

Kurt Weill

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Newsletter



*Rodney Milnes reviews the
Weill-Lenya Correspondence*



Weill in Vienna

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*edited and translated by Lys Symonette and
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The Newsletter is published to provide an open forum wherein interested readers may express a variety of opinions. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. The editor encourages the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for inclusion in future issues. The submission deadline for the next issue is 15 June 1996.

Cover photos: Wedding photo of Weill and Lenya, Berlin 1926; "View of the Concert Hall [Vienna]," watercolor by E.F. Hofecker, 1913.

To the editor

Responses to Andrew Porter's review of *Mahagonny* at the English National Opera:

I too was disappointed by the English National Opera production of *Mahagonny* last June, but in ways different from those remarked upon by Andrew Porter in his review [vol. 13, no. 2, p. 23]. Sixteen years ago in the Methuen edition of the Brecht/Auden text, I published (as you have done in your Fall 1995 issue) the Notes which Weill wrote before the Leipzig premiere, following them with "Suggestions for the stage realization" by himself and Neher which his Foreword was meant to introduce. Caspar Neher's projections, which Weill described as a *Bestandteil* of the performance material to be sent to any prospective producers, were shown in the Arts Council of Great Britain's Neher exhibition in 1986. The one with the bomber planes, which you illustrate, was reproduced in our catalogue then.

I blame the ENO for not realizing from the start that all this, like the need to minimize the actors's gestures and props (*Requisiten* does not mean "requirements") was part of the effort to create "fundamental forms of a new, simple, popular musical theater" (Weill to Heinsheimer on 14 October 1929). I am surprised that Andrew Porter, in his wholesale *Verriß*, makes no complaint about the company's failure to dig up the Neher slides or to aim—even in a theater the size of the Coliseum—at "an almost concertante" musical performance. Nor does he complain of the Americanization of the setting, which Weill himself wanted to avoid. This was expressed in names, accents, but above all in the Feingold translation. All these are basic errors of understanding and judgment, which threw the whole production off course and now make Porter's criticisms seem quite secondary.

If anybody wants some indication of how the Theater am Kurfürstendamm tackled the work at the end of 1931, Neher's *Regiebuch* is in the Vienna National Library; unfortunately I understood its importance too late for inclusion in the exhibition of 1986.

JOHN WILLETT

Thil-Manneville
30 November 1995

I object to Andrew Porter's opinions on Sian Edwards's conducting of *Mahagonny* at English National Opera. But then, being her husband, I would, wouldn't I? Anyone else interested in the matter can listen to a recording of the BBC broadcast, preferably compare it with a recording of the performance from the Met on 9 December, and then decide for herself whether Porter's adoption of the mode of disillusioned old creep was authentic or not. At least he spared us a rerun of his "analysis"; and at least the ENO performance will, presumably, have cured him of the "feeling of joy in men's and women's goodness" the opera induced in his person heretofore.

Enough of that. When it comes to the musical text of *Mahagonny*, Porter's opinions have the merit of mentioning the problem. They prompt my second reason for writing. Performers need a composition history of the opera: when, why, and in what circumstances did Weill write what he wrote? David Drew's crucial research of course answers most of this; but it has not been published under one cover and doubtless there is now more to add by both himself and others. What's needed is a list of the facts, such as they are, and a list of the unanswered questions. Are you able to bring this about?

IAN KEMP

London

11 December 1995

The English National Opera announced the resignation of Sian Edwards as music director on 6 November. Paul Daniel of Opera North has been named as her successor.

Sorting out the problems of Mahagonny is a task that requires travel to various archives and a concentrated period of study. As such, it is the perfect topic for a doctoral dissertation. Similar studies on Lady in the Dark and Street Scene have proven invaluable in determining viable performing versions. Anyone interested in undertaking this study should contact the Kurt Weill Foundation to inquire about financial assistance through the Grants Program.

A New Look

After thirteen years of using the same design elements, we decided it was time to give the Kurt Weill Newsletter a fresher look. The editorial policy and writing style remain the same. The overall content is also unchanged, but organized differently. Feature articles and reviews form the main body of the newsletter, pages 1–24. News, press clippings, and a calendar of events are now in a new, 8–page "pull-out" supplement bound into the center fold. The format of this section will be refined over the next several issues.

We welcome your comments.

Weill in Vienna

Norbert Gingold Remembers *Die Dreigroschenoper*



Immediately following the phenomenal success of Die Dreigroschenoper in early September 1928, Weill's publisher was suddenly faced with a great demand for performance materials. Universal Edition responded by hiring twenty-seven-year-old conductor and composer Norbert Gingold to prepare the piano-vocal score. That job led to his engagement in the next year to conduct the Viennese premiere of Die Dreigroschenoper at the Raimund Theater in a production starring Harald Paulsen as Macheath. At about the same time he also prepared the piano-vocal score for Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny. The following text is freely edited by David Farneth from an oral history interview he conducted with Gingold at his San Francisco home on 12 April 1985.

Did you see the Berlin production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* before you were asked to make the piano reduction for Universal Edition?

No. Believe it or not, I never saw the production in Berlin. Universal Edition gave me the orchestra score right after it opened at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm and asked me to make a piano-vocal score—the *Klavierauszug*. They were in an awful hurry, and I had only a few days to do it. UE printed it immediately and then sent it off to Berlin.

So you never saw Weill's manuscript piano score?

No, just the orchestra score. When I found little mistakes here and there I would immediately write him little notes, asking for clarification. He answered my questions very quickly, because neither of us wanted mistakes, in spite of the rush.

Were there many cuts or changes marked into Weill's manuscript full score?

No, it was quite clear and clean and with few changes and erasures. Maybe he had copied it from an earlier score, I don't know.

Were the orchestra parts used in Berlin handwritten or engraved?

At first they were handwritten, then UE had them engraved and printed. Luckily it was a small orchestra, so UE could hire someone

to copy the parts in a day if they were needed by another theater. And of course pretty soon the Berlin orchestra didn't even need parts; they could play it from memory.

Let's move to Vienna. How did you get the job conducting *Die Dreigroschenoper* at the Raimund Theater?

This is now the spring of 1929. Someone from the theater asked either Kalmus or Hertzka at UE (I'm not sure which) if he knew anyone who could do it. He recommended me saying, "Gingold's a composer, and he can play the piano part too." I was young at the time—only 27—and so many people were envious, not only because of the money, but because of the exposure too. I can't tell you how many times my picture was in the paper.

When did you first meet Weill?

He came to Vienna when we were preparing the orchestra. This was my first time to meet him personally, after we had exchanged letters. He told me he was pleased with the *Klavierauszug* and asked me to play something. I said to him that he should play to show me the tempi. "Oh no," he said, "you play much better." He didn't want to play a single note, but he seemed happy with the rehearsals.

How long did you rehearse before the production opened?

About six weeks or so. The orchestra had to play it almost by memory in order to do it well. It was necessary. Every morning we had a rehearsal.

Did the orchestra play the score note-perfect, or did they improvise?

No, I wouldn't say they improvised. But they played the jazzy numbers a bit freely, you know, not in strict, exact rhythm. That was the jazzy part of it. It wouldn't be right to play it "correctly." And if a player's mood changed, he might play it a little differently from night to night. But the notes were the same, of course.

Was it common for musicians to double on other instruments in the way Weill calls for in the score?

No. Some of the wind people played in orchestras, where they had to play the clarinet. Then they switched to the band and had to learn to play saxophone—soprano, tenor, alto—so they learned all those instruments and could play them. It was hard to find string players who could play wind instruments, though. We got a very nice group together, and they all played beautifully. We had two trumpets and one trombone. I don't think our trombonist doubled on anything. Neither did the trumpets. But for other instruments we had all kinds of combinations—it worked out fine.

What do you remember about Harald Paulsen playing Macheath?

Paulsen. Oh, he was famous. Paulsen brought wonderful character and temperament to the part. He also had lots of energy! When he was in the Old Bailey prison cell—a high cage—singing "Ballade vom angenehmen Leben," stage director Karlheinz Martin had him jump up and down on the mattress a few times and then fly over the top! The audience loved it. Oh, he was an acrobatic *Tänzer*—everything you could ask for. But then I found out the sad side of how he could do it. I walked into his dressing room one day, and he suddenly turned his back saying "just one moment" as he was putting some "energy" into his body. Lots of people took drugs in those days.

I also remember that he wanted a little bit of the “Moritat” inserted in the second act, so I played it for him on the piano. When Weill came I asked him if we couldn’t orchestrate it, because the musicians were just sitting there anyway. He said, “Okay, very good.” But Paulsen got furious when he heard the orchestra playing it, because no one had warned him in advance. He shouted, “I thought I was in the wrong musical—I didn’t recognize it—I expected piano—why didn’t you tell me?” The surprise sent him off for more heroin, or whatever it was he was taking. Of course he got his way, and we went back to using just piano.

That touches an interesting topic. How open was Weill to making changes in the piece to accommodate a particular actor?

He was always very soft-spoken, and I remember him being flexible, especially one time when Paulsen wanted a tempo a little slower. Weill said, “Okay. Do it as he wants it.” [See accompanying press article.] Weill was very easy to get along with. Very easy. If there ever was a problem, he would talk with me about it calmly. For him it was important that the performance be a success. He enjoyed that so much. Also, he was always anxious to talk to reporters or to radio people.

Can you remember anything special about the other cast members?

First of all, most of the actors came from Berlin. Only a few were Viennese. They were all very well suited to their parts—all first class. I auditioned the people from Vienna, and I knew what every role required. When somebody came with just a beautiful bel canto singing voice I said, “We’ll call you.” Every word had to be understood, and the typical opera singer is not easily understood. If you don’t know the language, you never know what they’re singing.

Let me ask you the age-old question about actors who sing versus singers who act. How did Weill feel about the presentation of the songs? Did he really want them sung well by real singers or was he content with actors that sort-of sing?

Neither. We looked for people who could sing *and* act. We cast predominantly actors who could sing well, but they were not principal singers. None of them would have been hired to sing grand opera.

But they could sing all the notes, in the ranges written?

Oh yes, the music was sung correctly, but with the voices of actors. The song can’t be “talked”; the melody should be there. But it can’t be a trained bel canto voice from the opera. It would hurt the whole production. To hear a beautiful voice—that’s not it.

How was the orchestra set up on the stage?

We were at the back of the stage behind a transparent scrim. I faced the audience, and the musicians faced me, mostly with their backs to the audience. I couldn’t really see the audience because the house was dark. I conducted and played the harmonium. We had a pianist too.

Wasn’t there a problem with the sound, with the musicians facing backstage?

The sound was very much muffled, of course. It was always like background music. The overture, for instance, sounded like it came from far away. That’s how Weill wanted it to look, like an improvised play for poor people by poor people. It was sophisticated and simplified at the same time.

How did you do the “Moritat”?

We used a grind organ. The actor started turning the cylinder and singing immediately after the overture. It was very realistic having the sound not coming from the orchestra. I had taken the music to a local grind organ maker, and he punched the cylinder.

Do you know if that cylinder was used for any other productions?

No, just for the Raimund Theater in Vienna. The director paid for it, and they kept it. I don’t know what they did with it. Weill liked the grind organ. I don’t know why they wanted to take it out in Berlin.

Did you make any cuts in the score?

The only one I remember while looking through this copy of the vocal score is “Salomon-Song.” I don’t know why it was cut; we just never did it. Other than that there were only very small changes. That always happens.

