

Kurt Weill

Volume 19

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Newsletter

Spring 2001



Centenary in Review

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by Michael Feingold

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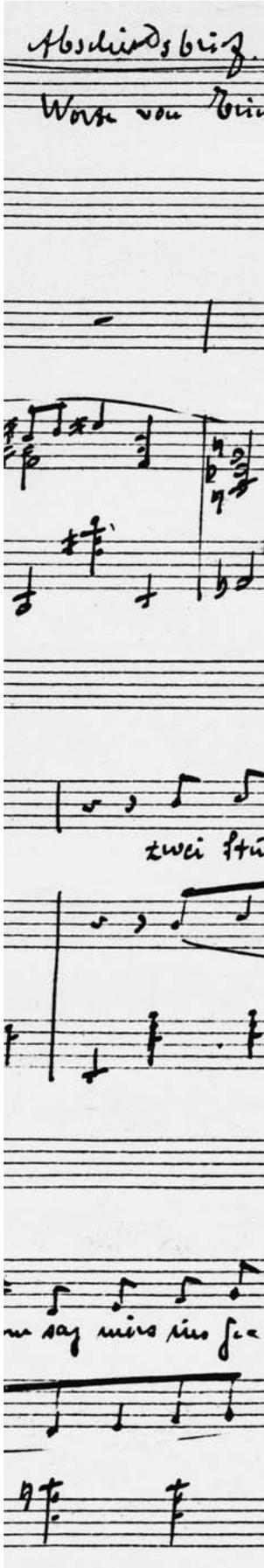
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Cover photo: Poster for production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in Hamburg, Autumn 2000.

From the Editor



During Weill's centennial year many prominent music periodicals and cultural publications in the U.S. and Europe—ranging from *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, *Opernwelt* and *BBC Music Magazine* to *The Atlantic Monthly*—commissioned prominent writers to assess Weill's contributions and influence. This issue features an expanded version of Michael Feingold's summary of Weill's career that appeared in the 14 March 2000 issue of *The Village Voice* (a U.S. weekly published in New York), for those in the U.S. who did not see it and to give Europeans the opportunity to read an admittedly broad and American perspective on Weill's centenary. The remainder of this "review issue" is dedicated to important publications and performances that have appeared in recent months.

With this 34th issue almost ready to be delivered to the printer, I announce the end of my editorship and place the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* in the expert hands of a new editor, Elmar Juchem. Dr. Juchem recently published the first German dissertation devoted to Weill's American career and has edited several books of documents, correspondence and writings by or about Weill. He currently serves as Associate Director for Publications and Research for the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music. Dave Stein, who has served this publication ably for seven years as copy editor and production manager, becomes the Production Editor, and Carolyn Weber continues to write and edit the "Topical Weill" section.

As I depart the Kurt Weill Foundation to accept a new position as Institutional Archivist for the J. Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles, I'd like to thank previous associate editors and other Foundation colleagues who offered counsel and contributed much toward the steady development of a publication that started in Fall 1983 as a modest, six-page foldout and which grew (in the last issue) to a 48-page, international "mini-journal"; they include Brian Butcher, Edward Harsh, Joanna Lee, Bill Madison, Mario Mercado, Dave Stein, and Carolyn Weber. Kim Kowalke and Lys Symonette always served in the background, largely uncredited, to offer inspiration, advice, and legal vetting. But the *Newsletter* could not be the publication that it is today without the excellent contributions from faithful correspondents worldwide who have seldom turned down a request for an article or review, individuals such as Andreas Hauff, Stephen Hinton, Horst Koegler, Michael Morley, Patrick O'Connor, Paul Moor, Andrew Porter, and Alan Rich, many of whom are represented in this issue.

For me, the most rewarding challenge has been to produce a publication with enough scholarly heft to appeal to academics, enough practical information to interest music and theater professionals, and enough lively writing to appeal to aficionados (to use a word that I try to avoid)—all this while striving for a worldview that would resonate with an international audience that has very different ideas about who Weill is and what his music represents. The second challenge was to balance the long-term need for an impartial treatment of the reception of Weill's works as manifested in performances, recordings, and publications with the more immediate requirement of promoting Weill's legacy here and now. The divergence of these two objectives is the principal reason for the current format, which attempts to separate critical analysis in the features and reviews sections from the more obviously promotional information presented in the "Topical Weill" section. The question of whether a newsletter published by the Kurt Weill Foundation can ever be truly unbiased cannot be addressed here, but I hope that most readers have appreciated our focus on Weill and his music, with a minimal amount of space devoted to the specific activities and programs of the Kurt Weill Foundation.

