

NEW PUBLICATIONS



ARTICLES

- Adorno, Theodor W. "On Jazz." *Discourse: Journal of Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 12 (Fall-Winter, 1989-90): 39-69. [Introductory comments by Jamie Owen Daniel, pp. 39-44.]
- Bassi, Adriano. "Kurt Weill e il Lied." *Rassegna musicale curci* 43 (Gennaio, 1990): 22-25.
- Krabbe, Niels. "Beggar's Opera gennem 250 år - fra John Gay til Alan Ayckbourn." *Musik & Forskning* 14 (1988-89): 5-93.
- Petazzi, Paolo. "Mahagonny, una favola anticapitalistica." *La rivista illustrata del Museo teatrale alla Scala* 3, no. 6 (Primavera, 1990): 38-43.

BOOKS

- Hayes, Helen, with Katherine Hatch. *My Life in Three Acts*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990.
- Hinton, Stephen, ed. *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera*. The Cambridge Opera Handbook Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Swain, Joseph P. *The Broadway Musical; a Critical and Musical Survey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Weill, Kurt. *Musik und Theater; Gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera. Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1990.

DISSERTATIONS

- Citron, Atay. "Pageantry and Theatre in the Service of Jewish Nationalism in the United States, 1933-1946." Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1989. [Available from UMI Dissertation Service.]
- Huynh, Pascal. "Kurt Weill et la république de Weimar: Une vision de l'avant-garde dans la press (1923-1933)." Ph.D. diss., l'Université François Rabelais de Tours and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, 1990.
- Lareau, Alan Hartland. "An Unhappy Love: The Struggle for a Literary Cabaret in Berlin, 1919-1933." Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1990. [Available from UMI Dissertation Service.]

RECORDINGS

- Berlin im Licht*. Ensemble Modern, H.K. Gruber, conductor. Largo 5114. ["Berlin im Licht"; "Slow Fox and Algi-Song"; "Klopslied"; "Ach, wäre mein Lieb ein Brunnlein kalt"; "Frauentanz"; "Bastille Musik"; "Öl-Musik"; "Suite Panaméene" from *Marie Galante*; "Cowboy Song"; "Captain Valentine's Song"; "Die stille Stadt."]
- Mahagonny Songspiel/Die sieben Todsünden*. Ute Lemper, Susanne Tremper, Helmut Wildhaber, Peter Haage, Thomas Mohr, Manfred Jungwirth, Berlin-RIAS Chamber Ensemble, John Mauceri, conductor. Decca 430 168-2 LH.
- O Moon of Alabama: Historic Original Recordings (1928-1944)*. Lotte Lenya, Kurt Weill, Ernst Busch, Theo Mackeben, Maurice Abravanel. Capriccio 10 347. [Includes songs from *Mahagonny*, *Konjunktur*, *Happy End*, *Der Silbersee*, *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, and reissues of the 1943 BOST recordings.]
- Radio Classics of the '50s* Louis Armstrong and his All-Stars. CBS, CK 45017. [includes "Mack the Knife"]
- The Threepenny Opera: Historic Original Recordings (1928-1931)* Lotte Lenya, Carola Neher, Lys Gauty, Odette Florelle, Harald Paulsen, Kurt Gerron, Lewis Ruth Band, Otto Klemperer, Theo Mackeben. Capriccio 10 346.
- The Threepenny Opera*. Lotte Lenya, Kurt Gerron, Erich Ponto, Erika Helmke, Willi Trenk-Trebitsch. Teldec 72025. [Includes selections from historical recordings as well as cabaret songs by Nelson, Hollaender, and Grosz sung by Marlene Dietrich and others.]

VIDEOTAPES

- Mack the Knife*. Raul Julia, Rachel Richardson, Richard Harris, Julia Migenes, Roger Daltrey, Julie Walters. 21st Century. RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video 77003. (VHS, Hi-Fi Format)

Kurt Weill

The Threepenny Opera

STEPHEN HINTON



Kurt Weill. *The Threepenny Opera*. Edited by Stephen Hinton. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 229 p.

In accordance with the general guidelines for the series to which it belongs (Cambridge Opera Handbooks), Stephen Hinton's volume on *The Threepenny Opera* contains essays on the history of the work – both its genesis and its reception at home and abroad – analyses of its musical structures, and interpretations. It is also supplied with a thorough bibliography and a discography.

Given that this is a series devoted to opera, it is in a sense not surprising for the work to be credited to the composer. In this case, however, that assignation takes on a particular piquancy when seen against the background of the increasingly strained relations between Weill and Brecht (continued, reputedly, in the relations between their respective estates). In the first of his essays, "Matters of Intellectual Property: The Sources and Genesis of *Die Dreigroschenoper*," Stephen Hinton makes the point simply and effectively by detailing the contractual distribution of royalties (62.5% to Brecht, 25% to Weill, the remaining 12.5% to Brecht's assistant, Elisabeth Hauptmann), surely one of the most unfair arrangements in theatrical history, when one considers how much of Weill's music has contributed to the success of the work from the very outset. Kim Kowalke's essay on *The Threepenny Opera* in America illustrates further how little Brecht's self-styled "fundamental laxity in matters of intellectual property" governed his attitude with respect to any gains to be derived from his own intellectual property.

Hinton's opening essay also underlines a point already familiar to students of Brecht, but worth repeating to any readership interested in theatrical history, namely that the opera which enjoyed such astonishing success in Germany in 1928 is not the one presented to audiences nowadays. This is because Brecht made a number of small but significant changes to the libretto in 1931, and this revised text then formed the basis for a "standard" version. The changes were mostly intended to give the work a slant which would be more compatible with the Marxist analysis of society Brecht had adopted in the interim, but the rough and ready manner of their incorporation into the text (the new passages, Hinton informs us, were simply stuck into a copy of the original 1928 version) resulted in the confusion of any message the work was supposed to convey (not that it had an entirely clear message in the first place) and in the suppression of at least one important element in its appeal, namely the conception of the male lead, Macheath. Even if Harald Paulsen (the first Mackie Messer) did play the part rather too suavely for Brecht's taste, the choice of this particular actor-singer, with his background in popular musical theater did at least match the original conception of the character as a debonair ladies' man. To bring this out, Hinton has included in his selection of material a translation of an essay by Brecht from 1928, in which Macheath is introduced to the public as "a gentleman idolized by all the girls." In his 1931 notes on the opera (which Hinton has not reproduced, possibly because they are so much at odds with the original conception) Brecht insisted that Macheath's appeal to the ladies is that of the well-heeled ("gutsituiert"), rather than good-looking man. The difference between the 1931 and 1928 conceptions would, however, have been made even clearer if Hinton's translation had not omitted the important word "young" from Brecht's essay of 1928 ("*der junge, von den Dämchen vergötterte Gentleman Macheath*"); I presume this is a slip in copying which can be corrected in any reprint, since Hinton's translations are generally reliable as well as lively.

In any such volume, the balance between historical, analytic, and interpretative essays will always be a matter of judgment. Here, I feel that rather more space could have been devoted to analysis and less to history. Although the fate of the work in America is of some interest, I do not think this should have been allowed to take up so much of the volume. On the other hand, what we are offered by way of analysis is often fascinating. Hans Keller's compact but illuminating piece from 1956 sets a standard for operatic-musical reviewing which his colleagues seldom attain. David Drew's essay on "Motifs, Tags and Related Matters" reveals just how subtly (and often ironically) "durchkomponiert"

Weill's music for the individual songs was. Yet, if Drew is correct, one of Stephen Hinton's generalizations is puzzling. Drew points, for example, to a motivic link between Polly's line "Ich bin sehr glücklich" and Macheath's cynical remarks in the "Zuhälterballade" about the plurality of amorous relationships. This does not seem to me to support Hinton's assertion, at least in this very general form, "that the music does not contribute towards dramatic characterization in any general or substantial way." Rather, Drew's analysis seems to indicate subtle musical character-drawing, since the obvious cynicism and self-interest in Macheath's "lyrical" song are actually also present, so the music reveals, under the surface of Polly's seeming naiveté. Polly's capacity for play-acting, which so perturbs Macheath when she sings about the hidden depths of "Seeräuberjenny" at her wedding-reception, is then confirmed when the "sweet young bride" transforms herself almost instantaneously into the hard-headed businesswoman perfectly capable of running the gang in Macheath's absence (however long this might last!). The fact that these characters are devious, and the manner of musical characterization (aptly) ironic, surely does not mean that they do not possess "true character or emotions," but rather that the characters and emotions are as "gebrochen" in their expression as the music with its allusions, parodies, and ambiguities. To take another example, does not the relation of music to words in Peachum's "Morgenchoral" correspond precisely to the way Peachum cynically exploits religious and moral sentiments to earn his living, and does he not run his business with the grim determination of the Protestant ethic – Weber's "innerworldly asceticism" – that inspired the chorales to which Weill's music alludes? One last illustration: a stage direction in the original libretto (one of a number which, as Hinton notes with regret, disappeared in the revised versions) indicates that Polly and Frau Peachum dance an "albernen Step" while singing the refrain of the first finale, a gesture which, like the mockingly over-pointed rhythms in text and music, underscores their cynical lack of concern for the moral state of the world. Hinton is quite right in observing that, "The words put into the mouths of the singers are frequently in quotation marks," but what and how they quote is surely as much a revelation of character as a naive outpouring of emotion.