Neither the piano-vocal score nor the published full score contains any Entr’acte or scene-change music. Do you remember there being any?

No, not a single piece, except for the bit of “Moritat” in the second act I talked about before. Nothing else would really fit in. It’s a special style. And there was no exit music or music for curtain calls either.

How long did *Die Dreigroschenoper* run in Vienna?

It ran over 100 performances, which is about three months. Maybe it was four months or so. It was not like in Berlin, and I can explain why. The style, subject, and everything else was better suited to a Berlin audience. The Viennese are a little more conservative. They don’t like seeing half-naked girls on stage. Some said, “Oh pfui” and left before the end. But it was a hit, anyway. In Berlin it played for years and practically the whole city saw it. Not so in Vienna.

What did you know about Weill’s politics then?

Some people were shocked by the subject matter of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, but I must say that Weill was not in even the slightest way a communist. He liked Brecht’s work because it inspired him to write music. Just like today I might decide to write music to some Hindu psalm or to praise Allah or whatever. Why not—it’s poetry at the same time. That’s how he considered it. He was not at all for communist ideas, not at all. And they probably never argued about that. They were too happy to have each other. Weill liked Brecht’s poetry. “Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral!” and so forth. It was not his opinion, but it was interesting to show those people who believe in it. And that’s why he did it. *Mahagony*



is the same way. I don't think he agreed with the kind of life shown in *Mahagonny*. But he was a musician, not a politician.

Let's talk about your work on the vocal score of *Mahagonny*. I assume that you got the full score from Universal Edition, just like with *Dreigroschenoper*?

Yes, but *Mahagonny* was obviously for a large orchestra and a considerably tougher job than *Dreigroschenoper*. Much more of the score had to be left out of the reduction so that it could be played on the piano. I tried to put in enough cues to show something of what was happening in the orchestra.

Did UE have your vocal score engraved as soon as it was finished?

Oh yes, they even wanted parts of it before the whole thing was finished. It went right to the engraver. And UE was not happy with the expense! They were much more pleased with the small score of *Dreigroschenoper*, which brought in millions of dollars. *Mahagonny* would never be the same sort of success.

After the success of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, the director of UE cautioned Weill against becoming too popular, against compromising his art for this sort of lighter fare. Did you get any sense of this attitude from the UE people that you knew?

Not that I remember. Of course *Mahagonny* is different from *Threepenny* in that it concentrates more on singing. For me that waters it down. The *Songspiel* version, which I never saw, must be as effective as *Threepenny*, but making an all-composed, all-sung opera out of it is not the right idea. It was not a grand opera nor was it a *Singspiel* anymore—it was in between the two.

So you don't think that *Mahagonny* works as a grand opera?

It was forced into the format of a grand opera. Many passages sound beautiful, like they were composed for grand opera. And then comes a musical number like "Moon of Alabama" and so forth. If that was heard separate—like in *Threepenny*—it would gain a lot. Of course, the dialogue in *Threepenny* is too realistic to be sung.

Do you think he was trying to come back to more "serious," more acceptable forms?

What he wrote later in America was much more serious than *Mahagonny*. Take *Lady in the Dark*, for instance. It has so much poetry in it—no politics, no communism. You see, Brecht pulled him into a certain style, which was successful once, but he couldn't continue all his life writing like that. He studied with Busoni—Busoni was not a jazz composer at all and he came back to the serious style, as you say.

Did Weill ever talk to you about how he felt about Brecht?

No, because he was still developing. He was very young then. A musician always wants his music to be first, the text is second. Weill knew that Brecht's text was very strong, and he instinctively drew away from it. Weill didn't want to be a musician and a poet at the same time. Poets are always being pulled down to reality—eating and drinking and money—and, of course, always poor. He got fed up with the idea. That was never what he wanted for himself.

Austrian Press Clippings, 1929

Neues Wiener Journal, 10 March 1929

The rehearsals for *Die Dreigroschenoper* are proceeding with an enthusiasm not witnessed here for quite some time; the performers have great interest in the musical coaching of this completely new type of work. Maestro Gingold has assembled an irreproachable musical ensemble, but he has also had to suffer one disappointment. Harald Paulsen, who has already played his role in Berlin more than two hundred times, showed up only a few days before the last rehearsals and killed every tempo. For instance, there is a "jealousy duet" between two girls during which Mr. Paulsen is seen in a prison cage sitting on a chair and bouncing up and down in time to the music. Apparently Maestro Gingold had coached these tempi much too fast, and Mr. Paulsen was incapable of executing his acrobatic movements to the given rhythm. As a result, the entire duet had to be re-staged, because Paulsen's slower tempo did not work with the

Neue Freie Presse, Graz, 7 May 1929

New Demonstrations Against *Dreigroschenoper* in Graz

Noisy demonstrations took place right at the beginning of today's *Dreigroschenoper* performance. The demonstrators threw stink bombs into the theater, which spread such a nauseating smell that the performance had to be interrupted in order to ventilate the house.

As the audience rushed outside for fresh air, the police arrested more than twenty of the demonstrators in order to establish their nationalities. After one hour the performance continued. Soon the noisy demonstrators started once more, and the actors stopped again. Most of the audience at the practically sold-out performance reacted with spirit toward the demonstrators: every time the police removed one of them, the audience shouted its approval. But a great number of demonstrators also gathered outside in front of the theater, where at 9 o'clock they began making a noisy scene. The police intervened immediately and scattered the demonstrators while the performance in the theater continued. When the first act came to an end at 9:45, tremendous applause drowned out the demonstrator's noise.

After 10 o'clock in the evening, during the prison scene of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, stink bombs were again thrown from the standing room section. But in spite of the unpleasant smell, the audience remained in its seats and listened to the rest of the performance with handkerchiefs held to their noses. The doors were opened so that the sulphurous, hydrochloric acid smell could escape. Causing further commotion, the police removed several young people from the standing room area and took them to the stage manager's room, where some fifty troublemakers had already been assembled.

Weill in Vienna

A Report on the 1995 Jeunesse Festival

by Jürg Stenzl



Vienna's decision to celebrate Kurt Weill's music during Paul Hindemith's centennial year does not mean that the composers were in competition. The focus in 1995 on both Weill and Hindemith simply provided a forum to investigate many questions about German music from the twenties and thirties. The tendency in the past to leave Weill out of discussions about music history in his time is easily explained. Being a successful composer, he does not need the type of promotion geared to introducing a forgotten or peripheral composer such as the likes of Othmar Schoeck or Roberto Gerhard. Rather, he requires a more unique approach tailored to foster his acceptance as a composer of *Kunstmusik*. Even if he had not become a successful composer of Broadway musicals, his tremendous success as a theater composer in Germany means that, from a European point of view, he is still in need of rehabilitation to be accepted in some circles. (By the way, we should try to separate the popular notion of "Broadway" from the complex historical reality of music theater in America. Most people—and not only Europeans—tend to imagine a Broadway composer as some sort of fictional motion picture-type character, but they lack any understanding of the historical facts.)

The choice of 1995 for the Kurt Weill celebration had nothing to do with significant dates in his life. Instead, the promotional materials emphasized the prominent cities in which Weill lived—Berlin, Paris, New York—and, as an aside, Vienna, the birthplace of Lotte Lenya. The year 1995 was probably chosen to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. Even so, the promoters did not call attention to other anniversaries in 1995, such as the annihi-

lation of German National Socialism and Italian fascism, or even the "liberation of Austria" (to signify a change from German occupation to Allied occupation). And nobody in Germany or Austria openly acknowledges that those who celebrate Weill the Jew are also manifesting their good, clean conscience.

It took Austria almost fifty years to come to terms with those musicians who were physically destroyed or driven into exile after the *Anschluss* in 1938. The leading authority working on this topic in Austria—Krenek specialist Claudia Maurer Zenck—is a German teaching in Graz. What seems to be the first monograph about exiled Austrian musicians did not appear until just last year: *Orpheus im Exil: Die Vertreibung österreichischer Musik von 1938 bis 1945* by Walter Pass, Gerhard Scheit and Wilhelm Svoboda (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1995), a book that shows all the signs of a "first try."

The Kurt-Weill-Festival organized by Jeunesse, Musikalische Jugend Österreichs, consisted of no less than ten concerts, seven performances of a staged production of *Der Silbersee*, and one concert performance of the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. The seventeen works presented ranged from the String Quartet, op. 8 (1923) and Quodlibet, op. 9 (1924) to excerpts from *Street Scene* (1946) and the four Walt Whitman Songs (1942-7). The festival planners evidently tried to bring the unknown Weill into the foreground while leaving the well-known Brecht-Weill collaborations (with the exception of the opera *Mahagonny*) in the background. Whether this approach works in reality remains in question. The "unknown" Weill will always be linked to the familiar Brecht-Weill because everyone has this duo's moniker etched on his brain, often in a rather deprecating fashion.

The Jeunesse festival resisted presenting any all-Weill programs, and the resulting combination of works chosen for any particular concert seemed arbitrary, as if the spaces left open were simply to be filled with something by Weill. As a result, the festival got off to the worst possible start with a concert featuring Dennis Russell Davies conducting the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin in Morton Gould's "Kristallnacht" from his *Holocaust Suite*, Weill's *Der neue Orpheus* (Françoise Pollet, soprano and Ernst Kovacic, violin), and Mahler's Symphony no. 4 (also with Pollet). It may be that Gould's score is effective as film music, but in the concert hall it was convincing proof of how impotent mere musical notes can be when trying to illustrate an event like the Holocaust. Gould's music is at best "well-meant"—which according to Gottfried Benn means the opposite of "good." The only way to address this theme musically is from a thoroughly real perspective and not as a mere sentimental regret of the genocide. Luigi Nono does this successfully in his tape composition *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* [Remember what they have done to you in Auschwitz] (1966).

Most fascinating in both Weill's music and Iwan Goll's text for *Der neue Orpheus* was the discrepancy between expressionism and objectivity [*Sachlichkeit*]. It is remarkable that Weill, who had already freed himself from stylistic points of reference, tried to combine totally diverse types of music in the form of six variations.

Austria's leading new music ensemble, Klangforum Wien, delivered the most outstanding program in the festival under the future chief conductor of the Hamburg Opera, Ingo Metzmacher. The first half comprised an excellent interpretation of Darius Milhaud's "poème plastique" (after Paul Claudel) *L'Homme et son désir* with the Vokalensemble Nova, followed by Milhaud's amusing *Carneval d'Aix* performed by pianist Marion Formenti. After the intermission, soprano Angelina Réaux presented a semi-staged performance of *Die sieben Todsünden*. Réaux captured the audience by exuding glamour and communicating the tone of the work, but one could not listen too closely without noticing her unsteady voice and inadequate intonation.

This brings us to the dilemma that remained unsolved in this and virtually every other concert of the festival. On paper, Weill's music looks simple in both rhythm and melody. The secret to performing this "simple" music, however, lies deceptively hidden in the text. Any performer who does not first study and recite the text and then rework the text into Weill's musical setting will fail to find the essence of Weill's phrasing. The same holds for all of Weill's works, whether in German, French, or English. Weill did not compose in Esperanto, but in language—that is, a dramatic style of language. The current manner of interpreting Weill's vocal music is infected with the same disease that plagues the interpretation of 18th-century secco recitative. Without a feeling for language, for rhyme and rhythm, and for caesura in the language, Weill's music cannot be interpreted, but merely recited.