I am especially pleased to include in my farewell issue David Drew's review essay on Daniel Albright's most recent book, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (University of Chicago, 2000), which broadens the scope slightly by dealing with some of the larger cultural issues surrounding Weill and his contemporaries. Although the future course of the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* is now up to the new editorial team, let me encourage you, the readers, to express your viewpoints more often in writing to the editor, so that these pages can become more of a focal point for public discussion and debate. We will all benefit from it.

David Farneth

The Weill Party

By Michael Feingold

A shorter version of this article originally appeared in the 14 March 2000 issue (pp. 60, 62) of the Village Voice under the title “The Weill Party: The 20th Century’s Most Influential Composer Turns 100.” This expanded version appears with the permission of the original publisher.

Fill in the missing term that links each of the following pairs: Ferruccio Busoni and Fred MacMurray; Jean Cocteau and Lee Strasberg; Fritz Lang and Langston Hughes. Hint: It’s a composer whose music has been recorded by rock groups, avant-garde ensembles, lounge acts, Broadway stars, opera houses, and Anjelica Huston’s grandfather. Second hint: I’m writing this on his 100th birthday. Final hint: Most people, misguidedly, only think of his name as coming immediately after “Bertolt Brecht.” A hundred years ago this week, on 2 March 1900, Kurt Julian Weill was born in Dessau, a midsize city in eastern Germany, roughly equidistant from Leipzig and Berlin.

Since another of Brecht’s major musical collaborators was a composer named Dessau, you might say that the ironies and confusions around Weill began at his birth. But Paul Dessau did not write the tune of “Mack the Knife”—nor, for that matter, did Bertolt Brecht, though in later life he enjoyed hinting that he’d had a hand in it. That sums up, in a way, the struggle Weill’s had establishing his reputation: His tremendous force and originality as a composer, especially of theater music, were only equaled by his ability to subsume himself, as any theater artist must, in the collaborative act. He changed the face of theater music, and permanently altered the way we think about music in general, but people still think first of “Brecht and Weill.” And yet he wrote with over twenty-five other lyricists, an astonishing array that includes everyone from Cocteau and Hughes to the Berlin cabarettist Walter Mehring and the Tin Pan Alley scribbler Sam Coslow (better known as the perpetrator of “Cocktails for Two”). Brecht’s may be the most lasting theatrical voice among Weill’s librettists, but the others—Georg Kaiser, Franz Werfel, Jacques Deval, Maxwell Anderson, Alan Jay Lerner—make up a list from which you could easily build a course on the modern history of the popular stage. Wherever you go in music theater, from mass spectacle to surrealist caprice, Weill was there ahead of you, humanizing the didactic and bringing depth to the divertissement. “He was an architect,” Virgil Thomson wrote when he died, “a master of musico-dramatic design, whose works, built for function and solidity, constitute a repertory of models.” And he did it all in fifty years: The centennial of Weill’s birth is also the fiftieth anniversary of his death (3 April 1950, of heart failure); the ongoing celebration of his work is both a birthday party and a memorial.

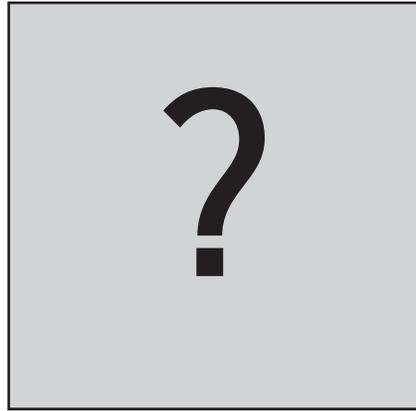
Which is appropriate, because one reason Weill’s career now looms so large in retrospect is that he himself appears as a model of sorts: the composer who survived everything. Born into the Wilhelmine Empire at its ostentatious peak, he lasted long enough to see the atom bomb and the Cold War. His half-century of life was bracketed by the two world wars that left Europe in ruins, one

