

Kurt Weill

Volume 18

Numbers 1-2

N e w s l e t t e r

Fall 2000



Centenary Issue

Festival reports from London, Berlin
and New York

Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt
Weill

SPECIAL INSERT
Updated Calendar of Events



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Kurt Weill

Newsletter

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An Evolving Identity

Centenary celebrations offer a chance to hear neglected works and to reevaluate a composer's career. Last fall, the special centenary "double issue" of the Kurt Weill Newsletter investigated new discoveries represented by stagings of three largely unknown works: *Die Bürgschaft*, *The Eternal Road*, and *The Firebrand of Florence*. In the intervening year, major festivals highlighted different aspects of Weill's career and were joined by new recordings, radio and television documentaries, magazine features, exhibitions, symposia, and new publications that provided the public with the most complete picture ever of Weill's life and compositional diversity. This second centenary "double issue" reports on these events and publications as space permits.

London, Berlin, and New York each played an important role in Weill's life and subsequent reception history, and each city took a different approach to programming for the centenary. London's BBC Symphony packed as much of Weill's music as possible into eight concerts, most of them broadcast over the radio, supplemented with film screenings and lectures. Berlin's Konzerthaus festival juxtaposed mainly Weill's German orchestral and chamber works with those by other composers in twelve concerts, along with a symposium, exhibition, and concerts in other venues. New York's major venues joined the Weill celebration with independent productions at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the New York Philharmonic, Symphony Space, The Japan Society, and The Juilliard School.

As each city attempted to introduce samples of "new" Weill to its audiences, certain national perspectives continued to be evident in programming choices. For this reason we wanted to capture a picture of Weill's evolving identity by asking a scholar-critic from each city to write an overview of each festival and then to tackle the vexing question, "What makes Weill Weill?". In the following pages you will find enlightening responses from Guido Heldt, Geoffrey Chew, and Eric Salzman.

To supplement these longer evaluations of Weill's evolving identity, a number of practicing musicians and theater professionals graciously agreed to share some personal thoughts. The result is "Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt Weill," which begins on page 26. Rounding out the issue, Jürgen Schebera challenges Germany's current image of Weill as reflected in a commemorative postage stamp, Erik Levi summarizes Weill's reputation in the U.K., and Seth Brodsky sees a paradoxical Weill reflected in different ways of staging *Der Jasager*.

The pullout section, "Calendar of Events, July 2000–May 2001," represents an updated supplement to the "Celebrate Kurt Weill" centenary brochure published in Fall 1999. New concerts and events continue to be added daily, so we encourage those with the means to do so to consult the Kurt Weill website for the most current information: www.kwf.org.

...listening Weill...

by Guido Heldt

The conjunction of musical anniversaries in 2000 seemed not to bode well for Weill: competing with the 250th year of Bach's death is a formidable task for any composer. But there is enough time between Weill's dates in March and April and Bach's in July, and the respective ensembles and audiences are sufficiently different to avoid too much overlap. Certainly, Weill has one thing going for him: After a half-century of being a "problem," after all those twisted and botched attempts to squeeze him into (or out of) one or the other version of twentieth-century musical history, the centenary seems to have fostered a sense that the time has come for a new look at Weill—less possessive, more curious, more rounded and relaxed. But what is new about Bach? Though the Bach activities are as numerous and lavish as could be expected, they give the impression of just going through the festive motions.

So even against one of the greatest figures of musical history, Weill did not fare too badly—at least not in Berlin, where he has the advantage of being a musical *genius loci* and avatar of its supposedly wild and golden Twenties, an era that has become distorted by legend: the lone high point of Berlin's short history as a capital (only since 1871), wedged between the catastrophes of the First World War and the Third Reich.

But here lies the crux of a problem that made itself felt throughout the Weill festivities. The trademark "Berlin sound" of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Mahagonny* is precisely the Weill that a new look at his oeuvre may shift slightly out of the limelight, or at least to supplement with other Weills. But taking on board new Weills may foster fears of compromising the old one, still dear to Berlin's cultural memory, especially at a time when the city is in dire need of an identity. Having become again the capital of Germany (which had learned to live without a real capital since the war and instead made do with a number of cities—Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Cologne, even Bonn—sharing that role), Berlin has not yet found its footing. It is unsure of how to deal with its past, unsure of how to claim center stage in a federal Germany, and under close scrutiny from the media, which cannot stop looking to Berlin for all things new and extraordinary but is always willing to mock it for any delusions of grandeur. Of course the Berlin-in-the-Golden-Twenties bubble could do with some deflating. A new Berlin ought to look for a more cosmopolitan sense of self, to which an international, multi-faceted Weill could be a fitting ornament. But constructions of identity are tenacious, and the reactions to the Weill programs showed that mixed feelings remain.

hören, weill proclaimed the motto of the concert series in the Konzerthaus Berlin from 2 March to 15 April—*listening weill*, a pun on Weill's name which almost (without the second "l") means "because" in German. Listening to Weill because . . . because of what? Refusing to provide any reason except the music may be a good precept for looking at Weill anew and for keeping him out of pre-conceived historiographical slots. So the Berlin festival tried to present a broad range of works and to place them in different contexts. The opening concert on

2 March placed the canonical Weill of *Die sieben Todsünden* next to the much less familiar Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra from 1924 and Béla Bartók's suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin* from 1926, another of the many 1920s artistic evocations of the lure and terror of the urban. Cushioning the somewhat abrasive sounds of Weill's concerto with the well-known Bartók and *Die sieben Todsünden* was an obvious crowd-pleasing tactic, understandable in an opening concert. But though Dmitri Sitkovetsky played beautifully and the Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester under Zoltán Peskó at least competently, they seemed a bit unsure what to make of the concerto, of how to give it tension instead of merely making it sound good. And since Doris Soffel's attempts to sound disreputable in *Die sieben Todsünden* were not quite convincing either, Bartók made the best impression.

The concert showed some potential problems of contextualizing the lesser-known Weill works, as did, for slightly different reasons, the chamber music matinee on 12 March, which pitted Weill's early Cello Sonata and String Quartet in B minor against Schoenberg's greatest hit, *Verklärte Nacht*, along with Anton Webern's *Drei kleine Stücke* for cello and piano op. 11 (1914) and Webern's cello sonata that had inspired op. 11, both inevitably more mature and personal

hören, weill

Kurt Weill Fest 2.3. - 15.4.2000



The Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester on stage at Berlin's Konzerthaus, located in the Gendarmenmarkt. The building was renovated in the late 1980s.

Berlin Highlights

Konzerthaus Berlin "hören, weill"

2-4 March 2000

Violin concerto and *Die sieben Todsünden*, with a work by Bartók; Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester; Zoltán Peskó, conductor

3 March 2000

Recordare, with works by Kaminski, Eisler, Dessau, and Schoenberg; ars-nova-ensemble; Peter Schwarz, conductor

4 March 2000

Quodlibet and *Symphony no. 2*, with a work by Milhaud; Kammer-symphonie Berlin; Jürgen Bruns, conductor

5 March 2000

"This Time Next Year: Kurt Weill Filmsongs und Theaterfragmente"; MusikTheater-Cabaret; Die Schönen der Nacht

6 March 2000

Musik zu *Die Dreigroschenoper*; Ensemble Modern; Berliner Singakademie; HK Gruber, conductor

8 March 2000

"Musik in der Novembergruppe"; *String Quartet, op. 8* and quartet arrangements by Steffen Schleiermacher, with works by Vogel, Tiessen, Antheil, Eisler, and Wolpe; Leipziger Streichquartett

9 March 2000

"Love, Liebe, l'amour: Die Liebeslieder Kurt Weills"; Angelina Réaux, soprano; Scott Dunn, piano

10 March 2000

Symphony no. 1, with works by Bach and Mendelssohn; Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester; Bruno Weil, conductor

11 March 2000

Chamber and incidental music; Ensemble Modern; HK Gruber, conductor

12 March 2000

Cello Sonata and *String Quartet in b minor*, with works by Webern and Schoenberg; Members of the Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester

12 March 2000

Intermezzo, *Abschiedsbrief*, and *Albumblatt für Erika*, with works by Busoni, Gruenberg, Hollaender, Milhaud, Copland, Gershwin, and Gordon; Jens Barneck, piano

12 March 2000

"Street Scenes," with works by Copland and Stravinsky; Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin; RIAS Big Band; Lawrence Foster, conductor

RIAS Big Band

2 March 2000

"Vom Ku'damm zum Broadway: Konzert am 100. Geburtstag von Kurt Weill; Jörg-Achim Keller, conductor and arranger

ensemble weill ...

2 March 2000

Mahagonny Songspiel and Songs from *Happy End*; Ari Benjamin Meyers, conductor

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin

15 April 2000

Der Protagonist (concert version); John Mauceri, conductor

Komische Oper Berlin

Premiere: 23 June 2000

"Von Berlin nach Mahagonny"; Oliver Pohl, conductor; Angela Brandt, director

Akademie der Künste

27 February-16 April 2000

Musical Stages: Kurt Weill und sein Jahrhundert, a collaborative exhibition of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Humboldt-Universität with Konzerthaus Berlin and Akademie der Künste

8-11 March 2000

Symposium: Amerikanismus / Americanism: Die Suche nach kultureller Identität in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts

than Weill's teenage works. Only Webern's *Zwei Stücke* for cello and piano (1899) were written by a composer even less experienced. Here, as in the opening concert, the program tried to balance unknown Weill with better-known pieces by others—a slightly dangerous strategy that risks overwhelming the music being celebrated with the background it is presented against.

But the sad sight of two dozen spectators in the Konzerthaus for Jens Barnieck's piano recital on the afternoon of the same day showed the even more obvious drawbacks of doing without popular pieces altogether. Weill wrote almost no piano music, so Barnieck took the opportunity to place what little there is in a surprising, even radical, program that had "Europe-America" written all over it: Weill's *Intermezzo* from 1917, the *Albumblatt* for Erika Neher from 1937 (based on material from *The Eternal Road*) and a solo piano arrangement of *Der Abschiedsbrief*, written for Marlene Dietrich on a text by Erich Kästner in Paris in 1933, were placed next to the first book of Weill's teacher Ferruccio Busoni's *Indianisches Tagebuch*, the *Jazz Masks* of another Busoni pupil, Louis Gruenberg, the *Mélodie perverse* by another 1920s icon and emigrant, Friedrich Hollaender, two of Darius Milhaud's *Three Rag Caprices*, Aaron Copland's Piano Sonata, and Gershwin's *Blue Lullaby*. It was perhaps the most intriguing program of the Konzerthaus series, with a striking variety of formal structures and pianistic textures, and all the more daring for being Barnieck's first appearance in eight years on a European concert stage (which resulted in a certain amount of nervousness). The most interesting thing about the Weill part was that *Der Abschiedsbrief*, with its bittersweet harmonies, was by far the most successful of his works (and perhaps of the entire program), thus reinforcing the cliché of Weill as song composer.

Of course, a concert series as Berlin's main homage to the quintessential theater composer could be deemed an unfortunate idea. It makes more sense in light of the intention to present lesser-known facets of Weill, and though presenting his instrumental works had the advantage of comprehensiveness (all the chamber music as well as both symphonies and the violin concerto were performed), the vocal concerts presented a lot of rarely performed pieces, too—*Recordare*, songs from the films *You and Me* and *Where Do We Go from Here?*, a selection of Weill's love songs, *Berlin im Licht*, and *Öl-Musik*.

In any case, the festival could not do without a large-scale theater work. And, paradoxically again for a series attempting to broaden the Weill niche, a concert performance of the good old *Dreigroschenoper* with the Ensemble Modern under HK Gruber on 6 March was positioned as the central event, with co-editor Stephen Hinton presenting the new critical edition of the score to Barbara Brecht-Schall as the public launch of the Kurt Weill Edition. One could argue that because of the new edition, which

the Ensemble Modern used in the concert performance and in its recent recording, it was not quite the good old *Dreigroschenoper*, but a new and important step in Weill performance history. Still, one wonders if the endeavors to display a broader picture of Weill would not have profited from a more daring choice for the Edition's first volume.

If the critical edition announced Weill's arrival in the pantheon, the Ensemble Modern's recording counteracts his apotheosis by trying to convey some sense of the pop event the *Dreigroschenoper* quickly became in 1928 (and of its uneven and strictly anti-operatic sound), employing pop *diseuse* and seasoned *enfant terrible* Nina Hagen as Celia Peachum, and Max Raabe, whose own Palastorchester harks back to the 1920s, as Macheath (Raabe's inability to vary his voice is a problem, but maybe also a legitimate part of the pop concept). But the concert version was not as successful as the recording.

Nina Hagen had to be replaced by Petra Lamy, who did her job well and with verve but lacked the exotic appeal of her counterpart. The uneven amplification of the singers' voices overshadowed their performances, marring the overall impression, which was a pity considering the crisp, sharply-contoured playing of the Ensemble Modern.

Surprisingly, the second concert of the Ensemble Modern, featuring incidental music by Weill, was the greater success: *Berlin im Licht* and the *Öl-Musik*, songs from *Happy End* and the "Suite panaméenne" from *Marie galante*, inci-

dental music to August Strindberg's *Gustav III*, *Vom Tod im Wald*, two pieces for Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*, and *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. Because the concert had an "our Weill" feeling, and the pleasure of hearing 1920s Berlin Weill elicited enthusiastic reactions from the audience, here the aim of popularizing the lesser-known Weill worked.

Die Dreigroschenoper and the instrumental works had to be counterbalanced by some American Weill beyond the songs which appeared in two of the programs. The obvious candidate was *Street Scene*, which has come to be recognized as perhaps the best of Weill's American works and even as a *chef d'oeuvre* in its own right. In cooperation with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and the RIAS Big Band, the Konzerthaus ended its series on 12 March with the European premiere of "Street Scenes," a concert sequence from the opera prepared by Lys Symonette and Kim Kowalke (coupled with Stravinsky's *Ebony Concerto* and Copland's *El Salón Mexico*). Here, as in the *Dreigroschenoper*, the acoustics of the Großer Saal in the Konzerthaus muddled the text and the musical



The Ensemble Modern presented a concert version of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and another concert devoted to Weill's incidental and chamber music. Both were conducted by HK Gruber. Photo: Ludwig Schirmer.

textures (though a smaller orchestra might have helped, as well). The singers had mostly operatic backgrounds, which suits *Street Scene*'s genre description as "American Opera," yet it was Michel Warren Bell as Frank Maurrant who, with his background in musicals and singing Porgy, managed to project his character most expressively.

Two factors beyond the details of the performance were probably more important in shaping reception of the work:

i) *Street Scene* suffers severely from being presented in a reduced concert version, maybe more than other operas, because of its carefully balanced interplay between dialogue, stage action, and music. In the transformation of *Street Scene* into one hour of "Street Scenes," the dense tapestry of small incidents unravels, depriving the work of its unique identity and the music of the rationale for the diversity of styles and allusions Weill employs. This does not speak against a concert format, but it makes effective abridgment difficult. At least Berlin audiences knew the stage version from the 1995 production at the Theater des Westens, so the risk of presenting the work in truncated form for the centenary may have seemed acceptable.

ii) The second problem had nothing to do with the work or its presentation, but with the audience. The Konzerthaus series and other activities aimed at least partly at doing justice to Weill's other than "Brecht's composer," but that is an uphill struggle. With striking regularity, the press reactions to "Street Scenes" resorted to the

lieb, weill

native concepts. Andreas Göbel in the *Berliner Zeitung* from 14 March approves of Weill's "broad range of stylistic means," but deplores too many "reminiscences of over-emotional film music"—apparently the formula for "kitsch in the grand style" that does justice neither to film music (which since the forties has developed to include more or less any music and is not a useful stylistic category) nor to *Street Scene*, which has nothing to do with film. But the idea recurs: in his review of the Weill birthday concert of the RIAS Big Band and the strings of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin on 2 March, Björn Döring in the *Berliner Zeitung* from 4–5 March writes of the adaptation of "My Ship" from *Lady in the Dark* that as soon as the orchestra takes over from the opening solo guitar, "the song dissolves from an artistic challenge into a stilted ballad, from Ku'damm to Broadway and even to Hollywood" (whereas the *Dreigroschenoper* had achieved a marriage of "street song and compositional subversion"). Music the Berlin audiences would probably like just fine if it came from Jerome Kern or Richard Rodgers gets a dubious reception because it is heard against the foil of Weill's work in the 20s, so that even *Lady in the Dark* is judged in terms of Ku'damm rather than Broadway.

Two supplements to the musical performances in Berlin were well aware that the twenties Weill is obstinately lodged in peoples' minds: *sehen, weill* (seeing, weill), the exhibition *Musical Stages: Kurt Weill und sein Jahrhundert* at the Akademie der Künste (27 February to 16 April); and *reden, weill* (talking, weill), the symposium *Amerikanismus/Americanism. Die Suche nach kultureller Identität in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* at the Konzerthaus and the Akademie der Künste (8–11 March).

Both tried to take the bull by the horns and address the "American problem." The exhibition, organized by the Kurt Weill Foundation and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, did this implicitly by declining to rank Weill's works as more and less important and scrupulously allocating about the same amount of exhibition space to each stage of his career, thereby not only saving "Broadway" from a preponderance of "Ku'damm," but also a collaborator such as Georg Kaiser from the long shadow of Bertolt Brecht. A grander exhibition, with more multi-media presentation of his work and more historical context, would not have gone amiss, but this would have been a different project and would have required different (not least financial) means. As it was, the organizers compiled an arresting array of information and documents; much to read that demanded close scrutiny, but also much to learn and wonder at.

The symposium, organized by the department of musicology at Humboldt University, approached Weill and America explicitly, but also by a circuitous route: trying to look at the cultural construction of "America" in early twentieth-century Europe and America, thereby treating Weill as merely one—albeit paradigmatic—example in a range of topics: technological exchanges between Germany and the United States, the idea of the popular in William Carlos



5,000 people attended the exhibition *Musical Stages: Kurt Weill und sein Jahrhundert* at the Akademie der Künste, a collaborative project of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

old idea of a "rift between the 'German' and the 'American' Weill, between the brash *Dreigroschen* song style and a rather naive musical touch" (Isabel Herzfeld in the *Tagesspiegel*, 15 March). This would not be so bad—at least it could be discussed—but for the automatic assumption that a "naive musical touch" is unworthy of "our Weill." There even seems to be a graded set of implicitly pejorative

Williams and Langston Hughes, America as topos in critiques of modernism, America in Weimar cinema, etc. [See Andreas Eichhorn's report on p. 11.]

But back to Weill performances. Berlin's theaters were sadly reluctant to grasp the centenary as a chance for new Weill productions. So the most eagerly awaited event in this respect was the production of *Der Kuhhandel*, Weill's ill-fated political operetta from 1934, in Dessau. Dessau had started its extensive Kurt Weill Fest in February; the first performance of *Der Kuhhandel* was programmed as the high point on Weill's birthday. It was a risky choice, as Johannes Felsenstein's production did not present the work as conceived by Weill and librettist Robert Vambéry, but Felsenstein's own adaptation of Vambéry's revised version made in 1970. The Dessau version also incorporated parts of the 1935 London adaptation of the work, *A Kingdom for a Cow*. Since *Der Kuhhandel* was never properly finished, some license in staging may seem acceptable, but Felsenstein overdid it. He transported the action from Vambéry's fictitious island republics of Santa Maria and Ucqua to East and West Germany in an unspecified near-past, clearly identifiable by the faces of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin emerging from the smokestacks of factories in the East and the brand logos of big companies in the West, with Juan Santos transforming into Hannes Biermann, President Mendez into Präsident Dr. Mende, Juanita Sanchez into Daniela Zanger (the name of the actress playing the part), etc. That General Garcias Conchaz changes into Generalfeldmarschall Görling shows another layer of political allusion present in Felsenstein's version, Germany's Nazi past. This would have been enough to mislead the audience about the nature of the work, but Felsenstein aggravated the problem by carelessly mixing the levels of political satire. When he accompanies the lullaby for the nation, *Schlafe Vaterland, teures*, by film projections of Germans applauding Hitler and of war scenes, it is oppressively obvious but achieves a haunting effect; when the president's son Bimbi is transformed into little Adolf, complete with moustache, making a pest of himself all the time, it is just farcical (as is a lot of the production). Either approach by itself might have worked; taken together, they jarred against each other. Press reviews were crushing, accusing the production of complete capriciousness and utter failure to update the work politically. This is true enough, but beneath a lot of justified criticism ran a more problematic undercurrent. Again, Brecht-Weill seems to have been the foil against which *Der Kuhhandel* was seen, implying a sharpness of political comment neither the work nor Felsenstein's production (who claims to have aimed at inconsistency and farce) can or want to provide. A work like Gershwin's *Strike Up the Band!* with its lighter type of political satire may have provided a more fitting comparison. These problems aside, the production had its fair share of entertainment value and a few arresting moments (the work song of Juan [Hannes] and the packers; the blithely ridiculous military parade near the end), and the Dessau ensemble and orchestra did their best, though only Carlo Hartmann's brutally swaggering Görling really distinguished himself.

The Dessau *Kuhhandel* may not have helped to establish the work in the repertoire, but at least it took a risk. The capital's theaters were frustratingly cautious; in fact, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (directed by Günter Krämer) at the Deutsche Oper was the only Berlin staging of a major Weill work during the season, a production that had premiered over a year ago, in February 1999.

It had aroused some interest originally because Jenny Hill had been played by the well-known actress Corinna Harfouch, aiming at an effect similar to the *Dreigroschenoper* with Nina Hagen and Max Raabe. Corinna Harfouch had been replaced by the opera singer Maria Husmann, who, unlike Harfouch, was capable of doing justice to the musical requirements of her part, but who did not achieve the same stage presence. Krämer, too, employed the two Germanies of pre-1990 as backdrop, with the chorus girls in eastern-style smocks eagerly grabbing high-heeled shoes while a German flag hovered oppressively above the stage. But he did it much less recklessly and kept everything in good taste, which made the whole affair not exactly boring, but not particularly exciting either.

Another concert performance proved more interesting, certainly in musical terms: *Der Protagonist*, Weill's one-act opera from 1926 in the Philharmonie with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under John Mauceri on 15 April. Protagonist



Daniela Zanger and Generalfeldmarschall Görling (Carlo Hartmann) in the Dessau production of *Der Kuhhandel* directed by Johannes Felsenstein. Photo: Claudia Heysel.

Endrik Wottrich had fallen ill and had to be replaced by Robert Wörle (Fatty in the Deutsche Oper *Mahagonny*), who sang marvelously, with rhythmic precision and clear enunciation. None of the other singers could quite match him, but overall standards were high. Mauceri and the orchestra were in good form, bringing out all effects with gusto but keeping the music taut. The highly expressive



vocal parts of the opera seem more dated than the wonderfully compact and colorful orchestral part which makes the success of the work in 1926 easily understandable.

All in all, Weill will not be quite the same after this spring; the narrow niche has been broadened a bit, especially for his early works, and one may even hope that some works will pop up more frequently in concert programs in the years to come. But old habits die hard, and large parts of Weill's American works are not—and will not be for some time—a natural part of Berlin's image of Weill. Perhaps some seeds have been sown; but it remains to be seen if they will grow in the years ahead, or if the Weill situation will revert to its small paradise garden of a few canonical works surrounded by others listened to (if at all) merely for their curio value. Weill is not the same problem he was before the centenary, but he is still an unanswered question.

What Makes Weill Weill?

There is, of course, no simple answer. So let us try to find a complex one. And in staunchly postmodern fashion we may begin not by looking for the most ingenious, thoroughly thought-through or up-to-date answer, but by deconstructing the question.

As short as it is, it does not offer much to latch onto. But its very simplicity makes it the more suspect to the wary deconstructor—because it projects the sort of naturalness that one is trained to disregard. And if the question itself does not provide enough to respond to, we can always look at some of the stock answers it elicits.

The first thing to catch the eye is the essentialist assumption the question seems to make—the implication that there actually might be a very special something that makes Weill Weill. What could that be? Or rather: What could it be thought to consist of?

- It could be looked for *in* the music (or at least in some of it—that which would represent Weill at his most Weillian): a set of characteristic elements of musical language or structures; or, to those less analytically inclined, some *ineffable* of musical identity more present in some works than in others.

