The 90th anniversary of Kurt Weill’s birth has sparked programming of virtually every one of Weill’s concert and stage works as well as cultural exhibitions, radio programs, film series, and an international musicological conference. To commemorate the varied festivities, the Kurt Weill Foundation has published a special calendar of events. On page 8 is a guide to some of the major performances, as well as a summary of recording, broadcast and publishing projects.
NEWS IN BRIEF

HURRICANE ROARS IN FOUR NEW PRODUCTIONS OF MAHAGONNY

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the premiere of Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny (Leipzig, 9 March 1930), four opera companies will mount new productions during the 1989-90 season. The Los Angeles Music Center Opera, in a co-production with the Théâtre de Genève and Kentucky Opera, opened its season on 10 September with Mahagonny with subsequent performances on 13, 14, 16, and 17 September. See page 20 for a review.

Luciano Berio's Mago Musica festival in Florence has announced Mahagonny for June 12, 14, 17 and 24. Graham Vick will stage the production at the Teatro Comunale.

Mahagonny will also bow on two West German stages in 1990. The Augsburg Stadttheater premieres the work on 4 February, with stage direction by Wolf Seesemann and mise-en-scène by Rainer Sinell. In June, the Hamburg Staatsoper will mount its new production in the Kampnagelfabrik, a performance space used for modern and experimental works. Günter Krämer directs and Ingo Metzmacher leads the musical forces. Among the cast is William Pell (Jimmy Mahoney), the Parsifal at this year's Bayreuth Festival.

'MACK THE KNIFE' HEIR SUES BIG MAC

The son of the late singer Bobby Darin is suing McDonald's Corp. for more than $10 million, alleging the restaurant chain copied his father's singing style in the "Mac Tonight" commercials. The suit, filed last week in Santa Monica, Calif., alleges that the ads infringe on rights to Darin's 1959 hit version of the song "Mack the Knife." The commercials feature a tuxedoed man with a smiling quarter-moon head belting out the hamburger jingle. The suit alleges the character's voice and gestures resemble those of Darin, who died in 1973 of heart problems. The suit was filed on behalf of Dodd Darin, the singer's son and only heir. Darin's upbeat version of "Mack the Knife" sold 2 million copies and won Darin two 1960 Grammy awards. [Reprinted from the Rochester Democrat-Chronicle, 10 October 1989]

SINS AT JUILLARD

Juilliard Opera Center will present the Lincoln Center premiere of Die sieben Todsünden on 23, 25, 27 February at the Juilliard Theatre in New York. The production will be directed by Christopher Mattaliano and conducted by Bruno Ferrandis. Todsünden shares a double-bill with the American premiere of Benjamin Fleischmann's unfinished "Rothschild's Violin," which was later completed by Dimitri Shostakovich.

FOUNDATION AWARDS SPECIAL 1990 CELEBRATION GRANTS

The Board of Trustees of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music is pleased to announce the results of a special round of professional performance grants established to promote celebrations of Kurt Weill's music during 1990.

American Music Festival, Philadelphia. First professional revival of Love Life.

Bühnen der Stadt Bielefeld. Staged production of Street Scene.

Great Lakes Festival, Cleveland. Administration of a Kurt Weill Festival.

Heinrich-Heine-Institut und the Dumont-Landmann-Archiv. Two exhibitions mounted in conjunction with the Kurt Weill Festival in North Rhine Westphalia.

Sinfonietta, Marc-Andreas Schlingensiepen, conductor. Concert performance of Vom Tod im Wald, Bastille Music, Kleine Dreigroschenmusik, and Concerto for violin and wind instruments.

Stadtheater Gütersloh. Staged production of Der Silbersee.


Theater Oberhausen. Staged production of a triple-bill: Royal Palace, Der Protagonist, and Der Zar läßt sich photographieren.

