Strehler and Tannant does greater justice to the original German text.

As a long-time fan of Strehler's work, my disappointment is great after waiting with such anticipation. It brings no pleasure to watch a production fail, especially one directed by one of the most interesting originators of post-war European theater. One would have hoped for less lavish spectacle and more inspired direction, less visual perfection and more life. I could sum up the whole thing in terms of a boxing match: in the struggle between *L'Opéra de Quat'Sous* and Strehler at the Châtelet, Strehler seems to have lost the fight by a split decision; and in the other contest, Brecht versus Weill, the match ended up with a unanimous decision in Weill's favor. And so, at least for my part, I shall continue to imagine an ideal production of *Dreigroschenoper*.

ALAIN JOMY  
Paris

**Lady in the Dark:** "Childhood Dream" and "Circus Dream." The Juilliard Orchestra, soloists, and chorus, New York. 23 September 1987.

The opening program of Juilliard's third annual FOCUS! festival, an ambitious and interesting series of concerts subtitled "Music in the Melting Pot: Immigration and Interaction," concluded with a concert performance of excerpts from Weill's *Lady in the Dark*, written in 1940 with Ira Gershwin (lyrics) and Moss Hart (book). All of the music from *Lady in the Dark* is contained in three through-composed dream sequences and a childhood flashback in which the main character, Liza Elliott (originally played by Gertrude Lawrence), sings the celebrated "My Ship." In the original Broadway production, the dreams were elaborately designed and staged — utilizing four turntables — making *Lady in the Dark* the most expensive musical Broadway had seen. The excerpts included in the Juilliard program were the "Circus Dream," a raucous juxtaposition of courtroom trial and circus, complete with a veritable Gilbert-and-Sullivan-quoting jury, and back-to-back showstoppers for the Ringmaster, "Tschai-kovsky," (originally played by the late Danny Kaye in a role often cited as his Broadway debut — his debut was actually in *The Straw Hat Revue*, 1939) and Liza, with "The Saga of Jenny" as well as "My Ship."



Stuyvesant (Michael Mauldin) grants Brom (Jay Allen) a reprieve in Act I of *Knickerbocker Holiday* at the University of Jacksonville.

The fact that *Lady in the Dark* was written for the theater and not for the concert hall should not preclude a successful concert performance of the music. Indeed, the self-contained nature of the musical sequences makes it ideal for such a performance, but several unfortunate artistic decisions conspired to make energetic and fun-filled music seem rather pale and ill-at-ease on the concert stage. By expanding the orchestra to well past the size of a Broadway pit orchestra (I think I counted eight cellos), the conductor, Don Jennings, created balance problems between the orchestra and the singers, rendering most of the lyrics, especially those sung by the chorus, unintelligible. This situation was only made more awkward by the decision to have the weaker singers use a handheld microphone. The orchestra played very well, however, and the few selections that came to life were a tantalizing reminder of the many delightful surprises contained in this work.

Lauren Flanigan's beautifully sung "Saga of Jenny" was compelling, and it was nice to hear the "Dance of the Tumblers" performed, since it is omitted on most recordings. The biggest disappointment of the evening was "Tschai-kovsky," Ira Gershwin's tongue-tripping catalogue of Russian composers; it was hard to imagine that, as presented, this was the song that made Danny Kaye into a star. It was interesting to hear the Weill excerpts in the context of the works of the other composers on the program — Milhaud, Schoenberg, and Copland — especially since Schoenberg's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra was written almost contemporaneously, in 1942.

DAVID LOUD  
New York

**Knickerbocker Holiday.** Florida Theater, University of Jacksonville, Jacksonville, Florida, 3-5 October 1986.

It may seem odd but what I like to remember about the Jacksonville University production of *Knickerbocker Holiday* is a pair of asterisks that showed up in the program. They were tiny, scarcely visible on the page, but their significance looked as big as the show itself.

One asterisk announced that musical numbers by the Dutch Dancers "did not appear in the original 1938 Broadway production," and were "being performed as a world premiere on stage at the Florida Theater." Well, that could mean (1) the musical needed a lift in one or two spots or (2) the dance department of the College of Fine Arts needed to be part of the show. Right on both counts. In any event, the Dutch Dancers (Rosemary Silvestro, Tamara Sisler, Amy Grimm, and Apryle Adams) performed gaily and colored a sometimes talky, politically overwrought book. Curiously, one of their numbers, "I Do Business in My Hat," came just after the famous "September Song."

The second asterisk appeared beside the name of Michael Mauldin, a tremendously gifted actor the producers imported a week or so before the dress rehearsal to replace the person originally cast as Stuyvesant. Here was a situation that called for a professional, and in landing Mauldin director Gaylen Phillips could not have done better had she resurrected Peter Stuyvesant himself.

