ARTICLES


BOOKS


RECORDINGS


“Musicals.” Lambert Wilson, baritone; Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo; John McGlinn, conductor. EMI CDC 7 49792 2. [Includes “Love Song” from *Love Life.*]

7 pièces tirées de l’opéra de *quat’sous* (Sieben Stücke nach der Dreigroschenoper) arranged by Stefan Frenkel. Ensemble Stanislas; Alexis Galpéruiné, violin; Jeff Cohen, piano. Gallo CD-676.

*Symphonies nos. 1 and 2.* Gewandhausorchester Leipzig; Edo de Waart, conductor. Philips 434 171-2. [Compact disc reissue.]

“Unquiet Peace: The Lied Between the Wars.” Cyndia Sieden, soprano; William Sharp, baritone; The New York Festival of Song; Steven Blier, piano. [Includes “Ofran’s Lieder,” “Berlin im Licht,” “Muskel von Margate,” and “Cäsars Tod” from Der Silbersee.]


Violin Concerto. Eivind Aadland, violin; Norwegian Wind Ensemble; Ole Kristian Ruud, conductor. Simax PSC 1090.

Violin Concerto, Vom Tod im Wald, Das Berliner Requiem. Alexandre Laiter, tenor; Peter Kooy, bass; Elisabeth Glab, violin; Ensemble Musique Oblique; Philippe Herreweghe, conductor. Harmonia Mundi HMC 901422.

Or Opera Grove, as it’s familiarly called. Four handsome volumes, red-bound, gold-topped. Over five million words; nearly 5,000 pages; 1,300 authors. The typography makes the volumes a pleasure to read: the binding allows them, from “Aachen” through “Der Zweiöstantisch photographieren” and “Zyliss-Gara, Teresa,” to lie open on the desk. (The typesetting is British, the printing and binding American.) There are abundant and excellent illustrations, chosen not just for decorative value but for informative content. My brief is to review Opera Grove’s treatment of Kurt Weill. Perhaps that’s rather as if The Tailor and Cutter sent a critic to assess some new movie on the basis of the men’s clothes. Let me first pay brief general tribute to the enterprise.

Operas Grove is a pleasure to use. It’s laid out with clarity. The worldlists and bibliographies are easy on the eye, not labyrinthine in the run-on style of Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart or the Encyclopädie dello spettacolo. It is much handier in format than either of those (or than The New Grove Dictionary of American Music). Since Opera Grove arrived some months ago, I’ve been consulting it just about every day. It’s become the work of first reference for all matters operatic. The physical pleasure it continues to give is not just a bonus; it reflects thinking that has ordered and presented so huge an amount of information in the most useful and accessible way.

Operas Grove is not just the New Grove opera entries gathered and updated. About 90 per cent of it, the editor estimates, is newly commissioned and written. There are articles of merit on big general subjects: “Opera” itself, “Libretto,” etc. One reads them with interest. But it’s for specific fact, information, and stimulation that one most often consults The Grove Dictionary of Opera. Its great strength is the series of articles on composers and their works. A long article on each important composer is followed by a worldlist and a bibliography; there are individual entries, usually by the same author, and some of them also long, on their principal operas. If I were to dwell on all the good things I’ve found, I’d never get round to Weill. But, in brief, Opera Grove, besides being a great dictionary compilation of all the facts about opera and its practitioners, is much more: it’s an active, readable, stimulating, well-informed companion.

Grove has always done well by Kurt Weill. In the fifth edition (1954) there are two columns by Hans Redlich that are notably more perceptive and appreciative than what all but a few enthusiasts were thinking and writing at that date:

Kurt Weill’s creative achievement is of profound importance to the modern opera stage. Alone among his numerous contemporaries who, like himself, strove for a regeneration of opera and for its release from Wagnerian dominance, he worked on the firm basis of a novel operatic conception..... This new operatic type of his [whose constituents Redlich summarizes] deeply influenced a whole generation of composers. Redlich, in fact, is the only Grove author to note Weill’s continuing influence on composers who remained in Germany after he had left it (among them Wagner-Regeny, who gets ample treatment in Opera Grove, and Fried Walter, about whom I find nothing in any Grove). Whether Redlich’s claim that works by Britten, Gershwin, Menotti, Blitzstein “testify to the lasting penetration of Weill’s influence” is -- except in Blitzstein’s case — perhaps more debatable. New Grove (1980) has fifteen columns by David Drew (plus, as in each of these counts, worldlist and bibliography). This brief monograph is surely the best piece of writing about Weill that exists. Each word is weighed, each sentence charged, and the whole is filled with knowledge, wisdom, understanding and acute commentary. Five sections deal with Life, Reputation, Early Works, Central Works, and Broadway Works. The second ends: “A quarter of a century after Weill’s death there is still widespread ignorance of his work apart from Die Dreigroschenoper...coupled with a seemingly unbridgeable division of opinion.” I’ll return to Drew’s sixth, final section, called The Two Weills. The entry in The New Grove Dictionary of American Music (1986), two and a half columns by Larry Stark, is by Larry Stempel, follows Drew lines, in a summary, more generalized, less interesting way.

The main entry for Weill in Opera Grove, about five and a half columns long, is by Stephen Hinton, the editor and author of the Cambridge Opera Handbook on Die Dreigroschenoper and the editor, with J. Schebera, of Kurt Weill: Musik und Theater, gesammelte Schriften (both 1990). Hinton has also written individual entries on Der Protagonist, Der Zierlein, Der Zweiöstantisch photographieren, Der Dreigroschenoper, Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Der Jasager, Die Bürgschaft, Der Silbersee, Die sieben Todsünden, A Kingdom for a Cow, Street Scene, Down in the Valley, and Lost in the Stars. Royal Palace (of which only the vocal score survives) is missing; so is Der Weg der Verheissung/The Eternal Road, a work about which people may well seek information. In addition, Andrew Lamb has provided short entries on Happy End and Lady in the Dark. They seem rather like afterthoughts. In his preface, Stanley Sadie has warned readers that “very few individual works [in the categories of opera, musical, musical theater] are assigned entries of their own.” But if the musical comedy A Kingdom for a Cow, Happy End, a play with songs, and Lady in the Dark, a play with dream sequences set to music, are in, then why not Johnny Johnson, Knickerbocker Holiday, One Touch of Venus, The Firebrand of Florence, and, above all, Love Life? Not room for them all, of course; but if Hinton had been allowed to deal with more than just three of the ten American works he could have buttressed further his defense of the Broadway Weill.