WEIMAR CULTURE EXPLORED AT HARVARD

On 23 February 1990, the Department of Music, Harvard University, will host a symposium "The Tempo of the Times," American Music in Weimar Culture which will examine the assimilation of American influences by German artists in the 1920's. Dr. Hermann Danuser, Professor of Musicology; Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg im Breisgau, and Dr. Kim H. Kowalke, Professor of Music, The University of Rochester Eastman School of Music, will deliver formal papers on "Americanism in the Music of the Twenties - Fiction and Reality" and "Off to Mahagonny." Drs. Christoph Wolff and Reinhold Brinkmann of the Harvard Music faculty will join Danuser and Kowalke in an afternoon panel discussion. A concert of chamber music of Eisler, Hindemith, Schulhoff, and Weill is planned. For further information, call (617) 495-2791.

Related to the symposium and examining the nature of the American influence in the Weimar Republic, the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, in association with Goethe House, Boston, opens on 20 January "Envisioning America, The Prints, Drawings, Photographs of George Grosz and His Contemporaries." Dr. Beeke Sell Tower (Goethe Institute) and Peter Nisbet (Daimler-Benz Curator, Busch-Reisinger Museum) serve as curators for the exhibition which runs through 18 March. Dr. Timothy Benson (Associate Curator, Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies) will organize the show for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where it runs from 19 April to 24 June.

GUY STERN AWARDED GOETHE MEDAL

On 22 March, at Munich, Weill Foundation board member Guy Stern was awarded the Goethe Medal by Dr. Klaus von Bismarck, the President of the Goethe Institute. The Goethe Medal honors outstanding achievement in the study of German culture abroad and the promotion of cultural exchange through artistic or scholarly work. Dr. Stern, Distinguished Professor of German Language and Literature at Wayne State University in Detroit, has most recently published "Thomas Mann and the Judeische Welt" and the book Thesen und Themen zur Exilliteratur.

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The Newsletter is published to provide an open forum wherein interested readers may express a variety of ideas and opinions. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. The editor encourages the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for inclusion in future issues. The submission deadline for the next issue is 1 February 1990.

David Farneth, Editor Mario R. Mercado, Associate Editor Michael Hoexter, Production and Typesetting Board of Trustees Kim Kowalke, President Henry Marx, Vice-President Lys Symonette, Vice-President Guy Stern, Secretary Milton Coleman, Treasurer Harold Prince Julius Rudel

Foundation Staff Kim Kowalke, President David Farneth, Director and Archivist Lys Symonette, Musical Executive Mario Mercado, Associate Director of Programs Michael Hoexter, Office Manager Barbara Tran, Office Assistant
WHO SINGS THE "BARBARA-SONG"?

The following letter was sent to Dr. Kim Kowalke. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author. Mr. Vambery was an eyewitness to the rehearsals and first performances of Die Dreigroschenoper.

Dear Prof. Kowalke,

You are absolutely right about the "Barbara-song." Roma Bahn was not only an excellent actress but also an exceptionally quick study. But time was too short, since Aufricht refused to postpone. Her "Seeräuberjenny," which she nevertheless did, was in no way inferior to the more famous versions of Carola Neher and Lenya.

Robert Vambery
21 May 1989
Los Angeles

COMMENTS ON MUSIK BEI BRECHT

To the editor:

Mr. Dilmling's review cites the omission from Musik bei Brecht [Joachim Luech-...]

TV DOCUMENTARY ABOUT EXILES PREMIERES

The Exiles, a documentary about the emigration of European intellectuals to the United States during the 1930's, had its New York area broadcast premiere on WNET/Thirteen on 24 September. Directed by Richard Kaplan, the film consisted of interviews with European emigrants, including Billy Wilder, Nuria Nono, scenic designer Wolfgang Roth and Lotte Lenya. The documentary focused upon the profound influence the forced emigration had on education and cultural life in the United States, and in particular, the role of artists and musicians upon the American scene. Weill's music forms part of the sound track.

CBS SINS GAINS AWARDS

The Edison Foundation in Amsterdam has awarded the CBS Masterworks recording of The Seven Deadly Sins the 1988 Edison Award for best recording of a Vocal Solo or Vocal Ensemble with Instrumental Solo or Ensemble Accompaniment. In addition, the Washington Post cited it as one of the outstanding show records of the year. The recording features Julia Migenes and the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. Also included is Little Threepenny Music.