I saw the Saturday night performance. Over thirty minutes went by before Mauldin made his first entrance. But it

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made all the difference. Apart from a marvelously expressionistic town square set designed by Johnny Pettegrew and a few good bits of stage business, Act One was going nowhere. The first half hour was boring; there was no real engagement of the senses. The faults were those found in many college productions: uneven talent, poor projection, lack of voice control (yelling instead of projecting quiet authority), and a habit of using strange facial expressions that have nothing to do with the action on the stage. Such faults are inevitable in college performances, but it would be better if they were minimized in a musical that doesn't automatically knock 'em in the aisles with showstopping songs and dazzling dance routines — or that has a \$60,000 budget and is being showcased in one of those splendidly old renovated downtown theaters.

That was the view of things for the first half hour. Then Mauldin came on stage, put the show in gear, and gave it direction. He also gave everyone a lesson or two in the art of acting: superb use of hands, body language, acting tone, use of space — the whole bit. He was a marvel to watch. It is pleasant to imagine the invaluable experience the student cast must have gained by working with him during rehearsals.

Mauldin was not, of course, the whole show. Director Phillips received strong performances from Jay Allen as Brom Broeck and Jeanne Marie Murray as Tina Tienhofen, as well as from Ken Boyle in the role of Washington Irving. Kurt Weill's intriguing musical score was ably handled by a student orchestra conducted by William J. McNeiland.

Audience reaction, at least on that Saturday evening, was lukewarm. No surprise there. A vapid love interest that is clearly secondary to some heavy-handed, tiresome political content about the wickedness of authority figures and government influence is not going to win many hearts. Nevertheless, *Knickerbocker Holiday* is just the type of slightly off-beat, "different" musical that a college should be scheduling for its drama majors, and to which theatergoers should be exposed.

For lack of more experienced actors, the Jacksonville University production was only half realized. But the choice was right on the money.

GEORGE W. HALLAN  
Jacksonville University

Sharon Rosin (Susan) and Doug LaBrecque (Sam) in the University of Michigan's revival of *Love Life*. The production, which ran from 16-19 April, will be reviewed in the next issue.

Photo: David Smith.

## Die Dreigroschenoper.

The Academy of Vocal Arts, Philadelphia, PA. 3, 4, 6, 7, February 1987.

In a city blessed by so rich and diverse an array of cultural organizations as is Philadelphia, it is inevitable that those with specialized thrusts or small budgets face something of a challenge in commanding their fair share of the limelight. For the public, the difficulty frequently is simply knowing what is available. Add to this the fact that many of these same institutions exist as training grounds for students aspiring towards professional careers, and the balancing act of attracting and pleasing an audience becomes a delicate one, indeed.

As the four sold-out performances of *Die Dreigroschenoper* made abundantly clear, the Academy of Vocal Arts, on this occasion, offered a high-caliber production that claimed an enthusiastic following. But make no mistake — to give the work as the Academy did in German (a rarity outside German-speaking countries) was not an attention-grabbing ploy. Nor was it an exercise in dry didacticism for the benefit of student singers. Rather, the performances represented a consistently polished example of musical theater worthy of heartfelt praise.

Nevertheless, success on this level, rendered so deceptively easy as it was here, oftentimes is not fully appreciated. After all, given the popular style so unabashedly cultivated by Weill in *Threepenny*, plus its directness of expression and, above all, transparency of textures, it might be easily assumed that the work is child's play to pull off. Yet as anyone who's ever heard an amateur orchestra play through a Haydn symphony (not entirely a remote analogy in view of the required precision of ensem-

ble in both Haydn and Weill) can tell you, easy it's not.

If all this reads a little like some junior ad writer's unrestrained enthusiasm for a pet project, it is done to underscore the nature of the Academy of Vocal Arts' achievement. For by and large the Academy's production was a model of what *can* result when the challenging factors listed above are thoughtfully considered and then surmounted.

The cast of young, fresh, unforced voices sang with conviction into a hall of small size — the Helen Corning Warden Theater — a delightful neo-Elizabethan room graced by an Italian Renaissance fireplace and musician's gallery that provided a congenial backdrop for John Scheffler's striking fixed set in front of which was placed the orchestra. The singers, largely free from taxing musical demands, were able to concentrate on acting with considerable authority. Granted, some roles were not defined sharply enough and some of the cast excelled more than the others in German diction, but these were rarely things that stood in the way of the listener's overall enjoyment. The excellent eleven-member orchestra was drawn from the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, deftly led by Christofer Macatsoris. Two were especially noteworthy: Richard A. Raub as the nimble keyboardist on piano, harmonium, and celesta and John Ilika in charge of some nice 'n nasty trombone playing. Dino Yannopoulos merits special mention for preparing *Threepenny* in such a way as to allow the singers to concentrate on the work's dramatic qualities: the staging was straightforward and unaffected, blissfully devoid of the "director-disease" penchant for extraneous elements. Sincerity of this sort deserves our sincerest thanks.