Der Lindberghflug is an important work not only in music history, but in the specific cultural history of radio as well; its inclusion in the festival also allowed Hindemith to be brought into play, at least in the program booklet. Perhaps this is the time to question the emerging resurgence of uneasiness about a "certain Hindemith" and to pose the question about a "certain Weill" as well. In an exciting discussion at the Südwestfunk that included critic Gerhard R. Koch and pianist Siegfried Mauser, composer Wolfgang Rihm stated about Hindemith, among other things, "Here again we have this compulsive fooling around with counterpoint; in the end, the stressing of the first and third beats in the bar causes the musical action to stand still. The melodic progress is halted in favor of a metric prerequisite. And this is what for me has always seemed so problematic with Hindemith. . . . Sometimes I regret that in Hindemith's music the biting surrealist mockery and sinister atmosphere inherent in his drawings is obliterated by overuse of counterpoint" [published in: *Paul Hindemith: Ein Komponist und sein Jahrhundert: Eine Sendereihe in 25 Folgen zum 100. Geburtstag von Paul Hindemith*, edited by Lotte Thaler (Baden-Baden: Südwestfunk, 1995), p 2, 5.]. Both Rihm and Koch were of the opinion that Hindemith "ties everything to a strict style [*Satztypus*] . . . yet he fears delivering himself not to contemporary times but to the flowing musical time [p. 10]. . . . But where there is danger, there is also salvation, and somehow in Hindemith there must lie danger. Otherwise we would not be so eager to salvage something."

Numbers 5 and 9 in Weill's *Der Lindberghflug* are contrapuntal "inventions," a type of motor-driven counterpoint similar to that of Hindemith. We can also find comparisons in number 14, the "Triumpfmarsch." In the program notes we read (among many other crude assertions) that *Der Lindberghflug* "is thoroughly operatic, typified by expressive declamations and immediately gripping and appealing in its sonorous fullness." Was the author thinking about Berg and Krenek, or maybe even Puccini? However many operatic traits might be at play, conductor Jan Latham-König was unable to bring out its musical characteristics. He seemed to take *Motorik* as the essential attribute of the work—the only one, apparently.

Weill's Second Symphony, performed in the same concert, invited even more comparison to Hindemith, especially the *Mathis der Maler* symphony. In the 1930s composers began writing conventional symphonies again, even without the kind of political pressure experienced by Shostakovich in the USSR and other composers in

Germany, for example. (Aaron Copland's re-orientation towards the "common man" happened at exactly the same time.) The first-movement trumpet solo and the Largo of Weill's symphony point unmistakably to Mahler. Here Weill's music excels through melodic strength, through pathos, never broken by either orchestration or the type of musical writing. Yet the melody calls out for a text. Weill's melodic idiom is so identified with his vocal and theatrical works that it is difficult to listen to this slow movement as absolute music.

More importantly, we can recognize in *Der Silbersee* and *Die Bürgschaft*—the last works he wrote in Germany, before his exile to France and America—the same turn toward conservatism that



Conductors HK Gruber, Vladimir Fedoseyev, Peter Keuschnig, and Secretary General Roland Geyer

affected his contemporaries. The divorce of the European Weill from the American Weill is certainly the result of the totally different structure of theater and concert life that Weill found in America. But we must also remember that Weill did not write any instrumental music after the Second Symphony. Therein lies one explanation of Weill's American style. A second explanation is apparent from the very beginning of his creative output: Weill is a musical chameleon, who can rather expediently take up different idioms by integrating them to great effect into his theater music. Theater music has almost never had to answer to the demands of stylistic unity that are expected in orchestral and—most of all—chamber music. Even in his concert music (as demonstrated as early as his First Symphony [1921]) Weill reveals his eclectic personality by eschewing the convention of stylistic unity.

In the next event in the festival, at the historic Musikverein, the home of the Vienna Philharmonic, Dimitrij Sitkovetsky played the Violin Concerto brilliantly while at the same time conducting the accompanying Wiener Virtuosen. Comparisons with Busoni's *Arlecchino* and *Turandot* come readily to mind, as does the commonly-made comparison with Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat*. The first movement is, without question, over-orchestrated, and a conductor is essential to achieve the proper balance between the soloist and the wind accompaniment. Whether its form is intended to be free (in the manner of Debussy) or whether it represents a belated expressionistic heritage requires closer examination. Weill exposes his fondness for hybrid forms most in the central movement, Notturmo-Cadenza-Serenata, by combining two character pieces—the brittle sound of Stravinsky's Octet or Piano Concerto and the traditional virtuosic cadenza—into a single movement. The concert concluded with a semi-staged performance (with dancer) of the entire *Histoire du soldat*, a work which presents a completely untraditional treatment of the solo violin.

Another concert in the Musikverein, this one with the Ensemble Modern under HK Gruber, brought Weill and Hindemith into direct confrontation. The ensemble played Hindemith's *Kammermusik* numbers one and two with virtuosity. Hindemith's own performances of his chamber music preserved on recordings demonstrate that as a performer he avoided comfortable, middle-of-the-road interpretations and instead drove his music to the extremes. Hindemith the interpreter, like Hindemith the cartoonist, went to the limits and played at high risk. The Ensemble Modern did likewise and delivered stunning performances.

Weill did not fare so well with the Ensemble's problematic interpretation of *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik* and, with the focus turned to Gruber as chansonnier (with microphone!), renditions of Berlin im Licht, David Drew's adaptation *Öl-Musik*, and *Suite Panaméenne* (comprised of four incidental numbers from *Marie Galante*, 1934). Rather than taking a fresh look at these pieces, Gruber reenforced two stereotypical misunderstandings. First, the Ensemble "hacked" the *Dreigroschenmusik* in a manner similar to typical interpretations of Hindemith. These tunes are so familiar that an astute reading must be brought to bear in order not to restate the worn-out clichés. Second, the vocal numbers were served with an overdose of Viennese Schmalz [*ver-mienert*]. This sort of operetta sentimentality was totally out of place here. None of this can be blamed on Weill.

Programming continued to be a hit-or-miss affair throughout the month-long festival. For instance, why did the Arcus Ensemble Wien combine Weill's String Quartet, op. 8 with, of all things, Eisler's String Quartet, op. 75 from his American exile, Hindemith's Clarinet Quartet (1938), and Busoni's Suite for Clarinet and String Quartet from 1880? Far more logical choices would have been Busoni's *Klavierübung*, Milhaud's 6th and 7th string quartets, Krenek's quartets opp. 23 and 24, or Hans Krása's 1923 quartet. Or they might have even considered a more famous crowd-pleaser that shows amazing Weillisms: Poulenc's Sextet for Piano and Wind Quintet (1932).

On the other hand, conductor Vladimir Fedoseyev and the NDR-Sinfonieorchester Hamburg presented a convincing combination of Weill's First Symphony (1921), *Quodlibet* (a suite of music from the children's pantomime *Zaubernacht* [1922]), and Stravinsky's *Petrushka Suite*. The festival concluded with an all-American program with Peter Keuschnig again conducting the NDR orchestra in *Central Park in the Dark* by Charles Ives, five of Aaron Copland's *American Songs* (1950 and 1952), and Weill's orchestral versions of the four *Walt Whitman Songs*. Rounding out the concert was Robert Russell Bennett's *Porgy and Bess Potpourri* followed by the overture and four vocal numbers from *Street Scene*, featuring American singers Roberta Alexander (soprano) and Damon Evans (tenor).

Anyone who opens Weill's oeuvre up to serious discussion must do it within the context of the theater. This was demonstrated all too clearly by the concert performance of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in the Großer Konzerthausaal under the direction of Jan Latham-König. All of what I said earlier about approaching Weill's music from the text (he probably would have instructed singers to take a meticulous approach to the *Gestik* in his music) became even more valid here, especially since the conductor failed to draw a sharp portrayal of the music. Again the performers let themselves be carried away by the music, rather than gaining control of it. It is not a disparagement of Weill to say that *Mahagonny* is magnificent theater music. It was written completely and totally for the stage; and therein lies its strength or, if done in a concert hall, its weakness. *Elektra* and especially *Wozzeck*, theatrically effective as they are, can be labeled as "symphonic poems" with accompanying voices. The entire drama of *Wozzeck* is contained within the orchestral music, and the stage has been composed into it, so to speak. In

his words, Berg composed his opera like an "ideal stage director." But in *Mahagonny*, singing, *Gestik*, stage design, and orchestra are molded into one dramatic unity.

For actual music theater, the festival had to rely on the "off-scene" Neue Oper Wien to mount *Der Silbersee* in the small Jugendstiltheater, located outside the city's center in the fourteenth district. *Silbersee*, a *Schauspieloper* that falls between opera and theater, presents difficulties even beyond the usual ones with Weill. It can be thought of as a theater piece with an overwhelming amount of incidental music, or as an *opéra comique* with demanding acting roles. It is difficult today to find actors who can sing, even to the lower level that is required by a work like *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The problems inherent in performing *Der Silbersee* can be solved only by a big opera house. The nature of the text presents another problem: Kaiser's social parable strikes a modern audience as naively idealistic. Anyone who produces this work with great love but limited means can hope only for a "vindication of honor" [*Ehrenrettung*]. Commendable, yes; but such an approach cannot do justice to the work.

It never became clear how stage director Bruno Berger found significance in the work for himself, and therefore for us. He remained faithful to the text and transported it into more or less suitable images, eventually culminating in one idyllic matter-of-fact [*neusachliche*] tableau. There were musical problems as well. The orchestra, under the direction of Walter Kobéra, drowned out the singers and played without nuance. The singers, again, fell into the usual traps described earlier in this article.

Der Silbersee is atypical of Weill in its unity; the self-contained score lasts approximately 70 minutes. The music's uniformity corresponds to the linear quality of Kaiser's text; it hardly shows a trace of montage or stylistic breaks. Kim Kowalke is right in his description of *Der Silbersee* as a "synthesis of elements found in earlier compositions" [*Kurt Weill in Europe* (New Haven: Yale, 1979), p. 307]. As mentioned before, many composers in the early 1930s felt a tendency towards a kind of synthesis; the best known theoretical example is Hindemith's *Unterweisung im Tonsatz*. But, without making a value judgment, it must be said that this synthesis came about because of conservative omens [*Vorzeichen*]. Such is the case with Hindemith and Casella, Stravinsky and Honegger, Copland and Shostakovich—and also with Weill. When considering *Der Silbersee* (and also *Die Bürgschaft*, which is without question the most important score from Weill's late European period) the consequence of this synthesis is a topic that cries out for further research. I cannot help feeling that while Weill's music gained a certain unity [*Geschlossenheit*] during this period, it also lost some theatrical strength. Neither Georg Kaiser nor Caspar Neher provided Weill with the challenges that Brecht did. For Weill, other authors and other forms of theater now had become a necessity. He found them in America.

Jeunesse's Kurt-Weill-Festival made one thing clear as we steadily approach Weill's centenary, when the entire world will celebrate and perform Weill just as it did with Hindemith in 1995: We must formulate new questions in response to the scope of his entire oeuvre. The answers to those questions might reveal Weill to be a far more complex personality than he himself would have been prepared to admit..