But though we may be able to find some aspects (especially harmonic) of a “Weill sound” reaching from the 1910s to the 1940s, compositional technique on this level does not seem to be what Weill is about—which (risking gross oversimplification) may be not so much the technical niceties of composing art music but rather the relationship of the twentieth-century composer to the history of his art, to the ways he can build on it or use it or deconstruct it; or

the role of music in theater; or the possibilities of musical theater as a voice in social discourse; or the place of the composer in society. To find Weill in his compositional techniques would be a challenge to the analyst (who is used to dealing with musical languages quite different from Weill's in twentieth-century music, though now that Gershwin has established a firm place in the canon of serious musical analysis, Weill should merit a place high on the waiting list). But it would seem to avoid the question—a side road worth exploring, but not a satisfactory answer to the riddle.

- A variant of this most essentialist perspective on the question would be the stock answer par excellence: Brecht/Weill™, the golden boys of the Golden Twenties, the Dioscuri of twentieth-century musical theater and authors of its greatest success. This image of Weill still looms surprisingly large, the marriage of “street song and compositional subversion” (see above) lodged all the more securely in peoples' minds because it stands not only for itself but for the “sound of an era” (or at least of the clichéd idea of one). Here as perhaps nowhere else in music the brand-name aspect of art (without which public discourse about art would be as unwieldy as the art market) comes into its own. It is precisely what large parts of the Weill centenary activities worked against, but perhaps we should tread cautiously here. The music markets can cope only with so much Weill (or any other composer), and perhaps some amount of “brand-identity” may be necessary to secure him a place at all. Very few artists get away with too much diversity. Stravinsky comes to mind as a (partial) exception; in fine arts the prime example may be Gerhard Richter—but for both Richter and Stravinsky stylistic switches have become a sort of second-level trademark. So it may not be surprising that it takes a lot of patient work to establish more than the usual narrow Weill concept in the cultural consciousness.

- Apart from musicological or marketing concepts, Weill's Weillness could be thought of as something residing not so much in the music itself, but in the relationship of the works to the wider world. This could be constructed as a thread connecting the points of Weill's career, spanning the superficial fault lines in an oeuvre comprising *Happy End* and the *Recordare*, symphonies and songs for Lys Gauty, settings of Rilke and radio cantatas, *Der Protagonist* and Broadway musicals. The most promising contender may be the idea of “Öffentlichkeit als Stil,” the orientation towards public relevance and response Kim H. Kowalke has suggested as a general Weillian principle—not covering all of his oeuvre, but bridging particularly the biographical break of the double emigration to Paris and then to New York. [See Kowalke, “Kurt Weill, Modernism, and Popular Culture: ‘Öffentlichkeit als Stil,’” in: *Modernism/Modernity* 2 (1995), pp. 27-69.]

But from such mere connectedness it is a dangerously small step to an implicit inner logic, and nearby lies the complementary step from ascribing a *psychological* telos to Weill's creative impetus (a telos one can observe Weill himself constructing step by step from the mid-twenties onwards to justify his compositions) to ascribing a *historical* telos to the development of his work against the foil of twentieth-century (art) music and the historiographical accounts of it which have prevailed until recently. Such a historical teleology would all too easily elevate Weill into the real anti-Schoenberg (instead of Stravinsky, who used to fill this role)—a leading warrior in a retrospectively imagined battle of exoticism against esotericism—an interpretation buttressed by the mutual lack of understanding with which Schoenberg and Weill came to view each other's work.

One cannot actually charge Kim Kowalke with playing Weill off against Schoenberg (no more, at least, than Weill himself used Schoenberg as a negative foil for his own aesthetic); the simplistic idea of a modernist European Weill versus a commercialized Broadway Weill was (is?) too tenacious not to deserve some serious opposition. (In fact the strongest objection to attempts to point out the unifying threads in Weill's work, published in these pages by Richard Taruskin [vol. 4, no. 2 (Autumn 1986), pp. 12-15], aimed in the opposite direction—against trying to use the afterglow of auratic 1920s modernism to ennoble the Broadway Weill. But one need not charge Kowalke to realize the problematic potential of overstating the unity of Weill's work, making it into an embodiment of an alternative, more humane and democratic history of the relevant music of the century. Such a concept would be no less mythical than the obsolete accounts of twentieth-century music history as a tale of progress. And it would be the more dangerous now that popular music has, quite rightfully, begun to claim its place as an academic subject—an assimilative process that would be subverted if it gained revisionist undertones, and a process which would do a disservice to Weill if it saw him as the leader of such revisionism.

- Conversely, one could claim non-unity as the characteristic aspect of Weill's oeuvre, invoking the broad range of his works. This approach is remarkable because it does not so much concern musical language or genre but rather the basic relationship between composer, work, and public.

The early works can be seen as attempts to adapt tradition and its contemporary developments in the light of Busoni's "Junge Klassizität." The Brecht works shift the ethos of art production away from grappling with the seeming autonomy of music history and into the realm of political comment and commitment. For this they utilize musical means that largely break with tradition or its modern(ist) consequences—musical means that the apologists of musical high modernism could only appreciate as ironic unmasking of the innate wretchedness of the cultural spheres they stem from. The work Weill does on Broadway goes a step further, a step towards a music for the masses which—though still addressing social and political issues—largely refrains from the didactic aspects of a Brechtian model of theater (which Weill was never more than partially in accord with), aspects which still held high the artist's claim to lead the way. Weill's struggle to discard the hypertrophic idea of the artist as a sage and seer he had been confronted with in his education as a "classical" composer is helped along, as well as paid for, by working under the laws of the Broadway stage (though Weill's special contribution to American theater may lie in his attempt not to pay too much and at least partially defend his independence with regard to subjects, collaborators, and working conditions, enriching the Broadway musical by his European experiences as well as profiting from it).

But replacing a teleology of progress by an apology of the popular is dangerous too, and no less ideological. And a definition of Weill's Weillness that took the idea of non-unity, of diversity, too seriously would risk losing all substance. That Weill may in fact be many Weills is a comforting way out of the conundrums into which the question of his identity leads; but again it avoids the question rather than giving a convincing answer. Even this vagueness might incur the risk of making him into an embodiment of something, this

time the anti-Haydn. Instead of patiently building his artistic legacy, putting stone on stone in perfect self-sufficiency, Weill would appear as the quintessence of a "worldly" composer, reacting mercifully to the upheavals of his times and circumstances—another cliché waiting in the wings (if not already on stage).

- Beyond the essentialist implication of the question, two more stock answers seem to lie in wait:

- i) One could state that a generalized answer is impossible, that everyone has her or his own Weill in mind and ear. Trivial, but true enough, and, because of the diverse music Weill wrote, more plausible for him than for other composers—anti-Haydn again. But this would not just be another trick answer; it would also ignore that the Weills we have in mind are probably not as individualized as we may

hope, but cluster around the same clichés again and again (enough of which have been mentioned above).

- ii) Of course, the postmodernist reflex reaction to the question would be to turn it around: Not to ask, "What makes Weill

Weill?" but rather, "What has Weill been made into?" (or "What is he made into by the possible answers to this question?" which has been the strategy of my text so far). This leads in two directions: The first is the frustrating history of Weill reception, with all the usual suspects: Adorno, Bloch, Virgil Thomson, Harold Clurman, Horst Koepler, et al. This perspective is of inestimable value if we want to understand Weill's position in contemporary musical life and consciousness, but it is a well-plowed field by now. By its very nature, it cannot help us answer the question of Weill's artistic identity.

The second perspective points to the history of "practical" Weill reception, his place in popular music. There his music has found a refuge from the beginning, from Berlin dance bands to crooners such as Frank Sinatra and Mel Tormé, jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Bill Evans, and Willem Breuker, and pop musicians such as P.J. Harvey, Todd Rundgren and Lou Reed (who once said he would like to be the Kurt Weill of rock 'n' roll). This, too, is a highly selective Weill, restricted to a small number of standard songs. Still, listening to musicians such as Van Dyke Parks, Henry Threadgill, John Zorn, Carla Bley, and Tom Waits transform Weill into a creative adventure on Hal Willner's 1985 Weill homage *Lost in the Stars*, one knows that at least this partial Weill is in good hands, protected from ossifying into a monument of himself.

Nothing quite works; Weill seems to refuse to be made into Weill. This may seem frustrating; but it may be liberating, too. Why, one might ask, do we have to know what makes Weill Weill? Why do we want to risk replacing bad old clichés with slightly better new ones, or make him into a cog on a wheel in the big machines of musical and cultural historiography? Why not relax a bit and listen to the music for a while, which is fine enough to spend some time with. This too is escapism. But it is also a lot of fun, and that may be the best we can hope for from music, anyway.

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treffen, weill

Amerikanismus/Americanism Symposium in Berlin: A Report

by Andreas Eichhorn

"Amerikanismus/Americanism: The Search for Cultural Identity during the First Half of the Twentieth Century" was the title of a large-scale symposium organized by Humboldt University's musicology department in conjunction with the Berliner Konzerthaus. The symposium took place 8–11 March at the Konzerthaus and was funded in part by grants from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music. It was part of a galaxy of Kurt Weill Centenary events in Berlin, including the exhibition "Musical Stages: Kurt Weill and His Century" at the Akademie der Künste and a concert series held at the Konzerthaus that focused on Weill's concert works.

The organizers of the symposium, Hermann Danuser (Berlin) and Kim H. Kowalke (Rochester), decided to contextualize Weill's life and work in an interdisciplinary fashion under the double perspective of both *Amerikanismus* and Americanism. In his brilliant and multi-faceted opening paper, "In the Jungle of American Cities: Between Capitalist Crime Capitals and Modern-Day Routine," the architecture historian Kurt W. Forster (Montreal) pursued the question of how European architects responded to the impact of the Chicago and New York World's Fairs, finding a new architectural language and thereby contributing to the Americanization of America and the world. Continuing this theme, John Czaplicka (Berlin/Cambridge, Mass.) used a case study of Erich Mendelsohn's book *Amerika* to illustrate America's ambivalent reception of German artists wavering between fascination and rejection.

The symposium's first thematic session was dedicated to *Amerikanismus* in Germany. Friedrich Kittler (Berlin) elucidated the topic by discussing technology reception ("German-American Technology Transfer"), concentrating on the effect of the American system of manufacturing, while historian Alexander Schmidt-Gernig (Berlin) traced fractures and continuities within several areas of discourse about America by the German bourgeoisie before and after World War I. Mass communications expert Richard Herzinger expanded Schmidt-Gernig's perspective to the present day in his fact-laden paper, "(Anti-) Americanism as a Hermeneutic Model of Left- and Right-Wing Criticism of Modernity," while Friedmar Apel (Paderborn/Bielefeld) inquired into the influence of Theodor W. Adorno's exile experiences on his social theory.

Two papers were dedicated to Americanism in or from the United States. Jack Sullivan (New York) explored the often underestimated impact of American literature, myths, and music on European composers ("Kurt Weill's New World Symphonies"). Michael Hoenisch (Berlin; "E Pluribus Unum? Ethnicities and Migrant Cultures in the USA") illuminated the various models and forms which determined the (not always successful) processes of integration and Americanization of the various ethnic cultures in the United States. The third session focused on the popularization of the arts—an idea closely linked to Americanism and of central significance to Kurt Weill—which chair Steven Hinton summarized as art "for, of, and by the people." Heinz Ickstadt (Berlin) demonstrated in his paper ("Innovation and Democratic Aesthetics in Modern American Literature") that popular art in the United States is closely linked with the aura of democracy and the notion of "patronage by the people." Using the poets William Carlos Williams and Langston Hughes as examples, Ickstadt was able to show the ways in which established linguistic conventions were disrupted and new forms of literary communication developed in the service of a demo-

cratic aesthetic. Gisela Schubert's contribution (Frankfurt; "The Art of the Popular: Transformations of the Musical") showed the extent to which George Gershwin (who was always fascinated by the idea of the "melting pot") was, as early as 1920, one of the first to succeed in defining himself as American and creating an authentic American musical language in his musicals. By the end of the 1920s, he had united these goals with an artistically ambitious formal design.

The Weimar Republic's Americanism manifested itself most prominently in the *Zeitoper*, a genre that aimed to overcome the gap between elite high culture and popular entertainment. In this connection, the medium of film, labeled by no less than Erwin Panowsky as the first great democratic art, served as a special role model. Bryan Gilliam (Chapel Hill; "From Hollywood to Berlin: The Impact of American Film on Weimar-Era Music Theater") pursued the question of how film influenced *Zeitoper* thematically and also in terms of dramatic time structure. Michael von der Linn's paper (Cranford, N.J.) also searched for influences ("The Tin Pan Alley Song and the Weimar *Zeitoper*"). Von der Linn attempted to prove that European composers borrowed certain specific musical and formal features of American song style in order to lend selected parts of their scores an American flair and authenticity. The final paper on *Zeitoper* dealt with the reception of Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*. By tracing the genesis of this work, Andreas Eichhorn (Frankfurt; "America as a dream for future society, however, remains suspect...": The Reception of Krenek's Opera *Jonny spielt auf*) demonstrated that the opera's Americanisms are largely European projections of an ideal picture of America rather than an authentic picture of the United States. This explains the opera's huge German success as well as the bewilderment with which it was received in New York.

Six papers were dedicated to the life and work of Kurt Weill. Giselher Schubert (Frankfurt; "Der Lindberghflug") provided vivid insight into the unique character of *Der Lindberghflug*, a work whose history is complicated because the artistic goals of the authors (Weill, Brecht, Hindemith) soon diverged and thus hindered the collaborative process. A comparison of the stylistically diverse settings of scene no. 5, "Fog," by Weill and Hindemith respectively, revealed their different understandings. Nils Grosch (Freiburg) traced the sociological function of the Americanisms in Kurt Weill's ballet *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Due to an illness, J. Bradford Robinson (Hoya) regrettably was forced to cancel his paper, in which he had intended to show the significance of the often underestimated source value of the "Regiebuch *Mahagonny*."

The concluding contributions by Kim H. Kowalke (Rochester; "Kurt Weill, Americanism, and the Quest for American Opera"), Tamara Levitz (Montreal/Stamford; "Kurt Weill's Identity as German-Jewish Composer before 1933") and Stephen Hinton (Stanford; "Life, Work and Posterity: On the problematical nature of the construct of an 'American Weill'") gave a strong signal that Weill's image is still changing. Kim Kowalke demonstrated Weill's key position in the development of a specifically American opera. Levitz suggested that scholars rethink the question of Weill's biographical identity in light of a multiple identity. Hinton, in turn, addressed the problem of Weill's musical identity. Formulating a proposal to overcome the "two Weill" notion coined by Theodor W. Adorno and David Drew and its inherent degradation of the "Broadway composer," Hinton pleaded for the abandonment of the category of an individual or personal style and its replacement with the functional, depersonalized, and historically older category (*stylus theatralis*) of a genre style. In the song style and its varying dramaturgical functions, Hinton recognized the possibility of circumscribing Weill's compositional identity.

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LONDON

Vorsicht, bissiger Hund!

By Geoffrey Chew

The BBC Weekend-Guildhall School centenary festival held in London earlier this year was by any reckoning a great success ("Berlin to Broadway, The Music of Kurt Weill": Guildhall School of Music, 11-14 January 2000; Barbican Centre, 14-16 January 2000). This fact is not free of irony. For the last time the composer's operetta *Der Kuhhandel* was heard in London, in 1935, one of the critics sympathized rhetorically with the Nazi regime from whom Weill had narrowly escaped; even in the 1950s, after his death, a recently unearthed BBC report rejected the solo cantata *Der neue Orpheus* for broadcast, describing it as "part of just that diseased mentality which helped to bring about Hitler and the war." The habit of blaming victims for the crimes perpetrated against them was not, of course, confined to Britain. Here is another typical example: in October 1930, just at the time when performances of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* were being disrupted in Germany by Nazi troublemakers, a Czech critic published an article entitled "Beware of the Dog! The Case (or the Fall?) of Kurt Weill." ("Case," *případ*, and "fall," *pád*, are related words in Czech, though not identical as they would be in German.) The article also draws on the metaphor of disease: "The case of Weill is particularly important. I suggest the establishing of frontier quarantine, in the interests of protecting newly-formed artistic organisms, so that his influence should be restricted to the world of our neighbors when our own world is already so desperately infected. . . . The present-day artist must be full-blooded." The implication is clear: Weill is a dangerous modernist above all.

Even today there is still no general agreement that Weill is a major composer—some dissenting voices made themselves heard in the columns of the daily London papers during the festival—but the risks attached to his modernity attracted no attention in January 2000. I don't think anybody was secretly hoping for the riot police or the public health authorities to be summoned. So does this mean that we are at last in possession of an objective assessment of the composer and his modernism? Or at least that we are now in a better position than ever before to reach such an assessment? And how does a major event like the London festival, with performances of a substantial number of lesser-known works, contribute to an improved understanding of the composer? I think that the festivities did make a very positive contribution. But in some ways a just appraisal of the composer still remains quite elusive, precisely because we no longer think that the dog has rabies, and we think his teeth have been drawn. This is a consequence, perhaps, of the fact that all of Weill's particular brands of modernism are now obsolete; so in consequence

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Berlin to Broadway:
The Music of
Kurt Weill
14 - 16 January 2000

Barbican Centre

90-93 FM **BBC** RADIO 3

a strenuous effort of historical imagination is now required in order to understand them.

The work of performance, criticism, and scholarship that has gone into the Weill enterprise in the decades since his death is almost second to none: scholars and performers of the highest caliber have been involved, and the work has been funded at enviable levels (the existence of this journal is evidence of that, and how many other composers are able to boast such well-endowed activities?). So the availability of information about the composer is incomparably greater and more refined than it was even twenty years ago, let alone during his lifetime. And a collected critical edition of the works is at last under way. These are the indispensable conditions for a festival such as the London one, and for the reassessment of the composer's reputation.

There were, admittedly, inevitable problems in the selection of the works that were performed at the festival: inevitable, because the Barbican Centre is a concert hall and not a theater. So, the chamber and orchestral works were favored—even though Weill is a theater composer *par excellence* and there remain major, underexposed works for which no space was or could be found. This meant that any reassessment of the composer was, first, “against the grain”—though none the worse for that—and, secondly, provisional. The theater works that were performed had to be creatively rethought in order that their drama might be projected; so *Der Kuhhandel* was presented with a narrator declaiming newly-composed verse glosses (which incidentally also provided a tongue-in-cheek ironic distancing which was probably very advisable with that particular piece).

Nevertheless, in spite of the gaps and the problems, the festival cast fascinating light on Weill's status as a modernist, not by recreating the conditions in which his work seemed scandalous, but by forcing one to confront works in a variety of different styles, written from a variety of aesthetic points of view. Of course, it is impossible to think in terms of a single “modernist style”; since Frank Kermode's famous essay “The Modern” (1965–6, also reprinted in *Modern Essays*, 1971), we have needed to distinguish at least between an earlier and a later 20th-century modernism, between what Kermode terms “paleo-modernism,” essentially the modernism of Wilde and the Decadents, and “neo-modernism,” essentially the modernism of Duchamp and Cage. To frame the opposition in this way is immediately to see that Weill fits into neither camp very easily. Or, rather, to see that isolated works fit into one or other camp more easily than others; in this sense Weill is “protean,” projecting multiple artistic personae (itself a modernist if not post-modernist characteristic). However, further refinement is possible: Kermode observes that the neo-modernists, “by constantly alluding to [the art of the period between the Renaissance and Modernism] as a norm they despise, . . . are stealthy classicists, as the paleo-modernists, who constantly alluded to Byzantine and archaic art, were stealthy romantics.” There is nothing very stealthy about Weill's adherence to classicism, or about his abhorrence of “Romanticism” as understood in the 1920s and 30s; he expressed a thoroughly modernist desire to construct a new classicism in the spirit of Busoni. But there is nothing doctrinaire about the way(s) in which this is done, and it is wonderful to see the multifarious ways in which he reinvented the classical ideal from work to work.

London Highlights

South Bank Centre Kurt Weill: From Time to Time

3 October 1999

Cabaret Evening: Weill American Songs;
Kim Criswell and Wayne Marshall

4 October 1999

Happy End, Der Jasager; London Sinfonietta;
Martyn Brabbins, conductor; Stephen
Langridge, director

10 October 1999

Die Dreigroschenoper, Ensemble Modern; HK
Gruber, conductor

14 October 1999

Mahagonny Songspiel, Selections from *Marie
galante, Cry, the Beloved Country*; Matrix
Ensemble; BBC Singers, London Adventists
Chorale; Robert Ziegler, conductor

2 March 2000

Violin concerto, *Vom Tod im Wald, Oil-music,
Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*; London
Sinfonietta; HK Gruber, conductor

2 March 2000

Symposium with Barrie Gavin, David Drew,
and HK Gruber

29 March 2000

Broadway songs; Mary Carewe, soprano;
London Philharmonic Orchestra; Kurt
Masur, conductor

Lobby exhibition, film screenings, related lobby
events

Barbican Centre BBC Weekend

14 January 2000

Der Protagonist, Royal Palace; Soloists; BBC
Singers; BBC Symphony Orchestra; Sir
Andrew Davis, conductor

15 January 2000

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik, Der neue Orpheus,
Vom Tod im Wald*, Symphony No. 2; Soloists;
BBC Symphony Orchestra; Sir Andrew
Davis, conductor

15 January 2000

Frauentanz, Recordare, Cello Sonata, *Bastille
Music*; Nancy Argenta, soprano; Nash
Ensemble; BBC Singers; New London
Children's Choir; Stephen Cleobury, con-
ductor

15 January 2000

Der Kuhhandel; Soloists; Maida Vale Singers;
BBC Concert Orchestra; Robert Ziegler,
conductor

15 January 2000

Ute Lemper, singer; Matrix Ensemble;
Robert Ziegler, conductor

16 January 2000

Two Movements for String Quartet, String
Quartet No. 1, String Quartet in b minor;
Chilingirian Quartet

16 January 2000

*Das Berliner Requiem, Der Lindberghflug,
"Trains Bound for Glory"*; Soloists; BBC
Symphony Chorus; BBC Concert Orchestra;
Stephen Jackson, conductor

16 January 2000

The Firebrand of Florence; Soloists; BBC
Singers, BBC Symphony Orchestra; Sir
Andrew Davis, conductor

Film screenings: *Kurt Weill: Ballad of an
Unknown Composer* (1978); *I'm a Stranger Here
Myself*, 1992; *You and Me* (1938); *Die
Dreigroschenoper* (1931); *September Songs* (1994)

Pre-concert talks by Joel Galand, Stephen
Hinton, Kim H. Kowalke, Rodney Milnes,
Jeremy Sams, Lys Symonette

Lobby performances by The Weimar Players
and students from the Guildhall School of
Music & Drama

Guildhall School of Music & Drama

12 January 2000

String Quartet, Op. 8

13 January 2000

*Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen, Legende vom
toten Soldaten, Four Walt Whitman Songs*

13–14 January 2000

Mahagonny Songspiel, Die sieben Todsünden
(semi-staged concert performance)

14 January 2000

Öl-Musik, "Le Grand Lustucru," "Surabaya
Johnny," "Ballade von der sexuellen
Hörigkeit," "Bilbao-Song," "Alabama Song,"
"Blues-Potpourri (Tanzpotpourri I),"
"Foxtrot-Potpourri (Tanzpotpourri II)"

Lectures and round tables by Darla Crispin,
Stephen Hinton, Kim H. Kowalke, and Erik
Levi.