JAMES PARSONS  
Philadelphia





**Der Protagonist.** Kurt Weill. One act opera by Georg Kaiser. Vocal score by Erwin Stein. English translation by Lionel Salter. [Vienna]: Universal Edition No. 8387. [1986, reprint edition]

**Der Zar lässt sich photographieren.** Kurt Weill. Opera buffa in one act by Georg Kaiser. Vocal score by Erwin Stein. English translation by Lionel Salter. [Vienna]: Universal Edition No. 8964. [1985, reprint edition]

**The Ballad of Magna Carta.** Kurt Weill. Words by Maxwell Anderson. Valley Forge: European American Music Corp. EA 585. [1986, reprint edition]

**Four Walt Whitman Songs.** Kurt Weill. For voice and piano. Valley Forge: European American Music Corp. EA 584. [1986]

The Schiffbauerdamm and Broadway elements of Weill's career have been fairly extensively documented elsewhere, albeit with all the attendant polarizations and — to apply a pre-post-structuralist concept — “misunderstandings.” In many ways, the “two personae” notion is too neat and simple. The idea of two Weills serves as a heuristic construct which demands qualification: a model which may well have to be abandoned, it is a point of departure for any investigation. Already, one senses, attention is being drawn, by way of undermining the neatness of the model, to an enigmatic mix of continuity and diversity in Weill's output — something to which this group of scores bears ample witness. The transitions in his stylistic, and above all, aesthetic development are rarely as abrupt as popular opinion would have us believe, while many of the lesser known works testify to a remarkably protean facility in all kinds of idioms and genres. A more differentiated account of Weill's career must be concerned, then, both with addressing the possibility of a “unified survey of style,” which Herbert Fleischer called for in 1932, and at the same time with illuminating the sheer range of interests to which the composer applied his talents.

Faced with some of the more popular images of Weill, some scholars feel compelled to lapse into an apologetic, even crusading tone when discussing his life and music. If Weill has been misrepresented, then that was a danger inherent in much of his oeuvre, a risk he was prepared, even committed, to take. However, one cannot simply overlook the trail of myth and distortion which must be seen for what it is if the music is to have space in which to breathe. That space can, to a certain extent, be created. And one can make no better start than by first making all the works themselves available, as with this clutch of reissues. In this instance, moreover, the choice of works seems particularly propitious.

First, the two early one-act operas, *Der Protagonist* and *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, both to texts by Georg Kaiser, the vocal scores of which have been reissued by Universal Edition for the first time since publication back in 1926 and 1927 respectively. These are reprint editions, using the original plates, with the valuable addition of the fluent, singable translation (including stage directions) by Lionel Salter underlaid below the German words.

If Weill's debt to his teacher Busoni was more an aesthetic than a stylistic matter, then this seems especially evident in his first opera, *Der Protagonist*, completed in 1925. The critic Oskar Bie declared Weill's achievement in this work as pointing to “the future of opera;” he may well have had in mind Busoni's essay of the same name, (“Von der Zukunft der Oper”) which appeared in *Von der Einheit der Musik* in 1922. And even if he didn't, it's scarcely an exaggeration to regard *Der Protagonist* as a practical realization of Busoni's programmatic reflections. For this reason, one could be forgiven for assuming that Weill had specially commissioned the libretto from Kaiser. The text already existed as a play, written in 1920, and for the operatic version very little was changed or cut from the original, making this an early example of *Literaturoper*.

Busoni's reflections on opera had already appeared in his *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, but without a significant passage which was only added in the 1922 version: “...it ought to be possible to consider the form of a scenario accompanied by music and illustrated by song, without words, producing a kind of ‘sung pantomime.’” It is this “afterthought” that crucially informs, whether directly or not, the musical language and structure of *Der Protagonist*. The two pantomime scenes, fortuitously present in Kaiser's play, occasion Weill to experiment for the first time with the device of stylistic dualism.

He establishes a highly effective theatrical opposition between the *espressivo* of the opera proper and the neo-classical, Stravinskian angularity of the pantomime music. To this extent Weill's declared repudiation of Wagnerian music drama — an obligatory maneuver for his generation — was aided and abetted by Busoni.