catching him in adolescence and the other as he approached forty. As a Jew, he escaped the Holocaust and lived to see his relatives settled in the newly founded State of Israel. A principal target of the Nazi campaign against “degenerate art,” he had to relearn theater practice and backstage jargon in three foreign countries and Hollywood to boot. His catalogue teems with missing and unexplained items: the opera score that got left on a train and never reappeared; the translation he may or may not have coauthored, of which no complete copy exists; the additional music for a London production that went up in flames during the Blitz. One reason commentators wax pompous about “the two Kurt Weills” is that in America he downplayed some of his German achievements, under the impression that the scores had been irrecoverably destroyed by the Nazis; it isn’t every tunesmith who gets personally singled out by Hitler, along with Thomas Mann, Einstein, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as “a menace to Aryan culture.” Two Weills? The miracle is that we have one. Besides, given the range of his creative personality and the number of situations in which he worked, the number is more like six.

And this, too, is part of what makes Weill the quintessential modern musician. His is the art of a man who saw that no institution was permanent, that instability was the structural center of modern life. A lover of Bach and Mozart, Busoni’s prize pupil, he was educated to carry on the German classical tradition in symphony and opera; instead, he disrupted it with tango recordings, Dada libretti, and knotty, polytonal scoring. The final blow to his career in the traditional forms was Brecht, whose poetry lured him to attempt, through the marriage of cabaret and classical expectations, a political disruption to match the aesthetic one for which he was already becoming notorious. Commissioned to compose a chamber opera, he obliged with a plotless “songplay” (*Songspiel*) made of six poems linked by orchestral interludes. When he and Brecht built it into a full three-act opera, *Mahagonny*, the evening opened with a truck driving onstage. And when the word “opera” actually appeared in the title of a Brecht-Weill work, it played in an ordinary theater, and had in its principal roles an operetta tenor, a singing actress, a cabaret *diseuse*, and a dancer, cast because she was the composer’s wife, whom nobody but Weill thought could sing at all—until opening night made Lotte Lenya the toast of Berlin and, soon after, the definitive performer of Weill’s songs. It took decades of explanation, some of it by Lenya herself, to make the world realize that he’d actually intended much of his work to be sung by trained voices.

The Threepenny Opera, a work that can feel at home anywhere from dark subbasements to vast amphitheatres (including opera houses), is the unlocalized *locus classicus* of Weill’s brilliant indeterminacy. Its form is as hard to pin down as its setting, which would be London at the time of Queen Victoria’s coronation (1837), except for the 1890s costumes and Kipling quotations, the passages drawn from the work’s 1728 source (John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*), and the intermittent lapses into 1920s Berlin slang usage (like *polenta* instead of *Polizei*). Weill’s score moves from scraps of realized folk song through long verse-and-chorus ballads to extended choral finales that are meant to remind you of Bach. And it’s all orchestrated for a peculiar combination of instruments that happened to belong to one of Berlin’s more popular dance bands—Theo Mackeben’s “Lewis Ruth Band.” (The phony American name was a cutting-edge Berlin band shtick.)

Threepenny made so much money that its now-famous authors inevitably attempted a sequel, *Happy End*, which did nothing for Brecht’s reputation but enriched Weill’s with a set of perhaps even



“Fill in the missing term that links each of the following pairs: Ferruccio Busoni and Fred MacMurray . . .”

greater songs. Another byproduct was a small flurry of theater music for works by such members of Brecht’s circle as the director Erwin Piscator and the playwright Lion Feuchtwanger. But even as Weill was immersed in Brecht texts, completing the full-scale *Mahagonny* and turning out two gemlike minor works, the one-act opera *Der Jasager* and the radio cantata *Der Lindberghflug*, the two men’s collaboration cracked open. It was partly a matter of contracts, on which Brecht notoriously took unfair advantage of even his closest friends; but it was nearly as much a question of music versus words. There may also have been a third issue in the contrast between Weill’s firm but soft-spoken, invariably courteous behavior and the colleague-alienating tantrums that were such an important part of Brecht’s tactical arsenal. The first word everyone who knew Weill personally uses about him is “gentle.” “He was the gentlest man I ever worked with,” S. J. Perelman told me. “I only heard him raise his voice once,” Weill’s lawyer and producer John F. Wharton recalled, “when I told him *Street Scene* would have to close.” But gentleness is often the velvet glove that masks an iron determination; under enough pressure, worms will turn. Gilbert and Sullivan wrote fourteen stage works together, Rodgers and Hart over twenty, Brecht and Weill barely half a dozen. By the last of these, the masterful sung ballet *Seven Deadly Sins* (1933), they were on strictly formal terms; Brecht simply provided lyrics to a preexisting scenario by Weill and the ballet’s backer, Edward James (the wealthy husband of dancer Tilly Losch), with help from the Ballet Russe’s Boris Kochno. After that, Weill often helped Brecht out, and planned new works with him, but always guardedly.