I imagine that this type of volume will generally appeal to anyone – director, singer, musician, actor – intending to stage the work concerned. Such readers will find their needs well served not only by the sections on musical analysis, but also by Geoffrey Abbott's essay on the re-construction of the *Dreigroschen* sound, which derives from his

own practical work in the theater, and also by Stephen Hinton's concluding essay on the pervasive ambiguity and openness of the work, which delivers a well-considered rebuff to Adorno's high-brow dismissal of any popular appeal in Weill's music as sheer "misunderstanding" and invites a realization of the unsettling qualities which give the songs of *The Threepenny Opera* their enduring vitality.

RONALD SPIERS
Birmingham, England



Kurt Weill: Eine Biographie in Texten, Bildern und Dokumenten
By Jürgen Schebera. Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1990. 301 pp.

It has been an exhilarating decade for Weill scholarship. Every year seems to bring to light new sources – even new works – while a profusion of articles, books, dissertations, and recordings have explored uncharted territory. Jürgen Schebera has made no small contribution to these developments, especially in expanding our knowledge of the discographic, pictorial, and documentary records of Weill's life and career. Most particularly he has proven to be a master sleuth in the libraries, archives, and private holdings of the former German Democratic Republic, collections of paramount importance for a composer born in Dessau, educated and professionally active in Berlin, and with important ties to such cities as

Leipzig and Dresden. But Schebera's research has taken him far beyond the borders of Germany, and his most recent biography reflects extensive investigation of sources in Western Europe and the United States, as well.

This new book, Schebera's third on Weill within the span of ten years, provides a striking example of the expanding base and shifting purposes of Weill scholarship. His *Kurt Weill – Für Sie porträtiert* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1980), part of a popular series, goes barely beyond a biographical sketch and summary of works. *Kurt Weill – Leben und Werk* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1983) offers a significantly expanded biography, a rich assortment of iconographic material, and a valuable appendix devoted to texts and documents by and about Weill; it is, on the other hand, marred by a number of inaccuracies, over-generalizations, and a somewhat cursory treatment of the American years. Schebera's latest book, subtitled a "Biography in Texts, Pictures, and Documents," represents a major revision and expansion of that 1983 account through the incorporation of a wealth of new material. The annotations, which between 1983 and 1990 have more than doubled, tell the story. Important new sources, including newly discovered photos, recordings, programs, family letters, Weill's correspondence with his European and American publishers, the author's interviews with friends and colleagues (even from Weill's Dessau school days), diaries, and, of course, recently published scholarship, have provided Schebera with many of the links missing from his earlier accounts. A book of this length cannot provide all the detail one might wish, but Schebera's discussion of both large and small issues is more differentiated than earlier. Moreover, the author's judicious and well-balanced use of these new sources lends his narrative greater immediacy and makes his biography the most up-to-date and generally accurate account of Weill's career available today.

While most of the factual errors and inconsistencies from Schebera's 1983 text have been eliminated and the photo captions are more generous, the text is not without its gremlins. To name a few: Leo Kestenberg joined the Prussian Cultural Ministry in 1919, not 1910 (p. 32), Antheil's *Transatlantic* is about modern politics, not an ocean journey (p. 63), Theodor W. Adorno studied philosophy in Frankfurt, not Vienna (p. 75), Weill and Brecht first met in April 1927, not 1928

(p. 78), the rehearsals for *Johnny Johnson* began in October 1936, not 1935 (p. 197), the attack on Pearl Harbor is given as December 6th (p. 237), and Davy Crockett, who died at the Alamo in 1836, was a Congressman from Tennessee, not Texas, which did not become a state until 1845.

Misinformation about American history spills over into confusion about American life and culture, as when Schebera infers (p. 209) that the seven years it took Weill to become a naturalized American citizen represented some extraordinary example of the ponderous pace of American bureaucracy, or when he implies (p. 192) that the debacle of Weill's 1935 League of Composers concert in New York (with its elite audience of new music enthusiasts) represented a classic clash between contemporary European art and American tastes shaped by commercial music.

Kurt Weill's thirty-year professional career is divided more or less equally between Europe and America. While, as in the 1983 book, the discussion of the first fifteen years occupies over two-thirds of the narrative, Schebera's revision adds new perspectives to his account of Weill's American career. In particular, the author's decision to abandon a strictly chronological narrative in favor of three chapters dealing with Weill's works for the Group Theatre and Playwright's Company, his Broadway Musicals, and his pursuit of the idea of a Broadway opera (as well as a short interlude dealing with Weill's works for the fight against fascism), is a clear and sensitive means of treating the preoccupations of Weill's American years. Unfortunately the descriptive discussions of the music are only slightly expanded, and, as in the 1983 biography, there are no musical examples. This is especially regrettable for the American works, for which no introductory source is presently available for the general reader.

The appendices are comprised of a good bibliography, a selected, partially annotated discography, an index, and the by now obligatory chronology of Weill's life. Schebera's biography is an attractively produced volume which is clear, coherent, and largely free of ideological baggage. One would welcome an English translation, especially with the addition of musical examples and some expansion of the discussion of the American years.

CHRISTOPHER HAILEY
Occidental College

Mahagonny Songspiel. Bremer Theater. Elmar Gehlens, dir.; Anthony Beaumont, cond.; 26 May 1990 (Premiere).

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny. Hamburgischer Staatsoper. Günter Krämer, dir.; Bruno Weil, cond.; 9-10, 12-17, 19-20 June, 19-20 September 1990.

In Germany there has been no lack of scholarly efforts or of artistic ventures pertaining to Kurt Weill and his oeuvre during this 1990 anniversary year. It was especially instructive to have the opportunity to enjoy productions of the *Songspiel* and the opera in close proximity to one another in the neighboring Hanseatic cities of Bremen and Hamburg.

The production of the *Songspiel* in Bremen concluded an enthusiastic series of "Five Little Operas of the Twenties," which also included Ernst Toch's *Egon und Emilie*, Darius Milhaud's *Die Entführung der Europa*, George Gershwin's *Blue Monday*, and Paul Hindemith's *Hin und Zurück*. Thanks to the staging and set designs of Elmar Gehlen, the Bremen Theater was able to offer these five one-acters as a coherent set in a single multifaceted cycle. Weill's *Mahagonny Songspiel* stood out from the others, however, in two ways. Firstly, it represented the artistic pinnacle of a preferred genre in the twenties. Secondly, the production was proof that the piece had lost nothing of its socio-political actuality as a *Lehrstück*. Since it took place shortly before the union of the two currencies of East and West, the production coincided with widespread debates in the two Germanies about the "money issue." The *Songspiel* alluded to this issue, but the audience would surely have noticed its relevance, even if placards had not been carried across the stage that read, "With Kohl we've got it made!"

The Hamburg production, under the musical direction of Bruno Weil, with the staging of Günter Krämer, and the costumes and set designs of Andreas Reinhardt, had a very different impact. It was grand culinary opera! Indeed it began as "epic theater"; the director himself functioned at first as narrator. But from the very beginning the culinary aspect of the production was a veritable feast for the eyes: in the foreground of the stage stood three empty music stands, behind them three men in black tails and top hat. The interplay of black and white dominated the broad, well-lit space of the stage. The staging then intensified to make an unforgettable scene as about a hundred or more citizens of the city of Mahagonny stepped out on stage, decked out in black



The Widow Begbick (Eva Gilhofer), Jim (William Pell), Joe (Hans Joachim Porcher), Bill (Johannes Martin Kränzle), and Jakob Schmidt (Peter Galliard) consider the "love" market in Hamburg Opera's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. Photo: Helga Kneidl

and white suits and wearing Mickey Mouse masks that gave them a disturbing anonymity. They sat in neat rows of rocking chairs, rocked in unison, and "consumed" the music about which Trinity Moses asserts: "That is eternal art!" All of this great fun was taken in wide-eyed by the entire audience; but, of course, such a display also serves to unmask its own malicious intentions. It is unfortunate that in this scene the musical production left something to be desired. Apparently young pianists – perhaps because they no longer grow up in households in which this "Prayer of a Virgin" was a tradition – seem hardly capable of playing this number with the kitschy sentiment which is required; in Hamburg one heard a sort of etude with a few too many mistakes.

However, the rest of the musical production offered an entirely enjoyable feast for the ears, not least of all due to the fact that the original instruments were used: banjo, guitar, bandoneon, and zither. The production went far toward bringing Weill's rich score to the test. That *Mahagonny*, in spite of being structured into numbers, is still grand opera became convincingly evident in Hamburg, especially because the entire work was performed without intermission, thereby allowing the greatness of the finale to come vividly to fruition. It should also be mentioned that the Hamburg program, with its essays by Walter Mossmann and Andreas Hauff, is the sort of document that one only reluctantly lends to a friend for fear that he might forget to return it.