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Books

Portrait of a Marriage

by Rodney Milnes

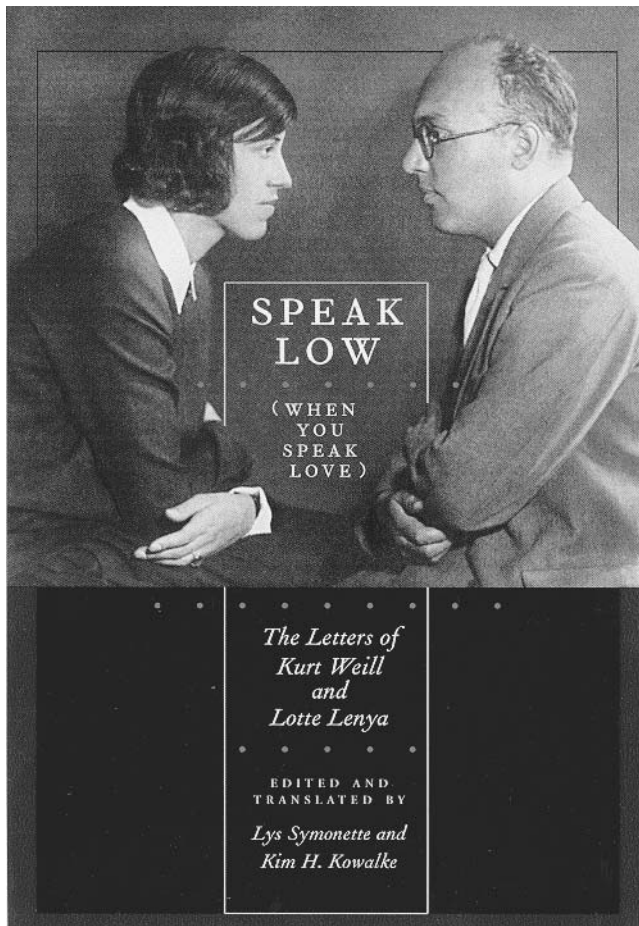
A review essay of

Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya

edited and translated by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 554 pp.
ISBN 0-520-07853-5

[Excerpts from the book appear on pages 12-15.]



“My only consolation,” wrote Weill to Lenya from Yugoslavia, brooding on the failure of *Kingdom for a Cow* in 1935, “is the Verdi letters, which I’m reading again. The analogies are startling.” Maybe more startling than he realized. Just as readers can feel faintly, near-voyeuristically guilty at reading the letters of Verdi and Giuseppina Strepponi—so intimate, so intensely private—so it is with the Weill-Lenya correspondence, conducted without any thought of eventual publication. Their marriage, or rather marriages, remain unique, as incomprehensible to outsiders as they were to insiders, who couldn’t understand why or how they stayed together. The Verdi marriage was equally mysterious, and so was Richard Strauss’s in a completely different way. The reason for reading the letters, as for publishing them, is for the insights they provide into the mind of a relentlessly enigmatic composer; as Lenya famously said, even after 26 years she never really felt she knew him.

The surviving correspondence—with frustrating gaps during the Brecht collaboration and the gestation of most of the major American works—falls into seven neat sections. The first, sadly one-sided (Lenya’s first letter is dated 1933), provides perhaps the key to the marriage, when Weill writes in 1925, “there must be nothing petty between us, because one lifetime is not enough for two human beings to explore the cosmos that lies between them.” Shortly after, they started living together, following an amazingly overheated effusion from Weill reminiscent of Act 2 of *Tristan* (but shorter).

The second section, covering Lenya’s affair with Otto Pasetti, the divorce, and the early years of exile in Paris, is enormously depressing—the nadir, you feel, of Weill’s life. His misery is mostly between the lines, though the signings-off get progressively cooler; he pretends to believe in the “systems” with which Lenya and her lover are gambling away his money, sends greetings to Pasetti and arranges for him to appear in *The Seven Deadly Sins*; the sense of relief when the affair flounders and he can finally refer to Pasetti as “a swindler” is palpable. The depth of his despair is revealed when the editors include part of a letter to Erika Neher, giving vent to feelings he would never express to Lenya, to whom he writes repeatedly offering money. Such are the stratagems of relationships. All this while he was scrabbling for work, suffering personal attacks in Paris and a severe crisis of confidence with attendant attacks of psoriasis—it is hard not to dislike Lenya at this stage.

The near-daily letters in 1935 between Weill in London and Lenya in Paris (and later vice versa) signal a rebirth, emotionally if not artistically—Weill trying to tempt her to join him (“everyone is sure you could have a big career over here”), she playing it with caution. She visits, but does not join him on holiday, whence he writes, perhaps more with hope than complete confidence, that “we’ve really solved the question of living together, which is so terribly difficult for us, in a very beautiful and proper way.” His pushing her for the role of Miriam in *The Eternal Road* is, you feel, a form of insurance for her joining him in the United States, much though this mystified their friends.

The 1937 series between Weill in Hollywood, where he was trying to earn money with an interesting mix of cynicism and desperation, and Lenya in New York, where her career as a cabaret singer fizzled out, are near-daily. The tone is lightly affectionate, with fascinating gossip about Fritz Lang, Walter Wanger and the Spewacks, vain efforts to acquire the rights to Molnar's *Liliom*, and a sudden hiatus when Lenya goes off-line and Weill gets decidedly cool, warning her about her choice of friends. She delays joining him, despite repeated invitations, until the following year.

The warmest series comes from 1941–42 when Lenya was on tour with Helen Hayes in Maxwell Anderson's *A Candle in the Wind*. Again, almost daily; hugely intimate and affectionate despite lovers on both sides, full of delightful gossip about the perils of working with the Lunts. There's a revealing moment when Weill considers giving the impoverished Brecht a monthly \$50 allowance, to which Lenya replies with a panic-stricken telegram ordering him to do no such thing, followed by a long letter giving her reasons—absolutely riveting stuff. She knew her Brecht. She busily buys furniture and effects for Brook House from all over the States, and clothes for her husband; he gives detailed reports on the progress of the garden. A picture emerges of near-domestic bliss, reinforced by Lenya's "I missed you so much" when exploring New Orleans, and her sudden, unique signing-off as "Dein Weib." These are wonderful letters.

So are those of Weill's second Hollywood period (1942–4), in which he describes his efforts to get Ira Gershwin to work on *Firebrand of Florence*—it is ironic that the gestation of this, his least known work, "my first Broadway opera," is the most fully documented in these letters, and Lenya's input shows just how much he relied on her judgment. Their post-mortem on its failure also shows them very much at home in the shark-infested waters of Broadway: it was of course everyone's fault but their own, though Weill's insistence against everyone else's better judgment on casting her as the Duchess seems to have contributed to the failure. The warmth, relaxed intimacy, and playful obscenities of the American letters are in stark contrast to the guarded tone of the Paris-London correspondence. They seem, misleadingly, to indicate a cloudless marital sky, yet Weill's attachment to a (still) anonymous woman in Hollywood was the greatest threat to the marriage; Lenya threatened to move out of Brook House and the crisis may have contributed to his shockingly early death. Weill's rejoicing at the end of World War II—"we are still young and can enjoy what is considered the best part of our lives in a world without nazis"—makes that early death tragically ironic.

So much for the letters, and what might be called the voyeur dimension. It is not for anyone to understand other people's marriages: it is enough to say that the letters movingly reveal an indissoluble personal and artistic bond. What do they tell us of the enigmatic composer? He emerges as a mass of contradictions. He was

basically shy, yet had no objection to being lionized—his reception in what was then Palestine in the final section of letters pleased him greatly. He was basically charitable, yet could be extremely sharp—his repeated excoriation of Klemperer, as well as various collaborators, can be alarming. He was worldly-wise (seeing through Hollywood in a flash, but playing it for all he could get) yet strangely childlike, basking in often imaginary adulation (from Antheil, Wanger, and Chaplin among others). He was basically calm, but knew the value of temperament, threatening to walk out of *Firebrand* at a crucial stage. Basically serious, he had a delicious sense of humor, christening Lenya's Italian tapeworm "Adolf".

The letters confirm that there was little of the "ivory-tower" composer about him, even in early years: he was right down there in the marketplace getting his hands dirty. He had to; in the first years of exile there was money to be earned, and he constantly "talked up" himself and his work—the words "the best music I've written up to now" recur regularly. He was hard-nosed and realistic about his career; again, the analogy is with Verdi in that he plainly regarded his U.S. period as "galley years," setting his sights on a postwar era when he could return to the American equivalent of opera—*Street Scene* and *Lost in the Stars* point the way. (Tragically he was not spared.) To that end he integrated himself in U.S. society, showing great impatience, disgust even, with the cliquy Hollywood expatriates. His closest friends were all American.

His humanism shines constantly through the letters, from his horrified description of Essen in 1927 on a trip with Brecht planning the aborted "Ruhrepos" project, right through to his starry-eyed appreciation of pre-lapsarian Palestine twenty years later, though not all the views he expressed there will be considered politically correct. Various plans with Paul Robeson, a figure definitely viewed as politically incorrect at the time, show that *Lost in the Stars* was no chance event. Weill wanted to change the world.

The editing of the book, footnotes, fore-words and after-words, biographical glossary and all, is impeccable, though the editors appear to be more discreet about Weill's extramarital interests than Lenya's—maybe their art reflects life. Lenya's brief, very useful autobiographical sketch is included. I wonder only if Weill's London address of "Brancham Gardens" is a mis-reading—it is not to be found in current or elderly street directories. And there are no clues to those three Weill "rosebuds," the name Jenny, ships, and executions. Enigmas remain, but the composer is a great deal less enigmatic than he was before the publication of this volume. It is simply invaluable.

Excerpts from

Speak Low (When You Speak Love)

The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya

Edited and translated by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke

University of California Press, 1996

8 WEILL IN BERLIN TO LENYA IN GRÜNHEIDE, [1925]

Muschi, süßes,

Now I'll tell you anyway what this letter will be about. And pass over our misunderstanding in silence, because silence will tell you best how your look tore me apart when we said goodbye to each other. Weariness? Oh no! But this occasion is too important to dwell on that—and my feeling for you so tremendous that no everyday event can possibly compete with it. There must be nothing petty between us, because one lifetime is not enough for two human beings to explore the cosmos that lies between them.

What I wanted to tell you is that I desire nothing more passionately than to be allowed to be endlessly good to you. I know that ugliness must disappear from your life for you to be able to believe that a very kind hand might wipe the pain away. I also know that nobody possesses what you're longing for as much as I do, because a thousand centuries and twenty-five years have been shaping me.¹ I would like to lavish on you all of what I am. Because I have nothing. Is it love? Is it kindness? I don't know. But you should take it with both hands. It is not a present from me, because it lives only for you; but it could become your present to humanity. It is independent of space, time, or matter. You just have to know and believe strongly that it is there—then it's already yours. Do you want it?

And do you understand how it hurts when you call me a fool [*Tschumpel*], and I look at you in disbelief that this word could come from you; and how afterward I'm dazed and helpless when you ask me for the smallest, simplest thing? You know that I'm not good natured, that I've always been a boor and not well liked, and that I am not "good." But there has to be somebody with whom I can let go; otherwise I will choke on my own optimism. You are something wonderful to which my faith clings. I savor the fact that you're alive. And it's incomprehensible that you might be able to love me. That I may love you is bliss enough.