In view of the later collaborations with Brecht, which prompted theories about “epic opera,” it is noteworthy that Maurice Abravanel described *Der Protagonist* as “the first successful attempt at an opera that moves the spectator while completely leaving his feelings of sympathy to one side.” And Adorno observed, “The unity of the dramatic individual, which until now almost always functioned as the cohesive force of dramatic music, is shattered.” Weill's third one-act opera, the opera buffa *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* is very much concerned, like *Der Protagonist*, with the typically Kaiserian dialectic of illusion and reality. With all its “epic” elements — the stylistic dualism embracing chromatic *espressivo* and jaunty tango, impassively commenting chorus, the confrontation of old and new, “false” and “real” — *Der Zar* can be seen as an opera about opera. By placing a lyrically amorous member of the old order (The Tsar) in the altogether up-to-date setting of the photographer's studio, with the telephone and gramophone playing integral roles in the proceedings, Weill and Kaiser have a serious point to make, but with delightfully witty, well-crafted, and undogmatic means. In the prefatory material to the *Mahagonny Songspiel* (whose composition held up progress on *Der Zar*), there is talk of “the liquidation of aristocratic art forms” — an issue of cultural politics which the *Songspiel* formulates in a stridently question-begging fashion. The creators of *Der Zar*, however, would appear no less aware of the agenda. Yet they employ a much more equivocal approach, nudging rather than shaking the audience into drawing its own conclusions.

Such cultural strategies quite simply did not come into question during Weill's American period — the period from which the other two recent reissues originate. Weill's partial complicity in “liquidation” yielded to an attitude of affirmation and assimilation. It must be remembered, however, that this development began as early as the systematic eradication of surrealistic dissonance in *Der Jasager*. Harmonically, there is much in *The Ballad of Magna Carta* from 1940 that harks back to *Die Bürgschaft* of eight years earlier, to choose another example at random. The *Ballad* is imbued, too, with the characteristically

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Weillian quality of a purposeful rhythmic vitality within the context of a coherent dramatic structure. The music follows the contours of the text and yet generates a form that is satisfying in itself. As the preface to this reprint edition informs, "*The Ballad of Magna Carta* was produced for the first time on February 4, 1940, in the 'Pursuit of Happiness' program of the Columbia Broadcasting System with Burgess Meredith in the role of Narrator." It is scored for 2 flutes, oboe, 4 saxophones, bassoon, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, piano, harp, guitar, drums, and strings. Here it is published in piano arrangement "for presentation by glee clubs and choral societies in schools and colleges." But why a kind of new world *Lehrstück* narrating the story of the charter granted by King John at Runnymede in 1215? Perhaps because, as Weill and his frequent collaborator Maxwell Anderson rather naively conclude in their introduction, "[The leader of the lords and barons] states the idea of Magna Carta, and is therefore the first modern advocate of democracy."

Be that as it may — a similar sentiment may well have sparked off the attraction to Walt Whitman. As much as anything, Whitman must have seemed to Weill, who was soon to become a naturalized American, as "a prophet of the democratizing trend in the Western world and an enthusiast of the 'common man,'" to use the words of the current *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The first three of this set of piano songs ("Oh Captain, My Captain!" "Beat! Beat! Drums!" and "Dirge for Two Veterans") were first published in 1942, with a dedication to Max and Mab Anderson. The fourth song, "Come Up from the Fields, Father," was composed in 1947, and has been specially engraved for this collection. For the recording made in Weill's lifetime and released on two 78 discs (1947), the four songs appeared in a different sequence (2,1,4,3), which may well have been endorsed by the composer himself.

One can say little more in the space of a brief review than that all four songs deserve and repay close scrutiny — not least because they illustrate a hitherto neglected facet of Weill's American period and invite reassessment. It may appear from Broadway compositions such as *Lady in the Dark* that Weill successfully repressed his European roots in a quest to develop American ones. These Whitman settings, however, belie the implied irreversibility of such a psychological metaphor, while at the same time

## An American Musician in Berlin. By Michael Danzi. Schmittens: Rücker, 1986.

[292 p.]

One should not expect from this book the flair of *An American in Paris* or the vivid detail of Isherwood's *Berlin Stories*, even though the title seems to promise as much. Nor should one expect to read only about Berlin — nearly half of the narrative deals with the American musician in America. And the American musician is Michael Danzi, who grew up in New York at the turn of the century and began his career as a dixieland violinist. Danzi soon switched to the banjo and quickly became one of its leading exponents. In 1923, he went to Germany and established himself as Berlin's foremost banjo player throughout the roaring Twenties and into the Thirties. When war broke out, he returned to New York and enjoyed a long career on Broadway and in Radio City Music Hall. Michael Danzi died in February 1986.