Purest in structure and musically the most fully achieved of his works, *Seven Deadly Sins* is probably Weill’s masterpiece. It’s also a pivotal midpoint that seems to sum him up: Written in Paris, it’s a German work set in America; it uses the form of traditional religious parables to transmit secular ideas about women and economics through an image derived from Freudian psychology. For all its purity, it’s a hybrid work—a ballet with principal roles for soprano and male vocal quartet—and for all its somber gravity, its central image has a trashy, popular source: The two sisters, practical singing superego and impulsive dancing id, are the good and evil twins of a thousand horror movies, and may have been inspired originally by that most chichi of English carnay attractions, the Siamese twins Daisy and Violet Hilton; most of what they endure is derived from underworld stories or tabloid headlines—badger games, strip shows, vamps driving rich men to suicide and

Hollywood extras sleeping with directors. Weill transfigures the tawdriness with his distinctive blend of objectivity and compassion: When dancing Anna’s heart gets broken, her singing twin (who caused the break) gives the word “*Schwester*” (sister) a downward portamento, on a major sixth, that carries your ears straight back to Countess Almaviva’s sorrows in Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro*. Tawdriness can’t beat that.

Nor could tawdry America beat Weill’s classicism. Fascinated by his adopted country’s roiling, emergent culture, he turned each of his Broadway projects into a different experiment in form—Thomson’s “repertory of models” with a vengeance. While ideologues like Adorno moaned over his pursuit of commercial success, and highbrows like Elliott Carter fretted over his abandoning art music for hit tunes, he was stretching Broadway’s modest tolerance for innovation to the breaking point: a satirical operetta about the corruption of democracy (*Knickerbocker Holiday*); a psychological-realist spoken drama interrupted by three one-act surrealist operas (*Lady in the Dark*); a musical burlesque on modern art’s dilemma of self-awareness (*One Touch of Venus*); a pageant of American history, told vaudeville style, as the story of one marriage’s failure (*Love Life*); a naturalistic social drama transmuted to Puccinian heights (*Street Scene*); a choral cantata, its sections alternating with narrative scenes, on the tragedy of racism (*Lost in the Stars*). If that’s the track record of a “commercial” composer, then Emma Goldman was Cole Porter in drag. Lenya was right; after all the talk about “schizoid career” and “dual musical personality,” there is, as she insisted to her dying day, only one Kurt Weill.

And who is he, exactly? Easier to say what he is in musical terms. He’s that sighing downward sixth. He’s the sensuous English horn solo in *The Eternal Road*. He’s the unexpected D natural that nobody except Lenya gets right when they sing “Foolish Heart.” He’s the upsetting contrapuntal trombone in the last chorus of “Surabaya Johnny.” He’s the tango rhythm that crops up everywhere, the Mozart figured bass that shocks you awake in the hurricane scene of *Mahagonny*, the pennywhistle sound that slices through the lush train-station chorale in *Lost in the Stars*. Where there’s a bittersweet tune, a rhythm that clutches your heart, a propulsive sense of something big being built, and a startling flash of orchestral color, there’s Kurt Weill. “Everything he wrote,” Thomson’s obituary said, “became, in one way or another, historic.” He literally didn’t know the half of it. Fifty years later, on his 100th birthday, we’re still discovering Kurt Weill.