HEINRICH W. SCHWAB
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Translated by Peggy Sherry

Die sieben Todsünden. Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus; Henning Brockhaus, dir.; Mark Andreas Schlingensiefen, cond.; Ute Lemper, vocalist; Düsseldorf; 12, 15, 16 April, 1990.

This important production in the context of the Kurt Weill Festival in North Rhine Westphalia created quite a sensation: the ballet was supposed to have been paired with the early Brecht one-act play *Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit*, and Ute Lemper had been designated for the leading role in both stage works. However, after the first few rehearsals, the director of the play replaced Ms. Lemper, reportedly because she was unable to master the role of the bride. Thereupon the original coupling idea was discarded, and in its place a Weill song program, starring Ms. Lemper (a program which this reviewer was unable to attend), followed the performance of *Die sieben Todsünden*. The performance of the ballet obtained additional publicity through the cooperation of Germany's most prominent prostitute, Madame Domenica, whom management had imported straight from the Reeperbahn in Hamburg for a small entrance in the ballet's third scene, "Pride." Lots of hurly-burly in the foreground; and the result?

The result was one of the most successful productions of *Die sieben Todsünden* to have been given in Germany in the last few years. This is true – however unlikely that may seem – in two respects: musical and dramatic. Because the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus has no house orchestra and an anticipated cooperation with the Deutsche Oper am Rhein never materialized (with the

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Ute Lemper as Anna I, foreground, and various incarnations of Anna II in the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus production of *Die sieben Todsünden*. Photo: Bernbach/Rothweiler.

exception of "borrowed" singers for the family roles), conductor Mark-Andreas Schlingensiefen organized an orchestra of young musicians, the Sinfonietta Düsseldorf, expressly for this production, an orchestra which prepared Weill's score in a series of intense weeks of rehearsal and with model commitment, full of enthusiasm, and removed from any sense of dull routine. Schlingensiefen inspired the ensemble to make splendid music. Equally extraordinary were the four soloists who sang the family (Martin Peters, Wilhelm Richter, E. Lee Davis, Peter-Nikolaus Kante) and — discounting a few lapses in vocal intensity — Ute Lemper as Anna I, also. Because Lemper has dance training, she was able to integrate her role fully into the production. Rather than positioning herself on the apron of the stage (like Gisela May or Milva), Lemper's Anna I entered the stage dancing, thus providing the role an entirely new dimension. The house was "built" in the middle of the stage by means of super-imposed projections, and the rest of the stage action revolved around it. The renowned set designer from Prague, Josef Svoboda, placed the dancers upon the open cars of a railroad train; the track encircled the house and the running speed was synchronized precisely with the music. Concentrated within such a limited space, the choreography achieved compelling metaphors. Anna II is presented in each new scene by a different dancer, so that in the end, Anna I is surrounded by her sister sevenfold. In the intervening scenes the family — dressed in Alaskan fur coats like men from *Mahagonny* — unabashedly

interrupted the plot and demanded money and services from Anna.

The staging drew many connections to the German reality of 1990. And the plot, dominated by Weill's unique music, unfolded in a most concentrated fashion, indeed sometimes with breathless suspense. The response? Well-deserved and stormy applause for an impressive piece of ensemble playing!

JÜRGEN SCHEBERA
Berlin

Translated by Margaret M. Sherry

Street Scene. Bühnen der Stadt Bielefeld; Jörg Fallheier, dir.; Rainer Koch, cond.; 3 March 1990 (premiere), continuing April-June.

Der Jasager and Down in the Valley. "Campus Cantat," Universität Dortmund; Dr. Willi Gundlach, cond.; 8 June (Hamm); 10 June (Dortmund); 11 June (Recklinghausen) 1990.

The production of *Street Scene* under the title *Eine Strasse in New York* at the municipal theater in Bielefeld deserves special interest in the context of the reception of the American Weill on the German stage, for *Street Scene* may be more difficult to transplant to foreign soils than works such as *Lady in the Dark* or *Love Life*. What was for 1947 Broadway audiences an example of progress toward the larger musical expression of opera is viewed today by Germany's traditional theater audience as a regression. Although the country has a long and varied tradition of opera, the public knows the Broadway musical only as a finished Anglo-American import. To them, *Street Scene* appears to be an opera which has descended to the status of a musical, instead of a musical which has opened itself to the possibilities of opera. Thus the work is used by critics to re-enforce the European notion that Weill succumbed to cultural degeneration in the U.S.

The setting of *Street Scene* does, however, address a social issue relevant to Germany in 1990 — that of searching for peaceful co-existence in a multi-cultural society. Berlin especially, but other cities as well, have

attracted immigrants from Turkey, Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia, and, with the opening of the border, there are increasing numbers of Rumanians, Poles, and refugees from virtually every other country in the world. *Street Scene's* New York ethnic microcosm could easily be transferred to the metropolis of Berlin, and it is therefore especially felicitous that Lys Symonette's translation makes use of Berlin dialect.

The theme of *Street Scene*, like that of *Mahagonny*, explores the influence of big-city life on its inhabitants. Unlike *Mahagonny*, however, *Street Scene* is not epic theater; likewise, the role of the music is also different. Weill himself speaks of the connection between drama and music, according to which "song continues in a natural fashion, where speaking leaves off, and the spoken word is as much incorporated into the musical structure as the dramatic action." The technique of constructing an imperceptible transition from dialogue, through melodrama, to song represents a special challenge: on the one hand, *Street Scene* is a naturalistic play; on the other, it moves — as in opera — over and over again onto a higher, more symbolic plane. The great challenge for the director of this work is to find plausible transitions, instead of — as would have been appropriate to the Weill-Brecht tradition — making the separate parts as distinct as possible.

In the Bielefeld production the music outshone the drama. The orchestra delivered a bravura performance under the direction of Ewald Hesse (alternating with general music director Rainer Koch). It was a pleasure to witness song, dance, and accompaniment so well integrated as in "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed." Here, Heike Limmer (Mae Jones) and Michael Lawrence (Dick McGann) played the only entirely convincing scene of the evening. On the whole, the performers functioned with varying conviction, amazingly independent of whether they were soloists, members of the chorus singled out to sing solos, or actors; whether guest artists or regular members of the company; whether American or German.

Monika Mayer (Emma Jones) and Ion Bric (Carl Olsen) understood best how to play their roles without embarrassing exaggerations. Gidon Saks gave a convincing portrayal of Frank Maurant as a man characterized by authoritarian and xenophobic views and a helpless brutality in human relations. Maïke Pansegrau was a lyrically satisfying Anna Maurant, without, however, equally convincing acting. Richard Panzner and Freia Marten (Abraham Kaplan and the role of his daughter, Shirley) played their roles with exaggerated hysteria, while Drummond Walker (Lippo Fiorentino) reduced his part to a caricature of a gigolo. John Pflieger as the black janitor Henry Davis did

not speak a single intelligible word and managed to ignore the blues atmosphere which is so clearly present in the score.

Rose Maurrant undergoes the greatest inner development, when she decides to leave New York City alone – without Sam, whom she loves – because she has learned from the tragedy of her parents the deadly consequences of trying to possess another human being. Werner Schwarz (whose voice is entirely appropriate for his role) and Rose Marie Flynn tried to suggest youthfulness by squirming a great deal; the role of Rose never acquired the most rudimentary, essential outlines.

The stage sets of Dorothea Jaumann are largely to blame for the fact that the majority of the actors took refuge in antiquated, operatic gestures. She transformed the street (as called for in the stage directions) into a courtyard; as a result, the audience was shown too literally what is supposed to have happened “in passing.” How coincidental can it seem when Anna Maurrant’s lover Sankey “just happens to pass by” in a courtyard? And what justifies the action of a pack of children swarming in and out of a courtyard? In addition, the set forced the singers to sing from the apron of the stage, reinforcing another opera house cliché.

When the text and music needed space to take effect, Director Jörg Fallheier neutralized them with stage antics. For instance, the cast danced around a Statue of Liberty during the ice-cream sextet. In another place, the two nursemaids drew focus away from the cynicism of their lullaby as they played catch with a newspaper that one of the babies had soiled. Perhaps it’s not surprising then that the chorus stood around Anna Maurrant’s bier at the end of the show as if they were a herd of sheep. Clearly the director left to the actors the responsibility for giving life to their roles.

Unfortunately, the Bielefeld production did little to refute the shopworn rumor that Weill sold out to Broadway’s commercialism and wasted the remains of his talent in a handful of platitudes. They apparently ignored Joachim Herz’s advice when he discussed the role of singing in the theater on the occasion of the opening of the Leipzig Opera House in 1960:

“When does singing become a convincing and, beyond that, necessary and basic expression of a human being? Not when the situation is so unreal that one no longer minds the separation from reality, but rather when it is so full of life, so purged of all artifice, so directly brought down to the lowest common denominator and to the innermost nerve of an active and involved human being, that such an individual can no longer express himself except in singing and making music.”

ing ensemble delivered uniformly convincing performances.