Other London events

4 July 1999

Barbican Hall
Die sieben Todsünden, Broadway songs; Susan
Graham, mezzo-soprano; London
Symphony Orchestra; John Eliot Gardiner,
conductor

6 February 2000

Barbican Hall
Die sieben Todsünden, Songs; Anne-Sofie von
Otter, mezzo-soprano; Deutsche
Kammerphilharmonie; Joseph Swenson,
conductor

The BBC Weekend was preceded by several days of events at the Guildhall School of Music, starting on Tuesday 11 January with a vocal master class by Lys Symonette. On the following day, a workshop and two concerts were devoted to the string quartet in the hands of Weill and his contemporaries. This was an astute choice of topic. Besides giving several student ensembles the chance of encountering unfamiliar music, it helped to ground a view of Weill's modernism (or at least some aspects of it) in its context. Weill's String Quartet No. 1 (1923) and two movements from 1922-3 that were dropped before it reached its final form were juxtaposed with quartets by other contemporaries (besides Schoenberg and Hindemith, these were Goldschmidt, Korngold and Alois Hába). This made a nice illustration of the responses to a key genre of various Busoni pupils, all of whom were committed in their differing ways to a renewal of classicism. The history of the string quartet in the twentieth century remains to be written—and of course it would also include works greater than some of these, like Bartók's, and works more at odds with the classical aesthetic than any of these, like Janáček's. But this is a genre of central interest, owing to the long shadow cast over it by the legacy of Beethoven, investing it with a high seriousness of intent often expressed in terms of some highly serious traditional ideals and procedures—mystical transcendence and *motivische Arbeit*, to name only two. And so the day made an outstanding introduction to the recital of Weill's string quartets by the Chilingirian Quartet later in the week (see below).

Various student concerts from Thursday onwards presented some vocal pieces (solo and choral); period-piece arrangements of well-known Weill songs for theater, jazz, and salon ensembles (including some by Luciano Berio); and semi-staged versions of stage works. Student singers gave creditable performances of several lesser-known works, including some early songs (*Abendlied*, 1917; *Die stille Stadt*, 1919, both British premieres), and the four Walt Whitman settings of almost three decades later. In the context of this festival, the latter, the subject also of a lecture by Kim Kowalke, provided striking evidence not only of the composer's love affair with America, but also of another kind of modernism. Weill was not the only modernist—Schreker was another—to seize on Whitman's curious, archaic poems, almost a century old when Weill set them, wordy, uneconomical, and seemingly unsuited to musical setting (and, in Schreker's case, worse in German), full of nameless longings and always seeming to verge on the embarrassingly unironic. In short, they seem to embody the opposite of a modernist ideal. But in every twentieth-century setting of Whitman that I know, European or American, there are curious tensions set up, which perhaps constitute their own irony; and Weill's settings are of more interest than most. The semi-staged student performances of the *Mahagonny Songspiel* and *Die sieben Todsünden*, also coupled with a lecture (by Stephen Hinton on the Brecht-Weill collaboration), would have been better totally unstaged; the ballet choreography was particularly unsympathetic.

The annual BBC Weekend, this year devoted to Weill (last year's featured Messiaen) was divided between the Barbican Hall and St. Giles Church, which is now part of the Barbican complex. It began with a wonderful double bill of works from the mid-1920s, *Der Protagonist* and *Royal Palace* (the latter a British premiere in the reconstruction, perhaps a bit too opulent, by Gunther Schuller). The commitment and engagement of Sir Andrew Davis's conduct-

ing of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, here and throughout the rest of the weekend, made of the surreal *Royal Palace* in particular a principal highlight of the festival, with its dramatic sweep through to the magnificent final ensemble, a tango where Dejanira ("man-hater") walks out into the depths of the lake. This is, perhaps, one of the unfamiliar Weill works least in need of reinterpretation and most in need of a good new staged production.

Saturday provided four concerts, enough to tax the most dedicated listener. The first was another well-chosen program with Sir Andrew, including the second Iwan Goll setting (besides *Royal Palace*), the cantata *Der neue Orpheus*, together with the *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, the Second Symphony and (in an impressively dark performance by Alistair Miles) the Brecht ballad *Vom Tod im Wald* of 1927. These four works in themselves cover a wide range of modernisms, and correspond to several alternative Weill authorial personae. A similarly wide range was covered in the afternoon concert at St. Giles. Nancy Argenta sang the medieval settings of the *Frauentanz* of 1923 (together with the Nash Ensemble) with delicacy; the BBC Singers and the New London Children's Choir under Stephen Cleobury gave a memorable performance of the extraordinary a cappella *Recordare*; and we had a rare example, in the lyrical performance by Paul Watkins and Ian Brown of the early Cello Sonata, of Weill's "paleo-modernism" in a Debussy vein. The early evening concert comprised Jeremy Sams's new and witty translation of the original German version of *Der Kuhhandel* (not the adaptation for the English stage as *A Kingdom for a Cow* in the 1930s), with a generally strong cast of vocal soloists, the Maida Vale Singers, and the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Robert Ziegler. This was given the new title "Arms and the Cow"; it is essentially an old-fashioned operetta but with a political spin, and is much less obviously "modernist" than the surreal pieces of the 1920s, the pieces from the Brecht collaboration earlier in the 1930s, or indeed the works of the American period. It promised to be a highlight of the festival, yet in the event seemed disappointingly flat. Clearly, too, the jokes are no longer capable of standing on their own for modern taste without additional tongue-in-cheek comment from the narrator. Still, the performance was a good one, and there was poetic justice in hearing it performed in an important London venue after all these years. The final, late-night concert was a selection by Ute Lemper of well-known Weill songs, for a capacity audience.



Sir Andrew Davis, chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Photo: Mary Dunkin.

Three further concerts on Sunday completed the week's events. The first comprised the string quartets and the two separate quartet movements in an early-afternoon performance by the Chilingirian Quartet. Next came a late-afternoon concert with the BBC Symphony Chorus and BBC Concert Orchestra (conducted by Stephen Jackson) of *Das Berliner Requiem*, *Der Lindberghflug*, and "Trains Bound for Glory" (an adaptation by David Drew of numbers written by Weill for *Railroads on Parade*, a pageant produced at the 1939 New York World's Fair). And finally Sir Andrew Davis again confirmed his reputation as a major interpreter of Weill in the performance of *The Firebrand of Florence*, with a lively cast (including Rodney Gilfry as an engaging Benvenuto Cellini) and once again, the BBC Singers and BBC Symphony Orchestra. Again it was a shame that this sparkling performance was unstaged—though the singers were constantly (and comically) threatening to turn the Barbican hall into a theater.

What Makes Weill Weill?

The festival left us with a lot of food for thought concerning Weill's position as a modernist, as I've indicated. What did it teach us on the thorny question of the "two"—or three, or more—Weills of the traditional literature? Are we still inclined to make the traditional sharp division between the supposed "artistic integrity" of the German works of the 1920s and 1930s and the supposed "capitulation to commercialism" of the American works of the 1940s? I've drawn attention above to the multiplicity of personae adopted by the composer, many of them serving to construct one or another variety of modernism. But the theory of the two Weills was never intended to elucidate matters of this sort, but rather to bring some sort of moral censure to bear on the composer, quite a different matter. At the festival, there were indeed two Weills, defined by sociology and not by aesthetics, in terms of the two quite distinct audiences that attended: one was catered for almost solely in the recital of Weill songs given by Ute Lemper that could have sold out all tickets more than twice over (clearly, then, the festival organizers were not quite in touch with the realities of the market!). I cannot speak for this audience, though I think it possible that the construction of Weill that attracted them rested on no exercise of the historical imagination. Whether or not that is a just estimate, Weill's music is, I think, capable as a whole of teaching us an amazing amount about the "varieties of modernism" produced during the first half of the twentieth century, more, perhaps, than some composers whose modernism was more extreme and thorough-going.

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Participants in pre-concert talks (left to right): Kim H. Kowalke, Paul Hughes, Jeremy Sams, Joel Galand, and Stephen Hinton.



Lucy Schauer (Emilia) and Simon Russell Beale (Narrator) appeared in *The Firebrand of Florence*.

The Rehabilitation of Kurt Weill

by Erik Levi

The following appeared as the introductory essay in the program booklet for the BBC Weekend to provide a historical context for the festival and to summarize post-war British reception of Weill. It is reprinted here with permission.

When Kurt Weill died from a heart attack in New York City at the tragically premature age of fifty, the American musical establishment paid generous tribute to his achievement. Writing in *The New York Herald Tribune*, the distinguished composer and critic Virgil Thomson hailed Weill's attempts to found an American operatic tradition, describing each of his works as a "new model, a new shape, and a new solution of dramatic problems." According to Thomson, he was "probably the most original single workman in the whole musical theater, internationally considered, during the last quarter of a century." Olin Downes, the critic of *The New York Times* was no less eloquent. In his opinion Weill's score to *Street Scene* represented the "most important step toward significant American opera yet encountered in the musical theater." Summing up his accomplishments, Downes claimed that Weill "stands as a sovereign example of the forces that merge in the American melting pot toward a national expression, and the forces which are working to create new forms of operatic expression in our musical theater."

If Weill was regarded extremely favorably in the United States, he remained an almost forgotten figure in postwar Britain. Shamefully, his obituary in *The Times* barely stretches to a few lines, and even fails to single out any of his compositions for separate attention. An equally cursory appraisal could be read in *The Musical Times*, Britain's longest-established music periodical. Fortunately, a selected number of specialist journals countered this morass of apathy with the publication of an appreciation by the Austrian émigré musicologist Hans F. Redlich. Redlich's tribute deserves extensive consideration since some of its judgments seem as relevant today as they were in 1950. Alongside a brief summary of Weill's German career, from his apprentice years under Busoni in Berlin to his early breakthrough as a composer of Expressionist operas and his seminal collaboration with

Bertolt Brecht in the late 1920s, there are pertinent observations on the crisis that faced all musicians who had become victims of the Nazis. Like so many others of his generation, Weill had to start once more "at rock bottom," trying to establish himself in France and England, before eventually finding a home in the United States. Redlich observed how disappointing it must have been for Weill that even after the defeat of Nazism in 1945, the country of Weill's origin had effectively cold-shouldered the composer of *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*), one of the "most successful and stylistically far-reaching" operatic works of the twentieth century. Furthermore it was a tragedy of our contemporary world, "living as it does in spiritually watertight compartments," that the compositions of the mature Weill written in the United States had "remained a closed book even to his most faithful admirers in the old world."

Although it would take many years before British and European musicians began a serious exploration of some of Weill's American works, the rehabilitation of some of his earlier output proceeded more rapidly than Redlich might have imagined. In Germany, for example, there was a conscious attempt to revive some of the music that had been proscribed by the Nazis. Lotte Lenya, Weill's widow, also worked tirelessly on her husband's behalf. Visiting Germany during the mid-1950s, she starred in commercial recordings of *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*), *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (*Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*), *Die sieben Todsünden* (*The Seven Deadly Sins*), which brought some of the most important of his Brecht collaborations to a new generation of listeners.

Yet there was still much resistance in accepting Weill as a significant twentieth-century composer, and attempts to present his music in Britain were few and far between. In 1952, for example, the early cantata *Der neue Orpheus* (*The New Orpheus*) was submitted to the BBC reading panel with a view to future broadcast. But the reports were largely unfavorable, one assessor going so far as to claim that this "distasteful" and "unhealthy" work represented "that diseased part of the European mentality which helped to bring about the catastrophe of Hitler and the War."

Such attitudes receded during the 1960s and 1970s as the musical environment in Britain became far less parochial, and some of Weill's theater pieces were staged in London. A rediscovery and reappraisal of the cultural achievements of the Weimar Republic, coupled with the widespread commercial success of the film *Cabaret*, certainly helped to stimulate further interest in Weill. Thanks largely to the tireless efforts of the musicologist David Drew, early works that had remained unperformed and inaccessible for many years were resuscitated with great success.

There was, however, still the problem of Weill's American works. The general view, even into the early 1980s, was that despite Weill's brave and tenacious attempts to maintain his lifelong musical social and humanistic beliefs in his later theater pieces, they nevertheless represented what has been described as "a lowering of musical standards—a denial rather than a development of Weill's earlier idiom in which his individual voice was subsumed by an anonymous stylistic grey-ness." In effect there were two incompatible Weills—the progressive European composer who moved from atonal expressionism to the so-called popular jazz-based style of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and the retrenched American whose primary concern was achieving commercial success on Broadway.

This interpretation of Weill's position is now regarded as somewhat outmoded. No longer do we consider an apparent lack of continuity in stylistic development and/or a pluralist attitude to theatrical genres to be signs of weakness. Indeed, from the vantage point of a post-modernist perspective it is much more possible to glean palpable links between the diversity of Weill's musical activities in Germany and America. Thus, the stagecraft and theatrical vitality of *The Firebrand of*

Florence show no less ingenuity in approach than the experimental *Royal Palace*, even though in superficial terms each work utilizes a rather different musical language. More significantly the influence of Busoni remains paramount.

Fifty years after his death, and in the centenary of his birth, Weill's achievement seems all the more impressive. Having changed the very nature of German music theater during the latter part of the Weimar Republic, he faced the trials and tribulations of exile with greater courage, greater resolve, and greater zeal than almost all his contemporaries. Hearing many of his works—both established and unfairly neglected—in close proximity will surely confirm him as one of the most vital forces in twentieth-century music.

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NEW YORK

New York Discovers a “Third” Weill

by Eric Salzman

New York’s millennium-centennial season was a particularly propitious moment for local audiences to get to know the “third Weill”: the works that fall in the cracks between his great and famous European hits, somewhat defanged these days but still approved and beloved by all, and his American successes, iconic for the American musical theater but still not approved by neo-Brechtians (if any such remain) and knee-jerk German Adorno-ites (plenty of those still around).

It is one of history’s little ironies that Weill has always been alive in New York, where his influence can be traced directly through Blitzstein, Bernstein, Sondheim and a younger generation of composers. In post-cold-war, post-Berlin-Wall, post-serialist Europe, the Weill lineage is not even faintly discernible, either in the extensively funded modernist operas that nobody actually watches (or listens to), nor in the mega-Euromusicals that everyone hates and rushes to see (Save Modern Opera! Save the Euromusical! It Needs It!).

Two observations stem directly from the above. One is that in New York, Weill has never had to be rediscovered. He was and is adored (at least by those who remember his Broadway shows) and is still regarded as the ancestor of almost everything interesting and stimulating about musical theater since Rodgers and Hammerstein. The other is that Weill’s transition—from European *Zeitoper* composer, social activist, and Brecht collaborator to American composer and Broadway eminence—was much more complex than most of us thought. I had already made this discovery in the eighties when I was given access to the Kurt Weill archives (in the process of producing *The Unknown Kurt Weill* with Teresa Stratas), but that was only based on a few trunk songs. With the help of Wall-to-Wall Kurt Weill and various theater productions of forgotten or lesser-known work, much more of the evidence is in.

Wall-to-Wall Kurt Weill, Symphony Space

Wall-to-Wall, that marathon of musical marathons, has been taking place at Symphony Space on New York’s West Side since 1978. It started with Wall-to-Wall Bach, and Mr. Bach comes back to town regularly along with other classic European masters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Americans have had their turns as well: Copland, Bernstein, Ives and even “Cage and friends” have been wall-to-walled as well as Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin and Frank Loesser.

This imaginative mixture of European classicism and Broadway is perhaps a little less surprising if you know that Isaiah Sheffer, the Artistic Director of Symphony Space, is both a music producer and a theater director, and that Symphony Space is neither a conventional theater nor concert hall but a converted old movie house and de facto community center. Thirteen consecutive hours of Kurt Weill—11 A.M. to well past a scheduled 11 P.M. close, even with substantial cuts in the program—attracted a consistent capacity crowd on 25

New York Highlights

Brooklyn Academy of Music

10 February–5 March 2000

The Eternal Road

Chemnitz Opera; Michael

Heinicke, director; John

Mauceri, conductor

Nine Panel Discussions

Centenary Gala, featuring stars from Broadway, opera, classical, and pop music

Film Festival, including *Where Do We Go from Here?*, *Threepenny Opera*, and *You and Me*

Symphony Space

25 March 2000

“Wall-to-Wall Kurt Weill”

Produced by Isaiah Sheffer

The Juilliard School

11–15 April 2000

Der Kuhhandel

Frank Corsaro, director;

Randall Behr, conductor

Japan Society

4–9 April 2000

Der Jasager

Jonathan Eaton, director; Julius

Rudel, conductor

New York University Center for Music Performance

3–17 April 2000

Two panel discussions

Piano recital with Sherri Jones

Screenings at The Museum of

Television and Radio

“Weill’s Broadway Years: An

Evening of Music and

Memories with Weill’s

Leading Ladies and Men”

New York Philharmonic

9–11 March 2000

“Street Scenes” and Andrea

Marcovicci Cabaret

Leonard Slatkin, conductor

Brooklyn Philharmonic

25–26 February 2000

Der neue Orpheus

Robert Spano, conductor

American Composers Orchestra

27 February 2000

Der Lindberghflug

Judith Clurman Chorale;

Dennis Russell Davies,

conductor

New York Pops

24 March 2000

“Kurt Weill at 100”

Skitch Henderson, conductor;

Ute Lemper, vocalist

Philadelphia Orchestra

28 March 2000

Kleine Dreigroschenmusik; Car-

negie Hall; David Robertson,

conductor

The Met Orchestra

10 May 2000

Suite from *Mahagonny*; Carne-

gie Hall; James Levine, con-

ductor

Manhattan School of Music

5–7 May 2000

“September Songs: A Kurt

Weill Revue”

Carolyn Marlow, director

March (100 years, three weeks and two days after Weill’s birth), many of whom hung in for most of the day. These concerts are free, but that is only part of the story. They are an exercise in demystified culture and surrounded by an easy *gemütlichkeit* that K.W. would certainly have loved; the formalities of Big Culture are dispensed with and the hours pass with ease and delight, especially with the high quality of performance that was in evidence for most of the day.

A lot of the lesser-known music, including many works typical of the in-between Weill, turned up during the day in bits and pieces. Although most of this music showed a remarkable sureness (not to say assurance), the overall impression was that of a composer who hovered between popularizing serious art and making the popular form more serious. Weill constantly alternated between these two possibilities, even after his arrival in America. This ambivalence was hardly fatal but it reflects a division of musical and theatrical worlds that remains operative to this day.

The early evening segment also demonstrated something else: Weill as a godfather to avant pop-rock. The devotion of alternative pop and rock musicians to Kurt Weill goes back at least to Jim Morrison and, much later, Hal Willner’s remarkable *Lost in the Stars* compilation. The W₂W_KW segment included, among other things, a truly alternative “Alabama Song” performed by a Nina Hagen-style singer who calls herself Nora York, the tuba virtuoso Howard Johnson, scratch turntables manipulated by one Silva Sir-Fa, and Ethan Ryman on the digital multi-track! The entire segment was challenging and put a focus on the enduring relevance of Weill’s music. Missing however was any suggestion of Weill’s importance for the third music-theater [see “What makes Weill Weill?”, p. 24].

The evening ended, more conventionally, with a long orchestral segment that included some of the composer’s greatest German and American hits performed by the redoubtable John Mauceri conducting the New York Chamber Symphony and such stalwarts as Angelina Réaux, Judy Kaye, Ute Lemper, Melissa Errico, KT Sullivan, Peter Kazaras, and Hudson Shad. Most of the music consisted of old favorites, but this final segment also included a preview of the Juilliard production of *Der Kuhhandel*, shortly to be seen on stage (see below), as well as five songs from *Huckleberry Finn*—the last music he ever wrote.

The tribal, community feeling notable at most of these marathons was especially present at this one. It doesn’t take much to imagine Kurt Weill as a Manhattan Westsider and, in an event like this, the “problems” of the American Weill simply do not exist. Even the Five Last Songs, in their less-than-ideal Robert Russell Bennett realizations (and less-than-ideal performances), were rapturously received. Mark Grant calls Kurt Weill the first postmodernist, and he was here playing to a postmodern public as part of a distinctly postmodern event. [See Mark Grant’s comprehensive review on page 36.]

Weill’s Broadway Years, New York University Center for Music Performance

The American Kurt Weill was the subject of another and very different kind of love feast on 17 April at the Lucille Lortel, née Theater de Lys, where Marc Blitzstein’s adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* played for so many years. The program, organized by Foster Hirsch, was billed as “Weill’s Broadway Years: An Evening of Music and Memories with Weill’s Leading Ladies and Men”; it

was that and more. The “Leading Ladies and Men” turned out to include Quentin Anderson (son of Maxwell, the author of *Knickerbocker Holiday* and the projected *Huckleberry Finn*), Lys Symonette (Weill’s principal American assistant), and Carmen Capalbo (producer of *Threepenny* and the failed off-Broadway *Mahagonny*) as well as Kitty Carlisle Hart, Estelle Parsons, Paula Laurence, Jo Sullivan Loesser, William Duell (from the original *Threepenny*), Phoebe Brand (from *Johnny Johnson* and the original Group Theatre), and others. It was a long evening and not always quintessentially Weillian; from a purely interpretive standpoint, the entire troupe was eclipsed by the finale, Alvin Epstein’s razor-sharp “Mack the Knife.” Still, this bit of Broadway yesterday was a memorable and touching reminder of how and why Weill is still alive in American musical theater tradition.

Helen Schneider, Alice Tully Hall

Helen Schneider’s “Walk on the Weill Side” was, in fact, a Stephen Sondheim-Kurt Weill evening. Ms. Schneider bills herself as an actress-singer and she treats each song as a miniature theater piece, an approach that infuriates Weill purists (yes, there are some) and delights her adoring fans. This leads her to unconventional interpretive decisions, but she has deeply thoughtful and considered reasons for her choices. This is a clear and personal third way; Schneider stands conspicuously apart from the traditional Lenya/Stratas and Berlin/Broadway dichotomies. She approaches everything with the freedom and style of a jazz singer but with musical decisions informed, even guided, by dramatic choices. The Weill part of her program was clearly weighted on the American side (five Brecht songs and a *Marie galante* song, all sung in English, and ten American theater songs) but it is easy to see why her interpretations, intellectual and dramatic at the same time, appeal to European audiences and have helped the American Weill be taken seriously in Europe.

Der Kuhhandel, The Juilliard School

Three major theatrical events of this extended Weill season took us back to the transition years. *Der Kuhhandel* stands literally between the European and American Weill. In 1934, a German writer by the name of Robert Vambery proposed an operetta project to the composer. They were both refugees in France at the time and the production of an operetta in German did not really have many prospects. Somewhere along the line, it turned into a West End musical; under the title *A Kingdom for a Cow*, it made its debut in



Juan (Michael Slaterry) and Juanita (Raquela Sheeran) appear in The Juilliard School production of *Der Kuhhandel*. Scenic design by Franco Colavecchia. Costumes by Thomas L. Keller. Photo: Nan Melville.

London in 1935 and promptly died. A few months later, Weill left for America.

Weill apparently considered the work unfinished, but he never returned to it and it was never performed again in his lifetime. A new edition, based on some 1970 revisions by Vambery and fitted to musical elements from the various manuscripts, was prepared by Lys Symonette. It was this version that was presented by the Juilliard Opera Center, directed by Frank Corsaro, in a delightful translation by the British writer Jeremy Sams.

Let me quickly add that *Kuhhandel* is astonishingly similar to an idea I had a number of years ago for a music-theater piece in the style of an old-fashioned operetta; it was to be set in the mythical Central American republic of Salvia and included an assassinated dictator, the dictator’s daughter who flirts with the rebel leader, a CIA agent who tries to manipulate everybody as well as choruses of soldiers, not-so-happy peasants, and angry guerrillas. Perhaps fortunately, this project never came to anything, but it did put me in a sympathetic mood for a Weill project that seems to me amazingly post-modern in conception. Alas, it didn’t work back then and it really doesn’t work now; I may have been one of the few people present who thoroughly enjoyed it. The relationship between the operetta tradition and the jazz and Latin elements is not well digested; Weill would learn how to handle this sort of thing better later on. A good example is the famous moment when the first version of the music for “September Song” appears out of the blue, rambles on for a bit and then, inexplicably, disappears; in *Knickerbocker Holiday*, it becomes a great song with a true Weillian *gestus* that is both popular and musico-dramatic.

I have a lot of questions about the performing edition. Without having studied all the issues of authenticity (which loom large here), I would guess that the re-creators—starting with Vambery himself who revised the text long after Weill’s death—have tried to do too much. We should, I suppose, be grateful for the decision to let us

hear almost every musical scrap associated with the project and also for a production that suggested some of the style and spirit—serious and silly at the same time—of the original. But the truth is that the work should have been edited ruthlessly for a modern production that would have emphasized the strengths of the piece; the redundant overkill of this version tended, however unintentionally, to highlight its weaknesses and tentativeness.



guage that even modern Japanese have trouble understanding, proved to be far more convincing than its 1930 German counterpart.