Hinton, like Drew, quotes Virgil Thomson’s obituary tribute, “Every new work was a new model, a new shape, a new solution of dramatic problems.” From T.W. Adorno’s obituary, he quotes, “The profile of this composer...is hardly commensurate with the concept of ‘composer.’” And he adds: “His putative metamorphosis in America represented less a significant departure, as often maintained, than the continuation of a development already under way,” and he takes issue (as others have done) with Drew’s phrase “one of music’s great ‘might-have-beens.’” The phrase is strong — Drew might put it differently now — but it needs to be read in context:

In his own generation he had few peers; but it is with greater composers whose gifts were partly unfilled or partly squandered that he is most profitably to be compared. Some aspects of him may also call Bizet to mind, others Musorgsky. But even if Weill remains one of music’s great ‘might-have-beens,’ his actual achievement is substantial and likely to prove of enduring significance.

When Hinton calls Street Scene Weill’s “chef d’œuvre,” an achievement that embodies the best of his European and American aspirations, he echoes Weill’s own claims for the piece. His argument has a slightly getting-it-both-ways quality: on the one hand, by changing, Weill was being consistent; on the other, we, looking for consistency in development, wrongly apply a “concept of composer.” The argument was anticipated by Drew:

Since the delineation of a character and function peculiar to each work...had been one of the hallmarks of the European Weill, it might be argued that he remained true to form in his Broadway shows, as he himself doggedly maintained.

But, Drew continues:

This would be to overlook the altogether changed methods of diversification.
Whereas in the European period, diversity is created naturally and methodically by the exploration in one work of potentials latent in the preceding ones, in the Broadway period it is the result of applying to a conventional background different types of prefabricated material imported from elsewhere, whether from folksong [Down in the Valley], from operetta and "Broadway," seismically responsive to commercial dictate, obdurately honest, ever adventurous, sometimes eager to return to "opera" (Gone with the Wind, Moby Dick).

For the rest, Hinton himself would wholly be one of the first to regret that Drew did not write the Opera Grove Weill entries and draw together the perceptive, appreciative new observations on the Broadway and Hollywood Weill which can be found scattered through the entries of his Weill Handbook (1987). Hinton's own Weill entry is sound but a shade pedestrian. Inevitably, since he has far less space, it is less detailed than that of New Grove (no mention of Jarnach's instruction, nothing—the Tailor and Cutter brief—about the non-operative compositions and how they relate to the operas). From the Worklist the 1969 revised vocal score of Mahagonny is missing; only the 1953 transposed vocal score of Die sieben Todsünden appears, not the 1972 edition with the songs at their original pitch, and the late-Lenya transposition banished to an appendix. The bibliography is long (over two columns of small print), unannotated, and uncategorized. Often when using Opera Grove I've wished that the books and articles dealing with particular works had been placed under their individual entries, not dumped into the conglomerate chronological lists under the composer concerned. One can dig them out, but it needs digging. Did editorial convenience take precedence of readers? (And just try using the 50-column bibliography appended to "Libretto.")

In his individual entries on the operas, Hinton tells the stories and does so clearly; but he doesn't manage much of musical characterization and commentary along the way (as many of the Opera Grove contributors succeed admirably in doing). He does provide the necessary information, adds brief assessments of each work, and on occasion cites views at variance with his. But, by Grove standards, he's a slightly dull writer. Most of the Opera Grove essays on operas by Handel, Mozart, Wagner, Verdi, Rimsky-Korsakov, Puccini, Strauss, Berg, many others quickly new responses to the work in question. These Weill entries hardly do that. But from the "dictionary" point of view they are sound enough. Lamb's two contributions seem to have been written with Drew's Handbook at hand. (Drew on Lady in the Dark: "Liza Elliott still feels threatened by a male-dominated and success-oriented society.... She consults her psychiatrist." Lamb: "Liza Elliott feels at odds with male-dominated and success-oriented society.... She consults her psychiatrist." etc.) And the Weill-related entries? "Brecht" is a rerun of Drew's good New Grove entry. So is "Lenya." Georg Kaiser is missing. Ira Gershwin gets a paragraph. There's a decent entry for Gustav Brecher, a passable one for Caspar Neher. "Maurice Abravanel" brings a surprise, for it informs us that he conducted the first performance of Knircherbocker Holiday "with Marian Anderson as soloist." (The article depends from Michael Steinberg's in New Grove and is credited jointly to Steinberg and Noël Goodwin. Did the latter confuse Maxwell, the librettist, with Maridan? Did the scruptuous Steinberg see and pass a proof of what appears over his name?) Abravanel's European Weill performances, including the premières of Die sieben Todsünden, and in America his premières of Knircherbocker Holiday, Lady in the Dark, One Touch of Venus, the Firebrand of Florence, Street Scene, and Down in the Valley are passed over in his brief entry (but noted under the works that have their own entries). There is no mention of the Kurt Weill Foundation or of the Yale archives under Weill nor in "Libraries and Archives." Polyna Stoiska, the first Mrs. Maurrant in Street Scene, is absent. Her Met career alone—eleven leading roles—should surely have won her an Opera Grove entry. Absent too is Brian Sullivan, the first Sam, and a major Met singer—Lohengrin, Walther, Parsifal, Pinkerton, and Peter Grimes among his many roles.

The Anglocentric coverage of twentieth-century singers has been widely remarked and deplored. It is the most evident flaw of the publication, but perhaps too much has been made of this rim-ship on the wonderfully capacious vessel. In general—and in most of the details—Opera Grove deals amply and thoroughly with opera through four centuries.