In *Down in the Valley*, Ilana Davidson (Jennie Parsons) and Marc Acito (Brack Weaver) – both young professional singers from the U.S. – demonstrated more vocal skill and natural expression than this reviewer experienced in the whole of the Bielefeld production. Donald Collup (the Leader), Donald P. Lang (Jennie’s Father), and James Mabry – who took over the role of Thomas Bouché at the last minute – and the chorus (with individual soloists for small parts) rounded out the collective achievement. The chorus sang with pure intonation and correct accent, both in English and German.

In *Der Jasager*, Tobias Schmeißert (the Boy), Hilke Helling (the Mother), Ulrich Schütte (the Teacher) and Thomas Bräutigam, Thomas Fischer, and Michael Knöppel (the three Students) captured the even and penetrating tone of the work remarkably well. Some of the musical sections ended rather bluntly, but it was unclear whether this reflected the director’s intentions.

Arnold Sundgaard (who along with Robert Vambéry represent Weill’s surviving librettists) compiled a retrospective glance at his collaboration with Kurt Weill for the program notes and honored the performance with his presence. A printed interview between Lys Symonette and Willi Gundlach illuminated the origin and meaning of *Down in the Valley*.

Symonette’s remarks addressed the different attitudes with which Germans and Americans approach their folk songs. In America, folk music is appreciated and preserved as a reminder of the human experience – it is seldom used as dull, commercialized music to accompany local beer festivals. Taken in this context, the German audience better understood how the folk songs set within the story line of *Down in the Valley* can be taken as seriously as the artful simplicity of *Der Jasager*.

ANDREAS HAUFF
Mainz

Translated by Margaret M. Sherry



Gidon Saks, Monika Mayer, John Pfeiffer, Drummond Walker, Suzanne Thorp, Ion Bric, Dagmar Obermark and Alexander Schlischefsky celebrate the glories of ice cream on a hot day for Bielefeld's *Eine Straße in New York*. Photo: Fritz Stockmeier.

In direct contrast to the Bielefeld staging, the production of *Der Jasager* and *Down in the Valley* in the University of Dortmund’s “Campus Cantat” project had two advantages. First, the entire cast prepared both works in a single cycle of rehearsals. Second, the concert venue spared the organizers the difficulties of mounting a stage production. Professor Willi Gundlach of the University of Dortmund cultivated the cooperative efforts of German and American students from three institutions: the Fredonia Singers from the State University of New York, Fredonia; the Chamber Chorus of the University of Dortmund; and instrumentalists from Buffalo State College. The result-

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Left: Jim Mahoney (Warren Ellsworth) and Jenny (Catherine Malfitano) in the Teatro Comunale di Firenze's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. Photo: Foto Locchi.



Right: The Widow Begbick (Yvonne Minton), Fatty (Bruce Brewer), and Trinity Moses (Timothy Nolen) assess the state of affairs in Mahagonny in the Teatro Comunale di Firenze's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. Photo: Foto Locchi.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Florence. Maggio Musicale Fiorentino; Graham Vick, dir.: Jan Latham-König, cond.; 12, 15, 17, 21 June 1990.

In December 1948, the organizers of the Venice Festival considered placing *Mahagonny* on their program. Weill wrote back suggesting to them *Street Scene* instead, and he requested that it be performed in Italian: "It will be much more attractive to present one of my more recent works than to revive a work like *Mahagonny* which was very much an expression of the decade after the First World War." In any event, they decided on the *Mahagonny Songspiel*; the full opera had to wait until 1964 to be performed at the Piccola Scala in Milan. It seems incredible today that the critic of *Opera* magazine then complained that Milan's director had taken the piece too seriously, "the naiveté of those taking part, who apparently thought they were dealing with some immortal masterpiece." I juxtapose these two references from 40 and 25 years ago to highlight both the progress that has been made in the acceptance of Weill's works as part of the permanent international repertoire and to refute his own opinion that *Mahagonny* is wedged in a 1920s trap. Seldom has it seemed a more pertinent or up-to-date opera than it did in Graham Vick's staging for the Florence Maggio Musicale – in German, of course.

The curtain rises to show the full depth of the Teatro Verdi's stage, the back wall a honeycomb of little rooms which contain lurking figures. Gradually arise two suspicious-looking men in raincoats, seated in tip-up cinema seats; a girl struggling with a

hideous, medieval metal conical helmet on her head in another space; a quarrelling couple; two prisoners reaching for each other through bars; people on a graffiti-daubed subway. The inner-city message is clear when Begbick and her crew arrive in a battered motorbike and side-car. Yvonne Minton, looking like the young Rita Hayworth, emerges to create the strongest, most searingly-sung, subtly-acted Leokadia Begbick, all the more terrifying for being attractive. To cast this role with Patrice Chéreau's unforgettable Geschwitz rather than some has-been diva was a stroke of genius. Miss Minton's diction, her smooth legato, and (something important in a role that was once associated with Trude Hesterberg), the stunning way she wears elegant clothes – ranging from jodhpurs, to black cocktail numbers, to traditional Madame's sequins – all added up to make hers one of the two dominant performances of the evening.

The other was Warren Ellsworth who succeeded in making Jim a wild, impetuous, slightly deranged but also touching and vulnerable character. He became the force of libertarianism to challenge the unbending economic orthodoxy of Begbick. As the evening progressed, the gathering tension between these two became evident; when the bill was presented at the end of Act 2, Minton's malevolent playfulness with Jenny and Bill appeared as a subtle foretelling of doom.

To say that Catherine Malfitano's Jenny was put in the shade by these two great interpretations is in no way to denigrate a fine performance by such an experienced artist. I was surprised that she went along with the decision to include only two verses

of the "Alabama Song," since it denied her an opportunity for a little more vocal display which might have gone down with the Florentine audience, many of whom seemed bewildered and bored by the piece. On the first night at least half the audience around me had left by the second interval. This was their misfortune for they denied themselves the chance to witness one of the most chilling and shocking coups-de-théâtre that I have seen in an opera house in recent seasons.

The use of the big stage, with minimal scene indications and a general feel of the 1930s in Vick's staging and Maria Björnson's costumes, did not prepare one for the final act. The curtain rose to show only Jim's head, Ellsworth's blond curls suddenly turned white, as if in shock, with the rest of the stage in darkness. When the other characters reappeared after his aria, they had all aged forty years. Begbick, Moses, and Fatty are in electric wheelchairs. The rest of the inhabitants look like the inmates of an asylum, in shapeless wool dresses, with walking sticks, hearing-aids and charity-ward spectacles. The crazed judges whirled in their chairs to the insistent rhythms of the trial scene. Malfitano seemed to gain an extra strength from this change and, unrecognizable in her gray wig and carpet-slippers, sang her best of the evening. The comparison with the recent events in Eastern Europe was unmistakable; while the fierce imagery, which ended with the crowd pushing the three villains out of their chairs and denying them the refuge of a heap of coffins, did detract from one's attentiveness to the music, the sheer force of the production took away my breath.

Jan Latham-König, who took over the conductor's desk from the originally announced Luciano Berio, seemed to have tightened his control on this opera since his recording of the work a few years back. Although the finale still goes *Im Schnecken-tempo*, some other scenes had gained momentum and drama. In particular, the Mandelay number, choreographed by Sean Walsh, reminded me of Brassai's famous description of the over-populated bordellos in Paris between the wars. The line of men, including Jim, Joe, and Bill, queue up, some with their trousers around their ankles, while the music never ceases its urgent beat. As each man reaches the front of the line he is given a pair of plastic transparent gloves to wear (the implication hardly needs reinforcing) and then mimes in a quick push-up on the floor, done in threes, the mechanical gesture of a sexual gesticulation.

Bruce Brewer's Fatty and Timothy Nolen's Moses made able foils to the formidable Begbick. Sergio Bertocchi as Jack, Dimitri Kharitonov as Bill, and Boris Bakow as Joe surrounded Ellsworth's exuberant Jim. The linking announcements spoken by Fabio Marinai on a simulated 78-rpm crackle recording added little to the effect of this mostly stimulating and provocative production. While I would not particularly want the time-warp of Act 3 to become a norm in this opera, and I think that by next year it will, because of its topical references, lose its power, this has to be set down as one of the more successful productions of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*.

PATRICK O'CONNOR
Surrey, England

"War Play," "Cry, the Beloved Country," Marie Galante, London. The Almeida Festival; Matrix Ensemble; Robert Ziegler, cond., 14 June 1990.

In 1950, Kurt Weill was looking forward to developing a new tradition of American musical theater based on a genuinely national heritage. In his much-quoted words to Olin Downes: "It seems to me that American popular song, growing out of American folk music, is the basis of an American musical theater (just as the Italian song was the basis of Italian opera)... this infiltration of song in musical theater will gradually become more refined and more removed from its origins."

It was not to be, for within a few weeks Weill was dead. But he evidently realized that in his previous attempts at American musicals he had not solved all the problems of the form, and the resulting works have been ones that Weill enthusiasts have grappled with, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, ever since. In Great Britain, there has been a strong trend of condescension towards the American Weill, and a belief that the Brecht collaboration represents the high point of his artistic achievement. Unfortunately, that opinion was not seriously dented by the recent staging of *Street Scene*, which was a success in its first production by Scottish Opera, but sagged badly when it came to London at the English National Opera. David Pountney's inventive production seemed more tricky than it had in Glasgow, the uncut first act was too long, and some undercasting and very lack-luster conducting combined to take the edge off what had looked like potentially a major Weill revival. Perhaps it can still be rescued.