Very much yours,
Äppelheim

1. Weill turned twenty-five on 2 March 1925, but the date of the letter cannot be precisely determined.

[Continued on page 13]

[Continued from page 12]

20 WEILL IN BERLIN TO LENYA IN LEIPZIG, [3? JUNE 1927]

Berlin, Friday

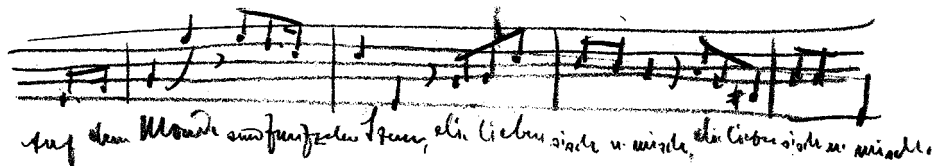
My *Tütilein*,

At last I have time to write to you at length. In Essen that was out of the question. But now I can give you a blow-by-blow account, so you'll have some idea of what I've been up to. The flight was magnificent. One actually feels amazingly safe, and much less nervous than on a train. The most beautiful moment is when the airplane very slowly lifts itself into the air. On Monday afternoon we [Brecht and Weill] had a preliminary talk [with the Essen officials], and in the evening when we walked every which way through the factories, some overwhelming acoustic impressions suddenly gave me an entirely new concept of sound for the play. Tuesday we drove ten hours through the entire Ruhr region up to the Rhine. Koch knows the territory very intimately and could comment on everything.¹ Coming out of the poisonous fumes of the Ruhr valley to the Rhine we immediately thought: Never go back into the poisonous gases! And we realized how beautiful it would be to recreate the colorful liveliness of this river instead of the gloomy gray factories that lie beyond it. The next day by noon we again emerged from the mines into daylight; then it became clear—the terrible horror down there, the boundless injustice that human beings have to endure, performing intolerably arduous labor seven hundred meters underground in complete darkness, in thick, smoldering air, just so that Krupp can add another 5 million to their 200 million a year—this needs to be said, and in such a way, indeed, that no one will ever forget it. (But it will have to come as a surprise, otherwise they'll shut our mouths!) We spent four hours in the mines, six to seven hundred meters deep; we walked for two hours, then climbed on all fours through two levels, then down ladders a hundred and fifty meters into the depth—and afterward went pitch-black into the bathtub. All my bones still hurt today. Thursday we took another plane ride over the Ruhr region, then we spent hours in the Krupp steelworks. This was quite refreshing and soothing after those terrible impressions. In between we went to city hall, to Bochum and Duisburg, to museums and archives. We have drafted a very favorable contract; let's hope it will happen. We get paid 5,000-7,000 marks (each), but the play will belong to us. The title probably will be "REP" (Ruhrepos, Essen Documentarium). They have paid decently for expenses; I still have 30 marks left over.²

Today Brecht and I returned by train in a sleeping car; in the morning I stopped by the editorial office [of *Der deutsche Rundfunk*]; then I saw "Guiloclo" [one of Weill's students]—and now I'm writing to my little sweetheart. You have arranged everything so nicely for me, but nothing can take the place of you yourself—or even just a part of you. I am so glad you're having nice weather; you will surely get your strength back. You also are a real goodie-goodie [*Bravi*], because you write me so diligently. For that there will be a great reward. But, little sparrow, I'm not coming to Leipzig. As of tomorrow I will again be working like a slave on the Kaiser opera [*Der Zar läßt sich photographieren*]. If that isn't ready in two to three months, I will have slipped up completely. The latest possible performance date in Essen is at the beginning of March! I'm not going to Grünheide.

Addio, my *Seelchen*. I'm looking forward to Tuesday. Regards to everybody who is good to you. And many kisses on your little *B...lein*.

Your Kurti



[Auf dem Monde sind fünfzehn Sterne, die lieben sich u. misch, die lieben sich u. misch]

[On the moon there are fifteen stars, which love themselves and me,
which love themselves and me]



ca. 1928

Will you take care of informing the Poniatowskis, without causing a fight, that I'm not coming? Then I'll write just a postcard: that it's impossible, as you already know; moreover, crowded trains, and so on.

1. *Karl Koch was a photographer who married the silhouette artist and filmmaker Lotte Reiniger (1899-1980). According to Weill's correspondence with Universal Edition, he filmed the original stage production of Die Dreigroschenoper in Berlin. Brecht introduced him to Jean Renoir, with whom Koch later collaborated.*

2. *The Ruhrepos (Ruhr epic) project collapsed before Weill set any of Brecht's song texts to music.*

3. *The Polish general Prince Joseph Poniatowski (1762-1813) was named *maréchal de France* by Napoleon; Weill's parents lived on the street named for him, at Poniatowskistraße 20. Sometimes Weill substituted an address for the surname of people he knew well; thus his brother Nathan, who lived on Täubchenstraße, became "die Täubchenstraße."*

275 LENYA IN MEMPHIS TO WEILL IN NEW CITY, [19 APRIL 1942]

Letterhead: Hotel Peabody/Memphis, Tennessee

[Note: The edition retains all grammatical and spelling errors in those letters originally written in English.]

Sunday 9:30 P.M.

Darling,

I just came back from the station. Howard [Schwarz] has left. He came yesterday evening and stayed over night. That was a tough job, to cheer him up. He was terribly depressed and unhappy and I am just the wrongest person in the world for cases like that. As you know, I am so flexible and adaptable to everything, that it is a great effort for me to understand somebody who is on the verge of committing suicide just because he has to peel potatoes three times a week. So I took Madeline (my understudy) to help, and she was just wonderful in jeering him up. So when he left, he felt quit happy. It was a beautiful day and we walked along the Mississippi, which is the most beautiful river I have ever seen in my whole life. It is very hot already and it isn't going to be any cooler. But it'll be alright. This is now the pritty part of our journey and much more interesting than the middle west. Now let me go back to your letter. I cant tell you Darling, how happy I am about the new show. I'll think it'll be great fun for you after that long pause. You think Mielziner will do a good job? You probably will end up some day as your own producer. I hope, you get those six colored girls. (Yes you did write me everything in your previous letter.) I am thoroughly disgusted about those dam pansies like Housmann. What a mean bunch. But it want do them any good. They cant stop you. But it is a pity that a guy like that, has such an importent position. No wonder, Sherwood never answered your letter.

I am very happy about the new song. Helen told me they cant find a name for her records and she said, poor Kurt, he probably has to think of a title too.—I am glad, *Dornröschen* [Freedman] doesn't handle "Tinted Venus." He is a little better (Rhinheimer I mean). I wonder, how your dinnerparty with the Atkinson turned out. I read notices about Steinbecks play. I think Atkinson was right about it in his second write-up in the Sunday times. How does the play go? [Paul] Munis play [*Yesterday's Magic*] didn't do so well, I hear. But that doesn't surprise me. He is such a dreary actor.

I wish, you could have seen the house we played in Nashville! An old church, the worst house I have ever seen. Alfred knows it. They played "Idiots Delight" there.¹ 3000 poeple! I felt like Mickey mouse on the stage.

Now to Brechts letter, which is a sympathetic one, but I am very much against it, to send him money. I belief to a certain extent, what he writes about the procedure of that 3 penny opera project but I dont trust him at all. I never believe, that he ever can change his character, which is a selfish one and always will be. I am sure he went through a lot of unpleasant things, but not so unpleasant, that it would change him. I know Darling how easely you forget things but I do

remember everything he ever did to you. And that was plenty. Of course he wants to collaborate with you again. Nothing better could happen to him. But I am convinced after few days, you would be so disgusted with him, I just could write it down for you what would happen. Think of people like Moss and John Steinbeck and Max and all the rest we know and compare them, than you know it's impossible for you to take up that relationship again. It's not surprising that somebody gets nice and soft when they are down and out, that's the natural way, but just let him be a little successful again and he'll be the old Brecht again. No Darling, I don't believe in changes like that. I don't give a dam, whether they call you selfish and stingy. I hate to think of all the things they called you in Germany and you were not any different from what you are now. But I always believed in decency and a certain fairness. And Brecht hasn't got much of it. So please Darling, don't waste much time of thinking about what they will say about you. It's not important. Let him do 3 p.

Opera if he thinks, he gets something out of it and it helps him but stay away from that crowd. Write him, that you are working on a new show now, but if he has any new ideas he should tell you about it and you'll see what you can do. And don't think, that I am unjust, you know I have a natural gift of being a sucker, but not when it involves you. "*Die sieben Winter und die grossen Kalten*" und die ganzen *Gemeinheiten tauchen for mir auf.*² *Nein, nein.*

Swell, that you found a gardener. Did that little lamp and the tray arrive I'll sent from Atlanta? And Darling, I gave Howard 50 \$ and he left me that check. Bring it to the bank. If it makes you feel better, send Brecht 100 \$ but don't send him anything monthly. It's very hard to stop it and one can't go on doing it. My business still didn't show up. The hell with it. I feel fine. Rita wrote me a long letter. I am sorry, that Hans feels so bad. Gigis letter is so dumb that's an effort to read it through.

We leave tomorrow at 8:45 arrives at 2 and leave after the performance for New Orleans. I am looking forward for your letter. Now *Träubchen*, I have to pack and then I'll sleep. They woke me up at 8:00 this morning to bring me your wire. But that was a nice awakening. Give Ada and Gil my love when you see them again.

Ich küsse Ihre Hand [I kiss your hand]
Monsieur and remain
yours truly and
very lovable Missi.

(They colored people here are very different from the northerner. Much more real and much darker. And sooo slow!!!)

1. Robert Sherwood's three-act comedy *Idiot's Delight* had run for 299 performances on Broadway in 1936 starring the Lunts.

2. "*The seven winters and the great cold*" and all those dirty tricks come to my mind again" (the quoted phrase comes from *Mahagonny*).



In Hollywood, possibly in September 1944.

Books

Hitler in der Oper?

by Michael H. Kater

A review essay of

Hitler in der Oper: Deutsches Musikleben, 1919-1945

by Michael Walter

(Stuttgart; Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1995) 320 pp.
ISBN 3-476-01323-5.



The combination of “Hitler” and “opera” is catching for at least two reasons. One is that we know how much Hitler always loved to attend opera performances, and the title effectively excoriates the tyrant in his *Führerloge*, enthusing over Richard Wagner. But there is a deeper significance to this image. Opera happened to be the most popular musical genre in the Third Reich, and it was also the one most enduringly supported by the regime. The reason for this was that the Nazis found opera most conducive to propaganda. As a recent UCLA dissertation by David Dennis has shown (just pub-

lished by Yale University Press), certain kinds of concert music, particularly by Beethoven, lent themselves ideally to the uplifting of national morale, and manipulative pianists such as Elly Ney cleverly exploited this.¹ For instance, to further a solemn mood, much Beethoven was played on the German radio network for weeks after the disaster of Stalingrad in early February 1943.² However, it was opera, with its pictorial images and its libretti capable of conveying verbal messages, that could best be used as a totalitarian instrument for steering public opinion in the desired direction.

This meant huge opportunity for opera composers in the Third Reich, and in return those composers showed themselves appreciative. Among other factors, it explains the early attraction Richard Strauss felt for the Nazi regime. And while contemporary composers of any quality never stooped as low as to write specifically “Nazi” operas (not even Carl Orff, who is often falsely accused of having done so, with his *Carmina Burana*³), typically Nazi themes such as heroism and individual sacrifice for the racially defined community were stressed in several newer works. Conversely, composers could put themselves at risk if they dwelled on the unheroic. This happened to Orff’s friend Werner Egk when in November 1938 he premiered his opera *Peer Gynt* at the Preussische Staatsoper in Berlin; his lead character was portrayed as a loser — in any event the opposite of a Nazi superman. Egk was not seriously endangered, however, because he had already earned some other credentials in the service of the Third Reich, and Hitler and Propaganda Minister (and boss of the Reich Music Chamber) Joseph Goebbels thought him to be the preeminent musical talent of the future.