ANDREW PORTER
London


Born in slavery and nurtured under institutionalized racism, jazz remains one of the most political of musicians. Jazz scholarship, however, can be as formalist in its methodology as some of the worst examples of what might now be called "old musicology." As someone who has always been intrigued by the social meanings attached to jazz both here in the United States and in Europe, this study by German historian Michael H. Kater struck me as a potential example of what historically and culturally grounded jazz studies might be. The book did not live up to my hopes, but it remains eminently useful for understanding some of the meanings of jazz in twentieth-century German culture, and by extrapolation, elsewhere.

Kater's strength is a love for documentation and detail. Besides conducting numerous oral histories with jazz performers and fans from the time, he sifted through governmental holdings from the Nazi period, most importantly, the archives of the Reichsmusikammer. As a result, his footnotes hold many riches. His penchant for detail and documentation, however, also keeps the book from being the study it could be. Overall it remains a largely descriptive report of Nazi policy and actions surrounding "jazz" as practiced in Germany; it provides little cultural analysis or interpretation of jazz's meanings and its power, particularly as dance music, that was such a vivid affront to a culture obsessed with body-blood purity.

In four chapters plus a framing introduction and epilogue, Kater shows how unsuccessful the cultural arms of the Reich were in controlling what musics the citizenry performed and consumed. At best, they
WehrmachtLuftwaffe (who regularly turned supported ensembles like the DTU as a play oo Armstrong's Hot 7). and eat it too was the creation of state-orchestra), the Golden 7 (which struck me of the Nazi machine. Particularly interesting in Goebbels' attempt to have his cake and show the "improvised nature of a dictatorial regime whose alleged totalitarianism was neither seamless nor inevitable" (p.102). The willingness of performers to participate in such ensembles demonstrates as well that the cultural and political meanings of the music were not fixed; "jazz" performers could be collaborators too.

Kater's narrative drags, however, as he feels compelled to tell us about every single performer and group, and when he does, his prose often becomes fanzine in nature, and we are treated to discussions of the sexual exploits of performers as if misogynistic sexual appetites were indicative of musical ability.

At the end, a real narrative returns as he discusses those individuals — he calls them "Jazz Victims" — who did indeed suffer for their musical tastes. Particularly poignant were the Hamburg Swing-Heines now the subject of the Hollywood movie Swing Kids whose love for dancing and embodying the musical and sexual excesses of that music made them especially despised by the Hitler Youth and obvious targets for retaliation. Although often coming from distinguished families, many of the Swings spent time in work and concentration camps where they indeed paid dearly for their supposed crimes of musical and sexual excess.

Kater claims to be a performing jazz musician. However, the depth of his musical knowledge remains in question. Although Kater dutifully defines jazz early on, he uses the term too uncritically for my taste. He admits that improvisation was not well understood or practiced by the majority of the performers under discussion. If that is true, then to call this music "jazz," however rhythmically charged it may be, dilutes the very American works serving as models and indeed erases the African aesthetic central to the jazz experience, as Goebbels' own sanitized substitutions tried to do. To have been more circumspect in defining this German popular music certainly would not need to detract from the arguments about the cultural contestations at work in Nazi-controlled Germany.

Similarly lacking in music-critical subtlety is his acceptance of Benny Goodman as the American King of Swing (capitalization his), his claim of Gershwin as a jazz composer in a league with Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson, and his description of jazz arranger Mary Lou Williams as "black woman pianist." More embarrassing are misspellings ("hapsicbord") and errors (he claims the BBC used "the first four notes of Beethoven's Erotica" (p.168) when he means the Fifth). Where were the editors at Oxford? I cannot help but wonder what musicological literature he has read, whether current or from the time about which he writes. The footnotes do not allay my suspicions that — despite the author's interdisciplinary aims — the discipline of musicology, which has produced thorough histories of jazz as well as studies of the meaning and presence of that music in Europe, was largely ignored.

SUSAN C. COOK
The University of Wisconsin, Madison


Twentieth-century conductors without a recorded legacy have not generally enjoyed much posthumous attention, and Gustav Brecher (1889-1946), music director of the Leipzig Opera from 1923 to 1933, is a case in point. Too often Brecher is noted only in passing for his championship of new music (Strauss, Busoni, Krenek, Weill, among others) and for a tragic death by suicide as the Gestapo closed in on his sanctuaries about Brecher by Heinrich Creuzburg, who was Brecher's conducting assistant from 1928 to 1932. Also included are statistics on the Leipzig Opera repertoire, as well as lists of Brecher's compositions, writings, and translations; unfortu-
nately the book contains no index. Schebera is generally adept at setting Brecher's accomplishments within the context of Weimar culture, but it is only by inference that we get any sense for his interpretive style relative to his contemporaries. Evidence suggests that Brecher and Brügmann were among modernism's moderates and that by the later 1920s Brecher's careful attention to expressive detail may even have seemed somewhat out of date. Kurt Weill, for instance, wrote to his publisher on 23 October 1927 regarding the planned Leipzig premiere of Der Zarin liisst sich photographieren that he found Brecher pedantic, "a musician rooted in an old-fashioned attitude" and "completely set on a declamatory style" that Weill found totally unsuited for his operas. Such critical perspectives would have given more depth to Schebera's loving portrait of his subject. Nonetheless this little book is an important contribution and valuable source for anyone interested in early twentieth-century opera history.

CHRISTOPHER HAILEY
Occidental College

**PERFORMANCES**

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| Britten/Weill Festival, Aldeburgh. Snape Maltings Concert Hall, 22-25 October 1992. | Britten's version, but Britten, when about to take the work to Holland, wrote that he hoped for a better reception for it there, since the Dutch audience would not have the "petty general prejudice that exists in England" and their memories would stretch back to Brecht and Weill. Kowalke read some passages from the Weill-Lenya correspondence, which he and Lys Symonette are editing for publication. Included was a letter Weill wrote from London where he had attended a performance of the original Beggar's Opera and said it was "one of the most beautiful" evenings he had ever spent in a theater.