But another radical attempt at rehabilitating some of Weill's American music came in the first concert of this summer's festival based around the Almeida Theater in North London. The concert took place in the huge and gloomy cavern of the Union Chapel and was very well attended. The leading Weill scholar David Drew had put together a pair of sequences from *Johnny Johnson* and *Lost in the Stars*, the first called "War Play," and the second "Cry, the Beloved Country." The retitling served honestly to indicate how far Drew's conception was from Weill's originals. In the case of *Lost in the Stars*, Drew gave Alan Paton's novel center stage, as a narration linking numbers from the show. This was a creative rewriting, no mere compilation, and it has led Drew to restore at least one number cut from the show, the bitter chorus "Gold," and to prefer a solemn ending which Weill sketched to the optimistic one he actually composed.

The result makes more of a political statement than does Weill's musical, which is essentially a personal drama. But neither does it turn out to be a musical. Weill frankly admitted that the piece was an experiment in writing "musical tragedy" in a form used for light entertainment, and with the combination of sententiousness and sentimentality that clogs too much of Maxwell Anderson's libretto (and some of Weill's music) it is difficult to know how best to present the piece now. The place of the hit numbers (superbly sung here by Cynthia Clarey and Damon Evans) is all the more paradoxical.

Drew emphasized the choral tableaux, the contrast of white and black choirs – precisely those numbers in which melodrama, thematic intricacy, and all that Weill has learnt before he came to America are best exploited. The final "Bird of Passage" section, with its echoes of Bach and even of Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony in the walking bass, is surely something that Weill was wise to alter.

Still, the anti-apartheid *Lost in the Stars* packs a punch, especially when given with Paton's conclusion that "when that dawn will come, of our emancipation from bondage of fear and the fear of bondage, why, that is a secret." *Johnny Johnson*, written as Weill's first American musical in 1936, seems far less sure of itself. David Drew has opted for a narration drawn not from the musical itself, but from history, and the events of the First World War weave themselves (in a narration bitingly delivered by the Almeida's new co-director Ian McDiarmid) around Weill's songs.

The problems of tone and stance seemed acute here: the predominant joviality does not taste enough of bitterness, perhaps because Weill had not solved the problem of matching his German astringency to the creation of American tunes. Too much is flamboyant without cutting edge; one or two songs like the classic "Farewell, Good-bye," hover near self-parody. The post-German Weill is surely better represented by the frankly popular sequence of marvelous songs and orchestral music from the French show *Marie Galante*, which completed this program. As Drew puts it, no re-writing was needed because these are "interpolations conceived and composed after the completion of the play; they are more loosely connected than other related works, and are perhaps best presented in an order appropriate to the immediate context and to the forces available." In this case, the forces included the splendidly accomplished Matrix Ensemble, which Robert Ziegler conducted with unflagging skill and stylish insight, and the singer was Angelina Réaux. She does not have the most even or technically controlled voice in the world, but she showed a real understanding of the idiom, and delivered the songs with a panache that brought the house down. This must be the first of many evenings. With this sort of advocacy, the American Weill stands a chance.

NICHOLAS KENYON
London

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Lynn Moeller, Richard Fremstad and Mark Almy in San Francisco's *Silver Lake*.

Silver Lake: A Winter's Tale. City Summer Opera, City College of San Francisco; David Ostwald, dir.; Michael Shahani and Judy Hubbell, co-music directors; 12-14, 20-22 July 1990.

For its fourth season, City Summer Opera, located at City College of San Francisco, presented the first complete and fully-staged U.S. production of *Silver Lake: A Winter's Tale*. The original 1933 production marked the last of Weill's works to be premiered in Germany. A few shortened presentations and concert versions have appeared in America over the years, including a free adaptation by Hugh Wheeler and Lys Symonette, directed by Harold Prince, which the New York City Opera presented in 1980. City Summer Opera used John Eaton's English translation, which had been heard once before in the 1987 Abbey Opera staging at London. David Ostwald served as the stage director, Michael Shahani and Judy Hubbell as co-musical directors, and Kristin O'Shee set the choreography. The production ran for weekends, 12-14 July and 20-22 July 1990.

Whereas Weill's previous collaborations with Kaiser, *Der Protagonist* and *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, were one-act operas, *Der Silbersee*, their third and final collaboration, is a play with music. Although the work lasts over three hours, the music takes up little more than one hour. This presents a challenge in performance, for the music of *Silverlake*, in contrast to Weill's better-known musical plays written with Bertolt Brecht, demands operatic voices. Hence, the performers need to be equally convincing as singers as well as actors. Happily, the City Summer Opera cast proved up to this challenge.

The principal roles in this production were double-cast, with the exception of Severin, superbly played and sung by Mark Almy. In the performance attended by this reviewer, there was hardly a weak moment in the other portrayals. Two performances in particular deserve special attention: Harriet March Page proved a delightful

menace as the scheming Frau von Luber, while Richard Fremstad made a fine Olim. Overall, the orchestra, under the direction of Michael Shahani, did justice to Weill's varied and demanding score; the violins became a bit ragged in only a few of the more technically taxing passages. The chorus, serving a function much like that of a Greek chorus, also offered several moments of haunting beauty.

The dark, bleak, and barren stage, with various Expressionist touches, provided a fitting backdrop to this fable of the dispossessed. Interestingly, Kaiser's fifty-plus-year-old tale of deception and greed, hungry homeless people, and lottery millionaires has become strikingly topical in the United States circa 1990.

MICHAEL COLBY
San Francisco

Happy End, Teatro Aberto, Lisbon, Portugal. Novo Grupo, Joao Lorenço, dir., 5 October 1989 -18 February 1990.

Like most French fans of Weill's music, I knew *Happy End* only from recordings: those included, of course, the legendary Lenya version on CBS and selections of three songs - "Surabaya Johnny," "Sailor's Tango," and the "Mandelay Song" - as performed by two of the best post-war singing-actresses, namely Catherine Sauvage and the late Pia Colombo, who both used the Boris Vian French translation.

So it came as a pleasant surprise to be driving one day in September 1989, along the wide and ugly Praça de Espanha in Lisbon, next to the world-famous Gulbenkian Foundation, and discover a poster announcing a new production of *Happy End* at the Teatro Aberto, scheduled for an early October premiere. Alas, I could not stay in Lisbon long enough to see it. My next visit was

delayed, but I returned in mid-February. Much to my surprise, *Happy End* was still running. None of my Portuguese friends and collaborators willing, I ventured alone, thinking, "If I don't like the acting (and if I understand nothing), I shall at least listen to the songs!" Well, what was just a visit made out of sheer curiosity turned into an enjoyable evening, and the Novo Grupo de Teatro should be warmly congratulated.

The Novo Grupo is a rather off-beat company, although not a very controversial group, which gives interesting renditions of foreign and Portuguese classical and contemporary plays. The Teatro Aberto (The Open Theatre) looks like a big barn, one not easily filled. Therefore, I was very impressed to see that, after a comparatively long run (four months is quite long by Lisbon standards), the play was still enjoying success. After playing from 5 October 1989 to 18 February 1990 in Lisbon, it moved to Porto where it ran into March.

The director Joao Lourenço prepared the Portuguese translation in collaboration with dramatist Vera San Payo de Lemos. The text read smoothly and moved along easily with the music which was conducted by Eduardo Paes Mamede. While not brilliant, the actors contributed solid performances, as well as enthusiastic singing. The cast was led by Irene Cruz as Lilian Holiday, Isabel Ribas as The Fly, and Fernando Gomez as Bill Cracker.

Perhaps because of the Portuguese setting and the production's staging, the play seemed less polemical. Nevertheless, *Happy End* is a farce, and the political undertones injected by Brecht at the time of the premiere, now bring, paradoxically, humor and spirit to the piece. It is the music, however, that truly gives life to the play. Both the set design by Jose Costa Reis and the choreography by Francisco Camacho added to the effectiveness of the production.

ALAIN JOMY
Paris



Sister Lillian Holiday (Irene Cruz) argues her cause before Dr. Nakamura (Fernando Luis) in the Lisbon Novo Grupo de Teatro's *Happy End*.



Rose Maurant (Sheryl Woods) confronts her father Frank (William Parcher) as he is apprehended in New York City Opera's Fall 1990 production of *Street Scene*.

Street Scene. New York City Opera; Jack O'Brien, dir.; Chris Nance, cond.; 7, 12, 15, 20, 23, 29 September 1990.

While the postponement of last year's production of *Street Scene* may have caused some initial disappointment, the wait for the New York City Opera's 1990 production was well worth it. This production illustrates unequivocally that *Street Scene* does indeed integrate many of the finest qualities of the theater when the artists take sufficient care to blend those components properly. While other Broadway collaborations of the 1940s frequently reveal an interchangeable assortment of characters and plots, *Street Scene* reveals yet another facet of the wealth of material at Weill's disposal. Further, when viewed in its proper social and historical context, and without irrelevant references to his European works, *Street Scene* can hold its own with any other contemporaneous work of the American musical theater.