How could this be? Weill considered *Jasager* his best score to date and many people today would agree that it has a unique combination of serious, through-composed music and a level of accessibility with a popular note that enables it to be performed by students. This is truly the popularization of a serious, artistic form. Weill achieved



The death of the boy as staged in *Taniko* (left) and *Der Jasager* (right). *Taniko* was staged by the Noh troupe Nohgaku-za and its principal members Kanze Hideo, Umewaka Rokuro, and Hosho Kan; *Der Jasager* by Jonathan Eaton, with sets and costumes by Danila Korogodsky. Photos: © William W. Irwin.

***Der Jasager*, Japan Society**

Der Jasager is generally described as one of Weill's major collaborations with Bertolt Brecht, but the text is actually Elisabeth Hauptmann's translation of Arthur Waley's abridged English translation of the Japanese Noh play *Taniko*, known in English as *The Valley Rite*. This was one of a series of pieces that Brecht called *Lehrstücke*, literally "teaching plays" (this one intended to be performed by and for schoolchildren), and dealing with serious, social subjects in a thoughtful way. *Taniko-Jasager* is about a young boy from a small town who goes over the mountains with his teacher and other travelers to find help for his sick mother; when he himself becomes sick on the journey, he agrees to let himself be sacrificed so that the others can complete the journey in safety. In the original Noh play, the boy is rescued by the gods, but there is no such *deus ex machina* in *Jasager*; he simply sees that he must acquiesce to the common will for a greater good. This point of view was controversial even for committed Marxists; apparently the Catholic hierarchy liked the play better than Brecht's comrades, causing him to write another play, *Der Neinsager*, wherein our hero refuses to bow to the collective will; Brecht recommended that the two plays be performed together.

Weill never had anything to do with *Neinsager*; in this Japan Society production, *Jasager* was accompanied by a still more unusual companion piece: the original Noh drama in medieval Japanese. Surprisingly, the old play, performed in an ancient style and in a lan-

this only once or twice afterwards: in the ultra-American and far less ideological *Down in the Valley* and, closer to *Jasager* in time and style, in *Die sieben Todsünden*.

Part of the problem at the Japan Society was the singing. Neither of the professional singers was adequate or convincing; Kurt Weill is never well served by mediocre operatic voices. The instrumental performance was adequate but the lack of vocal and dramatic ability did not permit the music to flourish.

A still bigger problem was the direction. The Jonathan Eaton production subverted the piece and, to an unprejudiced observer, the subversion appeared to be quite intentional. Eaton apparently does not believe or trust anything about *Jasager*, and that is the ultimate directorial unfaithfulness. The adult characters were cartoons: the mother, pathetic and grotesque; the teacher, a buffoon. The student performers, who represent the community, were depersonalized with face and body paint and ugly costumes; the stage architecture, made out of cheap building-blocks, suggested a grotesque parody of, or metaphor for, Soviet-style socialism.

If the community is faceless, ugly and dangerous, it becomes impossible to understand the boy's acquiescence. Is he a fool? Brainwashed? Eaton's English title for the piece is "The Consenter," and this is very close to "The Fellow-Traveler." At best, this consenter is an ignorant, tragic, innocent victim of Stalinism. A young boy, perhaps too young to know better, has been sacrificed for expedience. There is nothing to mull over, no conflict of values, nothing

to set us thinking. Brecht's idea, and Weill's as well, was to jolt audiences, young and old, out of passivity and to get them to think and react. Eaton's notion is to give us a lecture on the evils of socialism. The *Lehrstück* has been turned on its head.

The Eternal Road, Brooklyn Academy of Music

Starting off the New York celebration were the February–March performances at BAM of *Der Weg der Verheissung*, known in English as *The Eternal Road*. This legendary work, the project that actually brought Kurt Weill to America, was commissioned by an American impresario, Meyer Weisgal, from three German Jewish artists—Max Reinhardt, Franz Werfel and Weill. His idea was to get three world-famous assimilated artists to celebrate the traditions of Judaism and the survival of the Jews in a time of travail. The work was widely praised when it opened at the Manhattan Opera House in New York in January 1937, but the elaborate production (by Reinhardt and the once-famous designer Norman Bel Geddes) was a financial disaster. It took the Kurt Weill centenary and an enterprising opera house in the former Karl-Marx-Stadt in eastern Germany to get it back on the stage more than sixty years later. The Chemnitz Opera production, the first ever in the original German, was coproduced by Opera Kraków in Poland, The New Israeli Opera, and BAM. It featured an American conductor (John Mauceri, who has promoted the revival of the work for years), a German director (Michael Heinicke), a German dramaturg (Gerhard Müller), an Israeli designer (David Sharir), and an international cast of over 250, the largest ever to appear on the stage of the BAM Opera House.

I never had the privilege of hearing this piece live, as I was in America when it was performed in Europe and in Europe when it was done in America. I saw the video of the original Chemnitz production (essentially the same production and mostly the same cast that appeared in New York) and had a look at the piano-

vocal and orchestral scores prepared from the original materials. The premise of the piece is fairly simple. A Jewish congregation takes refuge in a synagogue from a howling mob. Scenes from the Torah, as read by the Rabbi, come to life before our eyes but the biblical re-enactments are constantly interrupted by the modern voices of the members of the congregation ranging from The Rich Man and The Cynic to The Gentile Girl looking for her lover and The Thirteen-Year-Old who, at the age of Bar Mitzvah, is the hope for the future (played in the original production by Sidney Lumet!).

The creators of the work were writing about the sort of pogroms that had taken place before 1934. The Chemnitz production—post-Holocaust, post-Wall—took the liberty of adding storm troopers and a heroic act of defiance and sacrifice (by The Adversary, of all people) at the end. Although some people objected, the new ending brought the piece forward across the events of the decades that followed and made a dramatic point that the original lacked. The pageant form is not very congenial to us today and, even with cuts in the dialogue, the piece sprawls. But there were no complaints about the opportunity to hear major Kurt Weill in a properly theatrical context.

Here is the “third Weill” in an extreme form. As was the case with other variously “radical” German Jewish composers of the time (Schoenberg and Stefan Wolpe come to mind), the political crisis stimulated the expression of a Jewish identity that was, seemingly, at odds with the composer's earlier work. But, ironically, nothing was easier for Weill than to assimilate the theatrical forms of a religious pageant and an oratorio-like expression, or to incorporate the Jewish and Middle Eastern musical idioms that appear throughout. It is, without a doubt, Weill's handling of the music that holds this messy, tent-like structure together. Compared to Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* (the comparison is inevitable), Weill's treatment is much more human, humane and down-to-earth but also far less of an artistic totality, less grand, less epic, less spiritual; it is, in effect, a Verdian treatment contrasted with Schoenberg's Wagnerianism. And, unlike Schoenberg, Weill actually finished his work, helped get it onstage, and then moved on.

An equally instructive comparison is with *Der Kuhhandel*, Weill's other large-scale dramatic work of the time. While *Der Jasager* and *Die sieben Todsünden* are culminations of Weill's European career and the last of his Brecht collaborations, *Der Kuhhandel* and *Der Weg der Verheissung* suggest new directions, the former as a new European operetta (something that, under the name Euromusical, is still on the table) and the latter as a serious folk opera-oratorio. Each is, in its own way, a rousing non-success, but each is an important experiment with musico-theatrical form and makes its own contribution to the composer's evolution from European radical to American theater composer. *The Eternal Road* might be thought of as a road not taken but, in fact, it brought Kurt Weill to America, where he remarried Lenya and decided to stay; it also took him to a whole range of new and popular music-theater forms with which he also decided to stay.



Brochure from the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

What Makes Weill Weill?

The single biggest achievement of the Kurt Weill Centennial performances in New York during the 1999–2000 season was to throw light on Weill's transformation from European to American composer. Far from being fallow, the period between his departure from Germany in 1933 and his first American successes in 1938 and 1941 was full of fascinating projects, major forays in new directions, and important musical developments. This "third Weill" (which also includes the *Marie galante* music, written for a French stage production, and *Johnny Johnson*, his first American musical, for the Group Theatre) now appears not so much as a transition but as a series of explorations of the possibilities of music theater outside of the conventional venues and forms of mainstream musical theater and opera.

The rediscovery of this rather considerable treasure trove of forgotten works tells us a number of things about Kurt Weill that were previously only imperfectly known. The most important of these was his willingness to experiment, not only with music-theater form in the narrower sense but also with the larger functions of stage music of all kinds. Another major point revealed was the sense that Weill was able to do this without losing his characteristic sense of himself and his musical or musico-dramatic style. There is a fruitful field here for someone who wishes to study the musical relationships (and there are many) between Weill's songs of this period and the music for the various stage works ranging from *Marie galante* to *Der Kuhhandel*, *The Eternal Road* and the first American musicals (*Johnny Johnson* and *Knickerbocker Holiday*). As heterogeneous as these works may seem, they all suggest roads to travel or routes to avoid, and together they constitute a variety of theatrical experience that few latter-day composers have managed to achieve. And they suggest why Weill's work in all forms and from all parts of his career continues to have relevance.

There was a missed opportunity in the New York events: to show the relationship with and the influence on the new music theater which has developed in recent decades in America and, more recently, in Europe. Weill's impact on the avant-garde of pop music was touched upon and his enduring place in the annals of American theater was well established in this remarkable centennial season. Only his longer-range theatrical influence—very much alive both on and off Broadway—was neglected.

For those of us working in new music-theater, it is this aspect of Weill that seems the most actual. The direct heritage is easy enough to understand: there is a line that connects *Threepenny*, *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Street Scene*, and *Love Life* to *West Side Story*, *Pippin*, *Assassins*, *Black Rider*, and a long list of theatrical works by composers as disparate as William Bolcom, Stanley Silverman, Adam Guettel (Richard Rodgers' grandson!), Michael John La Chiusa, Paul Dresher, Rinde Eckert, myself, and many others.

Some of the connections are more subtle but no less important. The notion of pop music as art and as a source for new theatrical expression; the insistence on contemporary subject matter; the use of closed musical and theatrical forms that link together into larger structures; the drawing on a communal language; the use of show and pop music traditions as a source of both irony and a shared emotional language; the popularization of serious musical forms and dramatic subject matter; the willingness to experiment with the interactions between music, language, movement, and theater; the

notion that clarity and simplicity are desirable and can be achieved without dumbing down—these are all Weillian features that have persisted and grown in new American musical theater.

Contemporary music theater, especially in its more experimental guises, has an avant-garde side that comes out of the developments of the last four decades in theater, dance, and performance art, a period quite comparable in many ways to the movements of the twenties and thirties that formed Weill's own background. Now, as then, musical modernism had given way to new tonalities, popular influences, and social-political interests. The musical sources for the new forms of "downtown" music theater and performance art in recent times were American minimalism, the more experimental forms of rock, pop and jazz, electronic and digital music, and the new vocalism deriving from jazz, world music, and "extended voice" experiment. The interaction of these elements with the Kurt Weill tradition—both European and American—might be said to define the new music theater in all its heterogeneity and in its rejection of both grand opera and grand show business.

Curiously (and unfortunately), the nascent music-theater movement, which appears to have originated in North America, has been somewhat stymied by conservative trends in both opera and on Broadway, by the commercialization of off-Broadway, and by rising costs and weakening support for alternative performing arts institutions. But the movement has since spread (by example or by historical synchronicity) to Europe and, with the formation of the Conference on Small-scale Opera and New Music Theatre (NewOp) and the C-Opera Internet Mailing List, it has assumed an international aspect.

There is something quite remarkable about the new-theater and alternate performance-art and music-theater movements in Europe that transferred to America in the 1930s, flowered after World War II in the New World, and then reappeared in Europe in more recent times, but it is a history not yet well documented or understood. What we can say is that the recent interest in Kurt Weill's American works in Europe and the spread of new music-theater to the Old World are surely interconnected phenomena, and they are certainly signs of change. Kurt Weill would have been pleased.

Eric Salzman's *The True Last Words of Dutch Schultz* (with Valeria Vasilevski and Theo Bleckmann) had its premiere in The Netherlands in late 1997 and toured in Europe; its New York concert premiere was in April 2000, at the Greenwich House Cutting Edge series in New York, directed by Victoria Bond. His current projects include *Abel Gance à New York*, a commission from *Chants Libres* in Montreal; a revised, fourth edition of his well-known *Introduction to Twentieth-Century Music* for Prentice-Hall; and *The New Music Theater* for Oxford University Press.

Germany's Picture of Kurt Weill in 2000

by Jürgen Schebera

These remarks are excerpted from a speech given by the author at the presentation ceremony of Germany's Kurt Weill commemorative postage stamp in Dessau, 17 February 2000. Presenting the stamp were Barbara Hendricks, Parlamentarische Staatssekretärin beim Bundesminister der Finanzen, and Wolfgang Gerhards, Finanzminister des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt.

The last five years have witnessed the one-hundredth birthdays of a significant number of artists and scientists who helped create the now-famous cultural life of the Weimar Republic. Only few people are honored each year with a jubilee postage stamp, so the selection process is undoubtedly a difficult one. Admirers of Kurt Weill welcome the unveiling of this stamp with great joy because of the honor that it bestows. But, after seeing the stamp, students of Weill's music must feel a twinge of sorrow amidst the general elation.

If we survey the jubilee issues over the past several years, we find that all of them feature an expressive portrait of the person's face, often with the honoree's signature used as an additional design element. The image evokes a sense of honor, dignity, and pride. But for Weill's stamp the picture chosen for the design is a publicity photograph taken in September 1943 during the final rehearsal period for *One Touch of Venus*. The composer is at the piano sur-

rounded by the principal cast members; Mary Martin's photogenic legs dangle above Weill's hands on the piano keyboard. On close inspection, one can see him looking sideways, somewhat embarrassed. Weill's persona is reduced to a mere cutout overshadowed by two sexy female legs, as if to say, "That's Broadway Glamor!"

This stamp firmly reinforces in the minds of today's general public the postwar German myth that Weill sold out to Broadway, a myth that at the same time allows us to dismiss irrationally his legitimate claim on Berlin. The myth says that Weill made a lot of money in America by writing cheap songs, and it has resulted in the avoidance of Weill's American music by German theaters and the German academic establishment. This myth, like many others, is based on ignorance.

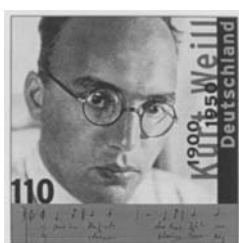
Why do we continue to embrace this myth when it is now well known that Weill's forced emigration to America was far from painless? Why do we fault him for writing for Broadway when that was the only medium available in the United States to a theater composer? Why do we refuse to acknowledge the difficulty of writing a successful work for the commercial theater, or ignore Weill's brilliance as an orchestrator, or decline to study the important contributions he made to the development of the American musical theater (which continues to influence current developments in Europe)?

I ask this distinguished gathering to contemplate these questions. We must also encourage future stamp designers and selectors to examine more closely the artistic and historical contexts of the honorees. Anyone who saw the recent Houston Grand Opera production of *Street Scene* in Berlin at the Theater des Westens has the beginning of an impression of what Weill was able to achieve in America. But Germans are still eons away from understanding the American Weill. What keeps holding us back?



Germany's commemorative postage stamp of Weill (above), designed by Fritz Haase and Sibylle Haase, is taken from this rehearsal photo from *One Touch of Venus*, 1943. Pictured left-to-right are Mary Martin, John Boles, Paula Laurence, Kurt Weill, and Kenny Baker.

Reproduced below is a selection of the designs not chosen for the stamp.



Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt Weill

For this special centenary issue we asked a number of prominent people in music, theater, and literature to share candid comments about their personal relationship to Weill's music or their thoughts about the nature of Weill's contribution to twentieth-century culture. Here are their responses.



Herman Wouk, author

While my second novel was still in the works, I heard from Kurt Weill. He proposed to do an *Aurora Dawn* musical, with me as librettist! What a leap to the moon, from the Columbia Varsity Show to collaboration with Kurt Weill! Once a week I came into Manhattan to talk over the idea with him, and we soon had a solid scenario blocked out. The question arose, should we proceed then and there to write it? Kurt Weill was free and willing, but I told him I wanted to finish a new novel about my boyhood, a matter of months, and I would be ready to go. He cheerfully acquiesced, and turned meantime to writing a musical with Alan Jay Lerner.

For two years after that Kurt Weill and I stayed in touch, but our schedules did not quite mesh. Shortly after *Lost in the Stars* opened I heard from him again. "Well, are we going to do *Aurora Dawn* now?" he inquired, the same old genial, businesslike Kurt. I was game, and we made a date to meet in Manhattan. A few days after his call, I opened *The New York Times* and read that Kurt Weill had suddenly died at fifty.

Talk about your lost opportunities. But a Broadway hit with Kurt Weill, so early in my career, might well have swept me past a creative point of no return. Such is my true feeling about this long-ago episode, and I have no real regrets.

Yet ah, *Aurora Dawn* with a score by Kurt Weill! That pious ex-seminarian, Joseph Stalin, once said to Winston Churchill, "The past is with God," and in another context Churchill himself wrote, "The terrible ifs accumulate." I am left with affectionate memories of Kurt Weill, and no musical *Aurora Dawn*. Not yet.



Bebe Neuwirth, actor

Weill's music has always resonated deeply and personally for me. I perceive it as both raw and elegant simultaneously. Singing it or dancing it, I feel connected in a spiritual way—that I've known the music for longer than I've been alive.



Ned Rorem, composer and author

In art the question of influence, or indeed of liberal uncredited helping oneself to the ingredients of others (plagiarism), is endlessly engrossing and endlessly irrelevant. Stature has little to do with originality. What an artist steals, if he is an artist, melts—during the very act of being stolen—into a new shape, as though in conspiracy with, but really despite, the artist. For instance, the form and tune and key of Ibert's "Little White Donkey" owe everything to Debussy's "Girl with the Flaxen Hair," yet each piece's effect is independent of the other. In the penultimate "motionless" movement of his two-hour *War Requiem* of 1961, how much does Britten owe to Weill's twenty-minute *Berlin Requiem* of three decades earlier, with those unmetered phrases for the Unknown Soldier's soliloquy, like Weill's long solo over a Hammond organ? Wilfred Owen's compassion and Bertolt Brecht's bitterness seem to join in their composers' nearly unbearable inspirations.

What is Weill's uniqueness, his value? His uniqueness is the gift to write whole operas that are real operas but woven as garlands, operas that rise and fall and rise again, are of a piece yet mantled like song cycles in which any small part is nonetheless extractable and self-contained. His value is in being better than others at the same game, a game worth playing.

[Excerpted and reprinted with Mr. Rorem's permission from *Settling the Score: Essays on Music* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988): 178-79, 182. The essay, "Notes on Weill," originally appeared in *Opera News* (21 January 1984).]

Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt Weill

Harold Prince, director and producer

In my opinion, “My Ship” and “Speak Low” are among the loveliest American theater songs written. Weill’s contribution to the American musical theater was potent and unique. Bringing his mittel-European origins—the sounds of an era riddled with politics and decadence—to an America that was fervently naive and optimistic, his music, in collaboration with his American partners, created a hybrid voice—more cynical, melancholy, wistful. Before Weill, immigrant European composers drew on their operetta backgrounds or, burying their Europeaness, appropriated the American dynamic, the edgy, rhythmic New York sound. Weill’s American scores merged both influences and illustrated the journey so many people took at the time.

In answer to the question you didn’t ask: I do not believe that the best of Weill was European. I think his career constantly evolved.

Thomas Hampson, singer

In addition to the overwhelming sensuality of Weill’s music—and by that I mean its three-dimensional beauty, drama, poignance and much in between as well—I am always aware of a great musical soul perpetually concerned that we “get it,” that we understand what it means to be human. And more to the point, that we *be* human—to, and for, and with one another. Like Busoni and Mahler before him, Weill was ahead of his time. But isn’t that what great artists are for?

HK Gruber, composer and conductor

This year I had the opportunity to do some interesting Weill programming: I would often place a “throw-away” song like “Berlin im Licht” right next to a complex piece like the Second Symphony. In so doing I could show without any lecturing that a little song by Weill had as much weight as a complete symphony. This standard of excellence can be found throughout Weill’s work, and I use it as a yardstick to which I as an artist must measure up.

Michael Kunze, author, playwright, and translator

Kurt Weill’s music has a very special meaning for me, because my mother loved to sing his songs. She was an actress and chanteuse, and admired Lenya. Already as a kid, I knew Lenya’s records by heart. I also could sing along with the whole *Threepenny Opera*.

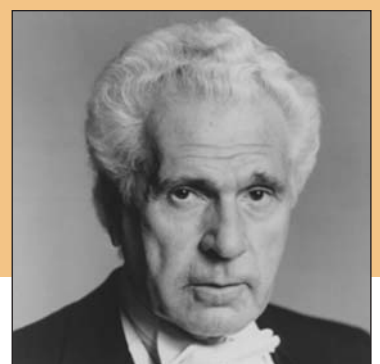
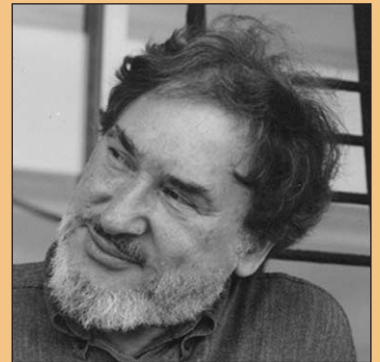
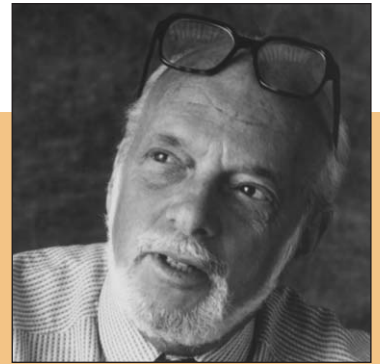
It took half a lifetime though, before I got to know the “American” Weill who some people think is so different from the *Threepenny Opera* Weill. I don’t feel that. Weill is always true to himself, no matter what genre or style he works in. After four bars you know for certain that this is something Weill has written.

He was one of those rare musical geniuses who are too smart to categorize music. Like Mozart he wanted to be popular and serious simultaneously, and like him he was successful in that. Some artists are simply too great to be pigeonholed by the professors of this petty world.

I always loved Weill’s music. Now that I’ve read his letters and other intimate documents I can’t help loving the man. He’s the kind of composer and human being lyricists and librettists search for. Sometimes I wish he could have been reborn right after his death. He would be about my age now, and I’d try everything to work with him. Well, I know it can’t be. Why then do I keep searching?

Julius Rudel, conductor

Kurt Weill’s music proves that there still can be originality in the supposedly used-up idioms of the past.



Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt Weill

Michael Feinstein, singer and pianist

Ever since I was a teen I have been enthralled by the music of Kurt Weill. My momentous introduction to his work came, perhaps inevitably, from the 1958 Lenya recording of *The Threepenny Opera*. My youthful bones were galvanized by its exotic, undulating rhythms and unearthly harmonies, the likes of which I had never before experienced. As I learned more about Weill and his life and times, a new world of music emerged for a shy, young kid growing up in Ohio who was reared largely on Lawrence Welk, barbershop quartets, and community choruses. Weill was my key to musical expansion and sophistication.

It is not possible for me to analyze his work because I am so partisan towards it, and, frankly, find critical dissection of a work often boring and self-serving. The stylistic variety of his output fascinates me. As a youngster I was propelled by the muscularity and raw dissonant energy of the early German works as I scrambled to find every possible recording and score available; sometimes paying high prices for obscurities. Shortly after my recording career commenced, I sang three very early unknown Weill songs with new English lyrics by Marshall Barer for an album called "Over There." While I was pleased with the achievement most critics were not, putting the performances and me in a neither fish nor fowl category.

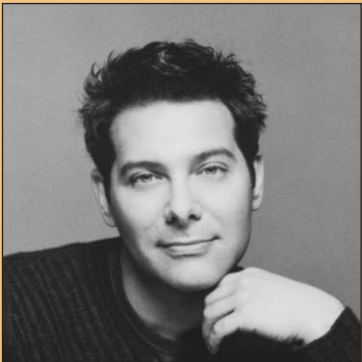
The sharp divisions between concert, theater, and pop music that made it once impossible to program a Gershwin piece on anything but a pops concert (and the attendant mentality surrounding such divisions) are largely defunct, and that is good for Weill because he is largely beyond category. It is easy, of course in broad strokes to divide the work into German and American periods. Many feel that his later work was more melodic due to the requirements of American musical theater, but it also seems to me to be a natural evolution of maturity and economy of expression. These thoughts were very much on my mind when in July of 1977 I met one of Weill's major collaborators: Ira Gershwin.