Eric Bentley
12 April 1989
New York

THREEPENNY CHRONOLOGY

To the editor:

A friend of mine in London sent me the Kurt Weill Newsletter celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Threepenny Opera. Since I happened to be among the cast of the 1956 production in London, I was surprised to see that the former 1955 French production in Paris at the Theatre de l'Empire was not mentioned in your chronology. I also participated in this production before the British one—a most interesting privilege having acted first in French in Paris, then in English in London.

I have many photos, magazines, and even a tape recording from parts of the London show, which was unfortunately not officially recorded at the time. I shall never forget the wonderful experience as an actress and singer the Threepenny Opera represented, and the exceptional souvenirs that remain with me as a highlight in my life.

By the way, in London, not only did we perform at the Royal Court Theatre, but also at Brighton (first performance), the Aldwych Theatre, then Leicester Square Theatre in London, success having opened the doors of the West End. I played Lotte Lenya's part as Jenny.

My congratulations and thanks for your work and Foundation.

Maria Remusat
4 August 1989
Paris
A few months ago the Kurt Weill Foundation received a rather terse letter from A.B. (name withheld), from New York City:

Why were the rights to re-film The Threepenny Opera given to Menahem Golan (arguably the world's worst director) and Cannon Films (arguably the world's most meretricious film company)? I don't have to see the film or read about it to know how it will turn out. Of course, The Threepenny Opera is Weill's most overrated work. His most underrated? All of his American theater and film music. Would you have information about Weill's visit to Palestine in the 30's or 40's - I know he went. Keep my name on the mailing list. Love the Newsletter!

As this issue of the Newsletter goes to press, a new, first-run, 21st Century Film Corporation production of "Mack the Knife," an adaptation of The Threepenny Opera directed by Menahem Golan, is indeed scheduled for a premiere showing on 15 October at the Chicago Film Festival and for general release in November. Afnicionados of this twentieth-century music theater icon may be as shocked today when confronted with the film's new musical arrangements (complete with soaring horn obligatos and trilling woodwinds) as when they first heard Peter Sandolf's scoring for the 1935 Threepenny film. Conflict between the dearly-held values of serious composers and the aims of the film industry are as old as the industry is young, and Kurt Weill was certainly no stranger to the fray. In 1931, he fought in the courts to prohibit mutilation of composers were brazenly treated as workers in the film industry of the 1940's where complicated and colorful film industry treatments. The film rights to The Threepenny Opera have been sold three times by the authors or their respective estates: in 1931 to Nero-Film, in 1958 to Gloria-Film, and in 1977 to the Dino De Laurentis Corporation. It is difficult to recall any other 20th-century musical theater work that has been honored with (or subjected to) adaptation by three generations of movie makers. While the estates of both Weill and Brecht encountered difficulties in exercising any form of artistic control in the latter two films, the authors themselves aroused much public debate in 1930 when they pursued litigation against Nero-Film for the mishandling of their artistic property in the first Threepenny film - a film which historians would come to regard as one of the last great works in the tradition of German Expressionism cinema.

Weill and Brecht thought that they had safeguarded the integrity of Die Dreigroschenoper when they negotiated the sale of the film rights for the celebrated G. W. Pabst production. The contract signed on 21 May 1930 between Nero-Film (for Tobias and Warner Bros.) and the publisher Felix Bloch Erben (as agent for the authors) explicitly stated:

The composition of additional music and the arrangement of existing music may only be carried out by the composer Kurt Weill, who is to receive separate remuneration for this from the production company. By the same token, new lyrics to existing music or any new compositions may only be written by the librettist Bert Brecht, who is to be engaged by the production company to collaborate on the screenplay.