Several elements combined to make this a remarkably successful performance; one was the emphasis placed on the comic digressions, especially those involving Mrs. Jones. Although Joyce Castle's portrayal sometimes came close to caricature, she still managed to keep within the bounds of propriety. By playing out the comedy to its fullest, the production accentuated the kind of contrast for which the original collaborators doubtless worked diligently. For example, the grotesque humor of the Nursemaid's number was so exaggerated that it dispersed entirely the preceding tragic atmosphere while effectively commenting

on the complex social issues embedded in that tragedy. Moreover, the comedy helped mitigate the force of Mrs. Jones' frequent cruel remarks, tempered somewhat Sam's annoyingly pervasive anguish, and also instilled horror in the eventual murder scene.

Although played somewhat tentatively at first, there was a real spark in the love affair between Anna and Sam. This initial tentativeness accentuated the tension of the events leading up to and encompassing the senseless murder. Similarly, mutual passion developed between Rose and Sam so that both were devastated when they parted. Their duet "We'll Go Away Together" made a believer of at least one member of the audience. And, for some inexplicable reason – perhaps by understating his aggressiveness and malevolence – even Frank Maurant became a somewhat sympathetic character.

Almost every soloist and principal character, with special mention of Kevin Anderson as Sam Kaplan, Margaret Cusack as Anna Maurant, Sheryl Woods as Rose Maurant, and Joyce Castle as Mrs. Jones, contributed a singular quality to the performance through their singing and acting. In particular, Mr. Anderson kept Sam's morose character, which can border on the hysterical, within the realm of credibility.

But in the final analysis, this was not a cast comprised of individuals, but of expertly executed ensemble singing and acting. While the individual love stories and the murder still emerged as the central events, the production emphasized the melting pot characteristics so essential to *Street Scene's* social consciousness. Weill's music unified the

disparate characters briefly in the "Lament," when the crowd gathered to comment on and sympathize with the protagonists, and in his operatic homage to America, the "Ice Cream Sextet," both of which were especially well done.

Perhaps because he had greater control of the musical material than would most other Broadway composers, including the transitions and connective musical tissue, Weill could tighten the musical and dramatic form more thoroughly than many of his competitors. He demonstrates this control most conspicuously and audibly in the lucidity of the orchestration. Despite occasional lapses into cliché, Weill's orchestration reveals many subtle touches that enhance the drama, particularly the use of solo instruments to emphasize important dramatic motifs. Conductor Chris Nance's nuanced interpretation provided a transparent setting that highlighted the underlying thematic connections between orchestral characterization and dramatic portrayals. Ranging from the ominous bass clarinet passage that first introduces Frank Maurant, to the plaintive solo violin in the introduction to Sam's aria "Lonely House," to the return of the opening introductory orchestral motif at the murder scene, each moment communicated a firm grasp of dramatic significance.

Ultimately, the recurrence of the "Heat" number at the conclusion discloses an astute empathy for the inevitability of the prosaic in life. When the orchestra plays for the last time the ominous motif associated throughout with calamity and Maurant's irrational personality, it reveals Weill's keen understanding of its underlying larger symbolic meaning for his characters.

It is in such moments as Anna's aria "Somehow I Never Could Believe," the "Ice Cream Sextet," and the "Lament" that *Street Scene* realizes its most profound aspirations toward opera. In this performance the singer-actors carried them off with aplomb. In fact, the overall successful blend of operatic, operetta, and Broadway elements made the work unique.

A recently published critical study of the Broadway musical mentions Weill only in passing as a composer of American musicals. *Street Scene* receives no mention at all. This production should prove beyond a doubt the lack of justification for such an omission and should go a long way toward dispelling any doubts as to *Street Scene's* central position in the American musical theater of the 1940s, and of its continuing relevance.

WILLIAM THORNHILL
Chapel Hill, NC

"Kurt Weill at Occidental College," Los Angeles. March-May 1990.

Occidental College in Los Angeles observed Weill's 90th birthday by hosting a number of performances, including two West Coast premieres and a range of works spanning the entire course of the composer's stylistic development. The series, funded in part by grants from the Kurt Weill Foundation, began with the presentation of Weill's string quartets, which date from his student years. On 4 March the engaging Armadillo String Quartet, a Los Angeles-based ensemble, performed the String Quartet, Op. 8, on a program which included works by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. The Op. 8 quartet offers an example of Weill's early dissonant style, although the piece is rather eclectic, moving from a free form string of sonorities in the Introduction to a more rigid formalism in the later movements. In a concert held on 29 April the Armadillo Quartet presented the West Coast premiere of Two Movements for String Quartet, an Allegro deciso and an Andantino, originally intended for the Op. 8 quartet. These movements were performed on a program that included Weill's rarely heard B minor Quartet and, in a particularly apt coupling, Mozart's Quartet in D minor, K. 173. Both are works of stylistic experimentation – evident, for instance, in Weill's disjunct use of waltz rhythms and in Mozart's bizarre fugal finale – and both are works completed in the composers' late teens.

After its 1934 premiere under Bruno Walter, Weill's Second Symphony fell into a relative obscurity that continued even after its publication in 1966. It was given its West Coast premiere by the Occidental-Caltech Orchestra on 23 May 1990, under the direction of Dr. Alan Gross of Occidental. To those unfamiliar with Weill's stage works, the piece might have seemed caustic, repetitive, and abrupt. At the performance, in fact, the work was somewhat overshadowed by a student performance of the Grieg Piano Concerto. Nevertheless, the Symphony represents arguably an important step in the development of the more "popular" style that would dominate Weill's work in America.

The American stage of Weill's career was represented in a May recital given by baritone Steven Kimbrough and pianist Dalton Baldwin, whose collection of Weill songs entitled *This is the Life* appeared on Arabesque records (Z6579). Their concert, given in Occidental's newly renovated Thorne Hall, included songs by both Weill and Erich Wolfgang Korngold. The juxtaposition of Korngold and Weill reflected the differing aesthetics of the two German emigres, the one a traditional romanticist who settled in Hollywood and the other a modernist who

embraced Broadway. At first the audience, primarily composed of students, responded more favorably to the rich harmonies of Korngold than to the harsh asstringency of Weill's setting of texts from Rilke's *Das Stundenbuch*, composed in 1923. To represent Weill's later style Kimbrough programmed the four settings of Walt Whitman's poems ("Come Up from the Fields, Father," "Beat! Beat! Drums," "Dirge for Two Veterans," and "Oh Captain! My Captain!"). The songs, whose texts are no less haunting than those of the Rilke settings, were written soon after the U.S. entry into World War II and are composed in a straightforward, vernacular, and consciously "American" style to which the students were most responsive. Kimbrough's masterful presentation concluded with "This is the Life," a selection from Weill's 1948 musical *Love Life*.

ROBERT SHACKLETT

Los Angeles



Mack the Knife. 21st Century Film Corporation. With Raul Julia, Richard Harris, Julia Migenes, Roger Daltrey, Julie Walters, Rachel Robertson; directed by Menahem Golan. RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video 77003. VHS, Hi-Fi format.

This, the fourth film version of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, bears as much resemblance to the stage work as Broadway's *Oliver* did to the Dickens novel. It also bears a remarkable resemblance to *Oliver*. Presiding over the plot is the congenial but interfering Street Singer played by rock star Roger Daltrey as

a kind of superannuated Artful Dodger with some excruciating rhyming couplets by way of epic narration. He also appears to have doubled as voice coach. Even Julia Migenes as a long-suffering Jenny has studiously adjusted her diphthongs to blend in with the local color of Cockney "low loife."

It is certainly not a purists' film. Why should it be? Pabst's wasn't, either. Yet, although with Pabst one may regret the truncation of the score to just 30 minutes of music, what remained of the original Weill was basically left intact. Apart from being a superb piece of cinema and notwithstanding the authors' litigious interventions, the 1930 film is, in its way, an invaluable document of "authentic" performance practice. The same can hardly be said of Menahem Golan's multimillion-dollar extravaganza, shot in Hungary in 1988. Most of the music is there, it has to be admitted. Inexplicably, however, it has been comprehensively rearranged for large, brash orchestral forces, which perfectly match the style of the dance routines a la *Chorus Line* and remove anything that might remain of the Weimar spirit.

Solos become duets, presumably because it was thought that arias and ballads don't work well on the screen. And there is a modicum of shifting back and forth between scenes, facilitated by the medium. Otherwise the screenplay follows the stage work more faithfully than either Brecht or Pabst did; for my taste, too faithfully. The invention expended on the score could more usefully have been channeled to the director, who fails to give the piece any pace or bite or, indeed, to bring to it any kind of interpretation. Raul Julia saunters around awkwardly as Macheath, delivering his lines as though embarrassed to be on the set. Richard Harris and Julie Walters tackle their cameo parts as Mr. and Mrs. Peachum spiritedly enough, though they can do little to alleviate the longeurs of the listless direction. Sixteen-year-old Rachel Robertson, we are told in the publicity blurb, "first caught the attention of the entertainment industry ... in a tremendously successful ... jeans television commercial." She may look equally fetching in her Laura Ashley garb and certainly has youth on her side. At last a truly youthful Polly. But she is no actress.