The first concert included the discarded overture to Paul Bunyan, orchestrated by Colin Matthews. Britten was at work with Auden on Bunyan at the time he met Weill. Donald Mitchell has suggested that "Tchaikovsky," from Weill's Lady in the Dark, influenced Britten's "Love Song" in his operetta. It is tantalizing to recall that while Britten and Auden were living in the notorious artistic boarding house on Middagh Street, Brooklyn Heights, their landlord was George Davis, who after Weill's death would become Lenya's husband. Perhaps more relevant was the juxtaposition of numbers from Bunyan with Weill's version of American patriotism and pacifism in excerpts from Johnny Johnson and Knickerbocker Holiday.

The first concert also included Britten's Sinfonia da Requiem, Weill's Violin Concerto, and Second Symphony. Never has the Symphony sounded so sumptuous, almost lush, in the overwhelming acoustic of the Maltings. This concert, conducted by Andrew Davis, was the first time that the BBC Symphony Orchestra had played here. It was odd to cast one's mind back nearly a quarter of a century to the first UK public performance of Weill's Second Symphony, given by the same orchestra at the Proms in 1968. (A few of the players remain, among them Colin Bradbury, Jeffrey Wakefield and Michael Duffield.) Since then our perceptions of both composers have changed, but it is Weill's position that has altered the more radically — no longer just the other half of Brecht and Weill, but an influential force on music for the opera house, musical theater, and concert hall.

The second evening, "Of Life and Love" included a brilliant performance of Britten's First Quartet by the Britten Quartet (substituting at the eleventh hour for the Borodin Quartet), and performances of Britten's On this Island and Weill's Fräulein. The latter were performed by Lucy Shelton, accompanied by Ian Brown and the Britten-Pears ensemble respectively. Fraulein and the very early String Quartet in B minor are real collector's items. David Drew can detect pre-echoes of Lady in the Dark and Knickerbocker Holiday in the quartet, and it was these two works that made up most of the Weill contribution to the third evening, in which the BBC singers were joined by HK Gruber and Angelina Réaux in excerpts from the two Weill works and Paul Bunyan. One thing that hasn't changed enough over the years, though Lord knows both Drew and Kowalke have campaigned for it strenuously, is the chance to hear Weill's own orchestration. This time it was piano, percussion and guitar that gave us the cabaret-style accompaniment. Gruber has an infectious manner; his "September Song" had a real Viennese lift to it, and he joined Réaux in the duet "We are cut in twain" from Knickerbocker Holiday that ended the evening. As for Angelina Réaux, who has already established herself as the leading Weill soprano of the younger generation, she once again proved, despite a heavy cold, that beauty of tone and elegance of phrasing do not tell against an incisive interpretation of Weill's songs. She turned out to be just as much at home with Britten — her performances of "Tell me the truth about love" and "Stop all the clocks" were the high-spot of the proceedings.

We all dutifully tripped off to the pictures on Saturday afternoon to see the Pabst Dreiroschenoper, a good prelude to the singers from the Britten-Pears School doing a concert of all the numbers to end the festival. Steuart Bedford conducted a 17-strong band who got around Weill's scoring for 23 instruments — for the original production these pieces were managed by only seven players! It is hard for young conservatory-trained singers to hit off the delicate balance between operatic parody, street song, and Berlin bark in this old favorite. Among the soloists, I particularly liked Deborah Haskew's Mrs. Peachum; she did all the verses of the "Ballad of Sexual Dependency" and launched the second-act finale with just the right bite and tone. Heather Pawsey's voice was in a way too good for Lucy; when her aria is sung securely it loses its irony. The heaviest burden fell on Isa Lagarde as Polly — in a concert version she has to sing all her numbers one after another in Act I, but her diction (the Feingold translation was used) and her manner were fine; only the low notes seemed out of reach. As a bonheurboche they offered Drew's Happy End concert sequence to send us all home humming "Na also goodbye."

PATRICK O'CONNOR
London

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This review is an expanded version of one which appeared in the December 1992 issue of Opera; reprinted with permission.
PERFORMANCES


The Seven Deadly Sins has long been my favorite work of Kurt Weill. When I learned that it was going to be performed in concert by the Los Angeles Philharmonic with its recently appointed Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting, I looked forward to it with great anticipation. Previously, I had seen only the debacle at the Brooklyn Academy of Music — the Pina Bausch choreography to Michael Tilson Thomas's conducting (see this Newsletter 4, no.1). Of course there were the usual questions: who would be singing, and were The Sins going to be performed in the original soprano version?

As a last minute replacement for Maria Ewing, Elise Ross was the soprano. (Yes, it was performed in the original key.) To date, Ms. Ross remains the only soprano to have recorded the work in the original high version (on EMI with the Orchestra of the City of Birmingham, Simon Rattle conducting). This remains my favorite recording, although opinions have varied about Ms. Ross's performance. At one time, some reviewers asserted that there was not much characterization in her singing. I am happy to report that the years have been good to her. Her performance of The Sins here proved excellent, with a fully developed characterization to go along with her strong singing.

While I was pleased to hear the work performed by such notable forces, there were many problems, largely in the area of orchestral balance. At times, the piano part assumed glaring prominence. The dynamic equilibrium was at its worst in sin number three (Anger), during which it became impossible to discern any of the woodwind parts. I attended a second performance and sat in a different part of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. My impressions, regrettably, did not change. In Avarice, the tempo could only have been described as "full throttle." The orchestra sacrificed any attempt at subtlety in order to keep up with Salonen's peculiarly frantic lead.

The male quartet of Greg Fedderly, Mallory Walker, Robin Bucck, and Michael Gallup sang with a security of pitch and convincing vocal color. Overall, the vocal contributions of Ms. Ross and the quartet provided the larger share of my enjoyment. The program began with the little-heard and quite forgettable Overture to King Stephen by Beethoven. Another Beethoven overture, Namenfeier, also rarely performed, followed intermission. The evening ended with Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements, in which Salonen offered his most persuasive interpretations of the evening.