When Nero-Film did not honor the spirit of its commitment to the authors, Weill and Brecht sued the production company. To summarize briefly the outcome, Weill won his case and settled for a cash settlement and the opportunity to provide musical collaboration on three additional Nero films. Although the court ruled against Brecht, partly because of his failure to deliver an outline for the screenplay on time, he was able to obtain from Nero his court costs, a fee for his initial collaboration, and the return of his film rights after three years. The film rights for the music did not expire until after ten years, on 20 May 1940.

The extent of the adjustments made to Weill's music for the Pabst film pale in comparison to those made in the later adaptations. Although the score was slashed to 28 minutes of music, the spirit and character of the music was retained, largely because the original theater musicians (the Lewis Ruth Band and conductor Theo Mackeben) were engaged to record the soundtrack. (Those readers interested in tracing the specific musical changes should consult Stephen Henley's forthcoming Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera (Cambridge University Press) scheduled for publication early next year.)

Upon settlement of the various disputes, the film was completed in simultaneous German and French versions utilizing the same production team and sets, although the costumes received minor cultural adjustments. Leo Lania, Ladiislaus Vajda, and Béla Balazs were responsible for the final screenplay, and Rudolf Forster as Mackie Messer headed the German cast which included Carola Neher (Polly), Reinold Schünzel (Tiger Brown), Fritz Rasp (Mr. Peacham), Valeska Gert (Mrs. Peacham), and Lotte Lenya (Jenny). Solange Bussy, André Mauprey, and Ninon Steinhoff adapted the text for the French version; Albert Préjean, Odette Fiorelle, Jacques Henley, Gaston Modot, Lucy de Matha, and Margo Lion played the principal roles. The German version premiered in Berlin at the Atrium theater on 19 February 1931 and it received its first American showing at the Warner Theater in New York three months later on 15 May. The French version was given its premiere in Berlin on 8 June 1931 and then shown in France in October.

Although the Nazis allegedly attempted to destroy all copies of the Pabst film, a print resurfaced for a first post-war showing in West Germany at Göttigen in August 1955. The Museum of Modern Art in New York borrowed a print from the British Film Institute and presented the first U.S. post-war showing on 1 December 1955. Thomas Brandon, a pioneer of art film distribution in the U.S., attempted to locate in Europe all existing prints of the film. As a result of his efforts, and with the assistance of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a restored version was released in 1960 and first shown at the 55th St. Playhouse on 11 July. Numerous third-parties undertook efforts - some of them unauthorized - to distribute the film in the post-war years on both sides of the Atlantic, including a home videotape released in 1984 and a videodisc released in 1988. Music selections from both the German and French versions have been available on records in numerous releases and reissues since 1931.

In 1957, Helene Weigel opened negotiations with Bavaria-Filmkunst of Munich and signed a letter of intent to produce an exclusive, full-budget film rights to Die Dreigroschenoper for a period of ten years. Lenya protested Weigel's unilateral actions, and the agreement was never concluded. But soon after, Lotte Lenya and Helene Weigel signed an agreement on 24 March 1958 to license the film rights exclusively to Gloria-Film of Munich for worldwide distribution, excluding the United States. In collaboration with C.E.C. Paris, Kurt Ulrich finally produced the film in 1963; it was directed by Wolfgang Staudte, choreographed by Dick Price, and featured art direction and costumes by Hein Heckroth (the designer of A Kingdom for a Cow). Staudte and Günter Weisborn adapted the play for the screen, and Peter Sandolf literally rearranged and reorchestrated the score.

Apparently the production company took greater artistic liberties with the property than were permitted by the contract:

Gloria-Film must preserve the satiric conception of the author, the social ideas in the work, its character, and music in the production of the film. The use of music other than that of "Dreigroschenoper" music by Kurt Weill requires the consent of Mrs. Lenya. The same is required for any divergence from the original orchestration. If new songs or changes in the songs by Bertolt Brecht are to be used in the film, Gloria-Film will require the consent of Mrs. Brecht-Weigel.

There is no evidence in Lenya's papers
to verify that she was consulted on, or gave consent to, the new arrangements and orchestrations undertaken by Sandlof.