Performances

Die Dreigroschenoper

Rio de Janeiro

Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil

Premiere: 2 August 2000

In the recent past, Brazilian productions of *Die Dreigroschenoper* have served as testing grounds for theatrical experiments that came in many forms, from the abstruse to the academic. In all of them, it was given that Brecht's text would be sidestepped to make way for the specific agenda of the particular production, and Weill's music would be kept far in the background—an inconsequential appendix to the play. In view of this history of debatable results and doubtful merits, the present production of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, in Rio de Janeiro's Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, is a bold and welcome departure. Director André Heller interprets *Die Dreigroschenoper* as the "play with music" it really is, following closely the recently published edition by Stephen Hinton and Edward Harsh, complete with "Arie der Lucy," "Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit," additional strophes to the other songs, and the reconstructed instrumental interludes. Mr. Heller's achievement is significant—he uses Weill's original orchestrations, thus introducing to Brazilian audiences a score virtually unknown to them except in bastardized arrangements. Even if the piquancy and acidity of Weill's *Klangbild* occasionally eluded this orchestra (the UFRJ Jazz Ensemble, conducted by José Rua or Guilherme Bernstein), the new production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* may well have opened the way for a re-evaluation of Weill's music in Brazil.

Heller's "exercise in possibilities," performed without intermission, was achieved through two radical decisions. One was to perform the songs in German, Singspiel-style, while the dialogue was spoken in Brazilian Portuguese. The other was to cast the production solely with opera singers. There is no doubt that the music gained enormously from performance by singers, all of whom were uniformly excellent. And yet, the play became somewhat wearisome as the singers strove to find a conversational tone in an acting style that was obviously unfamiliar to them. In fact, the production had a void at its center with a weak Mackie Messer; Lício Bruno sang the role expertly but acted with indifference and seemed strangely oblivious to the proceedings around him. Flavia Fernandes as Polly and Lucia Bianchini as Lucy fared much better, with Bianchini delivering a very poignant "Arie der Lucy." The same can be said of Regina Elena Mesquita and Eduardo Amir,

both excellent as Mrs. and Mr. Peachum, and Igor Vieira as a disconcertingly gay Brown. The burden of propelling the action forward, however, fell on Ruth Staerke, as Jenny, who rose to the challenge exquisitely. Ms. Staerke is one of Brazil's foremost opera stars, and she made her Jenny part Weill, part Carmen, part Elektra, and part Brazilian pop singer Cida Moreyra. The result of this potentially bizarre combination was overwhelmingly effective. Even if Heller had not succeeded on many other counts, this production would have been a pleasure to watch for Ms. Staerke alone.

The decision to perform the songs in German was the most radical of the director's "exercises in possibilities," perhaps an attempt to have the best of two worlds in the same production. Partial translations of the lyrics appeared on panels on both sides of the stage, but it is doubtful that *Die Dreigroschenoper* can be understood fully without discovering the many strata of meaning hidden in the complete texts. In the event, the effect of this bilingual production was rather disconcerting, almost tearing the production into two disparate halves. Only one further step separated Heller from exercising his possibilities to the fullest: preparing full (and fresh) translations of the lyrics into Brazilian Portuguese, as he did with the play, turning *Die Dreigroschenoper* into a true *Ópera dos três vinténs*, with music, lyrics, and play completely integrated.

As mentioned previously, this was the first time that *Die Dreigroschenoper* has been seen and heard in Brazil on its own terms and within its proper context. Thus, this was the first Brazilian production to keep political digressions at bay and adhere to the original text. The boldness of presenting the work with full attention to the music, however, earned Mr. Heller a hostile reaction from the press. Even today, it seems, Brazilian critics like their Brecht plain, with no music. Audiences, however, loved discovering this work in its original form. If only for this, Mr. Heller deserves all praise. His production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* finally liberated Weill's music from the subservient role it had played until now on the Brazilian stage.

Celso Loureiro Chaves

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil



Mrs. Peachum (Regina Elena Mesquita) gestures at a panel containing the Portuguese translation of the "Zweites Dreigroschenfinale." Macheath (Lício Bruno) stands in the center of the stage and Jenny (Ruth Staerke) stands to the right by the other panel. Photo: Marcos Vianna.