PAUL YOUNG
Los Angeles


Opera or play? Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny has posed this problem for the German theater ever since the 1931 Berlin production. Because of tradition within the German theater, it is often assumed that opera singers cannot act and actors cannot sing. There is no trace of this dilemma, however, in the Karlsruhe production. I have seldom experienced such a unified ensemble in which the singing, the speaking, and the movement was maintained at such a high standard. Even the opera chorus, often the sluggish part of German productions, was as lively as one could wish of the "girls" and men of Mahagonny.

The program notes include some interesting contributions, among them an interview with director Elke Gramss. He says, "The amazing thing is that one can produce such depressing material with such intense theatrical enjoyment... The work calls for artistic humor and precision; it has to be performed in a style that is always right on target." Gramss's staging is full of fantasy and creativity. It tells the story of the city and its inhabitants with real love of detail: it makes one think of Weill's later comment, "The sole manner in which to express an idea is by means of a personal story." Brecht's and Weill's stage directions call the four lumberjacks from Alaska "our four friends." The fact that the audience is unaware of this little detail in the score does not prevent the attitude embodied therein from coming across in the Karlsruhe production.

John Treleaven is an attractively naive giant of a Jimmy. He can hit the high C in his aria and still come across as "just another guy." Still, Treleaven's Jimmy possesses a far more sensitive nature than do his three cohorts. Hans Kiener, a familiar figure in the Karlsruhe repertory, plays Billy in well calculated contrast to Jimmy: he prefers "reading," and the farther the city of Mahagonny sinks toward its demise the more deeply he buries himself in his porn magazine. He is hardly aware of Jimmy's sentencing, then comforts himself a little with the attractive Jenny, and finally retreats into a drunken stupor. Indeed, Tiziana K. Sojat plays an amazing Jenny; she possesses the erotic glow demanded of her role, and she sings the coloratura in the "Alabama Song" beautifully and delicately. But she also knows how to control a vulgar intonation, which she cunningly added to "Denn wie man sich bettet." Thus, Jenny's ambiguous nature is aesthetically validated. The gangster trio is just as convincing.

Bianca von Zambell as Begbick, John Wegner as Trinity Moses, and Hans-Jörg Weinschenk as Fatty realize their roles with commensurate differentiations of feeling.

Various details of the Karlsruhe production visible from the beginning attest to a loving familiarity with the work: Jimmy's hat is representative of an essential element of his personality, revealing much about his condition. When he declares in scene 8 that he wants to eat his hat, it is not an empty phrase, but a real expression of his agitated frame of mind. The luxurious world of Mahagonny, illustrated on stage by a tanning salon with a real, water-filled swimming pool (an ersatz-Florida for the little guy of the German quotidienne), manifests its own well-considered logic. In scene 8 when Jimmy loses his nerve, Jack advises him: "Just swim a little," whereupon Klaus Schneider as Jack actually splashes into the water. As a result, he has to dry himself off during the next number, the "Gebet einer Jungfrau." Then suddenly, as if catching himself in the act of an aesthetic error, Jack calls out a little too confidently: "That's great art!"

The musical direction on the evening I attended was in the hands of conductor Myron Romanul; Wolfgang Heinzl, director of theater music, led the rehearsals and conducted the premiere. Romanul allowed a few errors of coordination during the chorals scenes. The court scene in the second act rushed, and it was weakened by several unfortunate cuts. One would sooner have suffered the excision of the "Kranich-Duett" and "Gott in Mahagonny" since Weill and Brecht left them out of the Berlin production of 1931. Aside from these flaws, the performance realized successfully the cross between opera and music hall that characterizes the sound of Weill's music. Even the rubato seemed right.

Jenny (Tiziana K. Sojat) and Jimmy (John Treleaven) in the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe production of Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny. Photo: Cord Weira.
In Karlsruhe, as in Berlin in 1931, loud-speaker announcements have replaced Caspar Neher’s placards. Karin Fritz, the resident set designer of the Karlsruhe Theater, has created a spare setting for Mahagonny. Up until the end of the hurricane, the set consists only of a yellow platform, and two yellow metal side walls with doors, creating an artificial world suggestive of the desert wasteland in which Mahagonny was founded. The set is open at the back, and from there come the actors, the swindler trio with their truck, the girls wearily dragging their bags, and the four lumberjacks from Alaska in fur coats.

After the intermission the back wall area is gone. The set has become triangular, now symbolizing a closed society. Nothing emerges from backstage—other than the electric chair for Jimmy’s execution. After Jimmy is strapped in, the men of Mahagonny attempt to flee, but the doors are closed. The chorus sings over the loud speaker: “Laßt euch nicht verführen, es gibt keine Wiederkehr!” “[Go not into temptation, there is no turning back.” Corresponding to the horrifying cynicism with which Jenny forsakes Jimmy, suddenly there are enough able handymen among the men of Mahagonny to finish constructing the electric chair.

It is clear to Gramss and Fritz just where the decline of the city of Mahagonny begins: as soon as the principle of “du darfsl” (“anything goes”) comes into play. The belly of Jakob Schmidt, who eats himself to death, literally explodes, and the corpse is suspended over the stage on a rope, on which half a hog already hangs. Joe (played with spirit by Georgi Mirostani) is the second one to go up on the rope; as the sacrificial loser of the boxing match, the spectator sees two dolls, bouncing up and down above the stage, in contrast to the superficial pleasures of consumerism below, evoking a decidedly threatening atmosphere. This visual solution could well have been inspired by Neher’s placards, some of which incorporated a gollows motif (one of these is reproduced on the cover of the Universal Edition piano-vocal score). When Jimmy is strapped in, a kind of net is created by the various straps and ropes—a clear if not subtle allusion to Mahagonny, the “city of nets,” as conceived by Begbick. After the execution, he too is suspended on the rope.

