

KURT WEILL NEWSLETTER

Volume 8, Number 2

Fall 1990

At right: Jimmy (William Pell) and a nest of Mickey Mice face the audience in the Hamburg Opera June 1990 production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. Günter Krämer, director. Photo: Helga Kneidl. Reviews of this production and the Maggio Musicale staging appear on pages 17 and 20.

Mahagonny premieres in four new German productions during 1990-91

Frankfurt Steven Sloane, conductor; Arie Zinger, director; Peter Paul and Uta Fink, designers. October 1990. The production guests in Leipzig for two performances, 17 and 19 January 1991.

Hildesheim Stadttheater Hildesheim. Premiere: 6 May 1991.

Freiburg Freiburger Oper. 1990-91 season. [Details in the next issue.]

Halle Landestheater Halle. Henry Akina, director. January 1991.

The Paris Revue, Kurt Weill

The popular Berlin Theater des Westens "Kurt Weill Revue" arrives in Paris for an engagement from 11 to 30 June 1991 at the Théâtre Odéon. The Revue will be staged and choreographed by Helmut Baumann and Jürg Burth. Peter Keuschnig is the conductor. Angelika Milster, Hana Hegerova, and Gaby MacFarlane are the featured performers who will be recalling the Berlin, Paris, and New York periods of Weill's career. Other cast members include Pascale Camele, F. Dion Davis, Eric Lee Johnson, Jeffery Judson, Cush Jung, Martin Pichler, Monica Solem and Sylvia Wintergrün. Excerpts from *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik* will be choreographed as a ballet.

Stratas's Weill Wins "Record of the Decade" Honors

Time magazine released its "Best of the Decade" album choices on 1 January 1990. Listed second in the top ten was "The Unknown Kurt Weill" (Nonesuch) featuring soprano Teresa Stratas singing rare Weill selections. Since Stratas introduced these fourteen songs in 1981, they have entered the repertoire of singers worldwide.



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Kurt Weill Musik und Theater

Gesammelte Schriften.
Mit einer Auswahl
von Gesprächen und
Interviews



Just Published

Kurt Weill. *Musik und Theater: Gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera. Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1990. 381 p.

Stephen Hinton. *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera*. The Cambridge Opera Handbook Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 229 p.

Kurt Weill The Threepenny Opera

STEPHEN HINTON



BBC Telecasts "Bird of Passage"

The British Broadcasting Corporation telecast on 30 June 1990 a commemorative program entitled "Bird of Passage: Kurt Weill in Exile" recorded at the 1990 Almeida Festival in London. The hour-long special consisted of selections from the Almeida concerts including *Marie Galante* and two suites prepared by David Drew: "Cry, the Beloved Country" from *Lost in the Stars* and "War Play" from *Johnny Johnson*. Robert Ziegler conducted the Matrix Ensemble, with soloists Angelina Réaux and Damon Evans.

Kurt Weill Festival Event Televised by the WDR

Westdeutscher Rundfunk television presented "Caterina Valente singt Kurt Weill" on 18 August 1990, a telecast of a concert recorded on 4 April. Ms. Valente performed Weill's American theater songs with the WDR Big-Band and the Kölner Philharmonie, Jerry van Rooyen, conductor. Musical arrangements were by Roger Kellaway. Ms. Valente's concert, also presented in Düsseldorf, was one of the events sponsored by the North Rhine Westphalia Kurt Weill Festival.

Dreigroschenoper in Latin America

The Berliner Ensemble took its production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* on a Latin American tour in April 1990. After performances at the International Festival in Caracas, Venezuela, and Bogota, Colombia, the Ensemble gained great acclaim for August performances in the "Gran Festival Ciudad de Mexico" at Mexico City. The Berliner Ensemble has been performing *Die Dreigroschenoper* since 23 April 1960, when it was added to the company's repertory. The Ensemble's most recent 1981 staging was

last seen in North America in 1987 at Toronto during the International Brecht Conference.