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Hamburg Staatsoper

Premiere: 12 November 2000

Is *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* the *Götterdämmerung* of the Weimar Republic? The new Hamburg production of Brecht-Weill's opera on 12 November showed striking similarities with the conclusion of Stuttgart's recent Ring cycle, which, in an annual poll of fifty critics, earned the Staatsoper the title of "opera house of the year" for the third straight time. The director, Peter Konwitschny, was also named best director of the year. Not only is Konwitschny in charge of the new Hamburg *Mahagonny*, but Stuttgart's Siegfried, the Dutch tenor Albert Bonnema, is Hamburg's Paul Ackermann (an alternate name for Jimmy Mahoney). When, at the start of the third act, alone on the vast stage, he launches into his "Wenn der Himmel hell wird, dann beginnt ein verdammter Tag,"



Before the boxing scene, Paul (Albert Bonnema) warms up Alaskawolfjoe (Dieter Weller) while Willy (Chris Merritt, left) and Heinrich Merg (Jürgen Freier, right) look on. Photo: Brinkhoff/Mögenburg.

reaching the bottom of his despair when he prays, "Nur die Nacht darf nicht aufhör'n, nur der Tag darf nicht sein," one envisions the approaching dark day of the Nazi takeover, or the *Dämmerung* of Germany's roaring Twenties. The moment stirs one's innermost emotions.

It isn't that the Hamburg production tries to conjure up the intellectual climate of the first *Mahagonny* performances in Leipzig and elsewhere in 1930. Actually, Helmut Brade's set, with the help of costumes by Inga von Bredow, suggests a timeless modernity, and Brecht's ferocious attacks on capitalism and opera are

exchanged for the pleasure principle of the "Du darfst" society, which in German is called the *Spaßgesellschaft*, where everybody is allowed everything. The cover of the program is dominated by the opera's title, printed over a male face with a yellow straw hat, black sunglasses and bared (or grinning?) teeth, proclaiming "Viel Spaß" (lots of fun). When Begbick, Willy der Prokurist (Fatty), Dreieinigkeitsmoses (Trinity Moses), and the flock of girls make their way through the auditorium to arrive at the site of Mahagonny, how appropriate that she promulgate "Viel Spaß" as her first commandment. The oratorio-like finale, with the escalating intensity of its funeral-march rhythm, is crowded with people carrying placards (too many for my taste), but the slogans have less to do with communism than with spreading the gospel of uninhibited lust and selfishness, with only Jenny left pleading for love. Thus the motto of the Hamburg performance seems to be, "Make Love, Not Money!" The wonderful intimacy and tenderness in the scenes between Paul and Jenny leaves one frustrated with Konwitschny's decision to cut the "Crane Duet." (The "Song of Benares" was also cut; both were, of course, controversial additions, and it is good to remember David Drew's statement in his *Handbook*, "There is no 'ideal' production of *Mahagonny*, just as there is no 'definitive' edition.")

I am almost certain that Brecht would have despised the Hamburg production for the same reasons that Weill would have felt vindicated by it, because it fulfills marvelously the work's operatic ambitions. Having followed the course of *Mahagonny* from the Hamburg recording sessions with Lenya under Brückner-Rüggeberg back in 1956 through countless staged and concert performances, I do not remember a performance (or recording, for that matter) as rich and rewarding musically as Hamburg's latest attempt. (This is the third production undertaken by the Staatsoper, following a 1962 staging by the orthodox Brechtian Egon Monk, with Janos Kulka in the pit, and, more recently in 1990, when Bruno Weil conducted Günter Krämer's infantile Mickey Mouse-mask revue, which was later revived at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin). Here Ingo Metzmacher directs the Hamburg Philharmonic. He has collaborated on other Konwitschny productions: *Lohengrin*, *Wozzeck* and *Freischütz*. In the first act he and the musicians, dressed casually, are in the pit. After Begbick's opening number in the desert, the whole first

act is played in front of the curtain, which opens only for the scene in Begbick's saloon. The set is dominated by a giant pink settee from which a banana-shaped slide transports the customers to the floor, timed exactly to the arpeggios of "The Maiden's Prayer"). After the intermission the orchestra wears glitzy big-band garb and sits on risers at the back of the stage; to accompany the boxing match scene, the entire brass section marches around the stage while Metzmacher whirls his baton like a drum major. For the finale, the platform carrying the musicians, now dressed in formal concert attire, is wheeled to the front, and the performance ends in



Paul Ackermann (Albert Bonnema) and Jenny Smith (Inga Nielsen) share a moment. Photo: Brinkhoff/Mögenburg.

oratorio style, with the crowds revealing their banners. As in the Stuttgart *Götterdämmerung*, all dramatic pretense is abandoned for the finale. (In Stuttgart, Brünnhilde abandons her stage persona for “Starke Scheite,” appearing in a gala outfit and singing her farewell as if it were a recital piece while Wagner’s stage directions are projected on a screen.) In Hamburg’s *Mahagonny*, Brecht’s polemic against bourgeois opera is projected on a transparent curtain, speculating that every discussion about this antediluvian species would inevitably lead to the destruction of the very foundations of the current social system.