Ultimately, the weaknesses of Gramss’s concept become apparent. How is one to depict the decline of Mahagonny? Neher sought a concrete visual solution. He created a placard on which someone sets fire to the “Hotel zum reichen Manne” and followed it with one in which a squadron of airplanes approaches the city. In Karlsruhe Begbick sets a fire too, but she merely torches a model, pushed into the foreground, of the yellow triangular stage. At this point, the balance between image and music falls apart. All the actors come onto the stage for the Finale, but they refrain from any semblance of a reaction. As the final cadence is resounding and the curtain falls, the little model is still burning brightly.

At the intermission, the audience talked excitedly about the production, but after this conclusion they could not leave the theater quickly enough. If anyone was talking at all, it was probably only to ask where one could go for a glass of wine. Alas, a suspenseful production dissipated into an all too indeterminate final image.

ANDREAS HAUFF
Mainz
Translated by Peggy Meyer Sherry


When Light Opera Works recently unleashed this 1938 satire by Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill, one would have expected its original topicality to be defanged. But it had lost little of its bite. Pieter Stuyvesant’s covert sale of weapons to the natives seemed only slightly distanced from current events, such as George Bush’s pardon of his former defense secretary’s activities in the Iran-contra enterprise. Suitably the Evanston chorus sang its last refrain of “All Hail, The Political Honeymoon” the very day The New York Times questioned how long such a period might last for (then) President-elect Bill Clinton. Nevertheless, it was Brom Broeck’s definition of democracy—“when you’re governed by amateurs”—that garnered enough of an audience response to make one believe that the ink of Washington Irving’s history was still wet.

In addition to impeccable timeliness, this Knickerbocker Holiday was blessed with packed houses and consistently high production values. Scenic designer Alan Donahue abstracted the Battery of New Amsterdam into an asymmetrical set of black stairs that dominated the stage and alternately suggested a fort, pier, and gallows. Such a plan allowed stage director M. Seth Reines effectively and quickly to fill or empty the stage with citizenry. The only proverbial flies in this ointment were on again, off-again sound reinforcement and murky rear projections of early American scenes, which called to mind family vacation slides shown on a bed sheet. Marc Robin skillfully choreographed the thirty-eight member cast; especially clever was the chorus of Dutch maidens with their synchronized wash rags in “Clickety-Clack.” Costume designer Karin Kopischke’s period dress provided just the modicum of historicism to set the proceedings squarely in the seventeenth century. The only anachronistic touch was Pieter Stuyvesant’s red getup, which at first suggested that the Governor might actually be an escaped Santa Claus from a local department store.

Among the cast’s weightier members, the New Amsterdam City Council threatened to steal the show with their faux-Dutch dialects “vich ver right at home in der Midwestern ‘vindy citey.’” They rendered “Hush, Hush” as a particularly amusing rendition of a song of exhortation, replete with boisterous buffoonery. Of the council, the standout was Warren Moulton as Tienhoven, who played a strong scene in which he found himself “in the loop” and concluded that he was indeed “The One Indispensable Man.” Brom Broeck’s partner Tenpin, portrayed by Matthew Greenberg, provided the quintessential “the Governor might actually be an escaped Santa Claus from a local department store.”

As Mistress Schermerhorn, M.G. Potts squeezed every...
PERFORMANCES

The Seven Deadly Sins. Salt Lake City, Abravanel Hall: Utah Symphony, Joseph Silverstein, cond.; Marcia Ragonetti, soprano; Marc Jacobs, dir.; 16 January 1993 (also: Ogden, Utah, 14 January; Provo, Utah, 15 January).

For the Utah Symphony’s “90th Birthday Salute to Maurice Abravanel,” Music Director Joseph Silverstein programmed three works with roots in the theater. First came *La Création du monde* (1923) by Darius Milhaud, one of Abravanel’s friends. Like
presenting several new works each year. It was so exciting to contemplate helping to build something new, not just repeating Lohengrin or Lohmami or Tannhäuser or whatever, but helping with something new that might be better or longer-lasting because of what I may have done for it.

When Abravanel offered to conduct, Weill responded: “You’re crazy. You don’t give up the Metropolitan Opera for Broadway.” But Abravanel resigned his three-year contract with the Met after only two years and became Weill’s music director. Between 1938 and 1947, Abravanel conducted half a dozen of Weill’s shows, including *Knickerbocker Holiday*, *Lady in the Dark*, *One Touch of Venus*, *The Firebrand of Florence*, and *Street Scene*.

Their collaboration ended in 1947 when Abravanel left New York to lead the fledgling Utah Symphony. During his thirty-two years as Music Director, he became the most prominent musician in Utah. Evidence of his importance is hard to miss. For the last fifteen years, the most generous patrons of the Utah Symphony have met in the “Abravanel Room” at Symphony Hall. The Music Director of the Utah Symphony holds the “The Maurice Abravanel Chair.” The Santa Barbara Music Academy of the West, which Abravanel directed from 1955-79, is the site of “Abravanel Hall.” This year, a second hall received his name when Salt Lake’s Symphony Hall was renamed “Abravanel Hall.”

Other recent gestures of respect are the visiting composer series recommended above: Lowell [Durham’s] appreciative biography, [Silverstein’s] “objective, detached reading, characterized primarily by precision and moderation. Since he tends toward understatement in general, I don’t know whether this represented nor- mal procedure or conscious choice. Ragonetti’s approach was well suited to that of [Silverstein]. Classically trained, she eschewed any hint of cabaret style. She may, of course, have been avoiding comparison with previous interpretations, especially Lotte Lenya’s. In any case, Ragonetti’s performance presented a controlled interpretation free of mannerism.