"Opera and the Golden West," Hofstra University, April 18 - 20, 1991

From 18-20 April 1991, Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, will sponsor a conference on the past, present, and future of American opera. This meeting will commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the world premiere of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* in December of 1910. Opera in the United States will be considered from a variety of viewpoints, among them, its European roots, European views of American opera, American composers and their works, and the relationship between American musical theater and opera. The program will include diverse speakers, panel discussions, films, performances and exhibitions. For information contact Athelene A. Collins at the Hofstra Cultural Center (516) 560-5669/5670.

Weill and Garlic

The following article is reprinted in full from the 27 July 1990 edition of the *Star News, Pasadena, CA*.

The "seen it all" department.

After you work at a newspaper for a while, you come to believe there's an organization, publication or conference for everything. We have two pieces of evidence this week.

Exhibit A: the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* (the man died in 1950, but his fans managed to put out 26 pages of news).

Exhibit B: the First World Congress on the Health Significance of Garlic and Garlic Constituents. Aug. 28-30 in Washington D.C.

Be there. Aloha.

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7 East 20th Street
New York, NY 10003-1106
Tel. (212)505-5240
Fax (212)353-9663

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 15 January 1991.

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To the Editor:

I would like to add a footnote to my review of the London recording of *Die Dreigroschenoper* [vol. 8, no. 1].

The recently-published *Cambridge Opera Handbook* by Stephen Hinton has raised as many new questions as it has answered old ones. In particular, Geoffrey Abbott's "The Dreigroschen sound" (Chapter 14) sent me scurrying back to well-thumbed copies of the piano-vocal and orchestral scores. It is beyond the scope of this letter to assess the validity of Abbott's general thesis that "authentic" performance practice for *Die Dreigroschenoper* should grant more authority than hitherto to the piano-conductor score and orchestra parts used by Theo Mackeben and the Lewis Ruth Band for the original Berlin production (as well as subsequent phonograph recordings and the film soundtrack). In any case, I do not believe that the complex issues Abbott raises invalidate conductor John Mauceri's decision to follow the published full score, which essentially represents Weill's "final" intentions.

Abbott does, however, present convincing evidence to support his contention that Weill intended the whole of Mrs. Peachum's role to be sung an octave lower than notated (p. 179). Nor does the lack of any explicit instruction to this effect disprove his theory: as critic Jon Alan Conrad has observed, future musicologists trying to reconstruct "authentic" performance practice for *Hello, Dolly!* would conclude from the published piano-vocal score that Jerry Herman had written the title part for lyric soprano.

If Abbott is correct, then the London recording errs not only in assigning the role of Jenny to a performer who must sing it an octave down, but also in giving Mrs. Peachum to one who sings an octave up. I wouldn't for one moment want to be without Helga Dernesch's trenchant Mrs. P. (or Milva's Jenny, for that matter); I am only suggesting that in the future producers might start thinking on other lines – for instance, the 1990-model Regina Resnik. Or maybe Carol Channing?

Nicholas Deutsch
14 September 1989
New York

Stephen Hinton responds:

It is gratifying to hear that the *Handbook* has sent at least one reader "scurrying back" to the score. What better recommendation? To say, however, that it "has raised as many new questions as it has answered old ones" is a rhetorical flourish which requires qualification. Many of the questions the book deliberately leaves unanswered arose from investigating old certainties. One such is the

origin of the work's title. According to Elisabeth Hauptmann, it was Lion Feuchtwanger who first hit upon *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Subsequently, Lenya (who herself followed Hauptmann) and countless other commentators have cited this fact. But if we accept Elias Canetti's testimony, cited on page 21 of the *Handbook*, there is no way of being certain about the coinage. Another such issue is that of Mrs. Peachum's tessitura. This is a specific matter which needs to be resolved in the light of a more general one – the vexed question of "authentic" performance practice.