Ira had a very warm relationship with Weill and Lenya and spoke of them fondly. He and Kurt wrote two Broadway shows [*Lady in the Dark* (1941) and *The Firebrand of Florence* (1945)] as well as one film score [*Where Do We Go From Here?* (1945)]. Ira, perhaps naturally, considered his most successful work with Kurt to be his most important—*Lady In The Dark*. He dismissed *Firebrand* as a work doomed from the start. Ira was never able to explain successfully to me why he agreed to write lyrics for it except to say that he was intimidated into it, being so painfully shy that he didn't want to say no to Kurt and hurt his feelings. Those who knew Ira well would be able to find this explanation plausible, but there must be more to the story that we'll never know. I read Ira an ancient review of *Firebrand* that blamed its failure on his lyrics, saying they were *too* clever, and intrusively so. This prompted one of the only expressions of irritation I ever witnessed in our six-year relationship. He said there was *so* much wrong with the show: a poor idea for a musical, bad staging, and the participation of Lotte Lenya. "Lenya?" I asked. "Of course," he replied. "She was supposed to portray the most beautiful woman in the world." Then he let a long silence linger so I could allow the absurdity of the idea to soak in. Even though it should probably never be revived, recent recordings of excerpts as well as the marvelous still unreleased 1945 discs sung by Dorothy Kirsten and Thomas L. Thomas prove that the score is worthy of attention. "There'll Be Life, Love, and Laughter" and "A Rhyme For Angela" are particular favorites of mine.

Another collaboration, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, produced the mock operetta "The Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria" of which Ira was justly proud. One day when Ira's old friend Vincente Minnelli paid him a visit, Ira uncharacteristically asked me to play the old 78 rpm demo recording he and Kurt had made of the sequence and beamed like a proud father as we listened.

But it was *Lady In The Dark* that made Ira the proudest, and justifiably so. Though its original impact cannot possibly be recreated, it remains a richly resonant work brimming with wonderful wit in both the music and the lyrics. Yet this first collaboration between the team was very hard for Ira because Kurt liked to set music to words and Ira liked to work with a good tune first. Their continued collaboration proves that they overcame the problem, but this was due to Ira giving in and writing all the words first. He told me that he wrote the words to contrived dummy tunes and gave the completed lyric to Kurt with a suggestion for tempo and rhythmic scan. In one instance, Ira said that "Girl Of The Moment" was actually his dummy tune which Kurt liked and used. Ira was careful to stress that Kurt added harmony and made it a real song, yet he remained secretly tickled that the inspiration came from his rehearsal melody. It is important to stress that Ira revealed this information in the strictest of confidence, and were he still alive, it would have remained untold.

Ira considered Kurt's lack of melodic inspiration a major flaw in his ability as a composer. He also disliked and found incomprehensible *The Threepenny Opera* and Kurt's other German works. When I told Ira how much I loved that period of Weill's output he simply couldn't understand it. I told him I felt it was brilliant and significant work and he replied that as talented as Kurt was, he was nowhere near as talented as his brother, George. George, he said, was a genius, not Kurt. As I muse about our conversation almost twenty-five years later in this rich year of Weill centenary celebrations, I can only repeat what I stated at the time: Sorry, Ira, but I don't agree.



Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt Weill

Steve Reich, composer

The most useful model [for beginning a new kind of opera or music theater] for me turns out to be Kurt Weill. What I learned from him is that if you're going to write a piece of music theater there are two basic questions you are obliged to ask yourself: what (and where) is the orchestra, and what is the vocal style?

Weill, as a student of Busoni and as a working composer, could have chosen a standard orchestra in the pit when he did *The Threepenny Opera*, but no, he chose a banjo, saxophone, trap drums—a cabaret ensemble. As to vocal style, again, given his background, it would have been natural to assume that he wanted bel canto operatic voices. Again he said no and chose a woman with a rough cabaret voice. The result is a masterpiece which completely captures its historical time. Not the time of Mozart or Verdi or Wagner—it captures the Weimar Republic—and the reason it does this is precisely because of his choice of orchestra and vocal style.

Kurt Weill was pointing the way to the future. Look at his musical context. Berg composed *Wozzeck* in 1921 with a huge orchestra and large vocal style and one can certainly see his work as done under the shadow of the death of German romanticism. Weill was aware of that death as well, but his reaction in 1928 is *The Threepenny Opera*. While Berg is looking backward Weill instead does an about-face and looks to contemporary popular forms as material for music theater.

We are living at a time now when the worlds of concert music and popular music have resumed their dialogue. Perhaps I have had a hand in this restoration myself but certainly Kurt Weill began it long before I was born. This dialogue is, of course, the normal way of the music world. It seems that the wall between serious and popular music was erected primarily by Schoenberg and his followers. Since the late 1960s this wall has gradually crumbled and we are more or less back to the normal situation where concert musicians and popular musicians take a healthy interest in the what their counterparts have done and are doing. Kurt Weill pointed the way back in the 1920s.

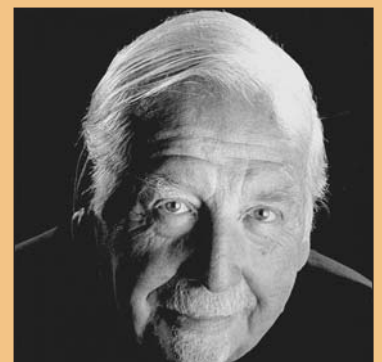
[Excerpted and reprinted with Mr. Reich's permission from "Kurt Weill, the Orchestra and Vocal Style from Interviews with the late K. Robert Schwarz." The chapter will appear in *Writings on Music: 1965-2000*, a collection by Mr. Reich introduced and edited by Paul Hillier scheduled for publication in 2001 by Oxford University Press.]

Milva, singer

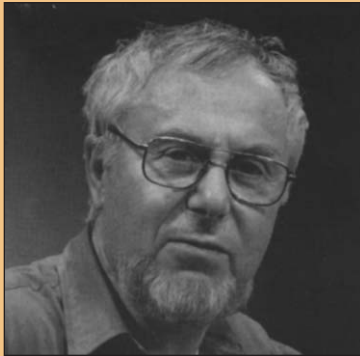
I am flattered and proud that the Kurt Weill Newsletter has asked me, Milva, for my opinion about the universally recognized musician Kurt Weill. When the great director Giorgio Strehler asked me to sing some Brecht-Weill songs for him, I was both frightened and enthusiastic. Up to then I had sung only popular songs, and I was anxious to prove my singing capabilities in a difficult new repertory. Strehler recognized the "singer" Milva and gave me my premiere at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan. I played Jenny in *The Threepenny Opera* for three consecutive years. This new world enchanted me so much that I almost gave up popular music entirely. I consider Kurt Weill one of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century. My connection to Weill has changed my musical life, my artistic life, and my life as a woman. I have just one more dream: to sing Weill in his adopted country, America.

Skitch Henderson, conductor and arranger

Because my approach to Kurt Weill's music has generally been from the podium, I have an almost fanatical regard for the sound of his orchestrations, which have, to my knowledge, never been imitated. I was reminded of this again recently, when I conducted a concert at Carnegie Hall with Ute Lemper. Very few composers come to mind that have the arranging and orchestration skills of Weill. His sound always clears my ears in some strange manner; even long after it has gone away, the memories are haunting. Other arrangers of his music, including myself, somehow lose the warmth, the inner voices, the right endings—even if you are lucky enough to find musicians who can assimilate his style. I'm so gratified to have had my time here in New York City overlap with his.



Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt Weill



Eric Bentley, playwright, author, and translator

I have never been a music critic. I wrote on music, if at all, only when it was subsumed under the heading Music Drama, which of course was where I encountered Kurt Weill. But I wasn't his critic, I was his interpreter and perhaps, in the end, his collaborator. It all began with a collaborator of mine, the late Desmond Vesey, who had done the only good English translation of *Die Dreigroschenoper* that was (so far as I know) around in the thirties. Kurt Weill saw it and observed that the lyrics weren't much good: they didn't fit the music properly. If he mistakenly attributed those lyrics to me, that is understandable, as I had already been asked to "edit" the Vesey text, and I ended up (after Weill's death) taking over the lyrics entirely—as evidenced in the edition of *The Threepenny Opera* still in print with Grove Press, Lotte Lenya's picture on the jacket. . . . Am still not ready to make a pronouncement for the Kurt Weill Newsletter on "What KW Has Meant to Me." Am still working out the answer by what has always been my method: when translating Brecht poetry, I sit at the piano and sing. Later perhaps I stand up and let others play the accompaniment with me singing to a crowd. Thank you, Kurt Weill!

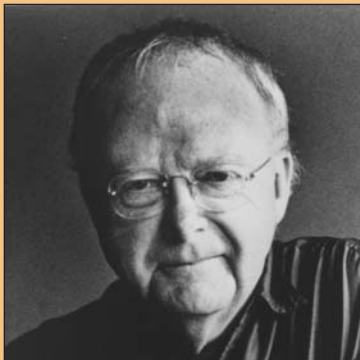


John Mauceri, conductor

Weill wanted to speak the language of the people. At the same time, his music has a kind of sadness. This is just in the nature of the man, who was a tremendous humanist. Kurt Weill was one of the few composers who was both a genius *and* a wonderful man. And this is especially apparent in his music, which is both sad and hopeful that the world could be a better place.

One of the problems with modern musicals today is that they rarely do anything more than tell a story. The story isn't more than the story. When I conducted *The Eternal Road* in New York this year—the first time it was heard there in sixty-three years—many young composers came to hear it. I had two conversations, one with Steve Flaherty, who composed *Ragtime*, and one with Alan Menken, who wrote *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Both were hearing this huge Biblical epic written in 1935 for the first time, and they wanted to talk about how amazing it was that Weill could write great, moving, huge pieces of music based on songs. Because the problem with a song is that it is only three minutes long. So how do you write something that lasts three hours based on things that are only three minutes long? That's hard. Ask Paul McCartney, ask Elton John. That's hard to do.

We need to keep performing Weill's music so that new composers can hear it and start their writing careers with the benefit of knowing something that is fifty or sixty years old. And that's what I hope will happen as Weill is performed more often.



Louis Andriessen, composer

One of the great things about Dutch culture is that we are constantly influenced by what is happening in surrounding countries. When I was asked to comment about Weill, my mind filled with memories of my student years at the conservatory in The Hague, where Weill's music was taught as a routine part of our education.

The most meaningful link between me and Weill was the great singer Cathy Berberian; she had a strong influence on me as a composer and also greatly admired Weill's music. In 1962 I went to Milan to study with Luciano Berio, who, of course, was then married to Berberian. I remember accompanying Cathy at the piano at several different performances of at least three Weill songs: "Le grand Lustucru," "Speak Low," and very passionate readings of "Surabaya Johnny."

Cathy had only two German composers in her repertory: Weill and Schoenberg. She had such respect for language, and such exacting standards of performance that included a very conscious awareness of the inherent sound of a text, that she refused to sing either Weill or Schoenberg in German, fearing that she would not do justice to the language. (She even did *Pierrot Lunaire* in the authorized English version.) This rigid side of Cathy was very elegant and also very authentic. I think that Cathy's great respect for language rubbed off on me. I always try to make text sing authentically in the original language—sometimes many of them at once!

Eighteen Ways of Looking at Kurt Weill

Anne Sofie von Otter, singer

Whenever I sing or hear Kurt Weill's music I am immediately taken in by his range of instrumental coloring and by his use of rhythm! Nobody has ever come close to writing the likes of his music; he has his own highly personal and original style—always the mark of a truly great artist. Moreover his music makes me happy and full of high-spirited energy. When I recorded the Weill CD for Deutsche Grammophon with John Eliot Gardiner, I was in seventh heaven!

Kurt Weill's music is clever and often full of humor, and, like the music of Leonard Bernstein, it speaks to a wide range of listeners who may not otherwise be attracted to so-called classical music. His music makes me tap my foot and it clears my brain—I love it!

Francesca Zambello, stage director

At this point in my life, the stomach-curdling jitters that used to plague me every opening night have given way to milder forms of hair-twisting, but the premiere of *Lady in the Dark* did make me wonder if I'd have to lie down on a couch for the next year. Weill's 1941 show hadn't ever been seen and heard in London, and the venue was the Royal National Theater, not a place where you want to fail. But that wasn't exactly what gave me the shakes. Just as I was sitting down I saw a familiar hair-do sink nearly out of sight three rows down. She really came, I gasped to myself: Kitty Carlisle. Not only had she been at *Lady's* original opening (and later on, actually *in* it), but she'd been married to Moss Hart! What if she hates it? I knew that back in the forties, *Lady* had been done up in a fabulously big way, and here we had done the show on a budget with a few props including the inviting couch on which the heroine, Liza Elliott, spends so much time wondering about her career. *Her* career. What about my career! We had also changed a bit of dialogue which had come off as too densely dated, and that too gave me cause to worry. Anyway, there was a party afterwards and I saw her approach, followed by a small retinue. She looked serious. Then she put on her glasses and said, "It is you. Bravo." Anyway, I gather she wasn't just being polite, but really was happy to be there.

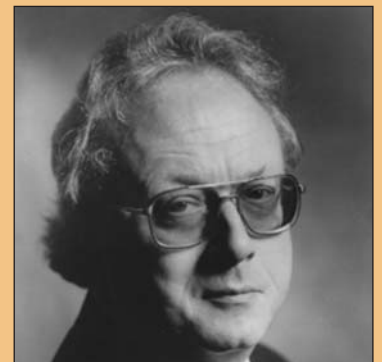
The only other Weill show I have done is *Street Scene*, which is absurdly undervalued in my estimation. When my Houston production traveled to, among other places, Berlin, I felt not anxiety but a kind of rage when we opened in the Theater des Westens. It was in 1995, just a few years after the wall disappeared, but while that event seemed in the distant past, I was hardly the only one who understood the significance of opening *Street Scene* in Berlin. Here we were in the city Weill loved so much and which would have happily killed him fifty years ago.

William Bolcom, composer

I regard Kurt Weill as a sort of spiritual brother; as with any family member, sometimes this has caused no small annoyance when critics have accused me of being heavily influenced by him! Now I'm not bothered anymore by that, as I had to realize that we have so much in common as regards attitude and background.

Many young composers today have journeyed from popular music to classical pretensions; both Weill and I came to popular music from classical roots. Either one of us could have been a "boutique" or academic composer if we'd chosen, and I think we didn't stop there only *partly* because we wanted to reach a wider audience: I think it's mostly because there is *nothing harder* than writing a good tune that communicates. (People always say, "Write a good popular song and your financial troubles will be over." If it were only that simple!) Weill wrote an awful lot of tunes (and much other music) in his short life, and not every one "works" or has become popular, but a respectable number of them have, and there he beats me hands down.

I'm in awe of the greatest of the tunes mostly; the big works are something I can relate to more easily in the way another composer might. Many years ago, when I won my first Kurt Weill Foundation grant, Lotte Lenya asked me what impressed me most of all Weill's work. I had to say "September Song." In it he bridges two cultures totally successfully; that song reverberates as deeply as anything ever written, and more as I get older. If an artist can do that even once in life, that's enough.



Lessons in Paradox

by Seth Brodsky

I must reach the utmost degree of simplicity if I want to write for students and wish to be comprehensible to them. But despite all such simplicity, I must give my best and highest.—Kurt Weill, 1930.

I don't think anybody really knew Kurt Weill. When he died, I looked at him, and I wasn't sure I really knew him.—Lotte Lenya, on Kurt Weill, 1978.

How does a man “reach utmost simplicity” and yet conceal his own identity, even to a lover of twenty-six years? This may be only one lesson in paradox, but it’s a good one: How to be utterly simple and yet remain utterly mysterious. In this regard, *Der Jasager*, Kurt Weill’s 1930 collaboration with Elisabeth Hauptmann and Bertolt Brecht, might be the composer’s most mysteriously simple—and paradoxical—score. And that itself is a paradox, because *Der Jasager* wasn’t engineered to hide its secrets; it was engineered to make everything crystal clear. This slender little school opera, to which Weill’s words above actually refer, is a work he and Brecht labeled a *Lehrstück* or “learning play/teaching piece.” Gearing *Jasager* for performance in schools, by schoolchildren themselves, Weill aimed to make the work a tour de force of clarity.

Why this need for simplicity and clarity? Because *Jasager* was supposed to instruct, not seduce. And for Weill it held many specific lessons: it could be a political lesson, a composition lesson, a lesson in integrity of expression, in operatic form or operatic production, or even a lesson in opera criticism. But it could not be lesson in paradox; you can’t quite “teach” that. “It is important above all to learn full understanding [*Einverständnis*]” are the first and last words Weill sets in *Der Jasager*. A “full understanding” is *Jasager*’s lesson and its method, laid down in perhaps the sparest music Weill ever wrote.

But the work has another story, an alternate history. The text of *Der Jasager* is not really Brecht’s own, and it doesn’t come from Weimar Germany but from medieval Japan. It’s actually a modified German translation by Elisabeth Hauptmann of Arthur Waley’s 1921 English translation of a nearly 600-year-old Noh play called *Taniko* (“The Valley Rite”). Brecht deleted all religious references, framed it with those quasi-Marxist choruses about learning “full understanding,” and Weill set it to music.

So *Der Jasager* is a palimpsest of sorts, written upon the faded traces of another work. This “borrowing” was a famous trait of Brecht’s (and also, to certain extent, Weill’s), and in this light *Jasager* is not alone among Weill-Brecht collaborations. But shifting the light a little, *Taniko* becomes quite a different model for *Der Jasager* than, say, *The Beggar’s Opera* was for *Die Dreigroschenoper*. For while *Jasager*’s creators attempted to eliminate all ambiguity and paradox, *Jasager*’s effaced model *Taniko* did the opposite. *Taniko* is an intentional knot of mystery born of Japanese Noh drama, which founded itself on ambiguity and paradox. Brecht, a “father” of the *Lehrstück*, set its highest goal as instruction; Zeami Motokiyo, a “father” of classical Noh drama, set Noh’s highest goal

as *Yugen*—a fusion of dimness, depth, and mystery. And while Weill demanded of *Jasager* an extreme, simple clarity, Zeami would have aspired in *Taniko* for “The Feeling that Transcends Cognition.” *Der Jasager*, like any instruction manual or set of directions, sinks as soon as it “transcends cognition.” And yet its origin, its “suppressed subconscious,” is an art of ambiguity. Weill and Brecht themselves experienced this irony firsthand: after initial performances, their tutorial on Marxist values was rejected as dictatorial by the German Left and celebrated (as dictatorial?) by the German Right. In a seemingly cynical solution, Brecht about-faced the text, and titled his revision *Der Neinsager* (“The No-Sayer”). Perhaps not ambiguous, but certainly paradoxical.

As long as its origin continues to be suppressed, *Der Jasager* can be understood, appreciated, even performed according to its authors’ assertions: opera as mechanism, as method. Witness Richard Minnich’s recent production of *Jasager* at California Institute of the Arts and surrounding elementary schools. Minnich fervently claims *Der Jasager* as a “tremendously effective learning tool” and advises against “becoming obsessed with perfect technical execution. [*Der Jasager*] is a forgiving opera, written to be performed by amateurs, not professionals.” Minnich gives us a pragmatic set of do’s and don’ts: education but not art, practicality but not perfection, amateurs but not professionals.

But what happens when one chooses *not* to forget *Der Jasager*’s relationship to *Taniko*? A lot happens, because the ideals of Noh drama reverse exactly those rules Minnich laid out for his *Jasager* production. Zeami, in his nine extraordinary Noh treatises from the early 1400s, consistently pleads for art rather than education; the practical must always give way to perfection’s relentless pursuit, and no Noh actor can tolerate the least amateurism—Noh is a consummately professional art. Essentially, all the ad hoc, external concerns of a “teaching piece” like *Der Jasager* must be thrown out the window.

Last April, Japan Society of America put *Der Jasager* up against its ancient ancestor *Taniko*, with fascinating results. Perhaps not surprisingly, things didn’t quite work: *Taniko*, ferociously played by the professional Japanese Noh troupe Nohgaku-za, shocked its younger sibling almost into oblivion. It wasn’t that the two works were all that different: both pieces came in concentrate-form, carved in the same hard stone with strikingly similar gestures—stark, obsessive, unblinking.

But *Der Jasager*’s austerity was still put to didactic use, while *Taniko*’s bareness plunged it into vigorous mystery, beautiful and violent. *Der Jasager* was still in school, but *Taniko* was in the theater, and if you’re given a choice, it’s hard to stay in school. The double-bill was anything but a failure, though. It certainly took the wind out of *Der Jasager* as a *Lehrstück*, but it offered a tremendous possibility for this small opera to be presented as a piece of art rather than a piece of instruction, one inspired by the Japanese tradition.

Kurt Weill’s ideals for simplicity are certainly applicable for a school-produced *Jasager*. But we also have words from Weill about the ideals of “theater opera.” They come from a 1935 letter to Lenya, in which Weill excitedly describes a recent production of *The Beggar’s Opera* as “one of the most beautiful nights I’ve ever had in the theater, an incomparably more beautiful and more aggressive production than *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and much better performed. Stylistically this was a theater of perfection such as I’ve previously encountered only with the Japanese.” So Kurt Weill’s

only recorded feeling about Japanese theater are preserved in three highly descriptive words: “beauty,” “aggression,” and “perfection.”

As words go, these three are pretty substantial, and they speak less to Brecht than Zeami, less to “pedagogics” than paradoxes. For instance, Zeami frequently writes about the absolute necessity of fusing beauty with aggression, brutality with elegance—and always in the pursuit of a special perfection, what he called *hana*, or “flower.” The actor must at once convey “violent body movement, gentle foot movement,” or else “violent foot movement, gentle body movement.” The actor portraying a warrior must convey roughness and grace, like “a flower blooming on a rock.” The actor playing an old man must infuse a late-life weakness and angst with brilliant charm, like “a flower blooming on a dead tree.”

Zeami’s paradoxes extend farther into the realm of aesthetic philosophy. “The art of the flower of profundity,” for example, is a mountain, a symbol of height. But the mountain is profound not because it is so high, but “rather because it is so deep.” “There are limits to heights,” Zeami specifies, “yet the depths cannot be measured.” And thus a paradox: true profundity is both limitless and imperceptible. Similarly, “the flower of peerless charm” reveals itself in the impossible image, “in the dead of night, the sun shines brightly.” But perhaps Zeami’s culminating paradox is his famous formula, “If hidden, acting shows the flower; if unhidden, it cannot.” The performer accomplishing this formula will achieve incredible force, though “the actor does nothing” and “nothing happens.”

This kind of intensity, with its invisible interiors and indissoluble paradoxes, does not tolerate a *Lehrstück* philosophy. But it does tolerate many scenes in *Der Jasager*, especially its penultimate number. The scene involves a young student and his teacher on a dangerous mountain journey with other students; the boy has fallen ill along the way. The custom, as the teacher explains to the boy, gives him a choice: either tell the group to abandon the journey and turn back, or allow the group to throw the boy to his death in the valley below and complete the journey unhindered. As the title implies, the boy says “Yes” to the custom—he has “learned full understanding”—and he is hurled to his death.