The film was shot by Staudte in West Berlin and released in Germany in April 1963 with a cast which included Curt Jürgens, Hildegard Knef, June Richie, Hilde Hildebrand, and Gert Fröbe. The soundtrack of the German version appeared as Telefunken-Decca BLK 16 242. (London Records released the recording in the U.S. as M 76004.)

When Embassy Pictures acquired the U.S. rights to Gloria's film adaptation in December 1964, it made an English version and interpolated new scenes featuring Sammy Davis Jr. as the street singer against the wishes and without the permission of Staudte. Most of the English text was simply dubbed over the German, but some of the songs were newly filmed in English versions. The lyrics were by Eric Bentley, with the exception of "Mack the Knife," "Salomon Song," and some portions of the Finale which employed Blitzstein's translation. RCA won the contract to release the English soundtrack, and Video Year distributed a home videotape (no. 164) in the U.S. for a short period in the early 1980's. The exclusive rights for distribution of the Gloria version expired on 31 December 1970, thus making it possible for yet another producer to attempt a film adaptation of the "play with music."

While the first two films were produced by the same companies which signed contracts directly with the authors or the authors' estates, Menahem Golan, in contrast, acquired the rights to make "Mack the Knife" after they had traversed a maze of complicated third-party contract assignments. In the early 1970's, Bertha Case (then the agent for both Lenya and Stefan Brecht) began negotiations on the film rights for The Three-Penny Opera with Stanley Chase, one of the two producers of the famous 1954-1961 Theatre de Lys production in New York. Chase, who was anxious to acquire the rights and who had already proven his well-intentioned interest in the property, began working with Paul Kohner to put together a workable package including financing, cast, director, studio, etc. When the various negotiations stalled, Chase approached producer Herb Ross, who hoped to do the film for Warner Brothers. In May 1973, Stanley Chase, in partnership with World Film Services, Ltd., confirmed a new offer to acquire the film rights and began negotiating with Bertha Case, Lester Levin (attorney for Brecht), and Floria V. Lasky (attorney for Lena) for what all parties thought would be a final contract. But
FROM THE EDITOR

David Farneth

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Notes

1. This does not include film and video licensing of single songs or television broadcasts of live performances.

2. Show Boat’s three-film adaptations date from 1929, 1936, and 1951.

3. English translation by Stephen Hinton. All of the contracts discussed in this article are located in the archives of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music.


5. Photo: Capparissi (ed. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Berlin, 1978) provides extensive photo documentation of both the German and French versions and includes press clippings, the filmscript, and reproductions of documents.


11. The Weill-Lenya Research Center holds extensive correspondence on the transaction.

12. Letter from Bertha Case to Lenya, 22 April 1975.


14. "Consultation" in this context indicates that the purchaser must simply inform the owner of their choices; the owner has no contractual power to veto them.

15. RKO’s contract called for an extension of the rights for five years from the date of release, or nine years from the date of the agreement: 25 March 1986.

16. Reportedly RKO sold its rights to Golan for a sum six times the amount paid by De Laurentiis in 1979, and the authors estates had no participation in the transfer. RKO was sold to Ted Turner in 1988 and disbanded.

Broadway's 3 Penny Opera: directed by John Dexter
Top to bottom: Jenny (Suzanne Douglas) and the Street Singer (Ethyl Eichelberger) perform the "Solomon Song." Mr. and Mrs. Peachum (Alvin Epstein and Georgia Brown) learn of Polly's (Maureen McGovern) marriage to Mac Heath; Polly (Maureen McGovern) and Lucy (Kim Criswell) wish they could crucify Mac Heath (Sting). Photos: Nancy Ellison

Hollywood's "Mack the Knife": directed by Menahem Golan
Top to bottom: Roger Daltrey as the Street Singer; Julia Migenes (Jenny), Richard Harris (Mr. Peachum), Julie Walters (Mrs. Peachum), and Bill Nighy (Tiger Brown); Jenny and Tiger Brown lead a demonstration. ©21st Century Film Corp.