In the same blurb, the director tells us that "*The Threepenny Opera* is absolutely relevant today, which is why we've decided to do this film." Now that it is done, I find it hard to appreciate his point. The whole is, frankly, a boring mishmash and a massive waste of resources and talent. The sound consensus seems to have been: don't rush to see it.

STEPHEN HINTON
Yale University



Happy End. Pro Musica Köln; König Ensemble; Jan Latham-König, cond. Capriccio (CD: 60 015-1). **Der Silbersee.** Pro Musica Köln, Kölner Rundfunkorchester; Jan Latham-König, cond. Capriccio (CD: 60 011-2). **Der Lindberghflug /Ballad of Magna Carta.** Pro Musica Köln, Kölner Rundfunkorchester; Jan Latham-König, cond. Capriccio (CD: 60 012-1).

What to do with *Happy End*? Ever since Helene Weigel sabotaged its Theater am Schiffbauerdamm premiere in September 1929 by treating the opening night audience to an impromptu communist diatribe, it's been adapted, de- and re-constructed, rearranged, updated, cut, and expanded. David Drew suggests doing away with the book by "Dorothy Lane" and presenting the numbers as a suite of pieces, not unlike the *Mahagonny Songspiel*, linked only by a common moral tone.

In his liner notes for the new *Happy End* on the Capriccio label, Josef Heinzelmann cites as the basis for the recording a never-realized 1932 plan by Weill to adapt the play's musical numbers into such a framework. Not content to simply present the score's thirteen songs, Capriccio includes snippets of dialogue supplemented by comments from a narrator (totaling over sixteen minutes) which, more or less, give us a basic understanding of the plot. The question raised is: why bother?

The book, written by Elisabeth Hauptmann and completed and doctored by Brecht, is rather stilted, the plot is banal, and the songs are only vaguely connected to the stage action. Still, *Happy End* contains some of Weill's best theater songs, and the lion's share of these fall to the characters Lilian Holiday and gangster Bill Cracker.

Gabriele Ramm's unsure intonation and hardened soprano will hardly erase any memories you might have of virtually anyone else's interpretations of Lillian's songs. Her perky "Matrosen-Tango" seems out of place, and a crude, matter-of-fact "Surabaya-Johnny" is devoid of the passionate lyricism, anger, and pathos needed to make this complex ballad work. Further, a distinct register break defines the differences in Ms. Ramm's pop and operatic vocal production. Walter Raffener's Bill seems trapped in his throat. Unable to sustain notes, his thick tenor sound never soars, for instance, in the "Das Lied vom Brantweinhändler," and you ultimately are forced to close your ears and imagine a voice capable of taking this music to the higher plain it deserves.

Karin Ploog delivers the spoken lines of The Woman in Gray (the gangster known also as The Fly) efficiently, but without much malevolence, and her light soprano seems totally inappropriate for her one song, "Die Ballade von der Höllen-Lili." The most accomplished singer in the cast, Stephen Kimbrough, is used primarily for speaking roles, and seems uncomfortable with the high vocal line of his one singing assignment, the "Mandelay Song." One could wish, too, for a more raucous delivery and faster tempo for this showstopper.

Jan Latham-König, thus far the conductor of the Capriccio Weill series, here produces with his own instrumental ensemble some gorgeous textures from Weill's delicious

orchestrations. But the effort is lackluster: he never quite "sings" when you want him to (as in the "Ja, das Meer ist blau" refrain of the "Matrosen-Tango"), nor is there a sense of abandon, much-needed in the "Mandelay" and "Höllen-Lili" songs. However, the closing "Hosiannah Rockefeller" is rousing and jazzy, notable for an ironically deadpan performance by the chorus.

All in all, I rather favor Drew's solution. And it is a recording of this version (from the acclaimed but, alas! out-of-print Deutsche Grammophon 3-LP set of Weill recordings produced in conjunction with the 1975 Berlin Festival [see note below]) that supplies the only competition for Capriccio's "first complete recording" of the work. (Lenya's 1960 recording of the songs - recently released on a CBS Masterworks Portrait CD coupled with her *Die sieben Todsünden* - can hardly count as an accurate representation of the work.)

Der Silbersee, too, would seem rather unwieldy to re-create as conceived since it originally contained over two hours of Georg Kaiser's spoken text. Ten years ago, New York City Opera attacked the problem head on by forging a totally new version of the work called *Silverlake*. The work's adapters clearly indicated that their intent was not to reproduce faithfully *Der Silbersee*, but to create a new work in English using most of the music from its predecessor (orchestrations intact), an entirely new book based on the main events of Kaiser's, and incorporating obscure incidental music penned by Weill for other stage dramas. *Silverlake* was recorded for Nonesuch by its original NYCO cast in 1980.

In a form not unlike that utilized for its *Happy End*, Capriccio gives us the first complete recording of the music from *Der Silbersee* along with chunks of dialogue and narration (far more extensive than those given with *Happy End*). Although the quality of the text far surpasses that of *Happy End*, one occasionally tires of the amount of dry dialogue reproduced on the recording. Olim's philosophical musings whilst preparing his police report on the shooting and arrest of Severin take up almost twelve minutes (including the musical punctuations by the chorus representing Olim's conscience).

Hans Korte as Olim delivers his extensive dialogue and a few sung passages with a gruff, totally unendearing baritone. Wolfgang Schmidt's Severin presents a tired, forced quality and tentative intonation. The vocal highlight of the set is the Fennimore of Hildegard Heichele. Her lovely, melting lyric soprano floats in "Ich bin eine arme Verwandte," and the "Cäsars Tod" ballad is right on target. Some of the best voices on the disc are, unfortunately, those of which we hear the least: John Riley-Schofield and Dariuz Niemirowicz as Severin's buddies,

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and Elizabeth Eaton and Andrea Andonian, who beautifully deliver the ironic and poignant duet of the two shopgirls.

The Kölner Rundfunkorchester proves itself the real star of the recording, delivering memorable accounts of the dizzying preludes to Acts I and III, the postlude to Severin's revenge aria (No. 11), and the delicate waltz which concludes the Severin-Fennimore duet at the end of Act II. In his best performance to date in this series, Latham-König leads a lyrical and expansive account of this brooding "Wintermärchen," with its hints of *Die sieben Todsünden* and the Second Symphony.

Although Capriccio is adhering painstakingly to Weill's original scores and producing some excellent instrumental results, one's worst fears about the vocal performances that surfaced with the *Mahagonny* that initiated the label's traversal of the Weill catalogue are unfortunately confirmed with this batch of recordings. Why must the myth of the great chasm between "singing actors" and "acting singers" be perpetuated with Weill as the poor victim? The principal roles in these new recordings have mostly been filled with voices that should, at best, be used for comprimario roles in provincial opera houses, not on aspiring world-class recordings. Decca has shown with its recent *Dreigroschenoper* that Weill need not always be snarled, barked, and warbled by "singing actors": his vocal lines can be filled by attractive, well-trained, world-class voices, without a loss of textual communication.

Capriccio also gives us a new digital recording of *Der Lindberghflug* coupled with the premiere recording of *The Ballad of Magna Carta*, two works conceived, as were *Das Berliner Requiem* and *Down in the Valley*, for radio performance.

I must say I enjoyed this disc much more than the other two recordings. What I found most attractive was the inclusion of a hitherto unreleased issue of a 1930 German radio broadcast of sections of the original version of *Der Lindberghflug*, a co-operative effort by Weill and Paul Hindemith. The contrast between the two composers is evident from the first Hindemith movement, the section representing the fog that plagues the first trans-Atlantic flight. Hindemith's first solo, "Ich bin der Nebel" ("I am the fog"), snarled by a grand opera baritone villain, sounds inappropriate from the start. Weill replaced it with a choral fugue, redolent of minor-key Mozart, with the right foreboding air about it. Indeed, the whole of Hindemith's contribution denies the piece, perhaps not surprisingly, a sense of coherency. One can easily understand Weill's desire to re-compose Hindemith's sections of the cantata to yield a stylistic whole.

Fascinating, too, is the difference in performance practice between the 1930 recording and that made in 1987; the authentic, dance-hall-laden rubato and fast tempi of Weill's Berlin days juxtaposed against the dry, slower tempi and clean but rather boring orchestral playing of the late twentieth century.

The Ballad of Magna Carta proves a delightful piece of fluff, chock full of 1940's sardonic wit, as supplied by Max Anderson's text. Its fifteen minutes provide an enjoyable pastiche of sentimental choruses, an overblown villain (Noel Tyl as a venomous King John), a bit of Weill's German sound in the orchestrations, and, from today's perspective, perhaps, a corny finale. Jane Henschel makes a meal out of the Narrator's arch speeches.