It is Rainer E. Lotz who has written down Michael Danzi's recollections, as told to him by the octogenarian virtuoso. Lotz's style — which probably owes much to Danzi's spoken narrative — remains monotonously in the first person and ultimately turns this fascinating biography into rather dull reading. Nevertheless, Danzi's uniquely rich experience as a leading musician in two important cities necessarily remains essential for

the historian and the popular music scholar. Moreover, Lotz provides a broad bibliography of German and English sources and an exhaustive, forty-eight page index, both of which add considerably to the book's value.

Danzi refers to numerous band leaders, instrumentalists, singers, and composers, but two names can be singled out as having particular interest here — Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. Danzi recalls two meetings with Weill; one in 1930 — when he played the banjo in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* — proved especially memorable. During a rehearsal Weill congratulated him with the revealing observation: "This is the first time I have heard the chords played as written: most banjo players have told me that the part was not written for banjo!" In 1955, at New York, Danzi played in the Theatre de Lys production of *The Threepenny Opera*. His recollections reveal all too familiar attitudes of the commercial music world: he remembers the extra fees he gained for playing three instruments and debating with Lotte Lenya as to whom had been the "big shot" in Berlin — she favored Weill while he argued for Paul Abraham.

This anecdote clearly illustrates the different spheres to which Danzi and Weill belonged. It is equally clear, however, that Danzi's memoirs deserve the interest of the Weill scholar, as they provide new details of the circumstances and times common to both.

GEOFFREY ABBOTT  
Augsburg

casting doubt on the mutual exclusivity of the European and American creative personalities. Here, at least, Weill strives for a synthesis. Away from the commercial arena of American theater, he finds time and a fitting opportunity, especially in the 1947 song, partially to revive the European *Lied* tradition, with resonances from such disparate sources as Schumann, Puccini, Debussy, and even Mahler. The settings employ free strophic variation within a sectionalized, usually ternary formal scheme (in the second song Weill produces something uncannily similar to Hindemith's setting of the same poem in the *Drei Hymnen von Walt Whitman*, op. 14, composed in 1919, though not published until 1983). As in the *Ballad of Magna Carta*, the foundation of the musical language is a floating and extended tonality, making use of dramatic, text-based dissonance. Weill frequently fills out the basic triad to con-

tain both an added sixth and ninth; it is a sonority he also utilizes as a pentatonically conceived melodic cell. Such a chord points to an obvious influence of popular music. Yet it has more than just local, harmonic significance. As Weill remarked in an analogous connection, "I arrive at the sixth entirely out of 'Stimmführung' (development of voices) [the orthodox translation would be 'voice-leading'], so it is not used as an 'effect'." The ninth is likewise generated contrapuntally. When the sonority reappears at the end of "Come Up From the Fields, Father," signaling a resolution after the agitated and unabashedly operatic central section, it is the Old rather than the New World that is invoked, a serenely resigned Mahler rather than a crooner's sugary ballad.

STEPHEN HINTON  
West Berlin



**The Musical Theatre: A Celebration.** By Alan Jay Lerner. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986. [240 p.; \$24.95]

Alan Jay Lerner finished his manuscript for *The Musical Theatre: A Celebration* shortly before entering a hospital for what proved to be the last time. Apparently a visiting friend spoke with a nurse before entering Lerner's room, asking how the celebrated patient was doing. The answer was most discouraging; the nurse reported that Mr. Lerner was not always lucid and on occasion lost touch with reality. Disturbed, the visitor entered the hospital room with trepidation, only to be shocked by the sight of Lerner propped up in bed and quite his usual self. They spoke for some while without mention of the nurse's warnings, yet the predicted aberrations never occurred. Lerner's remarks ranged from the personal to the professional, both of recent memory and of long ago. After leaving Lerner, the visitor happened to meet the same nurse in the hall and in reporting the pleasant visit asked just how Lerner's mental losses manifested themselves. "Well," the nurse replied, "he keeps on saying he's the man who wrote *My Fair Lady*."

This anecdote does not appear in Lerner's text, and though it made its way through New York theater circles at the time of Mr. Lerner's death, I cannot guarantee it even occurred. Like much of *The Musical Theatre: A Celebration*, it is amusing, personal, incidental to the subject at hand (musical theater), and linked to the true subject of the book, Alan Jay Lerner. Even if an out-and-out fabrication, the anecdote is in sympathy with the book as published, which frequently is quite cavalier as regards factual accuracy.

I say "the book as published," as distinct from Mr. Lerner's book, because it seems incongruous that a self-proclaimed perfectionist like Lerner would sanction so sloppy a publishing job. If the manuscript was the source of factual error, it cannot have received a close inspection by an editor or researcher. The publisher seems to be satisfied that Alan Jay Lerner's name is on the work, and what else could the reader want?