Most of the time, this approach worked, but there were moments when I wished the performance had more bite. The main tune in “Lust, for instance, seems to invite a more caustic, bitter delivery than Ragonetti offered. Anna II’s painful capitulation, marked by her acknowledgement that, “it’s right like this, Anna, but so hard,” precedes some of the work’s most dramatic orchestral scoring, setting descending lines first in the trumpets, then in the flutes. Louder trumpets, followed by a quieter flute descent would have better evoked this defeat.
PERFORMANCES

Up through Lust, Anna has had to be persuaded to demean herself. In renouncing love she seems to lose the last of her humanity, for in the ensuing Avarice, her degeneration has achieved such a momentum that the family seems compelled to try to reign her in.

In the final sin, Envy, the soprano portrayed both Annas by wearing on one arm a white glove and jewelry while the other was bare. Anna II entices people who have chosen paths she was persuaded to forgo. The summary list of the analogous “sins” is punctuated by strokes on a bass drum. As Anna confronts her compromises, she jerks her head away from the slide that depicts her natural desires at every drum stroke. Louder drum strokes would have been more forceful, emphasized the strength of Jacobs’ staging, and driven home the point inherent in the work’s dialectic.

Many of these observations could be seen as glibness over dynamics, but they raise an interesting question. That is, whether, even in a work that maintains an ironic distance from its subjects, the composer sometimes intentionally writes music that lets down its guard and confronts the audience with real pain or despair. I certainly hope so.

BRYCE RYTING
Brigham Young University


The San Francisco Ballet’s new Kurt Weill work Nanna’s Lied had its world premiere in the San Francisco Opera House in February, and the company included it during its New York engagement in April. It takes its title from one of Weill’s less familiar songs (to a poem from Bertolt Brecht’s play Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe), which Weill dedicated to Lotte Lenya at Christmas in 1939 as a sort of gesture of reconciliation: their relationship had just survived one of its lowest points, involving divorce and remarriage, and Brecht’s lyric repeats the bittersweet refrain, “Wo sind die Tränen von gestern? Wohin schneidet der vergangene Jahr?” (“Where are last night’s tears? Where are the snows of yesteryear?”

The new ballet has an unusual background, and, as the program points out, it marks “a startling departure” for its choreographer Helgi Tomasson, the brilliant Ice Islander who now heads this company and has done so much to improve it. Here he has “digressed from his customary lyricism and gentility in favor of passion and drama.” The suggestion he had a ballet to Kurt Weill’s music originated with Tomasson’s wife Marlene. He then investigated various songs, in three languages. “The music was what would I do with this music.”

At more than one point during the performance, anyone familiar with the songs must wonder just how successful an answer Tomasson has found to his own question.

The soprano Francine Lascault sings off stage. Denis de Coteau, this company’s capable chief conductor for the past twelve years, conducts selections that include the Kleine Dreigroschenmusik Moritat, “Le Roi d’Aquitaine” from Marie Galante, “Das Lied von der harten Nuss” and “Surabaya Johnny” from Happy End, “Denn wie man sich bettet” and the “Havana-Lied” from Mahagonny, the “Kanonensong” from Die Dreigroschenoper, “Nanna’s Lied” itself, and a reprise of the Moritat. Anyone who finds that hodgepodge bemusing will probably find downright dumbfounding the inclusion (as the fourth of ten numbers) of a contemporaneous recording, sung by Curt Bois, of the song “Guck doch nicht immer nach dem Tänzgerin hin” — not by Weill but by Friedrich Holländer, who also gave the world Marlene Dietrich’s lifelong theme song “Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe eingestellt,” a.k.a. “Falling in Love Again”.

The curtain’s rise reveals sets and costumes, by John Macfarlane, which manifest his familiarity with the expressionistic distortions of perspective which caused such a stir when Robert Wiene introduced them into his film classic The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. The negligible story — just barely enough to hang a ballet on — involves three primary characters, Nanna (Tina LeBlanc), Johnny (Stephen Legate), and Jacob Schmidt (Yuri Zhukov), plus four supporting dancers (Julia Adam, Paul Gibson, David Justin, and Grace Maduell). Johnny, naturally, does Nanna wrong, then Nanna, naturally, becomes a whore whose tricks include the bald-headed Mr. Schmidt.

Familiarity with the text of these songs contributes much to one’s not enjoying the ballet per se. That probably affects only a small minority, since the printed program includes neither the original texts nor translations. At virtually no point did the words have much, or even any, bearing on what one sees onstage. The jilted singer, for example, thrice enjoins her fickle lover: “Nimm doch die Pfeife aus dem Mault, du Hund!” although of course his kissler at no point contains a pipe of any sort. One comes away at the end feeling that those responsible for the selection of these songs, for this purpose, chose them for the charm of the music but failed — as most Americans do with pop songs in general — to pay more than the most superficial attention to what they actually say. I found musically indefensible a particularly maladroit splice in the “Havana-Lied,” which serves no apparent purpose except to double the short piece’s length, and no excuse occurs to me for the incongruous interpolation of the Holländer number, played through loudspeakers from a scratchy old 78-rpm shellac disc made almost sixty years ago, except that Mr. Tomasson presumably just likes it and needed a few more minutes of music there to flesh things out.

The dancers, Ms. Lancaster, Mr. de Coteau, and his orchestra do their jobs well, although I have never heard “Wie man sich bettet” taken so slowly, almost lugubriously. A reaction to the score as used here will depend largely upon one’s sense of the individual songs’ appropriateness and congruity.

PAUL MOOR
San Francisco

RECORDINGS


Though Weill’s two symphonies have yet to reach repertoire status in the orchestral pantheon, the recording industry is showing them with attention. In 1991, competing versions of both symphonies came to market: Roland Bader conducting the Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra (Koch International/Schwanr 311 147), and Michel Swierczewski leading the Gulbenkian Or-
Kurt Weill Newsletter

An and London labs. Philips' reissue of Edo through cross-breeding with the popular. Which is to say that Weill's Symphony No. 2 is just the piece for our own era of eclectic "new Romanticism." Less self-conscious than Weill's student symphony, its counterpoint is more exposed, its texture more luminous. Its lyricism and energy are irresistible.