In stating that Mrs. Peachum's music "was intended to be sung an octave lower than written," Geoffrey Abbott invokes two quite separate authorities: 1) the evidence of the early performance practice; 2) Weill's score. The distinction between the two is, I believe, crucial. Of the four arguments advanced in favor of the lower octave, the first two derive from the first authority. The second two are necessarily speculative, dealing as they do with the nature of octave doublings in instrumental parts on the one hand and with operatic mother-daughter relationships on the other. While the evidence to be adduced from original performance practice (i.e., the premiere and an early shellac recording) clearly favors the lower octave, that from the written sources is more complicated and hence less compelling. Mr. Abbott observes that Mrs. Peachum's tessitura, as notated, is unusually high in relation to that of her daughter – something unprecedented in opera history. He has a point. But then there is a lot about *Die Dreigroschenoper* that is unprecedented in opera history. Why should the mother be lower than the daughter? The fact that, taken literally, Mrs. Peachum's part fits the mezzo-soprano range might also explain why Weill does not necessarily expect the singer to reach the low G in the "Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit," offering her d as an alternative.

Be that as it may. The basic issue remains: what constitutes "authentic" Weill anyway? Both in Europe and America the genesis of his works was often closely bound up with their realization on the stage. From this it might be assumed that the premiere can lay claim to a high degree of authenticity in representing the composer's intentions. Yet there is a sense in which those first performances were anything but definitive: Weill made concessions to the contingencies of performance conditions and to the performers' limitations. In that sense it would surely be unfair to him – precisely because of those concessions – slavishly to follow early performance practice. This, in other words, is also an open question to be decided in each individual case. As far as *Die Dreigroschenoper* is concerned, and as the *Handbook* makes clear, the score by no means offers a

faithful version of the music as performed at the premiere. Nor did the composer ever intend it to.

In raising the issue again, Mr. Deutsch also sent me scurrying back to the scores – not only to the printed full score but also to Weill's autograph. The latter still awaits a proper edition. It is also the most authentic document we have.

To the Editor:

In recent issues of the *Newsletter* Eric Bentley and Albrecht Dümmling have criticized our book *Musik bei Brecht*. Inasmuch as we are now preparing an English-language edition of that book for Pendragon Press, we believe it is time to answer their criticism, if only to clear up the confusion for those who do not read German.

Prof. Bentley has the good grace to admit from the outset that he has not read our volume thoroughly. Apparently, Mr. Dümmling also skipped a few pages. If, for example, they had paid attention to the introduction to the catalogue of works, they would know that the works listed there had to meet some rather rigid criteria. They include:

The work was set to music by a composer who meets one of the following criteria:

- The composer is Brecht himself.*
- The composer is Paul Dessau, Hanns Eisler, or Kurt Weill.*
- The composer set the work to music in collaboration with Brecht.*
- The composer wrote the music for the premiere performance of the work.*
- The composer wrote the music which must now by law be performed in German-language productions of the piece or which is performed at the Berliner Ensemble.*

Admittedly, the stated criteria do not leave room for the inclusion of important works by such composers as Marc Blitzstein, as Prof. Bentley and Mr. Dümmling desire. Indeed, they did not allow us to include more than a handful of the thousands of settings written in the three decades since Brecht's death by composers of German, French, American, Latin American or other descent.

Musik bei Brecht is a very long book which took more than ten years to complete. Without some basis for selectivity, it would be a much longer book and would still be "a work in progress." Fundamental to the criteria which helped limit the book to an accessible size is our view that Brecht's own notions about music – notions he derived not only

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from his broad experiences as a listener but also from his practice as a writer and singer of songs – had a profound impact on the music composed for his works. Our criteria, then, allowed us to include those works in which Brecht's hand was most likely to be directly felt. One may fault these criteria and offer alternatives, but our critics should not simply ignore them.

Brecht's writings about music were also subject to careful selection. After weighing literally hundreds of essays, notes, marginalia and obscure scribbles, we chose to include those which gave direct evidence of Brecht's ideas and practice of music, leaving out those which mention music only secondarily or which serve non-musical ends.