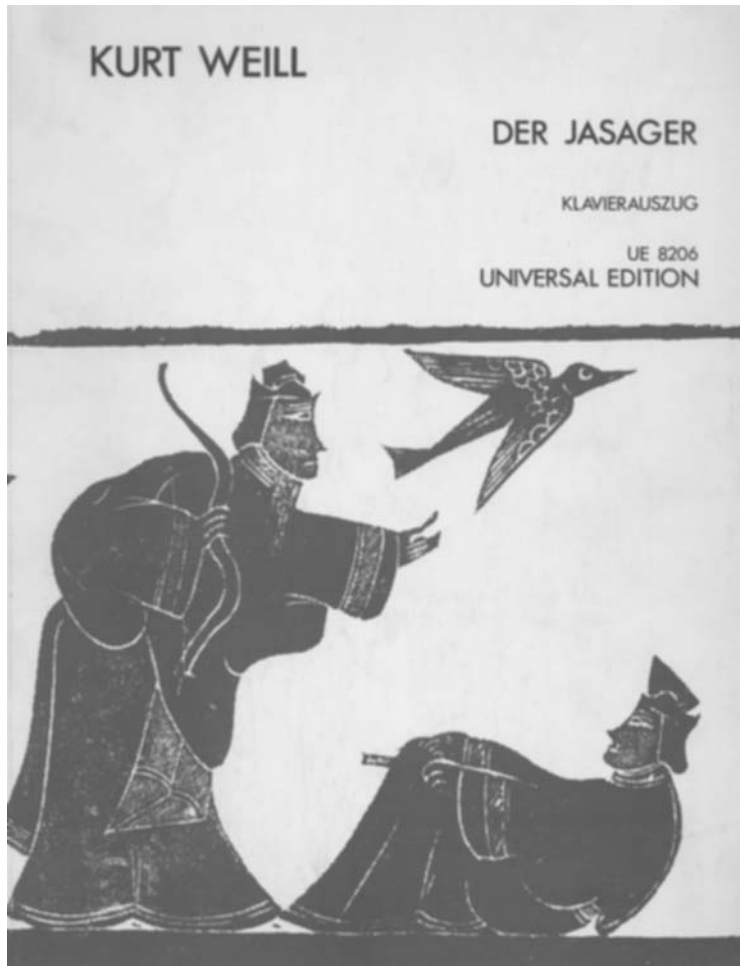
The longest scene in *Der Jasager*, it is also Weill at his blankest and barest. The boy and teacher speak in slow, unaccompanied lines of only a few pitches; Weill occasionally interpolates fascinating half-cadences on solo piano, painfully interior and hollow; at certain

key moments, the teacher declaims his lines at paralytic volume, reinforced by the entire chamber orchestra. The scene is the opera’s crux and catastrophe, and yet “nothing happens.” The music doesn’t act out resolution, the boy doesn’t act out understanding, the teacher doesn’t act out remorse or relief. Weill has outdone himself: extreme simplicity and total clarity have not created the full understanding, but a Feeling that Transcends Cognition.

That feeling could be exploited to tremendous effect. I can imagine this scene infused with the paradoxical intensity Zeami describes: the dialogue declaimed with fierce, impossible tension under relentless control; taut silences which suspend time in charged air; threadbare vocal lines and homely piano chords delivered with a wholly disproportionate beauty and polish, “flowers blooming on a rock.” And, presiding over the entire scene, an unflinching tone of concealment—of a depth within this simplicity, which yet remains unfathomable. That this limitlessness might be an illusion is not at all a contradiction. As Zeami explains, “What supports these illusions and gives them life is the intensity of mind in the actor. Yet the existence of this intensity must not be shown directly to the audience.”

Looking to Zeami for advice on a production of *Der Jasager* would entail a blatant misreading of Weill’s and Brecht’s *Lehrstück* approach.

But then again, Weill’s and Brecht’s own various writings demonstrate how frequently and quickly they could change their minds. Works can change their mind too, especially if in changing they illuminate a side in their creator we already sense and savor. *Der Jasager* played the role of a tutor to great effect in over three hundred German schools in the early 1930s. But on a New York stage in 2000, it’s a different work performing a different function; to preserve for authenticity’s sake the didacticism of *Der Jasager* sells the work short. When professionally staged in a double-bill with *Taniko*, and with the right treatment, *Der Jasager* could reveal great *Yugen*, deep, dim mystery. And there’s an irony to savor in this transformation. By moving *Der Jasager* from school to theater, by misreading Weill at and on one point, we might capture Weill on a larger scope, the Weill that Harold Clurman called “all theater, all mask.”



Music

Die Dreigroschenoper

The Kurt Weill Edition Series I, Volume 5 Edited by Stephen Hinton and Edward Harsh

New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; Miami: European-American Music Corp., 2000
ISBN 0-913574-61-9

While the two-sentence prologue (written by Brecht, but, one suspects, with some support from Weill) is often omitted from both English and German versions of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, it stands, in this edition, in all its appropriate contradictoriness on the page immediately preceding the Overture. Appropriate, because this splendid new edition is far removed from the qualified magnificence of the theatrical beggars' imagination ("Because this opera was conceived on the sort of splendid scale that only beggars might dream of, and because it needed to be cheap enough for beggars to pay for, it is called *The Threepenny Opera*"); contradictory because the declaration immediately signals the confusion or breaking down of the barriers between "high" and "low," serious and comic, irony and sentiment, and, yes, text and music that informs every line and note of the work.

Brecht himself had seen clearly one of the major reasons for the work's popularity when, in his *Arbeitsjournal*, he linked it with *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* as the only two of his works which could be categorized as "Repertoirestücke." And although Stephen Hinton suggests in his typically fluent and searching introduction that "the interpretive literature [on the piece] . . . is not as extensive as one might expect, given the work's popularity" (p. 29), I think he is slightly astray on two counts. First: his own earlier monograph for Cambridge University Press, taken together with John Willett's editorial material in the Methuen edition, represents as reliable a survey of the interpretive issues as one might wish; second, the quote from Dieter Wöhrle he cites on p. 35 ("Brecht's best-known work . . . [which] nonetheless plays a marginal role in scholarship") points—inadvertently, I suspect—to the major problem with the work for "academic scholarship." Precisely because it is popular, the real scholar can avert his/her gaze from the shamefully attractive spectacle and move on to higher things like notions of historicizing the present-past/mise en scène/viewer/character's corporeal presence, etc., or penetrating the postmodern unrepresentable.

The two volumes of this edition are models of their kind. The first comprises an introduction, facsimiles, the 1928 text and full score, together with appendices including numbers for various reasons dropped from or added to the original production. The second, a sixty-page "Critical Report," consists of commentary and notes on musicological and performance-practice details, together with a clear description of the manuscripts and published sources. I suspect that there may be some who would have preferred all the data and relevant material in one volume, but it is hard to see how this could have been as manageable as the present solution. At 282 folio-size pages, the primary volume is already of a size and scope to confirm Doctor Johnson's assertion that "a man will turn over half a library to make one book."

In fact, on the evidence of the list of sources consulted, it would appear that the editors, Stephen Hinton and Edward Harsh, have profitably trawled through not just one, but several libraries, together with other literary and musical archives. Twenty-three musical sources, together with a dozen textual sources, are listed in the Critical Report, and the "Statement of Source Valuation and Usage" is an essential guide through the thickets and undergrowth of this material. The editors make clear their reasons for their privileging of the holograph full score "for all musical dimensions," while at the same time conceding that some readings are overruled or supplemented. On every such occasion a cogent argument is advanced for the choice(s) arrived at. Particularly valuable for all musical directors of the work is the Tempo and Character Markings table on pp. 49-50, which, by juxtaposing data from four major sources and several minor ones, provides an indispensable and readily intelligible overview of the often puzzling variations in metronome and other markings for every number in the score. (Though it would have proved difficult to accommodate on the page, it might also have been useful to compare some of these readings with the actual recorded performances from the time which are also listed in the Source Material.) And the same musical directors will breathe a collective sigh of relief at the sight of the full score, so superior in layout and physical presentation to the previous material as to represent virtually a new piece; while those scholars (mostly German-speaking, though with a few notable exceptions) who have tended to overlook the music-text dialectic can now have no excuse for ignoring both the primary and secondary material here to hand.

Of particular interest for any planned performance is the material and commentary provided in the four appendices to the first volume, in which material both cut from and added to the first production(s) is reprinted and evaluated, and, in some cases, reconstructed. There might perhaps be an argument for firmly locating both "Pollys Lied" and "Die Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit" in the full score proper, if only to guard against any misguided directors and conductors opting to exclude the numbers from performance on the grounds of adherence to misplaced notions of "authenticity." But, on the other hand, the editors have been consistent in their procedure and in providing clear guidance for those who seek to re-insert the numbers in the score—as must be done, given that they constitute some of Weill's most inspired melodic inventions. The only cautionary note I would sound, particularly in the case of the latter, would be to trust that any over-enthusiastic performer of the number might not seize the bit between the teeth at the sight of the editors "leaving the choice of dynamic to the discretion of the performer as an aspect of characterization." I have lost count of the number of times I have heard this number, both in full productions and in Weill recitals, bawled, snarled, growled, or barked at an audience; these days it seems that "discretion" is not necessarily the first requirement directors look for when casting Mrs. Peachum. Let us hope that conductors and singers who can read dynamic markings as well as text will note the clear *piano* indications, as well as the editors' indication that Weill had also originally marked the tenor saxophone *p*, before replacing it with *mf* (which makes perfect sense in terms of the instrumental textures.)

Performers and musicians with little or no German may have wished for a bilingual English edition, but a little ingenuity can point them in the right direction (or directions). To have ventured into the translation minefield surrounding the piece might have extended the publication deadline by a decade. This aside, one might quibble with the translation of the odd passage in the

Introduction. When Brecht, apropos the writing of the “Moritat,” speaks of letting the actor playing Macheath keep the blue silk tie to which he was so attached, because the juxtaposition of the description of his crimes with the item of dress will allow the actor to come over “um so unheimlicher,” he was hardly envisaging that “the effect . . . will be all the more curious” (p. 20). We are not in Alice in Wonderland territory here, but closer to Grand Guignol: “eerie” or “sinister” is surely the meaning. Similarly, to translate “Zersetzung” by one of today’s buzz-words, “subversion” (p. 28), is not quite what the reviewer at the time had in mind. And the contrast of “Sinnbild” with “irony” might be more aptly, if awkwardly, caught by “figuration” rather than the flat “symbol” (ibid.).

Occasionally one might have wished for a slightly keener sense of the ironic in Hinton’s comments on some of Brecht’s remarks—given that irony, parody, and self-consciousness are aspects of the work to which he rightly draws attention. I doubt, for example, whether Brecht’s self-interview from 1933(!) is quite such a “blatant” expression of his “distance” from the “original incarnation” (p. 29) as Hinton thinks. It is surely just as self-mockingly aware of the work’s qualities as was Brecht’s acknowledgment of them in his letter to Piscator from autumn 1928, when he observes, “She’s a good old honest soul. Her success is most gratifying. It refutes the general view that the public can’t be satisfied—which of course is a touch disappointing for me.”

Both scholars and performers should find their expectations, whether disparate or complementary, more than satisfied by this edition. At almost every point the user of the edition can find direction, helpful commentary, clear guidance on musical and textual matters, and above all, a printed score that will replace what, in my past experience, has been hours of picking one’s way through the earlier Philharmonia Partitur, with the hired conductor’s score and the orchestral parts to hand in order to clear up questions of notation and dynamics, only to find one’s confusion worse confounded. And it is to be hoped that all those directors who have their own ideas on where the (usually only one) intermission should come will note the unambiguous indication in the master for the first edition of the libretto that there are to be two intermissions: a short one after the first “Threepenny Finale” and a long one after the second. This nod towards a common practice for opera and operetta must surely have been in Weill’s mind when he wrote the two finales, and it stands as another performance practice detail that reinforces the parodistic and ironic elements in the work’s structure.

Most of the observations on musical matters are well-gauged and pertinent, though in one important point in need of (slight) modification. While attention is paid to the borrowings (from self and others) in the text, it is surely just a little rash to assert that in Weill’s score “it is above all particular types of musical expression rather than actual compositions that are parodied” (p. 24), and to promptly declare that the Overture “is ‘baroque-like’ without actually quoting from a particular baroque composer.” A quick comparison of its opening bars will show that in rhythmic shape they are an exact imitation of bars 43–50 of Bach’s *Weihnachtsoratorium*—a reverse “Kontrafaktur,” so to speak, with the original 3/8 signature altered to 3/4, while the continuo figure for bassoon and organ (bar 45) is given by Weill to saxophones and harmonium. Of course the pitches are different, as is the mood; that is surely the point. Whether it might be described as an “art of vandalism” (p. 17) analogous to that practiced by Brecht is another question.

Turning forms, styles, and genres inside out and upside down was a procedure to which both Weill and Brecht were inclined. When Hinton suggests on p. 29 that “the pairing of putative oppo-

sites nicely captures the pervasive ambiguity that remains a constant challenge to exegetes,” I was set to wondering whether perhaps this alliterative assertion was not only apt, but maybe even cried out for a musical setting. Might not this veiled acknowledgment of the topsy-turvydom which crops up in most of Brecht’s work suggest yet another English connection (apart from the familiar Kipling and Gay ones)? And should we now also have a look at that particular type of comic opera (as well as the operetta and farce to which Weill refers) that Gilbert and Sullivan turned into such an ideal and popular vehicle for satirizing and massaging its target audience at one and the same time?

Michael Morley

The Flinders University of South Australia

Die Dreigroschenoper

Ein Stück mit Musik in einem Vorspiel und acht Bildern
nach dem Englischen des John Gay
Übersetzt von Elisabeth Hauptmann

Deutsche Bearbeitung von
Bertolt Brecht

Musik von
Kurt Weill

Series I, Volume 5

Edited by Stephen Hinton and Edward Harsh

Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, Inc. / New York
European American Music Corporation / Miami

Edition wins Paul Revere Award

On 5 June 2000, the Music Publishers Association awarded a Paul Revere Award for Graphic Excellence to the critical edition of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The edition won first prize in the folio category. The twenty-eight winning publications will be featured in an exhibition that travels to numerous college, university, and public libraries throughout the 2000–2001 academic year. For more information about the award visit the association’s website: www.mpa.org.

Books

Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents

David Farneth with Elmar Juchem and Dave Stein

New York: Overlook; London: Thames & Hudson, 2000

ISBN Overlook: 0-87951-721-1 / Thames & Hudson: 0-50097-487-X

xvi, 312 pp., 905 photographs and documents, 67 in color.

Whoever first pronounced those by now hackneyed truisms, “Every picture tells a story” and “One picture is worth ten thousand words” might well have had this latest volume of Weill documentation before them. (For the record, the former first appeared in conjunction with an advertisement for Doan’s Backache Kidney Pills (!) during the early 1900s; the latter is attributed to Frederick R. Barnard, in *Printers’ Ink*, 10 March 1927.)

Published in conjunction with *Musical Stages: Kurt Weill and His Century*, an exhibition presented by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, this volume, by David Farneth, Director of the Weill-Lenya Research Center, with his colleagues Elmar Juchem and Dave Stein, has raised the pictorial musical biography to unparalleled heights of excellence. In twentieth-century music scholarship, the published iconographies of Elgar (by Jerrold Northrop Moore), Britten (Donald Mitchell), Stravinsky (Robert Craft), and, more recently, Mahler (Gilbert Kaplan) have all, in their time, acted as the benchmark, but Farneth, Juchem and Stein set standards that one finds hard to imagine being bettered. Their achievement has been matched by first-rate support from the publishers and the highest quality reproduction by the printers; it is heartening to see Farneth acknowledge the contribution of both, as well as that of the book’s designer. The volume’s lavish design is a pleasure to the eye.

As the title suggests, the whole span of Weill’s life is embraced—from his German-Jewish heritage, through the years of his formal musical education, the years of the Weimar Republic and his life as a theater composer, his collaborations with Brecht et al., his relationship with Lenya, his exodus to America, the war years, composing for Broadway, to his relatively early death in 1950. A prefatory “brief life,” conveniently divided into the volume’s seven chapters, provides a useful overview. Each chapter is given its own more detailed chronology of life and works, as well as (a most helpful feature, this) tabulated contextual material for each year under the headings: Music & Theater;

Literature & Film; Science & Society; and Politics. For example, we learn that 1926, the year of Weill’s first major stage work, *Der Protagonist*, was also the year of Hindemith’s *Cardillac*, Duke Ellington’s first records, Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, the founding of the Lufthansa Airline, and the appointment of Goebbels as *Gauleiter* of the Nazi Party.

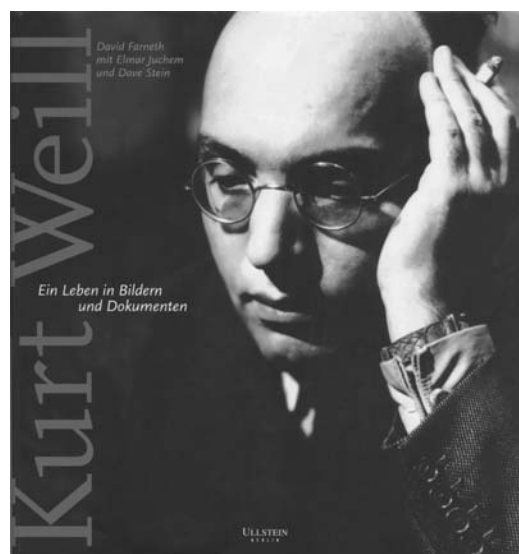
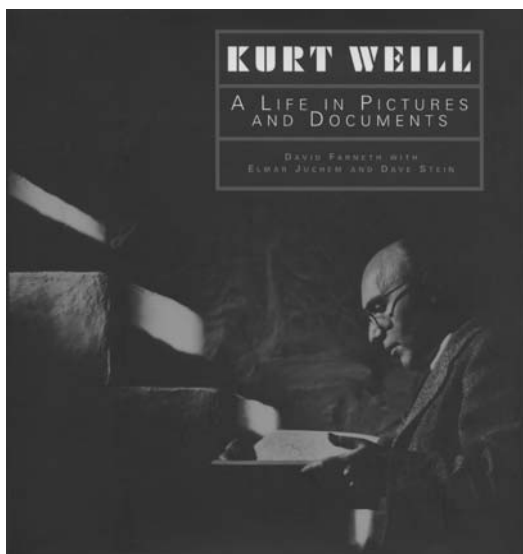
Photographs of Weill and his associates provide the core of the imagery—from the earliest family portrait of the composer as a babe in his mother Emma’s arms (one can recognize the man’s features in the child) to the last relaxed shot with his sheepdog Wooly, probably taken only a few weeks before his death. But the volume is packed with hundreds of other images, not one less fascinating or less evocative than those of Weill himself: autograph manuscript pages from virtually every major composition, annotated libretto drafts, letters, costume and set designs, production shots of stage works, programs and theater posters, record labels, newspaper articles and reviews, pamphlets. The whole tapestry of Weill’s professional life is presented here in an astonishing array of material that left me reeling in pleasure as each fresh page brought new delights. Worthy of special attention are the three magnificent color gatherings, whose vibrancy serves to remind one that life then too was lived in full color and not in a sepia haze.

The assembly of these images alone would render this volume significant; that excerpts accompany them from Weill’s correspondence (both to and from) makes it indispensable. These are given in English in the main text, but the scrupulous compilers have wisely seen fit to provide an appendix in which the texts are given (where applicable) in their original language. This practice is extended to any foreign-language documents reproduced as facsimile in the text, which are rendered in English translation in the appendix. A comprehensive index of names and of Weill’s works allows one to gain access to specific material with speed and accuracy.

This beautiful volume is a major addition to the Weill bibliography and an essential purchase for anyone interested in the composer and his times.

Philip Reed

English National Opera



Books

Musik und musikalisches Theater. Gesammelte Schriften

Expanded and revised edition. Edited by Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera with Elmar Juchem. Includes a CD of Kurt Weill speaking and singing.

Mainz: Schott, 2000. ISBN: 3-7957-0423-5

In 1975, David Drew published *Ausgewählte Schriften* by Kurt Weill; in 1990 the *Gesammelte Schriften* appeared in an edition by Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera under the title *Musik und Theater*. Ten years later, Hinton and Schebera now have published a revised edition, this time headed *Musik und musikalisches Theater*. The new edition follows the three-part structure of its predecessor. The first comprises articles, essays, and statements to the press; the second a selection of Weill's articles for the journal *Der deutsche Rundfunk*; the third a selection of conversations and interviews. As before, all texts appear in German; the eminently readable translations are largely the work of Jürgen Schebera.

There are good reasons for a new edition. Although a few documented writings have not yet been found (such as the lecture on *Die Dreigroschenoper* for Vienna radio and the "Anmerkungen zur Bürgerschaft"), several other texts have come to light during the past ten years that round out our picture of Weill in notable ways. Among the newly discovered writings, the reader will find texts such as "Romantik in der Musik" from the Warsaw journal *Muzyka*, a comment on the responsibilities of the Intendant of Berlin radio, a note on the *Berliner Requiem* for the *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunkzeitung* (Frankfurt), a contribution to an "Aufruf zu einer gemeinsamen Front im Kampf gegen die kulturelle Reaktion" in 1930, as well as program notes for the premiere performances *Der Lindberghflug* and the *Second Symphony*.

Newly added from Weill's papers is a typescript, "Was ist musikalisches Theater" ("What Is Musical Theatre?", 1936) and "Notizen für eine Antwort an Harold Clurman" ("Notes for a Reply to Harold Clurman," 1950). Other additions include three newspaper interviews (from 1929, 1937, and 1947) and three American radio interviews. A few texts are illustrated with reduced facsimiles of the originals; here and there the (still sparse) commentary has been expanded. (I found a small correction to the annotations on page 497: in his interview "I'm an American" Weill is not referring to the English Bill of Rights of 1689 but, of course, to the United States Bill of Rights ratified in 1791.) Oddly enough, three texts have been omitted from the previous edition without explanation: "Zur Musik des 'Ruhrepos,'" "Über die Musik zu *You and Me*," and "Notizen für den Film *Knickerbocker Holiday*."

The enclosed CD *Kurt Weill spricht und singt* represents a valuable addition. It contains recordings of three radio interviews as well as private recordings of songs from *One Touch of Venus* and the opening sequence of *The Firebrand of Florence* with Weill as singer and pianist. Two additional items should have merited a transcription or translation in the volume as well. A clip from a French newsreel shows Weill delivering a short speech at the Salle Gaveau concert in Paris in December 1932. A similarly brief portion of a German newsreel documents a meeting of Berlin theater people with Weill in New York in the summer of 1949, during which he

makes the noteworthy statement (in German with a slight American accent): "I hope that some of the works that I have written here during the past fourteen years will be performed in Germany, and then I will gladly come and attend and help." Here again, the annotations are very brief; one doesn't learn, for instance, which radio network broadcast the series *Opera News on the Air*.

The second section, containing Weill's articles for *Der deutsche Rundfunk*, corrects two errors of the previous edition. The beginning of Weill's work for the journal is given correctly (and even more precisely than in the old Drew edition) as 30 November 1924, and the new edition also includes writings that were part of the *Ausgewählte Schriften* but had been eliminated from *Musik und Theater*. Thus the reader no longer needs to consult the two editions simultaneously. Newly added are an introduction to Nicolai's opera *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, the early, general article *Opern im Rundfunk*, an announcement and review of Georg Kaiser's *Juana*, a short passage on Walt Whitman, and an article on the authors Christian Morgenstern and Arno Holz.

Considering Weill's vast output as a weekly critic over a period of five-and-a-half years, the selection still remains relatively small. The editors try to overcome this disadvantage by including a complete index of all Weill's articles for *Der deutsche Rundfunk*. Understandably, a number of unsigned articles showing music examples in Weill's hand were attributed to him; however, crediting Weill with the unsigned announcement of "boxing events" (pp. 357-58) hardly seems plausible to me. On the other hand, for reasons of style and content I believe that Weill was the author of several unsigned articles between late 1924 and early 1925 not included in this volume. Especially regrettable is the omission of interesting (signed) articles or passages on Bach, Berlioz, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Georg Kaiser and Leo Tolstoy—not to mention fundamental issues of programming. Weill's commentary on the *Berliner Funkstunde*'s evening program of 10 January 1929, which he called the "ideal radio program" and "the best evening in the history of German radio" (printed in the *Musik-Konzepte* volume *Kurt Weill: Die frühen Werke, 1916-1928*, pp. 95-96 and 104), does not appear.

The editors' judgment that Weill's contributions to *Der deutsche Rundfunk* after 1926 were of lesser quality and quantity, a sentiment retained from the previous edition's preface, reflects the common underestimation of the composer's writings. Up until he left the journal, Weill was involved in formulating the editorial line of *Der deutsche Rundfunk* for several important issues. Numerous contributions by Weill are probably hidden in a section that summarizes short reviews on various stations under the pseudonym "Ascoltante" (Italian for "listener") after Fall 1927.