All three digital recordings have been produced quite well, with an immediate but not overbearing presence to the voices, and the orchestra nicely detailed. The accompanying articles are extensive and informative, and complete texts and translations are included. However, I found maddening the complete absence of the now-standard boxed numbers that provide a correspondence between the printed texts and the CDs' individual tracks and index points! Only slightly less bothersome is the practice of simply numbering the many historical illustrations in the program book (and these are sometimes out of numerical sequence) and including a separate page which contains the relevant captions (in all cases, the captions are sufficiently brief that they could

have been included next to or under each illustration without significantly reducing the size of the image). Further, the booklet to *Der Lindberghflug* is rife with typographical errors. I must mention, too, that the cover art for all three recordings is somewhat crude and, in the case of *Happy End*, visually offensive.

If you already own the Nonesuch *Silverlake* and DG *Happy End*, you have little reason to supplement them with these recordings. If you're planning to acquire recordings of these works, you must examine your priorities: If you want some semblance of these works in the forms suggestive of their original context, i.e., with weight given to the spoken texts and music, and don't care much about vocal quality, I could recommend the Capriccio recordings; however, if you want to hear Weill's music attractively performed in versions designed to overcome the deficiencies of problematic texts in a recording, the Nonesuch *Silverlake* and Deutsche Grammophon *Happy End* (worth scouting used record shops for) remain unsurpassed.

[A note on the fate of the Deutsche Grammophon recordings: To date, four of the recordings contained in the original 3-LP set, with the London Sinfonietta, David Atherton, conducting, have been released on CD: the *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, Violin Concerto, and *Mahagonny Songspiel* (DG 423 255-2), and the *Berliner Requiem*, coupled with Gisela May's *Die sieben Todsünden* on Polydor 429 333-2.]

LARRY L. LASH
New York City



'It's a Kurtweiller.'

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SELECTED PERFORMANCES

CANADA

Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, Montreal, Quebec. McGill University, 26 October 1990.

ENGLAND

Happy End, Leeds. London Sinfonietta, Diego Masson, cond., 7 July 1990.

Johnny Johnson Concert Suite, Die sieben Todsünden, Royal Festival Hall, London. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Rhonda Kess, cond., Ute Lemper, vocalist, 26 March 1991.

Mahagonny Songspiel, London. Matrix Ensemble, Stephen Unwin, dir., Robert Ziegler, cond., Ute Lemper, vocalist, 7 December 1990.

The Seven Deadly Sins, London, The Barbican. West Australian Ballet Company, London Symphony Orchestra, John Harle, cond., 5 August 1990.

The Threepenny Opera, London, Bubble Theatre. June-September 1990.

The Threepenny Opera, Chesterfield. Chesterfield Pomegranate, December 1990.

The Threepenny Opera, London, Canonbury Tower Theatre. Sara Randall, dir., Colin Guthrie, cond., 28 April-12 May 1990.

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Frankfurt. Frankfurter Oper, Arie Zinger, dir., Steven Sloane, cond., 13 Oktober 1990.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Freiburg. Freiburger Oper, Städtische Bühnen, 1990-91 season.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Halle. Landestheater, Henry Akina, dir., 1990-91 season.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Hamburg. Hamburgische Staatsoper, Günter Krämer, dir., Bruno Weil, cond., 9, 10, 12-17, 19-20 June, 19-20 September 1990.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Hildesheim. Stadttheater Hildesheim, 1990-91 season.

Cello Sonata, Mannheim. Daniel Grosgrün, cello, Jean-Jacques Balet, piano, April 1990.

Down in the Valley, Lüneburg. Wilhelm-Raabe-Schule, Elisabeth Bahrdt und Regina Ewe, dirs., 28-30 June 1990.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Baden-Baden. Baden-Badener Theater, Frieder Lorenz, dir., 4 Januar 1990.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Bochum. Bochumer Schauspielhaus, Frank-Patrick Steckel, dir., 1990-91 season.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Theater der Obergrafschaft, Grafschaft. Westfälische Landestheater, 18 November 1990.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Klagenfurt. Stadttheater, Helmuth Fuschl, dir., 1 March 1990.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Köln. Berliner Theater des Westens, Günter Krämer, dir., 12 September 1990.

Die Dreigroschenoper, München. Münchner Volkstheater, Christoph Brück, dir., Denis Werb, cond., 12 May 1990.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Parchim. Mecklenburgisches Landestheater Parchim, Michael Muhr, dir., 1990-91 season.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Theaterhaus, Stuttgart. Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar, Peter Schroth, Peter Kleinert, dirs., 1 September 1990.

Happy End, Aschaffenburg. Stadttheater, 1989-90 season.

Happy End, Oldenburg. Staatstheater, R. Gerhard Jelen, dir., Gregory Lenton, cond., 6 June 1990.

Kleine Dreigroschenmusik, Vom Tod in Wald, "Pantomime" from *Der Protagonist*, Dresden. Dresdner Musikfestspiele. Reinhard Schmiedel, cond., 8-9 June 1990.

Knickerbocker Holiday, Ingolstadt. Stadt Theater Ingolstadt, 1990-91 season.

Die sieben Todsünden, Berlin. Brigitte Fassbänder, mezzo-sop., Zoltan Pesko, cond., 22 June 1991.

Die sieben Todsünden, Burbach. Saarbrücker Bürgerhaus, 12 May 1990.

Die sieben Todsünden, Köln. Torsten Fischer, dir., 16 September 1990.

Street Scene, Bielefeld. Bühnen der Stadt, Jörg Fallheier, dir., Rainer Koch, cond., 3, 11, 16, 29 March 1990.

String Quartet, Op. 8, Köln. WDR broadcast, Brandis Quartet, 1 September

1990.

Symphony No. 2, Tübingen. Junge Kammerorchester Tübingen, Markus Kosel, cond., 4 April 1990.

Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, Dresden. Dresdner Musikfestspiele. Dresdner Philharmonisches Orchester, Jörg-Peter Weigle, violinist, Reinhard Schmiedel, cond., 16-17 June 1990.

Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, Munich. Richard Strauss-Konservatorium. 20 July 1990.

FRANCE

Der Jasager, L'opéra junior, 1990-91 season.

Suite from *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Lyon, Montpellier. Orchestre de l'Opéra de Lyon, 14, 24 July 1990.

ITALY

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Florence. Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Graham Vick, dir., Jan Latham-König, cond., 12, 15, 17, 21 June 1990.

KOREA

Die sieben Todsünden, Seoul. Seoul Symphony Orchestra, Hans-Jürgen Nagel, cond., 3 October 1990.

NORWAY

Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, Oslo. 18 June 1990.

SCOTLAND

Symphony No. 2, Edinburgh. Usher Hall. Scottish National Orchestra, Matthias Bamert, cond., 2 November 1990.

Symphony No. 1, Edinburgh. Usher Hall. Scottish National Orchestra, Matthias Bamert, cond., 15 February 1991.

SOUTH AFRICA

The Threepenny Opera, Cape Town. Cape Town University, 9, 11, 13, 15 June, 11-14 September 1990.

SWITZERLAND

Der Lindberghflug, Winterthur, Switzerland. Kantonsschule Bülhlrain, Andreas Müller, cond., June 1990.

UNITED STATES

Berliner Requiem, Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, Providence, RI. Brown University, 20 October 1990.

Berliner Requiem, Kleine Dreigroschenmusik, Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, San Francisco, CA. Sinfonia San Francisco, Samuel Cristler, cond., 11 February 1990.

Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, Cambridge, MA. Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Gunther Schuller, cond., Tamara Smirnova-Sajfar, violinist, 21 April 1991.

Concerto for Violin and Winds, Op. 12, Katonah, NY. Caramoor Festival, St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, Paul Lustig Dunkel, cond., 29 June 1990.

Happy End, Chicago, IL. North Park College, 12-14 October 1990.

Happy End, Costa Mesa, CA. South Coast Repertory, Barbara Damashek dir., Dennis Castellano, cond., 31 May-13 July 1991.

Happy End, New York, NY. Juilliard School Drama Theater, February 1991.

Happy End, Richardson, TX. Classic Theater Company, 18, 24, 26 October 1990.

Lady in the Dark, Houston, TX. Houston High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Raymond Baron, dir., Patricia Bonnor, cond., 21-24 February, 1-3 March 1991.

Marie Galante Concert Suite, Los Angeles, CA. El Camino College Resident Artists, Hector G. Salazar, cond., 28 April 1991.

Der Silbersee, San Francisco, CA. City Summer Opera, 13-14, 20-22 July 1990.

Street Scene, Cleveland, OH. Cleveland Institute of Music, Andrew Foldi, dir., Carl Topilow, cond., 17, 19, 21 April 1991.

Street Scene, New York, NY. New York City Opera, Jack O'Brien, dir., Chris Nance, cond., 7, 15, 20, 23, 29 September 1990.

Street Scene, Rochester, NY. University of Rochester/Eastman School of Music, David Ruzzo, dir., Kim Kowalke, cond., 5, 6 April 1991.

Street Scene, Wooster, OH. Ohio Light Opera, James Stuart, dir., Evan Whallon, cond., 11, 13, 17, 21-22, 28 July, 2 August 1990.

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_____	Weill. <i>Gesammelte Schriften</i> (Hinton/Schebera, eds). Henschelverlag, 1990.	\$30.00	_____
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