But Hamburg’s first-nighters did not seem at all interested in entering a general discussion about opera and its political failings. Instead they celebrated the production team, soloists, chorus, and orchestra with tremendous acclaim. And one has to admit that Metzmacher kept the performance sizzling, emphasizing the score’s punch and escalating drive; launching into the jazzy numbers with panache, so that they really started to swing and soar; building the big ensembles up to overwhelming magnificence; and clarifying the musical textures in the contrapuntal sections to evoke the great Hamburg Bach tradition. What really surprised me, though, was the poetic touch Metzmacher drew from the score, making it sound so translucent and lyrically beguiling that for once Weill seemed the reincarnation of Mozart and Schubert rolled into one and sprinkled with a bit of 20th century acidity.

What a joy to have young, attractive opera singers with voices to match performing Weill’s great tunes with such aplomb. As Paul Ackermann, Albert Bonnema really looks and acts like a Siegfried (or Parsifal) of the space age: healthy and robust, good-natured and trustworthy, naïve and cunning, at times won-

derfully tender and then again a born fighter, a buddy and a chum one cannot but love—and a voice with marvelous flexibility and power, fearlessly climbing the summits of the tessitura. A truly intoxicating performance! Inga Nielsen (Jenny Smith), known for her adorable Elisabeth and Elsa, proved the equal of her great Danish compatriot, the silent movie star Asta Nielsen, only better, since she sings, too. Incredibly sexy to look at with her endless legs and her sinewy figure, completely innocent and insouciant yet irresistibly tempting in every one of her languorous gestures, she sings the part with crystalline purity and perfect tonal control, expressively shaping her phrases so that they shimmer with incandescence. What a relief after all those raspy, wrongheaded Lenya imitators! If I hold some reservations about Mechthild Gessendorf’s Begbick, it’s only because she sings her role too smoothly and elegantly, a somewhat dilapidated, misplaced Marschallin, her voice detached and freely floating rather than being moored to the action. As her two confidants, the lanky Chris Merritt as Willy (better known as Fatty) and the rather sumptuous Günter Missenhardt as Moses, played a couple of clever thugs, while Walter Raffener (Jakob Schmidt, the one who eats himself to death), Jürgen Freier (Sparbüchsen-Heinrich), Dieter Weller (Alaskawolf-Joe) and Frieder Stricker (Tobby Higgins) emerged as hulking fellows from the woods, their voices soaked in whiskey.

Among the many contradictory posters and projections that unfolded during the finale, only two were missing: “Down With Brecht!” and “Up With Weill!”

Horst Kogler
Stuttgart



From left: Willy der Prokurist (Chris Merritt), Begbick (Mechthild Gessendorf), Heinrich Merg (Jürgen Freier), and Dreieinigkeitsmoses (Günter Missenhardt). Paul Ackermann (Albert Bonnema) awaits his fate in the background. Photo: Brinkhoff/Mögenburg.

Performances

Street Scene

Chautauqua, New York
Chautauqua Opera

18, 21 August 2000

Last summer, New York's Chautauqua Institute, a Victorian resort community nestled in the Allegheny Mountains, focused one week of its annual season of lectures, theater, and music on 346 West 65th Street in New York City, the modest brownstone tenement inhabited by the characters of Elmer Rice's 1929 Pulitzer Prize winning drama, *Street Scene*. Visitors to the institute were offered five events related to *Street Scene*, including the Chautauqua Conservatory Theater Company's production of the original play, King Vidor's 1931 film adaptation, and Chautauqua Opera's presentation of Kurt Weill's 1947 Broadway opera, created in collaboration with Rice and the poet Langston Hughes. A special "Cabaret Evening" and a performance by the Chautauqua Symphony also featured the songs and music of Kurt Weill. True to the educational spirit of the institute, the week offered a lesson in dramaturgy as Rice's characters made their way from the play to the film and the opera.