This book is fraught with obvious factual inaccuracies which undermine the reader's confidence about the new information presented. For example, we are led to believe that *Champagne Sec* opened in 1931 (it was, rather, 1933), that Kurt Weill came to America in 1934 (it was 1935), and that *The Fantasticks* opened at the hundred-seat Sullivan Street Playhouse (the theater has half again as many seats). Further, the book states that the team of Styne-Comden-Green wrote all but two of the songs for the 1954 *Peter Pan* (only half of the score was by them) and that *The Firebrand of Florence* marked Lotte Lenya's American stage debut (ignoring performances in *The Eternal Road* (1937) and *Candle in the Wind* (1941)). And so on. Titles of musicals and songs are inaccurately given or punctuated, and at least one lyric is quoted incorrectly ("Triplets"). Ira Gershwin's lyric "Come to Poppa, Come to Poppa, do" from "Embraceable You" is reported to have been sung by Ginger Rogers, which would put *Girl Crazy* at the forefront of theater works of sexual liberation if this were true — it is not — the lyric was sung by Allen Kearns to Ginger Rogers. And though Lerner's remark about the "un-copyrightable" nature of titles is accurate, Noel Coward and Styne-Comden-Green do not share the title of "The Party's Over" (Coward's 1932 ditty is entitled "The Party's Over Now").

One cannot know whether Lerner had a hand in selecting the photographs which accompany his text (the stage shots are a definite plus), but one prays Lerner had no hand in their captions. Though the text maintains a persistent international focus on musical theater, shots of original London casts are seldom identified as such. Worse, what is labeled as the finale to *Porgy and Bess* is in fact Serena's room, probably Act 1, scene 2. A nice color shot of "The Farmer and the Cowman" hoedown bears the caption "*Oklahoma!* — the original Broadway cast performing the title song." Once again, both the scene and the set are misidentified. Foolish as these errors are, they're nothing compared to the *Mame* mess. In discussing the musical, the text nowhere mentions Angela Lansbury, yet offers a photo of Rosalind Russell in the title role. The photo caption gives no hint that this photo is of the play, *not* the musical. If no photo of *Mame* were available, why picture the play *Auntie Mame* without making clear that Miss Russell did not appear in the musical?

The sole value of this book is (perhaps could only be) that it offers Alan Jay Lerner's point of view, yet even this value is limited. Lerner is at his best when discussing his esteemed predecessors and those collaborators he held in high regard. He goes out of his way, for example, to laud Kurt Weill at every turn, yet is noticeably vague on the subject of *Love Life* ("too ambitious...too vague"). Odd for an author so firmly opinionated, though Lerner hits are given only more space than Lerner flops, not more analysis. Incidents leading to the creation of a Lerner hit are recalled, often when discussing the work of another, but precious little effort goes into placing his own work into the book's cavalcade. Lerner's literate tone and "I-was-there" reportage cannot substitute for keen observation.

Early chapters employ a grab-bag format well-suited to Lerner's casual opinion; for post-1930 works, the format changes to a season-by-season discussion which proves repetitive. It fosters the mention of too many shows on which Lerner really has little to say, and soon degenerates into a list of titles offering no more information than the aficionado could supply (and often less). If Lerner's socio-political views occasionally appear, they are not related to his works. Yes, minstrelsy shaped American music, but Lerner says this without reference to *Love Life*. Yes, nineteenth-century American democracy was hypocritical regarding blacks, but why assert this without once discussing *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*? True, after seven performances in New York, this Lerner-Bernstein creation sank into an acrimonious sea of red ink and Coca-Cola, but in a text suffused in Lerner's opinions, the omission is curious.

One inevitably asks, "for whom is this work intended?" Certainly not the informed reader, who will derive passing but limited pleasures from the opinions and anecdotes Lerner does share. That leaves the more casual and less informed reader, one who has a passing interest in the subject of musical theater. But if that is so, why would such a reader seek out *The Musical Theatre: A Celebration* to obtain Mr. Lerner's opinions? Evidently, his nurse did not even know who he was.

TERRY MILLER  
New York

# RECORDINGS

**Ute Lemper singt Kurt Weill.** Ute Lemper, Jürgen Knieper, pianist. Bayer BR-30018.

**Riki Turofsky sings Kurt Weill.** Riki Turofsky, Toronto Chamber Ensemble, Doug Riley, arranger and conductor. Fanfare DFL 9026.



Sixty-two minutes and forty-nine seconds for one record, thirty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds for the other. Fortunately, the more is also the better.