Mr. Dümmling laments the absence of the following statement from the collection of texts: "The technical elements of the stage grew uncommonly complex. Piscator's stage manager had a production script in front of him which was as different from the one used by Reinhardt's stage manager as the score of a Stravinsky opera was from a singing lute player's sheet music" (Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 15, p. 291). This and many similar sentences do indeed show the degree to which musical references crop up in Brecht's writings, even when the subject is not music, and it indicates that he was not ignorant of contemporary composers. On the other hand, it does not prove that, as Mr. Dümmling asserts in his own book (*Laßt euch nicht verführen*, p. 531), that Brecht had looked at Stravinsky's score. Brecht had been collaborating with professional composers for twelve years when the statement was written and could easily have learned of the complexity of a Stravinsky score from any of them. In any case, he was certainly perceptive enough to know that there were necessarily profound differences between a score by an avant garde composer and musical notations of a singer with a lute.

Selectivity implies a certain bias. Each of us – the musicologist and the theater practitioner – holds strong opinions about Brecht's theory and practice of music, and we have welded those opinions into a collective bias which can be read throughout the broad overview we provide in the introduction to *Musik bei Brecht* and which, for better or for worse, marks the collection of texts and catalogue works. Our opinions are, however, secondary to the material we present; our primary aim was not to interpret Brecht's relationship to music but to offer others access to the materials necessary for an interpretation. As Mr. Dümmling notes in his review, others have sought to elucidate the importance of music for Brecht's work, and our readers will find references to their seminal writings throughout *Musik bei Brecht*. Prior to *Laßt euch nicht verführen*, however, these attempts were either too

short to be comprehensive or limited to Brecht's work with individual composers. No work, including Mr. Dümmling's, provides readers the information which would allow them to make up their own minds. We did not approach our subject as "academic terra incognita" nor promise a "definitive" description of the terra nova. Instead, we have offered a road map, an atlas to help others find their way into and through a rich and varied landscape.

We truly hope that *Musik bei Brecht* will not be the last word on this subject. Instead, we hope that our work will spur others to study the wealth of available resources so that they might form their own interpretations. Only when the full range of Brecht's involvement in musical matters has become the subject for productive debate will we rise above trivial concerns about who discovered which snatch of melody or which composer was the more "Brechtian" and begin to address the unique musical elements of Brecht's theater and its value for contemporary dramatic and musical art. Above all, we hope that our contribution will encourage more and better productions of Brecht's works and the music associated with them. In the end, we would like to help move the debate off of the printed page and back onto the stage where it belongs, for the proof of the pudding is, after all, still in the eating.

Joachim Lucchesi
Berlin
Ronald K. Shull
Lexington, KY
23 July 1990

To the Editor:

In volume 7, number 2, of the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* the "Press Clippings" column includes an alleged recollection of a remark by Pierre Boulez in his famous interview from *Der Spiegel*, September 1967. According to the quotation in the newsletter, Boulez said that the operatic repertoire ought to be reduced to just one work – Kurt Weill's and Bert Brecht's *Mahagonny*.

First, any first-year undergraduate would know that Boulez could never seriously have said such a thing. Secondly, *Mahagonny* is not even mentioned in the *Spiegel* interview. And thirdly, what Boulez actually said about Weill was somewhat less flattering as shown by the following extract from the interview:

Boulez: I would like to collaborate with a writer who on each word he writes feels that music is to be added, even that the text can only live together with the music.

Spiegel: A rare gift.

Boulez: Yes, Brecht had it – unfortu-

nately he worked together with such unimportant musicians.

Spiegel: Weill and Dessau ...

Boulez: One could dream of a collaboration between Stravinsky and Brecht in the twenties. By God, that would certainly have produced a result.

This is quite a different matter! Unless the note in the Newsletter is a joke, one could – without taking sides as to whether Boulez is right or wrong – feel a little worried that such a quotation could pass uncommented by the editor of this otherwise excellent and useful newsletter.