Much of this is treated in Michael Walter’s fine study, which is a collection of essays, about half of them previously published. It adds to the existing monographs on music in Germany from 1918 to 1945, none of which is without fault: Eric Levi’s most recent one on music in the Third Reich is a correct but comparatively dull technical treatment, seemingly without any real people and even any real music in it.⁴ Eckhard John’s book on “*Musikbolschewismus*” in the Weimar Republic is contrived, myopic, and tendentiously influenced by modish ideas such as those from Klaus Theweleit’s unsubstantiated book *Männerphantasien*, and really anything but a comprehensive music history of the period.⁵ Michael Meyer’s earlier extended dissertation on the Third Reich largely reads like a bad copy of Prieberg’s classic study and, like Levi’s or John’s, has not bothered much with primary sources.⁶ Fred K. Prieberg’s own *Musik im NS-Staat*, published in 1982, is now dated, frequently undocumented, full of distortions, and shrill in tone; still, it has character, providing a satisfying overview of music under Hitler.⁷ Thus it is by far the best of the lot.

Contrary to what the title of Michael Walter’s book might suggest, it cannot fulfill the function of a complete overview, either for the Weimar Republic or the Third Reich. But it closes certain gaps and enlarges on some already known issues. Similar to other—and, like Walter, younger—musicologists, the author stresses the continuity in musical production from late imperial times to 1945, erasing the caesura of 1933, which of course had been posited a few decades ago by political historians and is now also slowly being brushed over by interdisciplinary historians of society and culture. In addition, Walter notes quite correctly that in strictly technical terms the professionalization of musicians, which men like Strauss had tried to advance since the beginning of the century, took a positive turn under the Nazis. (The details of this story are rich and fascinating and should be the subject of a full-scale monograph in the manner of recent works in social history that have been completed on lawyers, engineers, teachers, and physicians.⁸ A rewarding Ph.D. dissertation!) Walter touches on certain key themes in the history of music especially during the Third Reich, such as the quarrels over

cultural—including musical—control waged by the Rosenberg and Goebbels factions, and the centrality of Hitler in the cultural decision-making process. Was it really because Hitler himself heard Egk's *Peer Gynt* on 31 January 1939, and liked it, that the opera eventually received regime sanction and Egk was off to a stunning professional career?⁹ Was it because Hitler had personally disliked Hindemith's music during the Republic that the composer of *Mathis der Maler* just could not get a foot in the door of the Third Reich?¹⁰

There is no doubt that ideologically, music and music-making were polarized in the Weimar Republic, a situation which of course was quickly neutralized after 1933 by the Nazis, in that they carried on with the rightist tradition and suppressed the left. Even before 1933 there were ominous crossovers from left to right (the most prominent example being violinist Gustav Havemann); Walter deals with these problems in his first chapter, captivatingly entitled "The Murderers are Attending the *Rosenkavalier*." Using the microcosm of Marburg, Walter then explains the growing functions of Rosenberg's *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (founded in early 1929) as the first Nazi tool of public music control. In this context, I would have appreciated references to Rudy Koshar's well-established study of Marburg as a breeding ground for various forms of fascism writ small through the decades dating from the Second Empire.¹¹ In his next chapter, Walter treats the conservative character of repertory opera in Germany; in so doing he furnishes interesting details for a much-needed social history of the operatic ensemble such as chorus members, vis-à-vis the upper echelons (*Intendant* or *Musikdirektor*). Information such as the one about pronounced differences in earnings would have to form part of a larger history of the professionalization of musicians mentioned above. It is well that Walter dwells on the nexus between financial crises plaguing opera productions on one hand and the disposition of the audience on the other, as it shifted over time: economically impoverished during inflation after World War I, more prosperous in the middle "golden" years, and then again financially strapped during the Depression, opera audiences clearly influenced opera programs quantitatively and qualitatively.¹² Still, what I would have liked to see in this chapter is a more lucid treatment of the relationship between a stagnant opera culture and a flourishing operetta scene, a problem that receives rather short shrift; the impact of sound film after 1928–29 on either medium also could have been explored. It seems that in that triangular relationship opera clearly was the loser. Of course this would raise the larger question of high versus low culture, and how either interconnected with society for the benefit or detriment of the other—an issue so far not satisfactorily treated by any but the most astute, socio-historically oriented music historians.

In a subsequent chapter Walter talks about a ranking scheme applying to opera in the Weimar Republic. Using Giacomo Meyerbeer as a point of reference, Walter not only demonstrates that particular composer's decline after World War I, but also the preponderance of Wagner and Verdi and, already documented elsewhere and at first sight surprising, the relative non-distinction of Strauss. Walter's thesis that Meyerbeer's Jewishness had nothing to do with the deterioration of the popularity of his music in the twenties, after all a time of rising anti-Semitism in the nationalist camp, is not immediately convincing and thus worthy of further probing.

"Anti-Semitism" is the key concept leading the reader into the next chapter, in which Walter examines more closely the success of Egk's *Peer Gynt* with Hitler. Walter explains in detail why the opera, its libretto and musical content, was really anathema to Nazi *Weltanschauung* (allusions to jazz, tango, a use of muted trumpets, the heritage of Kurt Weill, whom Egk had met and admired in the late Republic, etc.). In so doing Walter illustrates why, as I am trying to show in my forthcoming book *The Twisted Muse*, Egk was con-

sidered by the Nazi regime to be the needed musical modernizer par excellence, who took moderate risks (his model being Stravinsky) but never committed the cardinal sin of identifying with the serialism of the Second Vienna School.¹³ Again the turf wars between Nazi greats such as Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg, and Hermann Göring over cultural control are well covered, but, as happens often with German-language authors, recourse to Anglo-American scholarship is again avoided (in this instance to the excellent book by Alan E. Steinweis on the Reich Culture Chamber¹⁴). This lacuna becomes even more pronounced in Walter's next chapter, in which he explicates the politics of music in the Third Reich and, in the process, attempts to assess Strauss's early role in this. Apart from his ignoring Steinweis, however, Walter's task remains impossible without a close perusal of pertinent documents in the Strauss family archive at Garmisch; here the use of Gerhard Splitt's tendentious anti-Strauss dissertation can be no acceptable alternative.¹⁵

In conclusion, therefore, I find Walter's handling of sources to be one of two problematic aspects of his generally fruitful study. His categorical denial of the importance of primary sources in research¹⁶ has led him to rely almost exclusively on literature, much of it critically reflective, but some of it, like Egk's partially apocryphal memoirs, highly questionable. With especial reference to Egk, Walter could have used a number of applicable entries in Goebbels's published diaries, which are surprisingly missing from his study.¹⁷ The author's entire discussion of music, and particularly opera, in the cultural-political setting of the Third Reich would have been enhanced, for instance, by the analysis of a policy document Egk wrote in autumn 1941 for the benefit of Minister Goebbels, in his capacity as head of the composers' section in the Reich Music Chamber (since June of that year), which today is part of the Egk papers in the (former) Berlin Document Center,¹⁸ as well as of Egk's denazification file available in Munich. Overall reliance on secondary literature also leads Walter to an exaggeration of the powers of the Rosenberg camp, which in reality were much diminished for the benefit of Goebbels, certainly after the Hindemith affair in 1934–35 at the latest.

My final quibble concerns the wisdom of joining eight separate chapters, some very specific and discrete in content, to make a monograph. Somehow that strikes me as rather artificial, if not to say pretentious. For whereas each of the chapters individually has something important to say, a common thread connecting them, and credibly spanning the period from 1918 to 1945, is absent. Instead, there are unnecessary repetitions, partial and unjustifiable emphases on various side-issues, and a potential imbalance between the period of the Republic on the one side, and that of the dictatorship on the other. At the present juncture of his career as a musicologist, Walter is not yet an elder statesman in the wider field of cultural history who, in the manner of a Carl Dahlhaus, Gordon A. Craig, or Peter Gay, can afford to string what might be regarded as exploratory pieces together and leave it to the reader to guess at what they might mean as a whole.

Notes

1. David B. Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
2. Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 174.
3. Michael H. Kater, "Carl Orff im Dritten Reich," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 43 (1995), 1–35.
4. Eric Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
5. Eckhard John, *Musikbolschewismus: Die Politisierung der Musik in Deutschland, 1918–1938* (Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1994).

6. Michael Meyer, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).
7. Fred K. Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1982).
8. See, for instance, Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Unfree Professions: German Lawyers, Teachers, and Engineers, 1990-1950* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
9. See Werner Egk, *Die Zeit wartet nicht* (Percha, R.S. Schulz, 1973).
10. To this day, the most critical treatment of Hindemith and his situation in the Third Reich is Claudia Maurer Zenck, "Zwischen Boykott und Anpassung an den Charakter der Zeit: Über die Schwierigkeiten eines deutschen Komponisten mit dem Dritten Reich," *Hindemith-Jahrbuch* 9 (1980), 65-129.
11. Rudy Koshar, *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism: Marburg, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1986).
12. On the interrelationship between economics and art, for the inflation, see Gerald D. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); for the depression, see Michael H. Kater, "The Revenge of the Fathers: The Demise of Modern Music at the End of the Weimar Republic," *German Studies Review* 15 (1992), 303-08.
13. Michael H. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press (November 1996).
14. Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill and London: North Carolina Press, 1993).
15. Gerhard Splitt, *Richard Strauss, 1933-1935: Ästhetik und Musikpolitik zu Beginn der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft* (Paffenhäuser: Centaurus Verlagsgesellschaft, 1987).
16. See Walter, *Hitler in der Oper*, 182, n. 34.
17. See the reference to Egk in Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente*, 5 vols. (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1987), III, 567.
18. Werner Egk to [Joseph Goebbels], "Vorschläge Oper," [October 1941], Berlin Document Center, Werner Egk File.

Books

Elisabeth Hauptmann: Brecht's Silent Collaborator

by Paula Hanssen

New York University Ottendorfer Series (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). 173 pages.

One's first impulse is to welcome this, the first book-length study of the one collaborator whose involvement with Brecht's life and work spanned almost fifty years. Dr. Hanssen sets out to address Hauptmann's "Many-faceted (role). . . from actual writing to ideas for plot, her translations which were used and her editing, to the labor of typing" (p. 16). (The rather ungainly English is, unfortunately, typical of the author's style, which could have benefited from a keener critical eye for verbal and syntactical solecisms.)

The book's eleven chapters are centered principally on a chronological survey of Hauptmann's contributions to Brecht's prose, poetry, and drama, attempting to pin down the extent and nature of her involvement in these while also devoting some space to a consideration of her own writings, specifically those included in the 1977 Aufbau *Julia ohne Romeo*. (It is surely high time for this essential volume to be reprinted; or are the problems that, apparently, hindered a second edition still not solved?)

While some reference is made to John Fuegi's exaggerated claims for Hauptmann's role in Brecht's work (in his *Brecht & Co.*, New York: Grove Press, 1994), Hanssen is rather more aware of the complexities of the collaborative process—especially in the theater

works—and is, correspondingly, more prepared to acknowledge John Willett's view of Hauptmann's involvement, which involves caution as well as proper acknowledgement of her significance: "we see. . . how easy it is to get him wrong if we fail to allow for her role as writer, communicator and person" (p. 159).