The volume opens with a page of enlightening quotations: "Weill on Weill" and "Others on Weill" (alas, full citations are not given). Extremely important is the introduction where the editors point out the "continuity in the artistic program as well as in the output," which can be seen in the collected writings. In only a few precise, convincing, and gripping pages the editors sketch the development of Weill's work for the musical theater over the course of thirty years. In the same way as America seemed to Weill an "advancement of Europe," Hinton and Schebera illuminate the continuity of the "German" and the "American" Weill. Two brief characterizations of Weill as a "great ironist" and "ahead of his time as a representative of 'postmodernity,'" which are not explored, will hopefully serve as an impulse for future Weill reception.

Andreas Hauff
Mainz

Performances

Wall-to-Wall Kurt Weill

New York City
Symphony Space

25 March 2000

Symphony Space's thirtieth "wall-to-wall" extravaganza presented what was undoubtedly the longest all-Kurt Weill concert ever: thirteen hours of music ranging from the composer's earliest student efforts to his unfinished last work, interspersed with oral reminiscences and readings from his letters to his wife, Lotte Lenya. The popular Upper West Side venue for concerts, theater, and literary readings has been producing similar marathons since 1978. Over the years it has given wall-to-wall treatment to Bach, Schubert, and Beethoven, as well as to Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, and Frank Loesser.

The Weill marathon was like a marvelously endless variety show, with a cast of seemingly thousands, both famous and unfamiliar. I missed hearing only twenty minutes of the thirteen hours: the opening *Kiddush* and *Legende vom toten Soldaten* (I arrived late) and excerpts from *Der Kuhhandel*, when, at 11 P.M., I made a mad dash for a quick taco to survive the last hour without fainting from hunger, having eaten nothing since early morning. The capacity house bulged with standees for virtually the entire event; if you left the theater you had to get back in line to be readmitted.

The thirteen-hour event laid out the terrain of Weill's entire compositional life like a giant aerial map photographed from a satellite. One could see geologic veins that are often invisible up close: for instance, the pentatonic tunes of the Brecht works of the late 1920s linked up with the pentatonicism of some of the Broadway tunes written twenty years later, such as "Thousands of Miles" from *Lost in the Stars*. One could compare the caustic use of saxophones in *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) with their more subtle use in *Down in the Valley* (1948). And the proverbial "two Weills" (Brecht and Broadway) multiplied into "many Weills" before one's eyes and ears: we heard the early Mahlerian and Busonian Weills, the French chanson Weill, the Palestine folk

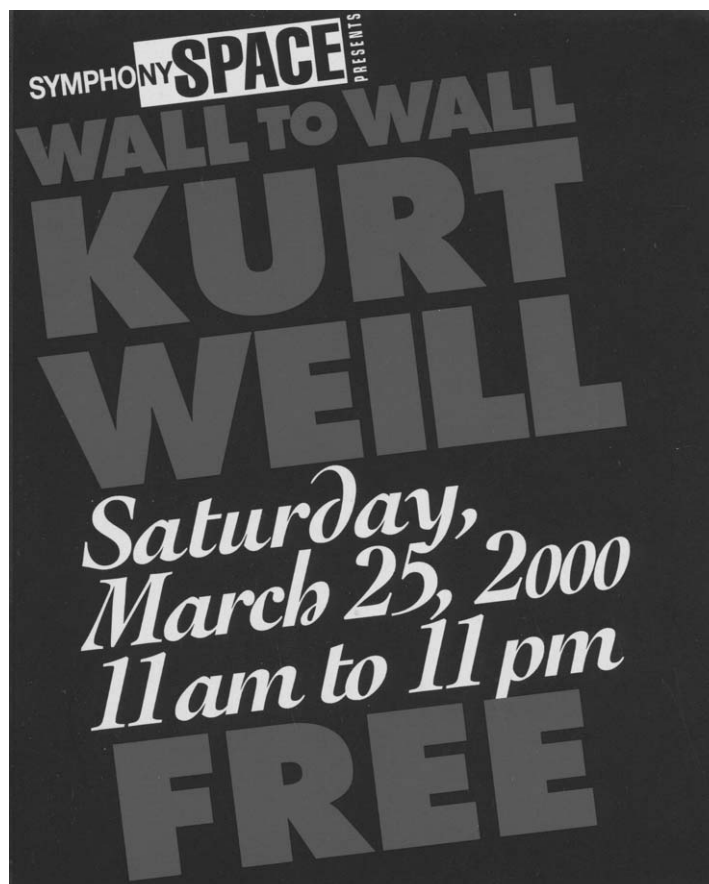
music Weill, the American folk song Weill, and, most intriguingly, the posthumous but thriving rock and electronic Weills.

Several rarely heard early works were performed. The 1916 *Ofrabs Lieder*, sung with great intensity by Nell Snaidas, showed the young composer writing in a Brahms-Wolf vein. The 1917 *Intermezzo* for piano, sensitively played by Sherri Jones, was in its second section less Brahmsian than rhapsodically Wagnerian. But in its first section the harmonic feeling of the *Intermezzo*'s static block chord accompaniment anticipates the slow march of the "Instead of" song from *The Threepenny Opera*. A style similar to the *Intermezzo* was also in evidence in the 1919 song *Die stille Stadt*, sung by Lucy Shelton.

The earliest work that seemed fully mature, the three-movement 1920 cello sonata (well played by Inbal Segev and pianist Joel Sachs) was a long, amazingly sprawling Mahlerian work with almost too great an abundance of ideas. The piece

struck this listener as an encoded opera score, full of hidden arias and recitatives. But in the next two concert works, both from 1923—the op. 8 String Quartet and the op. 10 *Frauentanz*, a song cycle for soprano, flute, clarinet, bassoon, horn, and viola—the composer seemed to return to abstract, non-theatrical thematic development. The three-movement String Quartet, a gripping piece, was performed masterfully by the Flux Quartet, a group that recently performed Morton Feldman's six-hour string quartet. *Frauentanz*, more in the style of Stravinsky and Orff (and possibly Busoni), seemed less convincing. Still, I think that Weill had more to say in the medium of chamber music but decided to walk away from it. In any event, he clearly never gravitated completely to atonality. No matter how chromatic or dissonant, there were always clear tonal centers in these early pieces.

Most of the day, appropriately, was devoted to Weill's theater music. The young theater troupe Ensemble Weil from Berlin performed fully staged renderings of both the *Mahagonny Songspiel* and David Drew's 1975 *Happy End Songspiel*.



Mahagonny was a tad boring, but *Happy End* came off better. Surprisingly exciting, though, were the *Sieben Stücke nach der "Dreigroschenoper"* arranged in 1929 for violin and piano by Stefan Frenkel. Violinist Diane Monroe struck exactly the right tone of brittleness and nonchalance in this virtuoso arrangement full of off-the-string bowings—a Weillian *Danse Macabre*.

Symphony Space's Artistic Director and emcee Isaiah Sheffer effectively mounted the 1948 American "school opera" *Down in the Valley*, with libretto by Arnold Sundgaard, in an off-book staged reading format with Clara Longstreth conducting the New Amsterdam Singers and the Mannes College Orchestra. Though the corn is as high as an elephant's eye in this piece, it is abundantly tuneful and sensuously scored. Even today it makes for affecting theater. Emily Loesser sang and played the female lead with a sweet charm and cheerfulness reminiscent of her mother Jo Sullivan Loesser (who spoke extempore about her role as Polly in the 1950s *Threepenny Opera* with Lotte Lenya), while David Staller handled the "Greek chorus" role of the Leader with authority and presence. Later, John Mauceri conducted the New York Chamber Symphony and the Riverside Choral Society in Robert Russell Bennett's lush orchestration of the five extant songs from *Huckleberry Finn* (1950, lyrics by Maxwell Anderson). The crowd went "Weill-d"; baritone Harry Burney radiated a Robeson-like presence as Jim, and young Alex Bowen as Huck simply won the audience's hearts.

A great deal of the marathon was given over to performances of individual songs, whether unpublished and unfamiliar or tried and true. In the rarity department we heard songs with lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, Howard Dietz, and even Ann Ronell, the Gershwin protégée who wrote "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf." We heard songs dropped from shows: good ones like "Who Am I?" cut from *One Touch of Venus*, entertainingly sung by David Green, as well as songs less than top-drawer, like "It's Never Too Late to Mendelsohn," Danny Kaye's original big number from *Lady in the Dark* (cut from the show, much to his disappointment we were told). Hudson Shad was amusing in various ensemble and choral songs, including the barbershop quartet "The Trouble With Women" from *One Touch of Venus* and the faux-brindisi "Song of the Rhineland" from the 1945 film *Where Do We Go From Here?* Two of the Shad, bari-

tone Peter Becker and bass Wilbur Pauley, also appeared in a fine performance of the *Berliner Requiem* conducted by Patrick Gardner, and the quartet reappeared later in the evening with soprano Judy Kaye under Maestro Mauceri's baton in *The Seven Deadly Sins* (English translation by W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman); the sepulchral-voiced and gaunt-faced Mr. Pauley was especially droll as the mother.

Mary Cleere Haran represented the cabaret approach to Weill, accompanied by distinguished composer and jazz pianist Richard Rodney Bennett in "Here I'll Stay" from *Love Life* and "Speak Low" from *One Touch of Venus*, while Joe Jackson brought rock stylings to "Speak Low" (which he dubbed a bossa nova, though it's actually a beguine) and high camp to "That's Him." With great humor and swagger Ute Lemper performed a winningly spontaneous, unrehearsed "Alabama Song" under Mauceri's baton, while Angelina Réaux enriched several songs with her powerful pipes and earth-mother qualities, notably two chansons from Weill's French period to the grandly louche accompaniments of master accordionist William Schimmel. Of the many other fine actor-singers too numerous to name who trod the boards of Symphony Space, perhaps the best performances in the Broadway idiom were by Melissa Errico and Judy Kaye. But the audience bestowed its most thunderous huzzah on the entrance of Kitty Carlisle Hart, who, once ensconced onstage (after having broken her hip several weeks earlier), reminisced "September Song" in a dusky Dietrichian contralto.

The thirteen hours also had delightful vaudevillian aspects. Dancer-choreographer Sally Silvers, costumed in a farthingale draped over a fascistic military uniform, performed her own modern dance version of "Der kleine Leutnant des lieben Gottes" from *Happy End*, to the Teresa Stratas recording. The Klezmatics performed tunes from *Marie galante* with great gusto, the trumpeter changing his mute almost every few bars, upstaging the clarinet, violin, and accordion. Drama critic and Brecht expert Eric Bentley performed "The Sailor's Tango" in a talk-singing style that made no pretense of musicality. Of the several high-decibel rock performances of Weill standards (mostly Brecht-Weill) included in a special, cleverly dubbed section "W₂W_KW," perhaps the most interesting was a version of "Alabama Song" by sultry blonde, black

leather-clad Nora York, sung against a spaceship-like ambience produced by digitally multitracked turntables and a remarkably agile tuba part played by Howard Johnson. No better testament to Weill's durability exists than the continuing lively interest alternate rockers have in his music.

Punctuating the event throughout and serving as entr'actes during stage setups were readings of Weill-Lenya letters (from the Kowalke-Symonette book *Speak Low*) by Teresa Stratas and Isaiah Sheffer. The excerpts ranged from laugh-out-loud to poignant; Stratas, ever the Duse of the Weill world, was remarkably affecting as she read Lenya writing about her late husband. During another interval, Lys Symonette reminisced about both Weill and Lenya. And Kim Kowalke and Angelina Réaux gave a fascinating insight into Weill's creative process by talking and singing through the early and intermediate drafts of the Weill-Ira Gershwin song "My Ship."

As the event proceeded from hour to hour, the program began to run overtime. Inevitably, cuts were made on the fly, so the audience missed choice items from *Street Scene* and *Love Life*. But after such a feast, no one noticed a few missing hors d'oeuvres. To bask for many hours in the sound world of one composer is an experience that every music lover should enjoy (and learn from) at least once. But even after thirteen hours the Weillian enigma remained unsettled: how did the same creative brain conceive the sounds of the op. 8 String Quartet and "Buddy on the Nightshift"? The only answer I have is that he had a phenomenal ear, an inexhaustible curiosity, and a self-imposed artistic credo to adapt himself to every possible cultural context. Kurt Weill was a polystylist before the term was coined, and probably the first post-modernist to boot.

A little after midnight, Wall-to-Wall Weill came to a perfect close with the pre-recorded Kurt Weill himself singing "That's Him" through the loudspeaker to the uncannily synchronized, live accompaniment tenderly provided by John Mauceri and the New York Chamber Symphony.

Mark N. Grant is a composer of concert and theater music. His book *Maestros of the Pen: A History of Classical Music Criticism in America* won a 1999 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award.

Performances

Ladies in the Light

Munich

Prinzregententheater

Premiere: 18 May 2000

One need not have attended every recent Kurt Weill performance to conclude that “*Ladies in the Light*,” produced by the Bayerische Theaterakademie, is one of the highlights of the composer’s anniversary. A brilliant revue, it covers Weill’s career from his beginnings in the Berlin of the Roaring Twenties, through his sojourn in Paris during the first years of exile, his arrival in New York, and his Broadway triumphs, *Street Scene*, *One Touch of Venus*, and *Lady in the Dark*. It is directed by Helmut Baumann. Until recently, Baumann was Intendant (general manager) of the Theater des Westens, Berlin’s home of the musical, where he personally supervised many German premieres of American musicals. He might be considered Germany’s Harold Prince, except that Baumann is also an excellent choreographer. For this revue, he has worked closely with Vicki Hall, star of many of his productions, who has directed

the musical section of the Theaterakademie since 1998. Text and dialogue between individual musical numbers, quoting extensively from contemporary sources, were contributed by Michael Dorner and Lida Winiewicz, dramaturgs of the Akademie and the Theater des Westens. Music director Frank Strobel conducted members of the Münchner Symphoniker. Harald B. Thor designed the multifunctional staircase set, and the costumes, suggestive of the different fashions in the various cities, were by Susanne Hubrich. The whole show, subtitled “Kurt Weill–Seine Zeit–Seine Musik,” brings Weill’s music to glorious life.

Its accent is on youth, naturally, for the performers come from the second- and third-year classes of the musical department of the Akademie, generally considered Germany’s first rank institution for the training of future stars for the musical stage—a relatively recent branch of our musical education system otherwise concentrated on providing new recruits for the opera, concert, and possibly jazz circuits. If it is at first somewhat surprising to see Weill, Brecht, Lenya, and their coterie played by rather young students, we should remember that they were all in their late twenties (or barely thirty) when *Die Dreigroschenoper* was first performed in the

Berlin of 1928. All the members of the early Weill and Brecht mafia are present in this production, including Elisabeth Hauptmann (Brecht’s secretary and supposed ghostwriter of many of his early texts), Carola Neher (a popular actress of the Brecht circle), Kurt Gerron (who played Tiger Brown in the *Dreigroschenoper* premiere), Helene Weigel (who later became Brecht’s wife), as well as an anonymous critic, obviously Alfred Kerr, the most influential of Berlin journalists. Only one American contemporary, Maxwell Anderson, is listed by name, and he is, ironically enough, played by the same actor who appears as Brecht.

The revue is thus set in its proper biographical and social context, though it is written from a markedly pro-Weill point of view (Brecht is characterized as a money-grubber, reckless plagiarist, and insatiable womanizer). Europe’s deteriorating political situation comes to the fore during the later Berlin scenes and takes over completely during the miserable years among the emigrants stranded in Paris. Later, Weill’s emphatically pro-American stance is given free rein in an interview which he concluded by saying, “I love New York!”. But the bulk of the show resides in its musical numbers. The first part draws on *Mahagonny*, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and *Happy End*, with individual performers emerging from the ensemble of twenty-five: Oliver Sohl as Weill, Stefanie Dietrich as Lenya, Andreas Berg as Brecht and Anderson, Merit Ostermann as Weigel, Effi Rabsilber as Elisabeth Hauptmann, Simone Arntz as Carola Neher, Andreas Kirschbaum as the anonymous critic, Felix Powroslo as Gerron, and Alexandra Seefisch as a journalist. In the second part, the refugees in Paris, terribly downtrodden and fatigued, sit forlornly around the piano played by conductor Frank Strobel, stepping forward one by one to perform their songs, “Youkali,” “Complainte de la Seine,” “Nannas Lied,” “Je ne t’aime pas,” and “J’attends un navire.” This part stirs the audience’s innermost emotions. Occasionally one of the singers seems inadequate for a particular song. For instance, Arntz merely whimpers her way through the “Barbara Song”; “Wouldn’t You Like to Be on Broadway?” is sung far too timidly; and “Moon-faced, Starry-eyed” is rather anemic. Otherwise, the New York songs of the third part, including “I’m a Stranger Here Myself,” “The Saga of Jenny,” and “Speak Low,” are served up with appropriate sophistication and, where



Ensemble scene from “*Ladies in the Light*.” Photo: Winfried E. Rabanus.

required, with tremendous swagger and dash; the actors thoroughly relish the sauciness of the American texts. Baumann's choreography really starts to soar during the choral arrangements of the American songs, infecting the whole auditorium with irresistible sweep and bravura. Small wonder that there were standing ovations at the end.

I have sat through dozens of Weill performances in recent years, but none has excited the audience as much or made as many converts as "Ladies in the Light" at the Munich Prinzregententheater.

Horst Koegler
Stuttgart



Director Helmut Baumann rehearses the cast; Simone Arntz stands to his left. Photo: Archie Kent.

Performances

Street Scenes

New York Philharmonic

9-11 March 2000

From the Broadway premiere through revivals by the New York City Opera, the English National Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, and even performances at the Theater des Westens in Berlin, *Street Scene* has proven itself to be a uniquely affecting and effective "Broadway opera," a work that has survived its half-century extremely well. Now, in an effort to reach concert audiences, the opera—shorn of its sets, costumes, chorus, and vast chunks of its original score—has been reduced to the kind of potted, excerpted versions of operas I remember seeing at Radio City Music Hall many decades ago.

It is one thing for a composer to reduce his own full-length opera or ballet to a concert version or suite. It is quite another for an arranger to do this, especially when the composer cannot participate or approve. This new reduction of *Street Scene* effected by Weill champions Kim H. Kowalke and Lys Symonette failed to satisfy. Elmer Rice's and Langston Hughes's carefully crafted libretto does not respond well to excerpting, and the stringing together of the opera's more dramatic numbers, without the leavening of its many lighter moments and choral ensembles, threw the work out of kilter and turned it into a heavy, often listless potpourri.

Without a visual "street scene" to orient the action, Lonny Price's minimal staging sometimes caused confusion. One constantly wondered exactly where the characters were going; for instance, when the singers made a partial exit to one of the chairs on the side of the stage, did they leave the street or simply retire to a neighboring stoop? Without the full complement of libretto, characters, and chorus, the narrative as presented here often became confusing, especially to those not familiar with the work.

True, the New York Philharmonic has a sheen that surely surpasses the usual Broadway pit band. But for all the expressive playing under the guidance of Leonard Slatkin, the physical presence of a sympho-

ny orchestra onstage overwhelmed the singers and helped deprive the evening of the work's gritty, melodramatic theatricality. Nor did seeing the musicians in black tie and gowns evoke the grim tenement setting of the plot.

The vocalists were fine, particularly Charles Castronovo (Sam Kaplan), Christine Goerke (Anna Maurrant), and Dean Ely (Frank Maurrant). But the audience could be forgiven for not becoming terribly involved in their concertized characters. And the chorus, so crucial an element in this work, was also profoundly missed.

When an obscure opera is given a concert version because it will not get produced otherwise, all well and good. But Weill's *Street Scene* is hardly comparable, let's say, to Donizetti's *Ugo, conte di Parigi*. A purely orchestral suite of the opera's music arranged by Weill himself would have been a different kettle of fish. Ah, but then one might miss the vocal parts. The answer to all these problems is simple: revive the opera, as is, more frequently.

Richard Traubner
New York City



Andrea Marcovicci Appears in Three Sold-out Performances at Lincoln Center

The New York Philharmonic rounded out its Weill celebration with three performances of "Andrea Marcovicci Celebrates Kurt Weill in America" in the penthouse of Lincoln Center's Rose Building. Jeremy Eichler reporting in *Newsday* wrote, "Marcovicci's love for these ingeniously crafted songs was both transparent and, judging by the coos in the audience, contagious."

Press Clippings

Vienna

The Firebrand of Florence

Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna

21 May 2000

"It was one of [Weill's] greatest disappointments that his operetta *The Firebrand of Florence* was a failure. It lasted through only 43 performances and up to now has been merely of interest to archivists. . . [Cellini] escapes several times from the hangman's noose, but at the end is allowed to love his Angela. If one were also to pronounce judgment on the music, the result would be

most luxurious Broadway sound, splendidly orchestrated and relaxed through a few isolated skewed harmonies. A "home game" for Dennis Russell Davies at the podium of the lively Radio Symphony Orchestra. The main reason for the striking success was undoubtedly Thomas Hampson as the hero of the title: A true firebrand in personality, overwhelming vocal richness, and humorous self-deprecation." —Gerhard Kramer, *Die Presse* (23 May 2000)

"[Weill's] *Firebrand* disappeared quickly into the archives—which Sunday evening in the Konzerthaus won't much alter, in spite of the jubilation of some of the audience."—hahe, *Kurier* (23 May 2000)



Konzerthaus Vienna

clear: complete acquittal for Weill. . . . He demonstrates his great mastery beginning with the twenty-minute through-composed opening scene. . . . The spellbinding duet 'Love is My Enemy' alone should have been enough to guarantee a run for this operetta. Conductor Dennis Russell Davies was very much in his own metier, had a happy hand for the tempi, and let the RSO gallop wonderfully. Semi-staged with a formidable cast of singers: Thomas Hampson (Cellini); Angela Maria Blasi (Angela); Jane Henschel (Duchess), masterful after beginning difficulties; Merwin Foard (Duke)." —Wolfgang Schaufler, *Der Standard* (23 May 2000)

"[*The Firebrand of Florence*] does not want to be anything more than a good old operetta—it makes no sense to apply higher standards to it. . . . [Edwin Justus Mayer's book] first acquires real life through Ira Gershwin's lyrics, with their sparkling wit and their break-neck feats of rhyme. Kurt Weill has poured a cornucopia full of inspired ideas over them, clothed in the

"If stars grant themselves a wish, it can now and then lead to the discovery of something special: In the Konzerthaus, Thomas Hampson sang the role of Benvenuto Cellini in Kurt Weill's almost forgotten operetta *The Firebrand of Florence*—an entrancing comic work that could even be a hit at the Volksoper!"—Karlheinz Roschitz, *Neue Kronen Zeitung* (23 May 2000)

Berlin im Licht and *Mahagonny Songspiel*

Ensemble "die reihe"

20 May 2000

"Last appearance of the season for HK Gruber at the 'Musical Xchanges' of Jeunesse and the Vienna Konzerthaus: With Ensemble 'die reihe' and good soloists, he was inspired and inspiring in his explanations and interpretations of Kurt Weill. His characteristic brash and casual chatting style, which always dashes straight to the goal, in spite of a few somersaults along the

way, has already marked the previous evenings. But the latently nervous, almost juvenile enthusiasm, with which Heinz-Karl Gruber's musical surgery revealed the compositional qualities of Kurt Weill, one of his idols, was a particular pleasure. . . . The Ensemble 'die reihe' generated a brilliantly caustic, sparkling sharpness, that offered stimulus to the consistently fine vocal soloists (Ute Gfrerer, Timna Brauer, Neal Banerjee, Bernd Fröhlich, Mathias Hausmann, and John Sweeney). Exuberant applause led at last to another outpouring of 'Berlin im Licht.'"