Lemper is twenty-four (Gemini, 1963); she has done *Cats* (who hasn't these days?), *Cabaret's* Sally Bowles in France and Germany, a "Grosse Weill-Revue" in Berlin, and "Weill-Abende" (with Knieper) all over West Germany. I like her.

She sounds intelligent, as if her stylistic decisions were her own. As Weill lady baritones go, she's at the upper end of the range; there's plenty of flexibility, and tone variety, and she uses them resourcefully. Better yet, she sings in tune. The selection (twenty songs — twenty!) is broad and generous. Understandably, the majority of the songs, and the best performances, are German. The American songs go less well, and I'd guess she doesn't yet know English, because there is no life in her declamation. She was out of her mind to try "Tchaikovsky," whatever the language.

The "Wie lange noch" is gorgeous. I've known for years that I could die happily with the Stratas performance; now I need this one too. Lemper's version times out a minute and a half faster than the Stratas (3:20 against 4:49); it's a whole 'nother song, an insidious, sardonic tango — not hair-raising, as Stratas

makes it, but beautiful on its own. The "Youkali" (exactly a minute faster than Stratas) once again deviates drastically from the way Stratas has made me hear that song, but it, too, is a haunting piece of singing, a viable and interesting conception. Knieper's support at the keyboard, his easy sense of the singer's very breathing, the elegance (to cite a single memorable instance) of his fadeout at the end of "Youkali," only heighten my irritation with Richard Woitach's inferior work on Stratas I. [*The Unknown Kurt Weill*, Nonesuch D-79019] (Don't get me started on the accompaniment on Stratas II. [*Stratas Sings Weill*, Nonesuch 79131])

In the great tradition of the international record market, the Lemper jacket notes (tri-lingual) have their share of howlers — factual (Feuchtwanger, e.g., listed as the author of *Die Bürgschaft*, "Lied von den braunen Inseln" listed as from that opera, *Firebrand of Chappell*, etc.) and grammatical. But the record's prodigality makes full amends, and Lemper is one of the best theater singers in quite some time.

Turofsky weighs in a few octaves higher. She began her operatic career as Oscar in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, just when you thought all Weill singers had to start out as Ulrica. I wish she knew what she was doing up there, however,

and I suspect she doesn't. She's all over the stylistic map, cutesy, pretentious, unmotivated: a parodied chanteuse in a sadly misjudged "Mon Ami, My Friend" here, a pure Hollywood brat for "My Ship" there. The twelve songs are in English and French (Blitzstein's translation for *Threepenny* songs, and a curious "Surabaya-Johnny" as translated rather deviously by Herbert Hartig). Actually, the last song gets a closer-to-interesting performance than anything else on the record — a kind of wide-eyed-dumb-broad approach, the way Meryl Streep sang it in that forgettable Chelsea production a few years back.

But even if Turofsky could "adapt [her] voice to the versatility of Weill's music" as the jacket notes claim, there would remain the horror of Riley's orchestration — for reeds, bass, percussion, and everything else electric, hideous in sound and in conception. One by one the great songs ooze by, shrouded in some thick digital goo. Is there no power of pure and simple delight imbedded anywhere in all this contemporary electronic gadgetry? And if there isn't, why aren't there laws against the murder of beautiful songs by such lethal means?

ALAN RICH  
Los Angeles



# SELECTED PERFORMANCES

## ARGENTINA

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires, 24, 27, 29 November; 1, 4 December 1987

## CANADA

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Royal Alexandra Theater, Toronto, The Berliner Ensemble, 21 - 26 October 1986

*The Seven Deadly Sins*, Edmonton, MacEwan Community College, 6 December 1986

## CZECHOSLOVAKIA

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Kreistheater, Příbram, 8 October 1986

## ENGLAND

*Concerto, violin & winds*, Barbican Hall, London, Stephanie Gonley, violinist; Lionel Friend, cond.; London Symphony, 19 February 1987

*Happy End*, The Place, London, St. Donat's Theatre, 4 - 11 April 1987

*Der Lindberghflug*, Chester Summer Music Festival, Chester, Manchester Halle Orchestra, Yan Pascal Tortelier, cond., 25 July 1987

*The Silverlake*, Bloomsbury Theatre, London, Abbey Opera, John Eaton, director and translator; Antony Shelley, cond., 30 March - 4 April 1987

*The Threepenny Opera*, Oldham Coliseum Theatre, Oldham, 16 April - 9 May 1987

*Street Scene* (benefit performance), The Palace Theatre, London, Peter Walker, dir.; John Owen Edwards, cond.; Tom Jobe, choreo., 26 April 1987

## FRANCE

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Théâtre Municipal, Angers, Théâtre Musical d'Angers, 22 March 1987