On another matter, may I give a minor addition and correction to David Drew's *Kurt Weill: A Handbook* and Kim H. Kowalke's *Kurt Weill in Europe*?

On page 184, David Drew writes: "The last production of *Mahagonny* in Weill's lifetime was mounted at the Raimund Theater, Vienna, on 26 April 1932..." The same is stated by Kowalke in his survey of *Mahagonny* performances on pp. 429-31.

This is not quite correct. In fact, the opera was performed at one of the leading theaters in Copenhagen about eight times, from 30 December 1933 to 10 January 1934. The second performance was even broadcast "live" on Radio Denmark, and according to one of the Danish newspapers (*Dagens Nyheder* [News of the Day], 2 January 1934), Weill actually listened to the Danish performance on the radio from Vienna; according to the same paper, he even sent a telegram to the opera company, saying: "It came through all right. The music was exactly as I had imagined it should be. Marvelous artists!"

The performance was extensively covered by the press and was well received by the audience. Together with Offenbach's *Orpheus* it was, in fact, the event of the theater life of that new year. The interest before the premiere was quite big, partly because of the German ban against the opera and partly because of rumors of sexual audacities. In both respects, however, the audience became somewhat disappointed!

The papers tell, among other things, that two days after the first performance, *Mahagonny* records were no longer available in the Copenhagen record shops. People furthermore unsuccessfully sought a piano score, and it was suggested that Denmark, as a cultural obligation, ought to publish such a score – a suggestion that we all know came to nothing.

The reviewers passed lightly over Brecht's text but went into some detail about the music. They were not very keen on the jazz element (all the time the opera is labelled "a jazz opera," and at the same time the reviews

stress that the jazz elements are both "cultivated and artistic!"), but find many passages worth listening to, especially in the first act.

Even if this performance of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* was not given by the leading Royal Opera Company but by a private company as a so-called "guest performance," Weill's opera apparently created quite a stir in Copenhagen bourgeois circles in the first week of 1934 – on the doorstep of the German "Reich" and at a time when any performance in Germany was, for obvious reasons, out of the question.

Niels Krabbe
28 February 1990
Copenhagen

Due to a production error, the Boulez-related reprint appeared without an appropriate editor's note. We thank Mr. Krabbe for calling attention to the omission. Regarding Mahagonny in Copenhagen: Weill may indeed have heard a broadcast of the production when he stopped in Vienna for 1-1/2 days at the end of December on his return to Paris from Rome; however, he did not mention it in his correspondence to Lotte Lenya or Universal Edition. On 3 May 1934, however, he did write to UE, "There are a few performances of Mahagonny in Copenhagen and in the Danish provinces."

To the Editor:

Due to an error, either editorial or reportorial, Paul Moor's review of Weilliana in San Francisco refers to Ute Lemper's rendition of "Je ne t'aime pas" as an example of *Marie Galante* songs on recording. Of course, "Je ne t'aime pas" isn't from *Marie Galante* at all, and the lyrics aren't by Jacques Deval; the song is one of the Lys Gauty cabaret chansons with lyrics by Maurice Magré.

It's also worth pointing out that "Je ne t'aime pas" was recorded (in English) for one of Ben Bagley's cheerfully distressing little productions and included (definitively and in French) in Teresa Stratas's "Unknown Kurt Weill" back before Ute Lemper was even a gleam in a promoter's eye.