De Waart's performances with the Gewandhaus group steer a middle course of interpretation; they present the scores accurately without saying much about them. I do not greatly admire the Gewandhaus Orchestra's sound, either live or on recordings, finding that its characteristic sound - in this performance as elsewhere - combines a dull turidity in the lower registers with an annoying, high-gloss sheen in the upper strings. The winds are not uniformly in tune, and ensemble work can fall short of ideal; listen no further than the end of the introduction and "beginning in earnest" of the first movement of the Symphony No. 2, where, in a brief span, the solo trumpet wobbles unpleasantly and the violins' ostensibly unison announcement of the movement's main theme proves ragged.

Still, the Symphony No. 2 has a way of "playing itself," and, though short of world-class, the performance doesn't stand in the way of enjoyment. The Symphony No. 1, however, is less well served. It needs interpretative help to keep from imploding into a black hole of inescapable density.

The other two readings currently in print demonstrate stronger points of view. Bader's brooding approach (with the Krakow Philharmonic) occasionally crosses the border to lethargy. He takes three minutes longer than de Waart to get through the Symphony No. 2, which represents a very audible difference in a half-hour-long piece. In the Symphony No. 1, however, his pesante yields a repressive, nightmarish quality that is at once unsettling and unforgettable. Swierczewski stands at the other end of the spectrum, arguing for vigor and brilliance with a Second Symphony that takes two minutes less than de Waart's. His Gulbenkian Orchestra, however, seems the least accomplished of the three ensembles; its players fail to digest and disguise the interpretative details the conductor proposes. All the same, their energy is exciting, and I'd like to hear Swierczewski's point of view rendered by a more consistently accomplished ensemble.

In the meantime, listeners may turn to Philips' reissue for a quite acceptable, unfussy, all-around reading, but they may find themselves more stimulated if they are willing to accept the shortcomings of the others.

James M. Keller
New York City

In the present context, the focus of interest in this mixed-bag recital is the first recording of Weill's early cycle, Ofrah's Lieder. Composed in 1916 and performed a year later, these songs attest to Weill's knowledge of the literature of German Romantic song and of its linguistic and textural elements, whether in the "Lotosblume" repeated chords of "In meinem Garten" and the later part of "Denkst Du," the Venetian gondola-song movement of "Nur dir fürwahr," or the Straussian sweep of the vocal writing in "Er sah mir liebend in die Augen." Most are through-composed songs with strophic elements; "Nur dir fürwahr" is more straightforwardly ternary. The harmonic language is not always deployed with certainty: an enigmatic conclusion to "In meinem Garten" suggests that it might have originally been intended to prepare another song in B-flat rather than the E minor of "Nichts ist die Welt mir." The latter is the most accomplished, expressively secure song in the set, as "Er sah mir liebend" is the most banal. The composer, clearly gifted, is not yet - despite the celebrated pre-echo of 'Seeräuber-Jenny' in "Denkst du" - recognizably the Kurt Weill (or Kurt Weills, depending on your point of view) with whom we are familiar.

The performance is quite acceptable; most of the songs lie well for Cyndia Sieden's securely tuned, somewhat whitish soprano, though her weaker lower range is less happy with "Er sah mir liebend in die Augen." Steven Blier plays fluently and forcefully, as indeed he does throughout this rather unfocused program, under whose rubric: "between the wars" Ofrah's Lieder do not, strictly speaking, belong.

Kurt Weill Newsletter

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The other Weill songs in the recital are more dispensable: "Berlin in Licht" and "Muschel von Margate" are in both the essential Strauss and Gruber/Ensemble Modern collections, "Clarin's Tod" in Lena's "Berlin Theater Songs." In the "Muschel," Sieden onlyガンガンcut at least at the fastest, militarily maintained tempo chosen here; she hasn't time to do anything with the words of the stanzas (extra syllables in later stanzas turn into mere gabbles), she treats the refrain brusquely by cutting the whole notes short, and the whole song is shrill in effect, without variety. Stratas, with a similar voice, makes the song work for herself and for the listener: At a slower tempo, she has time to work with the words, and she sings the refrain with portamento and charm, focusing the song's irony as well as its outrage. (She has also found more different ways to shout "Shell."). For full favor, though, HK Gruber's performance (in David Drew's Or-Musik suite) is the way to go.

"Berlin im Licht" is assigned to the estimable baritone William Sharp, who takes a pleasingly jaunty line than did Stratas; with lots of rubato and some Sprechstimme, she made it a sentimental, affectionate hymn to the city, while Sharp is more matter-of-fact. But Gruber (his Peachesque rasp supported by the authorized jazz-band accompaniment) finds an authentic Berlin edge that escapes both of them. In the Silberseer piece, Sharp is vocally more than adequate, but the text is not treated with a range of tonal and verbal inflection to bring out its bite.

These Weill songs are embedded in a curiously scattered program which disapp...
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Cello Sonata, Houston, TX. The Da Camera Connoisseur Series, Cary Hoffman, cello, John Perry, piano, 9 October, 1992.


Der Lindberghflug, Santa Cruz, CA. University of California, Santa Cruz, 12-14 March 1993.

Little Threepenny Music, Spokane WA. Spokane Symphony, 5-6 April 1993.


Mahagonny Songspiel, Hanover, NH. Dartmouth College, Brandon Adams, dir., 4-6 March 1993.


The Seven Deadly Sins, Symphony No. 2, Mount Vernon, VA. Mount Vernon Chamber Orchestra. Óysses S. James, cond., Nancy Scimone, sop., 18 February 1992.


Street Scene, Denton, TX. University of North Texas, Paula Homer, dir., Henry Gibbons, cond., 26, 28 March 1993.

Street Scene, Boston, MA. Boston University Theater, 15-18 April 1993.

Street Scene, Houston, TX. Houston Grand Opera, Francesca Zambello, dir., John Henry Curry, cond., 28, 30 January, 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 February 1994.

The Threepenny Opera, Ringde, NH. Franklin Pierce College, 22-24, April 1993.

Der Zar lässt sich photographieren, Bloomington, IN. Indiana University Studio Opera Company, 15-16 April 1993.

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