Perhaps the most important section of the study is the examination of the Chinese poems, where Hauptmann's role as mediator goes back to her 1929 translations of Noh-plays and stretches through to 1950. Given that the *Versuche* edition of 1950 explicitly lists Hauptmann as "Mitarbeiterin" for the Chinese poems, it is hard to see how, for example, Jan Knopf managed to discuss these works in his *Handbuch* without mentioning her role. But even here, the author's concern to rectify a serious oversight leads her to make some rather specious claims for Hauptmann's translation of a particular poem, differentiating it from Waley's English version as being "more dramatic," "more suspenseful." The textual changes cited are slight, and where Hanssen prefers Hauptmann's more emotive diction to Waley's more matter-of-fact and uncolored style, it could equally be argued that the latter's is closer to the tenor of the original.

The wish to emphasize Hauptmann's talents also leads the author to overlook subtleties of tone and register, as in her comparison of passages from Hauptmann's tale "Auf der Suche nach Nebeneinnahmen" with the lengthy final sentence of Brecht's "Der Arbeitsplatz" (p. 79). What Hanssen sees as "rambling" in Brecht is a deliberately complex sentence structure — an ironic, even parodistic, echo of the type of qualifying subordinate clause structure one finds in Kleist or Kafka, or even in legal, rhetorical language.

In one respect, Hanssen's study resembles Fuegi's, in that one struggles to form any picture which does justice to Hauptmann's personality and range of interests. Like Fuegi, I interviewed Hauptmann: unlike him I did not (and do not) construct, from her observations to me on her actual contribution to Brecht's work, an argument which has her writing 90% of this or 60% of that. At the time she was quite, though elliptically, explicit about her contribution to the two English "Mahagonny Songs" ("Daran war ich auch nicht ganz unschuldig," she stated, with a smile, going on to discuss the Kipling translations in detail, and more interested in mentioning her membership in the Kipling Society and her knowledge of the Trade Union Movement in Australia and New Zealand!)

It is to be regretted that she never found the time to write her memoirs; and Brecht's treatment of her in the fifties was, undoubtedly, insensitive at times. But she had a much more clear-sighted view of the situation than those who seek to portray her as a highly gifted writer, oppressed, exploited and discarded by a ruthless and opportunistic chauvinist. When Hauptmann, in a passage Hanssen quotes, observes of herself: "She had no gift for speculative thinking, for establishing large-scale connections, and conceiving her own plans" (my translation, p. 134) this is *not* downplaying her other real talents which are clearly evidenced, though not in sufficient detail, in this study.

What now is needed is a systematic examination of the documents in the Hauptmann Archive, an attempt to locate further correspondence between her and Brecht (there must be more), and a portrait of Hauptmann in which such questions as her personal and professional links with Burri, Bärensprung, Dessau, Weill, and Hindemith (and surely these latter two had an equally important role in the development of the "Lehrstück"?) are fully addressed.

Michael Morley

The Flinders University of South Australia

Performances

Street Scene

Turin, Italy

Teatro Regio

Premiere 12 December 1995

The Teatro Regio in Turin had the honor this past December of being the first in Italy to present Weill's Broadway opera *Street Scene*. The production attracted much attention in the local press, including front page coverage in the monthly magazine *Il Ré*. A number of articles prepared the public for the premiere with both basic information and more specific details about the piece and its background.

Weill enjoys a good reputation in Italy in intellectual circles, although too many still view him through the prism of his relationship with Bertolt Brecht. The repercussions of Giorgio Strehler's famous 1956 production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan are still felt, ensuring a wide knowledge of Weill as the composer of that work. A more refined understanding of the composer and his oeuvre, however, remains uncommon.

As for the general media, many of the familiar prejudices abound. These mostly reiterate in some way the opinion that upon his emigration to America Weill adapted himself too much to the (bad) commercial forces of Broadway and, by so doing, lost his unique Berlin style. These ideas, although trotted out once again in the press coverage of the Turin production, were belied by the remarkably positive reception given the work by the public.

From all the activity and publicity in advance of the performances in Turin, it was clear that the company had intentions very different from those of the interchangeable international opera business centered on the big houses like La Scala in Milan. The production team assembled by the Teatro Regio showed that it was not afraid to confront the serious issues of diversity and ethnic conflict that are manifest in *Street Scene*. In fact, both the stage director Giorgio Gallione and the music director John Mauceri went out of their way to raise the public's awareness of these issues.

Gallione states in his program-book article "Musical or Melodrama?" that, "For Weill, the integration explicit in the idea of the melting pot (represented on stage by the interactions of characters from a wide range of cultural and national backgrounds such as Irish, Italian, Swedish, African American and Jewish) was an example to follow." In his convincing reflections on Weill and *Street Scene*, Mauceri accurately concludes that: "Finally, to unify the different aspects of the music, there is the great communicator and master composer Weill, who knew to give his personalities the pain of real individuals without giving up an indomitable optimism: By listening to the music we can learn how to behave with civility, to be kind, to live as participating members of society."

The profound knowledge and preparation displayed by these essays is just as visible in the production itself. Gallione directs with great sensitivity for both Weill's music and Elmer Rice's libretto. He deftly counterbalances narrative realism with the fantastic imagination of the Broadway style. Mauceri, a musician both brilliant and passionate, makes transparent Weill's capacity

to integrate the musical elements of traditional opera (Wagner, Verdi, Bizet, Puccini) with the popular American music of his time (Berlin, Porter).

As a complement to their own skills, Mauceri and Gallione assembled an exciting collection of collaborators with whom to work. The set created by painter Luigi Benedicenti boldly realizes a three-dimensional New York tenement building. The beautiful costumes by Laura Vigilone are true to the style of the 1940s and respect the place of the characters. These, quite properly, are the clothes of working people, with no pretension to fancy haute couture.

This production is a suitable illustration of Weill's dream of a creative, collaborative, and serious musical theater. If there is to be a future for that old beloved monster called opera, this is the only way to proceed. The applause and acclaim showered upon the Turin *Street Scene* represent a justified success for both Weill and honest theater people in general.

Gottfried H. Wagner
Cerro Maggiore, Italy

A Letter from the Conductor

I have just returned from my journeys to Europe and Asia and wanted to report on the *Street Scene* performances [in Turin]. The orchestra truly loved playing this music and it was one of the great satisfactions of my life to hear Italian musicians truly understand and impart a collective wisdom towards this music that I had not heard before. The production seemed to be one of the best I've ever seen, [complete with] occasional Fellini-like moments in "Wouldn't You Like to be on Broadway?"

I'm happy to report that every performance received a standing ovation and that talk in Italy continues today about the success of Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*. The reviews were mostly ecstatic. There were occasional critics who questioned Kurt Weill's music from this period but I suppose that's to be expected from time to time. All in all, *Street Scene* in Italy was a very, very big success indeed and it was very moving for me to see the success Weill's music had with the Italian public.

John Mauceri

Performances

Grandeur et décadence de la ville de Mahagonny

Paris

Opéra Bastille

Premiere: 14 October 1995

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny is an epic delivered as a series of vignettes, rather like a portfolio of etchings or lithographs by Goya or Grosz that communicates subjects of vast scope—the horrors of war or the vanities of life—through a collection of closely observed incidents and details. Compared with the organic sweep of the through-composed *Musikdrama* or the self-invested panache of the grand opera, *Mahagonny* can seem fragmented and forced. Its structure is creaky and its finales are heavy-handed and overly long. Nor do its authors make things easy for a conductor or stage director whose traditional duties include bolstering a work's own defenses against audience disbelief. Instead, *Mahagonny's* self-conscious structural and stylistic artifices conspire to hold its audience at a distance; it conjures with one hand and instructs with the other. *Mahagonny* is nevertheless a masterful work, if not a masterpiece, and its chain of studied stage pictures can add up to a statement of fierce dramatic and moral impact.

In the new production of *Mahagonny* at the Opéra Bastille, the English stage director Graham Vick presented an allegory of health and decline, of youth, aging, and death set in an arid desert. The open expanse of the stage was dominated on the right by a giant saguaro cactus with a nesting mechanical vulture (complete with slowly flapping wings and turning head) that might have been more at home at nearby Euro-Disney. The rough-and-tumble frontier wear of the first act (sets and costumes by Maria Björnson; lighting by Thomas Webster) gave way in the second to showgirl glitz and a cactus that bloomed in neon glory. The third act was a bleak, wintry

landscape: our cactus suffers from a case of terminal blight, the scraggly vulture has lost its feathers, and the aged inhabitants of the city of Mahagonny, now clad in hospital smocks, are confined to wheelchairs and walkers. This then, within the geographic coordinates of the American southwest, was *Mahagonny* as an allegory of a self-indulgent baby-boom generation whose excesses are brought to an end by the ravages of Father Time.

Vick's production is a curious reading but one that, at first glance, seems to take cues from the music. At the beginning of the opera, for instance, there was at the rear of the stage a dollhouse-like cutaway of an

apartment building, in each of whose rooms one or more silent characters mechanically repeated commonplace activities of daily life—an eye-catching visual realization of the musical bustle of the overture. These slices of life, which suggested the urban environment of Otto Dix or Rudolf Schlichter (whose *Hausvogelplatz* graced the cover of the handsomely produced and richly illustrated program), might have been expected to anticipate scenes from the opera. Instead they had no discernible relationship to the stage setting or action and came to life only intermittently, as if afterthoughts, to articulate the beginnings and ends of the opera's three acts. The choppy ebullience of the second act, on the other hand, inspired what seemed like a series of jaded Las Vegas lounge acts, and in the third act Jim's "Wenn der Himmel hell wird" and Jenny's "There is no money in this land" have never sounded so bone-weary as in the slow-motion world of an overcrowded retirement home. In the end, however, this profusion of visually arresting images reduced Weill's score to evocative background music and the mythic stature of the city of Mahagonny to a cluster of clichés and associations.

Part of the problem appeared to be Vick's eagerness to fill the Bastille's large stage with activity and to prove *Mahagonny*, too, can be a spectacle. There was an endless stream of sight gags, such as the lovingly dressed human hot dog in the second act that completely upstaged Jack O'Brien's eating binge, and the quantity and quality of glitzy production numbers (with skillful choreography by Sean Walsh) suggested



Mahagonny as an allegory for the ravages of excess; Act III from the Opéra Bastille production of *Grandeur et décadence de la ville de Mahagonny*. (photo: Opéra National de Paris).

that dance is still *de rigueur* for Paris opera productions. Needless to say, Vick's "That's Entertainment" approach had no use for aggressive placards or projections, and the connective narration, spoken by the prominent journalist and familiar television personality Patrick Poivre-d'Arvor, was rendered quaint by being doctored to sound as if broadcast from scratchy 78 rpm records. This diverting sensory barrage resulted in a lack of focus. None of the characters, with the possible exception of Jimmy Mahoney, emerged with any definition. Indeed, against the ever-shifting sea of chorus, dancers, and supernumeraries, it was often hard to *find* the protagonists, and once located, they often proved oddly static and unaffected, thus undermining one of the core qualities of this contradictory work. For despite Brecht's theories, and largely because of Weill's music, we do come to care about the opera's protagonists and as a consequence feel all the more keenly the inhumanity of the social and economic forces that destroy them. Just as the biological metaphor of aging and disintegration that underlies Vick's interpretation robs the opera of its critical bite, his refusal to invest in his characters flattens them to two-dimensional stage properties.

The Bastille Opera is a great barn of a building and its acoustics were not kind to the singers, who were generally difficult to understand. Only Kim Begley as Jim Mahoney was able to project his part consistently and effectively, while Marie McLaughlin as Jenny Hill, who struggled with uneven intonation, seemed peculiarly bland. Trudeliene Schmidt sang the role of Widow Begbick (taking over from Felicity Palmer), and Robert Wörle and Franz Hawlata appeared as Fatty and Trinity Moses. Andreas Jäggi sang Jack O'Brien, and Wolfgang Koch, Ronnie Johansen, and Gunnar Gudbjörnsson sang the roles of Bill, Joe, and Toby Higgins, respectively.