William V. Madison
New York

To the Editor:

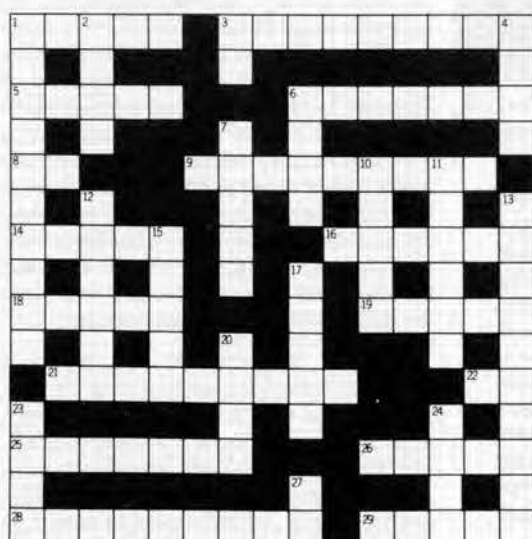
By a fortuitous coincidence, I happened to be listening to the CD reissue of "The Individualism of Gil Evans" the other day while reading the latest newsletter – which contains Leonard J. Lehrman's long letter on Marc Blitzstein, Weill, Bentley, et al. I was on the paragraph including Blitzstein's early criticism of Weill's "ditties" ("stilted Otchi Tchornayas") just as jazz composer/arranger Evans's wonderful version of "The Barbara Song" began playing.

Sure enough, suddenly obvious, there were the theme sections that echo that Russian rouser. I'd not noticed the resemblances before (the carelessness of a non-musician, I guess), but neither does it bother me now that they are apparent. Rather than making me want to pursue questions of Weill's sources of inspiration, I began instead to ponder the matter of his music's influence on jazz of the past 40 to 50 years (reversing the usual classically trained critic's search for jazz elements in Weill's compositions). Gil Evans, for one, was an active proselytizer of several Weill Songs – "My Ship" and "Bilbao," among others – and I have heard other jazzmen's versions of "September Song," "Speak Low," and even "Foolish Heart."

Has anyone attempted to document, catalogue, or analyze the far-reaching influence Weill's melodies have exerted in jazz? Surely it must be a matter not only of interesting tunes but of exotic chord changes, "jazzy" tempos, perhaps even the streetwise or world-weary lyrics supplied by others. I imagine that Weill ranks right up there behind the Gershwins, Arlen, Kern, and Rodgers & Hart and such, as a favorite source of what the jazz audience calls its "standards." Does such research exist? If not, it seems to me a fertile field for scholars.

Ed Leimbacher
13 July 1990
Seattle

Weill puzzle



Across

- 1 See 19
- 3 See 20 down
- 5 Lost opera after Körner tragedy (5)
- 6 Each of the following is this: Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, San Francisco, Memphis (3,4)
- 8 Initials of librettist of opera from Mannheim (1,1)
- 9 Queen in the tub in "Eternal road"? (9)
- 14 and 26
KW's wife (5,5)
- 16 Based his book on Gay work (5)
- 18 Librettist for "River is Blue" and "Waiting for Lefty" (5)
- 19 and 1 across.
Danced her way as 14's other half. Wedekind's wife (5,5)
- 21 and 24 down
What bees do to these two poor girls in Seven Deadly Sins. (5,4,4)
- 22 Myself (2)
- 25 Wear a knickerbocker and have this (7)
- 26 See 14
- 28 See 29
- 29 and 28
Wooden town that's a bit up and down (5,9)

Down

- 1 Sings 27 and 2, is in 20 and 3 across, and needs a psychiatrist (4,6)
- 2 See 27
- 3 Fashionable (2)
- 4 See 7
- 6 Over the moon here. Rather the opposite (4)
- 7 and 4 down
Sang Tchaikovsky in premiere of 20 and 3 across (5,4)
- 10 ...Wessel. S N Berman suggested as theme for musical to KW (5)
- 11 "Toughen up, ... down, Carry on" – Propaganda song, 1942 (6)
- 12 and 17
The Broadway opera (6,5)
- 13 Knickerbocker hero? (10)
- 15 Where the "Royal Palace" went up in flames (5)
- 17 See 12
- 20 and 3 across.
Woman without light – leading role, 1 down (4,2,3,4)
- 23 Not us (4)
- 24 See 21 across
- 27 and 2
1 down sings this hoping that it will sail in (2,4)

Reproduced from *Classic CD*, May 1990. Courtesy of *Classic CD*.