*Das Berliner Requiem. Vom Tod im Wald. Concerto, violin & winds*, Théâtre Mogador, Paris, Ensemble Musique Vivante, Diego Masson, cond., 15 December 1986

*Concerto, violin & winds*, Théâtre de la Renaissance, Lyons, Les Philharmonistes de Chateauroux, N. Convives, cond., 13 February 1987

*L'Opéra de Quat'Sous*, Théâtre musical de Paris, Châtelet, Paris, Milva (Jenny), Barbara Sukowa (Polly), Yves Robert (Peachum); Michael Heltau (MacHeath); Giorgio Strehler, dir.; Diego Masson, cond., 31 October 1986 - 8 February 1987

## FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Musiktheater, Dortmund, 11 April 1987

*Ballad of Magna Carta*, Cologne, Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln, 31 October 1987

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Schauspielhaus, Essen, Hansguenther Heyme, dir.; Alfons Nowaki, cond., 1, 8, 20, 26 November 1986, 29 January 1987

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Theater des Westens, Berlin, Gunter Kraemer, dir.; Peter Keuschnig, cond., 23 May - 14 July 1987

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, Liederhalle, Stuttgart, Württembergisches Staatssorchester, Dennis Russell Davies, cond., 22 - 23 February 1987

*Lost in the Stars*, Herrenberg, students, Andrea Gymnasium, 21, 25 November 1986

*Die sieben Todsünden*, Frankfurt, Ensemble Modern, Lothar Zagrosek, cond., 29 March 1987

*Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, Buergerzentrum, Waiblingen, guest performance by the Stuttgart Musikhochschule, students, 20 February 1987

## GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

*Das Berliner Requiem*, Berlin, Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Heinz Roegner, cond., 22 February 1987

## HUNGARY

*Koldusopera* (Threepenny Opera), József Attila Színház, Budapest, 3 - 24, 28 March 1987

## ISRAEL

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Cameri Theatre, Tel Aviv, New Israel Opera, Israel Chamber Orchestra, Marek Grzesinski, dir.; Lior Shambadal, cond., 6 - 24 January 1987

## ITALY

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, Brixen, Orchestra Haydn, Maurizio Arena, cond., 9 - 12 February 1987

## THE NETHERLANDS

*Die Bürgschaft*, Amsterdam, students, University of Amsterdam, Rietveld Academie, Sweelinck Conservatorium; Marge Scheurwater, dir., March 1987

## NEW ZEALAND

*Lost in the Stars*, New Zealand, Auckland College of Education, 10 - 11 April 1987

## SWEDEN

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, Stockholm, Musikhögskolans Symfoniorkester, Jorma Panula, cond., 25 October 1986

## SWITZERLAND

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Stadttheater, Lucerne, Horst Statkus, dir., November 1987

## UNITED STATES

*Berlin to Broadway*, Showboat Majestic, Cincinnati, OH, 4 - 28 June 1987

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Philadelphia, Academy of Vocal Arts, 3 - 4, 6 - 7 February 1987

*Down in the Valley*, St. Paul's Church, Riverside, CT, 23, 24, 30, 31 January - 1 February 1987

*Happy End*, Theatre 22, New York, American Shakespeare Repertory, 7, 11, 17, 22, 24, 30 January 1987

*Johnny Johnson*, River Valley Playhouse, Putney, VT, Friends of Music at Guilford, Karla Baldwin, dir.; Paul Dedell, cond., 14 - 16 November 1986

*Knickerbocker Holiday*, Florida Theatre Performing Arts, Jacksonville, University of Jacksonville, students; Gaylen Phillips, dir.; William J. McNeiland, cond., 2 - 5 October 1986

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, Carnegie Hall, New York, NY, New York Pops, Skitch Henderson, cond., 23 January 1987

*Lady in the Dark* — Excerpts, Alice Tully Hall, New York, The Juilliard School, students; Don Jennings, cond., 23 January 1987

*Lost in the Stars*, Richardson Auditorium, Princeton, NJ, Princeton Festival, Victor Symonette, cond., 10 - 13 June 1987

*Love Life*, Power Center, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan, students, Brent Wagner, dir., Mitchell Krieger, cond., 16 - 19 April 1987

*One Touch of Venus*, Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, CT, Ben Levit, dir.; Lynn Crigler, cond., 22 April - July 1987

*The Seven Deadly Sins*, San Francisco, Sinfonia San Francisco, 19 January 1987

*The Threepenny Opera*, Los Angeles Theatre Works, Los Angeles, Fall 1987

*The Threepenny Opera*, New York, NY, Riverside Opera, 20, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31 March 1987

*Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, Philadelphia, The Academy of Vocal Arts, 25, 27, 30, 31 October 1987

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