No doubt the star of the evening was conductor Jeffrey Tate, whose generally brisk tempos and carefully detailed reading of the score benefited from the Bastille Opera's dry acoustics. From the crisply buoyant overture to the snarling savagery of the final march, Tate provided from the pit a coherence and sweep that was lacking on the stage. The audience at the last performance on 7 November was demonstrative in its enthusiasm for the work and its interpreters.

Christopher Hailey
Los Angeles

Performances

Down in the Valley

Kansas City

Lyric Opera

Premiere: 16 September 1995

One of his simplest and yet most charming works, reminiscent of a primitive scene by Grandma Moses or a magazine cover by Norman Rockwell, Kurt Weill's *Down in the Valley* raised the curtain on the 1995-96 season of the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. This short folk opera (35 minutes long on opening night) dramatizes the title song in the tale of love-struck Brack Weaver and Jennie Parsons. Condemned to hang for the murder of Thomas Bouché, Brack breaks out of the dark Birmingham jail not to run away but to see his beloved Jennie one last time. In flashback, he tells how the crime was committed only because Bouché, who holds influence over the extension on the money for the Parsons' place, tried to impose his tipsy attentions on an unwilling Jennie at the Saturday night dance. Assured that she still loves him, Brack finds the strength to turn himself in to meet his fate. Despite the serious libretto, the opera abounds with delightful and familiar folk melodies, especially "Down in the Valley" which permeates the score, and including "The Lonesome Dove," "The Little Black Train," "Hop Up, My Ladies," and "Sourwood Mountain." Surely this work comes from the collective American consciousness, with songs that are known, loved, and sung by generations of children and adults.

The score flows effectively from one musical moment and lyrical song to the next, sometimes almost symphonically, as in the climactic meeting between Brack and Jennie following his escape from jail. Weill's orchestration reflects his experience as a veteran of the Broadway stage in his ability to capture succinctly the mood of each scene without going to great musical lengths. The change from the Moderato opening chorus to the Allegro animato of the jail scene is a case in point. In not more than a dozen measures, Weill's score takes us from the familiar title song into the supposedly real-life story behind it, with Brack in a frenzy in jail as he waits for a final letter from Jennie. Later, after hearing

Jennie's story and her father's advice to forget Brack, the musical transition into "Lonesome Dove" for the tender scene between the two lovers presents a moment equal to Hollywood's best. Weill demonstrates his mastery of the American musical theater genre and his command of scene and situation throughout the opera as dialogue turns without effort into song and dance. This kind of work demands singing actors in the best tradition of the American musical theater.

In the Kansas City production, tenor Michael Philip Davis presented a handsome and ardently-sung, if not acted, Brack Weaver. However, Joyce Guyer as Jennie Parsons was the more natural singing actress, with a fine lyric soprano voice. John Stephens gave an energetic performance as the leader and preacher, shadowing the action virtually throughout the entire story. The prayer meeting scene, especially, built into a vocal crescendo of spirited outbursts and interjections between the preacher and chorus. Brian Steele played the lecherous Thomas Bouché with just the right amount of vocal and character drive. The chorus executed its multiple parts admirably, delineating the various characters among the townspeople and with a generally accurate performance of Weill's more unusual choral harmonies. The simple, raked stage with stepped platforms around a stark, square playing area gave director Francis Cullinan ample opportunity to exploit realistic staging and effective moments of action. The scenery, mainly simple painted frames of pillars and posts along with sections of fence and other individual pieces such as the church window, moved in and out as needed while suggesting the locales and scenes of the action. Nicholas Cavallaro's effective lighting added to the *mise-en-scene*, underlining the mood of the story line from one scene to the next. One of the special effects featured the midnight train behind the jail scene with the chorus in back light. Russell Patterson, general artistic director of the Lyric Opera, conducted adequately, and the orchestra of about 25 instrumentalists responded in kind, usually overbalancing the singers. The audience gave a warm welcome to librettist Arnold Sundgaard during the curtain call of the opening night performance.

Daniel Paul Larson
Avila College

Performances

Love Life

Leeds, England

Opera North

Premiere: 24 January 1996

The Opera North production of Kurt Weill's *Love Life* represents the latest attempt to present a piece that has been called the missing link between Rodgers and Hammerstein and the "concept musicals" of the 1960s and 70s. The effort was an inconclusive one, showing, if nothing else, that a "straight" operatic approach to this curious hybrid offers no instant solution to its problems.

All the signs had been good. Under Paul Daniel, their young, dynamic, and extravagantly talented Music Director, Opera North has avoided the worst of the tribulations that have beset British professional opera of late. (Covent Garden has been the subject of a frank television documentary exposé of its inner workings; English National Opera has lost its music director in a very public manner; Scottish Opera has lost its orchestra; Welsh National Opera has failed to win funding for a new theater.) Based in Leeds, Opera North is Britain's youngest opera company, and its productions, orchestra, and chorus regularly outshine its more prominent rivals. (Witness the success of *Show Boat* a few years ago.) For 1996 the company had originally planned a conflation of Gershwin's *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'em Eat Cake*, perhaps with half an eye on the phenomenal success of *Crazy for You* in London. Those plans fell through, however, and two months later *Love Life* was chosen as a replacement.

No effort was spared in preparations for the production. Director Caroline Gawn established a performance version assembled from the labyrinth of variants left by the original performances on Broadway in 1948 and 1949. She and Musical Director Wyn Davies tailored musical materials, including a newly assembled set of orchestral parts, specifically for these performances. The company engaged a professional illusionist to rehearse the opening magic trick, and it also arranged for the entire chorus to be taught to tap-dance for the Divorce Ballet. Charles

Edwards came up with some ingenious and economical yet handsome sets, which were well matched by Nicky Gillibrand's costumes. Dialogue and dialect coaches transformed the cast into fluent mid-West drawlers (are American companies as scrupulous with British accents for Gilbert and Sullivan?).

I wanted to love this show for Opera North's sake, for Weill's sake, and for the sake of having a good night out. But I didn't. The reasons are not difficult to list, although ranking them in relative importance is trickier. First, Lerner and Weill's central conceit—of the Cooper family seen through the prism of American history—divides our attention between individuals and 150 years of social issues. The risk is that by the end

Would those impressions have been different given two star performers and a company with real showbiz hormones? Quite possibly. Alan Oke and Margaret Preece are respectable opera soloists who performed wonderfully as Sam and Susan Cooper. Opera North's chorus and orchestra are exceptionally adaptable and versatile; led by Wyn Davies's infectious conducting, they too did quite well. But the performers were all prevented from really getting inside the idiom by a production which lacked pace. Protracted stage changes allowed blood that stirred in one scene to congeal by the time the next one got going. The chorus of vaudevillians was tediously unfunny, especially when traipsing slow-motion across the stage with billboards.

Reviews in the British press were no less divided than those of *Love Life*'s 1948 Broadway premiere. In *The Times* Rodney Milnes, doyen of opera critics, praised the score to the skies and buried the earthbound visuals. In the *Guardian* Tom Sutcliffe—



The Locker Room scene from the Opera North production of *Love Life*. (photo by Clive Barda)

we may care about neither. Certainly the final, post-divorce, will-they-won't-they reconciliation seems unutterably trite. Second, despite the production team's efforts, the straightforward song-and-dance numbers sit uneasily beside the mildly allegorical vaudevilles. I can believe that the sweet and sour mix is the vestigially Brechtian point, but here again there is the risk of the two sides canceling one another out. Third, the best of Weill's memorable tunes—"Economics," "I'm your Man," "Is it him or is it me?"—are not quite in the show-stopper class, and there are too many so-so numbers in between.

who has a reputation as Britain's principal operatic hatchet-man—loved all of it. The *Independent* felt the tunes were not good enough, focusing pointedly on "I remember it well" which Loewe made so unforgettable in *Gigi*. The *Daily Telegraph* found the whole thing slack, as I did, and doubted that the work had been given a proper chance to show its full qualities. Maybe *Love Life* is, after all, an impossible hybrid which will never flourish unaided; or maybe it is still waiting for a performance that does it justice.

David Fanning
Manchester University

Recordings

Concerto for violin and wind instruments, op. 12

Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie

Christian Tetzlaff, violin and conductor

Virgin Classics 724354505621

(Recording also includes Paul Hindemith, Septet for Winds, and Ernst Toch, Five Pieces for Wind and Percussion, op. 83)



Kurt Weill's *Concerto for violin and wind instruments* is a transitional work, standing Janus-like between the composers who influenced Weill and the unique stylistic alloy he would soon forge from them. The piece's unique position in Weill's oeuvre thus offers the performer an extensive menu of interpretive strategies from which to choose.

One might focus on the work's virtuosic character, emphasizing its relationship to such showpieces as the Bruch and Mendelssohn concertos. This is an eminently defensible choice given the concerto's original conception as a vehicle for Josef Szigeti. Alternatively, the quotations of the *dies irae* chant in the first movement and the *danse-macabre* topoi in the second might suggest a more programmatic interpretation. Another reading could emphasize Weill's affinity for such early modernists as Mahler, Schoenberg, and Schreker. One could also explore the concerto's connections to Busoni and the neo-classical Stravinsky. Finally the interpreter could present the piece as a transitional work between the aesthetic poles of expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

With such a wealth of opportunities for exploration, the rather detached, matter-of-fact interpretation presented by Christian Tetzlaff and the Deutsche Kammer-

philharmonie is disappointing. The performers here seem content to view the work as an exemplar of 1920s Neoclassicism. In its relentless pursuit of an objective, note-perfect performance, their reading recalls the notion—outlined in Stravinsky's *Poetics of Music*, for example—that interpretation on the part of the performer is tantamount to treachery toward the score. (On a more concrete level, this recording recalls the kind of performance style associated with such musicians as Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players.)

The performance is characterized by metrical regularity (one can almost hear a ticking metronome in places), and an emphasis on articulation and structural clarity. From a specifically formal viewpoint, the focus on metrical articulation leads to a performance conceived in terms of downbeats and bars instead of phrases. The metronomically rigid manner, coupled with the rather aloof style of soloist-conductor Tetzlaff, distorts the dialectical relationship between the “romantic” lyrical violin and the dry “objective” nature of an orchestra composed of winds, double bass, and percussion.

On a more abstract level, I missed the kind of sensitivity to phrasing and dynamic shading that distinguishes a truly memorable performance. Further, the tempi are,

on the whole, too fast (in the second movement *notturmo* and the third movement especially), and the tempo relationships from one movement to the next are often ill-judged.

The biggest disappointment concerning the performers' approach, however, is the way it suppresses many of the concerto's most attractive features. I missed the dark humor and playfulness of the *notturmo*, for example. And the wonderful dialogue between the violin and woodwinds toward the end of the third movement (reminiscent of Schreker's *Ferne Klang* or the Forest Murmurs in the *Ring*) is reduced to nothing more than a long trill. Despite the obvious technical ability of the musicians and their wonderful sense of the concerto's differing textures, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie's pursuit of a cool, “neoclassical” reading has led to a denial of the concerto's humorous, ironic, emotional, and lyrical qualities. Ultimately, the loss of these aspects leaves one with an empty sense of missed opportunities.

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