—wawe, *Die Presse* (22 May 2000)

Cologne

Cologne Music Triennale

Zaubernacht

Ensemble Contrasts

1 June 2000

"The first German performance since 1922 of Kurt Weill's ballet *Zaubernacht* must be counted as one of the most important events of the Triennale. The original score and orchestra parts have been lost. However, on the basis of the composer's piano/vocal score, the British conductor and arranger Meirion Bowen has reconstructed a chamber music version, which should inspire respect in the listener for its color and originality, particularly since Celso Antunes and the orchestra, consisting mostly of musicians from the WDR Symphony, played with fresh musicality and youthful fire in a manner far exceeding what one would have expected as a customary ballet accompaniment."—Hans Elmar Bach, *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* (3 June 2000)

"Antunes had coached the work to perfection, so that it ranged between musical, revue, composition for toy music box, and racy romantic sleighride. In between there were harp-supported waltz rhythms, followed by constructed chamber music from the string quartet. The high art never became heavy and the 'light' sounds were held at the highest level with humor and charm — a musical *Magic Night* at the Music Triennale Köln."—Olaf Weiden, *Kölnische Rundschau* (3 June 2000)

The Seven Deadly Sins

Radio Symphony Orchestra Wien

2 June 2000

“... the enthusiasm in the Philharmonie mounted as Marianne Faithfull, an icon of the ‘60s, was celebrated at the end. This experienced diva radiated a striking mellowness in Kurt Weill’s *The Seven Deadly Sins*. . . as an interpreter of both Anna figures, she intentionally transposed the original version into the decadently colored lower octave. . . in contrast to the high-flying pathos of the self-righteously pious and money-idolizing family, exemplarily personified by the ensemble of Hudson Shad (Eric Edlund, Roy Smith, Peter Becker, Wilbur Pauley). . .”—BC, *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* (5 June 2000)

Dessau

Kurt Weill Fest Dessau

18 February - 5 March 2000

Die sieben Todsünden

Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen

18-19 February 2000

“[Patrik] Ringborg, who has already stated that he will not be available to be Artistic Director next year, provided some fresh air: A visible sign was the invitation to Milva, who sang *Die sieben Todsünden* at the opening concert. The diva knows how to translate the story of the schizophrenic Anna into impressive mimicry and gestures. Sometimes she screams, and at times Milva only whimpers, but when she sings, her voice manifests an unvarnished dazzling straightforwardness.”—Hagen Kunze, *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (22 February 2000)

Wind Orchestra Concert

Stockholms Spårvägsmäns Musikkår

26 February 2000

“The program consisted of compositions which had been planned for the Donaueschingen Kammermusiktage 1926 and for the first great light show in the Spree metropolis, “Berlin im Licht” (1928). The Spårvägsmäns Musikkår played music which had not been heard since its premiere. . . But the ‘Streetcar Musicians’ under Ringborg’s



“This Time Next Year”

baton played astonishingly tamely. The more the conductor wanted, the clearer his craftsmanship, the less he was able to inspire the musicians to enthusiasm. But that is exactly what these works needed.”—*Mitteldutsche Zeitung* (29 February 2000)

“This Time Next Year”

Die Schönen der Nacht

3 March 2000

“On the third and last weekend of the Festival, the public was introduced to a less-known side of the musical output of Kurt Weill. . . . The staged evening combined Weill’s Berlin theater songs of the late 20s with fragments from the unfinished musical *Huckleberry Finn* (1950) and songs from the films *You and Me* (1937) and *Where Do We Go from Here?* (1945). In creating the program, dramaturg Nils Grosch took into account the original dramatic contexts. In their acting and singing, Juliane Hollerbach, Leopold Kern, and Herbert Wolfgang developed a new story line. . . . From Weill’s notes quoted between songs, his frustration with the Hollywood movie world could be surmised, and one gained insight into this part of the composer’s musical work. . . . The audience thanked the Freiburg ensemble with sustained applause.”—*Zerbster Volksstimme* (7 March 2000)

Orchestra Concert

MDR-Kammerphilharmonie

3 March 2000

“As often happens at the beginning of a program, in ‘Berlin im Licht’ something was lacking in the coordination between the conductor’s podium and the soloist. . . . But by “Alabama Song” Daniele Ziegler and Peter Hirsch obviously had gotten used to each other. In comparing these with other interpretations, one again comes to

the conclusion that, with the exception of Lotte Lenya’s, there is no completely satisfying way of singing [these songs]. Rather, concentrating on this or that style of performance considerably reduces the art of a universal-minded Weill. For ‘Nannas Lied,’ Ziegler nestled into the curve of the grand piano, upon which Peter Hirsch accompanied her, and her singing likewise nestled into the ears of the listeners. Her readings alternated between naive

gentleness and cheeky insolence. . . . Finally one could again hear songs from *Marie galante*. ‘Youkali,’ ‘Le roi d’Aquitaine’ and naturally ‘J’attends un navire,’ which later became such a touching hymn of greeting from the French to the landing Allies.”—Axel Nixdorf, *Mitteldutsche Zeitung* (7 March 2000)

“Berlin im Licht”

London Sinfonietta

5 March 2000

“HK Gruber, the well-known Weill specialist, put together a concert program of some of the composer’s rarely performed works. . . presented with the highest virtuosity and great joy in playing. The curtainraiser was sparkling and snappy. The informally dressed conductor not only led his musicians in Weill’s 1928 song ‘Berlin im Licht,’ but he also sang it. . . . The centerpiece of the first half of the concert was the Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments, op. 12. . . the London Sinfonietta and Clio Gould gave the work a brilliant interpretation. . . . At the end there was the better known *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, again a real musical firework. The applause was stormy for the piece and for the whole concert, ending only after three encores had been played.”—Antje Rohm, *Zerbster Volksstimme* (8 March 2000)

Clio Gould, photo: Jens Schlüter



Recordings

Die Dreigroschenoper

Ensemble Modern

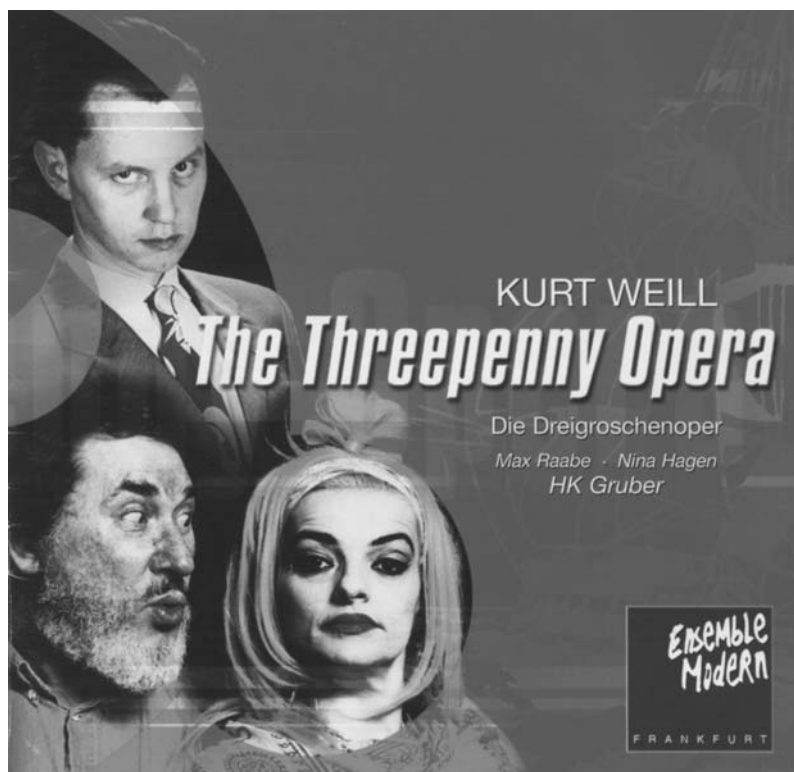
HK Gruber, conductor

BMG 74321-66133-2

This brilliant new CD comes attended by the highest of expectations: the first recorded performance to be based on the authoritative *Dreigroschenoper* volume of the Kurt Weill Edition; instrumentalists from one of the world's leading avant-garde ensembles; singer-actors at the forefront of their respective genres; and all under the capable baton of a Viennese cabarettist-conductor who is himself a composer of note and has consistently illuminated Weill's works in the past. And how many recording projects can claim—as acknowledged in the KWE edition—to have played a role in refining aspects of the edition upon which they are based?

It is safe to say, minor cavils aside, that these high expectations have been met. Those looking for an exact acoustical realization of the new KWE text will be disappointed, for the performers have granted themselves the license allowed to all living recreations of great music. In the “Zweites Dreigroschenfinale” (Second Threepenny Finale), when the score calls for *laut gerufen* and we hear instead not a “loud yell” but an ominous whisper, we realize with relief that the creative impulse has not succumbed to a misplaced obsession with fidelity. Nor are the *subito meno mosso* and concluding break-neck *prestissimo* of the “Erstes Dreigroschenfinale” (“First Threepenny Finale”), or the subtle tempo shifts and fermatas of the “Barbarasong,” to be found in the published score. These and similar departures from the codified text are perfectly right in context, and, hallowed by this recording, are likely to remain or become part of the *Dreigroschenoper* performance tradition.

Quite apart from the sterling qualities of the performance itself, listeners of this CD will immediately be struck by its completeness, for it incorporates all those instrumental interludes and reprises (or at least those that permit reconstruction) that were heard in the early years of the work's reception. Perhaps the most surprising is a waltz



version of the “Moritat” following the “Eifersuchtsduett” (“Jealousy Duet”). These numbers, deliciously performed by the Ensemble Modern, are valuable additions to the score as previously known, and we can only regret that the surviving parts are not complete enough to divulge the minor-key version of the “Moritat” that apparently served as a funeral march.

The twenty-three instruments called for in Weill's score, and originally negotiated by Lewis Ruth's seven-man band, have here been distributed among no fewer than fifteen members of the Ensemble Modern, including two percussionists. While there is no cause to lament this lack of fidelity to the premiere (multi-instrumentalism, deliberately flaunted, was a mark of professional expertise among Weimar Germany's dance bands), this does raise some questions about the nature of the backup ensemble to any performance of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Should each part be taken by a virtuoso and the whole played as superior concert music? Or should the accompaniment have the same slightly ad hoc flavor we expect from the singer-actors? Originally the musicians performed onstage, and the sight of a trom-

bonist turning clumsily to a double bass, or a percussionist gamely wielding a second trumpet, was doubtless part of the “beggarly” theatrical effect. Admirers of this CD will claim that the exquisite balance of the Ensemble Modern and the superb virtuosity so amply demonstrated in the “Drittes Dreigroschenfinale” (“Third Threepenny Finale”) more than compensate for any loss of theatricality—which is not, however, to deny that loss.

The completeness of this recording also extends to the instrumentation, which makes full use of the many ad lib. doublings indicated in the score. The most striking is the appearance of a Hawaiian guitar, the forerunner of today's steel guitar and a substitute in the 1920s for that staple of early Weimar novelty bands, the musical saw. The broad portamento favored by the Ensemble Modern's guitarist is fully in keeping with the spirit of the score, but his tendency to lag behind the beat in imitation of 1930s swing style is not. This is even less appropriate in that the other instrumentalists avoid swing altogether, playing crisply accurate dotted rhythms and clean, almost disembodied timbres. Weimar Germany's performance manuals were adamant in



The front and back covers of the *Dreigroschenoper* CD booklet show the principal cast. On the front cover (facing page), clockwise from top left: Max Raabe (Macheath), Nina Hagen (Mrs. Peachum), and HK Gruber (Mr. Peachum). Back cover, clockwise from top left: Sona MacDonald (Polly), Timna Brauer (Jenny), Hannes Hellmann (Tiger Brown), Jürgen Holtz (narrator), and Winnie Böwe (Lucy).

demanding that renditions of dance melodies adhere strictly to the written note values, and guitarists would be well advised to follow those guidelines in this case.

The vocal parts have been strongly cast from different worlds of the German entertainment scene. The versatile HK Gruber, as Peachum, can draw on his experience in Viennese cabaret and on a voice of protean expressive range, encompassing especially his rasping growl at *fortissimo* (applied in the “Zweites Dreigroschenfinale” [as part of the chorus] with all the force of a sanctified preacher) and a flesh-creeping mock innocence familiar from performances of his own *Frankenstein!!*. Max Raabe, as Macheath, has made an estimable career as a latter-day crooner in the 1920s tradition, deftly imitating the trilled r’s and period vowels of the genre. His smooth vocal delivery, fashionably just beneath pitch at crucial moments, lends Macheath a convincing air of arch suavity and pretense that may well become definitive for the part. Equally impressive are the reserves of expression he demonstrates in the “Kanonensong” (“Soldiers’ Song”) and the “Zweites Dreigroschenfinale.” Sona MacDonald, as Polly, brings to her part all

the advantages of a superior actress (she has performed under Peter Stein at the Salzburg Festival) and a wiry, operetta-honed voice that successfully projects both the youthful ingenue and the high-strung business woman. Jenny is ably if not outstandingly sung by Timna Brauer, a pop vocalist who once represented Austria in the Eurovision Song Contest. Lucy, expertly sung by Winnie Böwe, is almost indistinguishable from Polly in the “Eifersuchtsduett” but otherwise suffers from the fact that her showcase aria is transplanted to the end of the second CD, where it functions as a sort of endnote for the sake of completeness.

The most striking voice on the recording, and certainly the most controversial, is Nina Hagen’s as Mrs. Peachum. Hagen emerged in the early 1980s as a remarkable punk vocalist who quickly outgrew her native East Berlin and left for America, where her career unwarrantably refused to take off. She brings to the role of Cecilia Peachum a genius for outlandish overstatement and a ruined high register that leaves us wondering from what vocal wellsprings she will manage to finish each number. Her Mrs. Peachum is a comic-book *monstre*

sacré that makes the “Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit” (“Ballad of the Prisoner of Sex”) one of the highlights of the recording. Fortunately, she constrains her voice to a feigned girlishness in the “Erstes Dreigroschenfinale” so as not to overpower Polly, but it is perhaps telling that Hagen has not appeared in the Ensemble Modern’s recent concert performances of *Die Dreigroschenoper* with the same cast and conductor.

The voices on this CD clearly shift the expressive weight of the performance away from Macheath and his female entourage to the older generation of the Peachums. Yet it is mean-spirited to cavil at shortcomings which would be highlights in any other performance. The jaunty brilliance and deft perfection of the orchestra and the sharpness of the vocal characterization will ensure this CD a place alongside the famous Brückner-Rüggeberg reading of 1958 as a milestone in the interpretation of *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

J. Bradford Robinson
Hoya, Germany

Recordings

Die Bürgschaft

Spoleto Festival USA

Julius Rudel, conductor

EMI 5 56976 2

Given the current crisis in the classical-music industry, particularly when it comes to new opera recordings, it is a credit to all involved that EMI could be persuaded to record the American premiere of *Die Bürgschaft* at the 1999 Spoleto Festival. It is a work overshadowed by history and legend, known more by reputation than anything else; this is its first recording. Its first performance took place at the Städtische Oper, Berlin on 10 March 1932, in the tumultuous days before the presidential elections in which Hitler was a candidate for the first time. The doubly *entartet* Weill was attacked by the Nazi press and Alfred Rosenberg's *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*, and the interest shown in the work by other German stages soon evaporated in the face of practical realities. After the *Anschluß*, the Nazis raided the offices of Weill's publisher, Universal Edition, and destroyed all copies of the libretto and piano-vocal score; Weill's full score was rediscovered only after his death, and that for the "new scene" in act II was not recovered until 1993. (A 1957 revival in Berlin was clouded by postwar circumstances and cold-war politics.)

Why has such an important work by a major composer remained unknown for so long? As Kim Kowalke writes perceptively in the liner notes, the answer "would require a monograph about twentieth-century musical aesthetics, cultural politics, and reception history to answer satisfactorily." The short answer, however, is one of lack: *Die Bürgschaft* lacked a Lenya role, a libretto by Brecht, and readily extractable songs. Furthermore, it requires operatic

rather than theater voices, and two excellent choruses. Happily, both these demands are amply met by the present recording.

Although Weill never publicly took credit, he worked closely with Caspar Neher on the libretto. *Die Bürgschaft* is a sobering indictment of capitalism and demagoguery. Its critique of the progress of urbanization and civilization is embedded in the cynical "moral" that recurs throughout ("People do not change; it is the circumstances that change their behavior") and embodied by the opportunistic and amoral Gang of Three (excellently portrayed by Peter Lurié, Lawrence Craig, and Herbert Perry). For the most part, their music is the sleazy dance music of the

largely passive and helpless throughout; Luise particularly serves more as a symbol—of innocence literally and figuratively lost—than anything else. Both the enlightened Judge and the totalitarian Commissar are one-dimensional, although Weill's decision to write both roles for tenor results in an interesting parallel implied between the two (like Wagner's Licht-Alberich and Schwarz-Alberich). The central characters of Mattes and Orth are the most fully rounded—particularly Mattes, who is given a full operatic *scena* (no. 8) in which to agonize about what to do with the money he has found in sacks of chaff. His wife Anna has some of the most beautiful music to sing, however. The heart of the work rests in the two choruses: a small chorus, which, situated at a distance from the action, comments on and explains the plot to the audience; and a large, onstage chorus

that gets progressively more involved in the action. The small chorus distances and ritualizes the action; from it, a solo alto voice emerges to embody the principle of individuality and individual responsibility inherent in the bond or pledge. The onstage chorus functions as a negative symbol of the unindividuated masses. It is first heard offstage (men only) announcing the arrival of the town crier after the first trial, then enters the action (again, men only) during the second trial. The full chorus, men and women, dominates the third act: the ritual progression through the portals of War, Inflation, Hunger, and Sickness and the murder of Mattes.

As Andreas Hauff has argued, *Die Bürgschaft* is highly intertextual; both its text and music allude to other works. Turning to the text first, the most obvious of these allusions are scriptural: the parable by Herder that forms the basis of the action actually comes from the Talmud; Orth's abandonment of Mattes recalls Cain and Abel; the Judge is an Old-Testament figure; and, finally, the pledge or bond of the title might also be translated as "covenant" (and is symbolized by a rainbow in the prologue). There are even some New Testament echoes, such as that of Peter's denial of Christ in the Commissar's refusal



legendary "Weimar Weill." In good Brechtian fashion, it is thus immediately memorable, and the audience is made complicit in their amorality as it leaves the theater humming.

Die Bürgschaft does not really progress so much as regress: the titular pledge or bond depicted in the prologue weakens and unravels as corruption gradually sets in, beginning with Mattes's credo in no. 4: "to give but little, while retaining a lot: that is the way to get rich!" A weakness—probably deliberate—of the libretto is that the characters are mostly cardboard: Anna and Luise, the only two female characters, are

to aid Mattes ("I do not know the man"); indeed, the whole structure of the piece, framed by the narrative small chorus, recalls that of a Bach Passion. Other allusions are to the eponymous Schiller ballade (set by Schubert), Seneca (some lines are quoted directly), Marx, Gandhi, Tolstoy, and Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The rather static procession through the four portals, largely portrayed chorally, suggests a left-wing parallel to Franz Schmidt's slightly later *Buch mit sieben Siegeln*. And of course one of the strongest models is Brecht, obvious in the deliberate distancing effect of the small chorus and the rather hieratically constructed plot—not to mention the strong left-wing orientation of the work as a whole. (As for an intertextual link in the other direction, "The Fog Scene" [no. 9 "Jetzt ist es Abend"] reminds me of "Someone in a Tree," from Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures*.)

In terms of the music, the obvious intertextual link is the use of popular dance types (as well as those gestic families of rhythmic figures discussed in Kowalke's

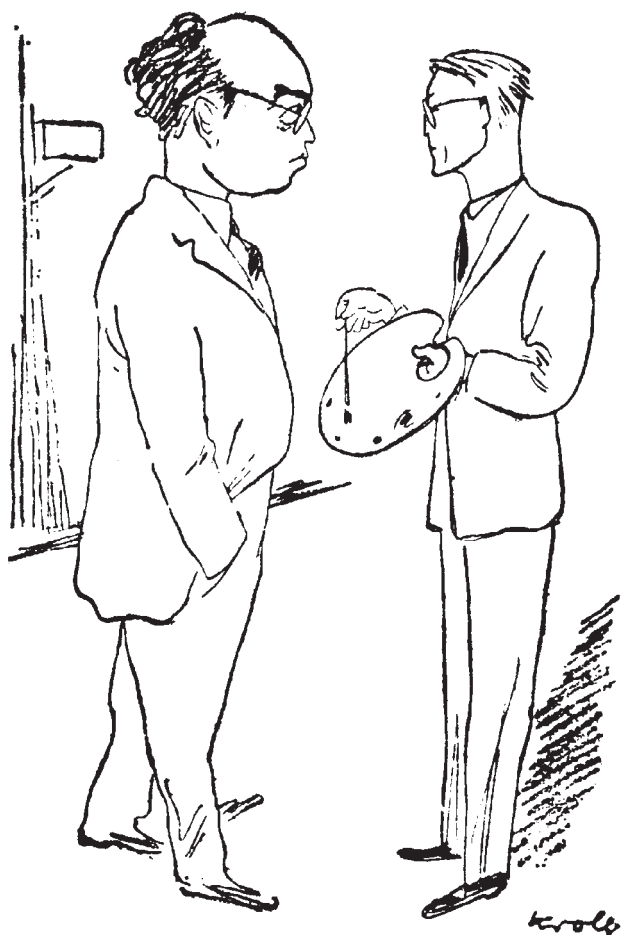
Kurt Weill in Europe) and Weill's unmistakably characteristic piano-tinged orchestral sound. There is also a strong neobaroque or neoclassical element: much of the score calls to mind the Weill of the "Crane Duet" from *Mahagonny* or the Hindemith of *Cardillac* and other works. The music exemplifies Weill's prescription in his essay "The Problem of Form in Modern Opera," published just before the premiere of *Die Bürgschaft*: "the renunciation of the illustrative function of music, the elimination of false pathos, the division of action into closed musical numbers, and the dramatic utilization of absolute musical form" (Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe*, p. 542). These principles are especially obvious in the Fog Scene, where the music is as divorced from any connection with the text or dramatic action as is the famous Pantomime (duet for two flutes) from *Cardillac*. (In *Die Bürgschaft*, this disconnection is explicitly thematicized by the situation, where fog, both literal and symbolic, prevents Mattes and Orth from communicating, and the basses in the small

chorus offer an irrelevant meteorological lesson.) A number of arias with obligato instruments (such as Anna's "Mir liegt die Angst" in no. 2, or Orth's "Sicher spät in der Nacht war's" in no. 6, both with oboe) strongly recall Bach, as do the many orchestral and choral canons and fugues. There is a strong musico-dramatic parallel between the idea of the bond and Weill's use of canonic or fugal structures. As the work progresses and the bond disintegrates, these devices are used less and less, as if the music too loses the ability to organize itself in strict, cooperative, and egalitarian structures. If these elements suggest Bach, the significant choral part points more to Handel, the subject of an impor-

tant revival during Weimar. This static, oratorio-like element of *Die Bürgschaft* is also seen in a preponderance of ternary structures in the musical numbers.

Perhaps inescapably with this premiere recording, one tends to listen more to the piece than to the performance. Both are indeed excellent. Despite the work's reputation for length, the recording fits easily on two CDs, lasting just under two-and-a-quarter hours. Apart from a number of minor cuts (in nos. 5, 10, 12, 16, and 24), amounting to less than ten minutes of music, the score is played as Weill would have heard it in 1932 (including the "new scene" in act 2, which was composed in early 1932 and hence not printed in the piano-vocal score). There are no real "name" singers here, but the reviews of the Spoleto performances emphasize the uniform strength of the cast. The performers' commitment to the work—especially that of eminent opera conductor and Weill champion Julius Rudel—has transferred well to CD, so well that it seems churlish to quibble over minor irritations. Mezzo-soprano Margaret Thompson is very moving throughout as Anna, particularly in her death scene (no. 23). Two strong bass-baritones are needed for Mattes and Orth (oh, to hear Hampson and Ramey in these roles!), and while Frederick Burchinal (Mattes) and Dale Travis (Orth) are generally good, they both can sound a bit tight and constricted on the high notes, Travis in particular. In *Die Bürgschaft* the chorus is as central to the work as the solo singers, if not more so, and The Westminster Choir is a model of clear diction and well-rounded choral tone. The recording is not "produced" in the 1950s-60s Decca sense: it does not aurally convey the separation of the two choruses, the difference between the uninvolved small chorus and the larger chorus. Likewise, no attempt is made to depict (in no. 12) the distance between the Judge on the stage and the offstage crowd listening to the Town Crier. These are only very minor criticisms, though, of what was to me a revelatory recording. One could hardly wish for a better first presentation of what remains a timely work for our age, an age in which, still: Everything occurs according to one law only: the Law of Money, the Law of Power.

Stephen McClatchie
The University of Regina



Caricature of Kurt Weill and Caspar Neher.

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