The play itself provides a fascinating study in dramatic form. As in Greek tragedy, Rice observes unities of time and place. He folds a broad range of human concerns—from childbirth to murder, hope to heartbreak—into what he considered a symphonic structure: "the statement, restatement, and development of themes, the interplay of contrasting instruments." The play also presents a symphony of sounds, as Rice indicates in his script: "there is constant noise . . . the distant roar of 'L' trains . . . the indeterminate clanking of metals . . . musical instruments . . . and human voices calling, quarreling, and screaming with laughter. The noises are subdued and in the background, but they never wholly cease."

In King Vidor's masterful film adaptation of the play, city sounds dominate the soundtrack, minimizing the orchestral underscoring. Despite the greater spatial freedom inherent in the film medium, Vidor maintains the intimacy of the play's setting by keeping the camera tightly focused on the tenement facade, cold and unmoved by the lives of its inhabitants. Vidor powerfully deviates from the static set twice in the film, pulling back the camera and flooding the street with people, thus confronting us with a crushing, faceless mass capable of transforming a private moment into a public spectacle before quickly dissolving back into the urban landscape.

The tragic scope and inherent musicality of the play made it a natural for operatic adaptation. Yet, as one music critic recognized in 1929, the play presented a challenge to any prospective composer: if the play were simply adapted to prevailing operatic conventions, a powerful, unconventional book would be buried by a conventional opera; if the libretto remained close to the casual style and mosaic structure of the play, the result would be not an opera, but a play with incidental music. Chautauqua's productions of the play and opera reveal Weill's delicate and tenuous solutions to these problems.

When he began sketching the opera late in 1945, Weill envisioned a work in which a wide variety of music would assume a primary role in carrying the action. Rice looked with suspicion upon changes to his original text, however, and thus limited Weill's original concept. Many of the musical moments in *Street Scene* are insertions into the existing text—an amplification of a moment, an expansion of a character's thoughts—rather than a musical adaptation of a complete scene. Yet, as Weill recognized, this is arguably one of the most effective uses of stage music; many of these moments, including the "Ice Cream Sextet," "What Good Would the Moon Be?" and the children's game song, "Catch Me If You Can," are indicated in the notes Weill made in a script even before he started working with Rice. In some cases, such as "Moon Faced, Starry Eyed," this musical expansion places a greater emphasis on minor characters than in the play. In others, musical concerns dictated changes in the plot, such as the addition of the African-American janitor to sing the blues song, "Marble and a Star." There are several points in the opera, however, where Weill sets scene into music, including the opening ensemble "Ain't it Awful the Heat," Rose and Sam's duet in Act I, and the Finale. These sections of the score flow seamlessly between melodrama, melodic recitative, choral commentary, and heightened lyricism as they translate the spoken drama into a new form of American music theater.

The operatic *Street Scene* does not simply supplement and translate the original, but instead transforms it to meet the different expectations and demands of the Broadway audience in the postwar political climate. Although Weill maintains the ensemble spirit of the original—he demands over twenty solo voices, an exceptional number for an opera—he nevertheless focuses on the conflict between Anna and Frank Murrant and the relationship between Sam and Rose by eliminating or scaling back several of the minor characters in the original play. Yet these cuts affect our view of the primary characters, either by removing a dramatic foil or limiting our understanding of their complexities. For example, by excluding the character of Agnes Cushing, a spinster who has devoted her life to caring for her mother, Weill removes a disturbing image of the future that frightens Anna Murrant. When Rose's crucial exchange with Lippo in the play's Act II disappears—during which Rose reveals her desire for independence and her uneasiness with relationships that may compromise it—she loses her own identity and becomes merely her mother's defender, her father's victim, Easter's desire, and Sam's obsession.

Shifts in the political and social climate between 1929 and 1947 compelled other changes. For post-World War II audiences, Weill and Rice eliminated the virulent ethnic slurs of the original, particularly Vince Jones's anti-Semitism and Shirley Kaplan's anti-Gentile comments, largely by diminishing the presence of these two characters. In addition, Mr. Kaplan's Depression-era anti-capitalist rhetoric challenged early signs of anti-Soviet sensibility and was thus scaled back in the opera, reduced to the harmless, dated tirades of an old man.

Weill and Rice also removed the play's atheistic content. Sam and Rose's discussion of God and the afterlife in the play is transformed into a discussion of human suffering and personal relationships, particularly their own. The play's focus on the eviction of Mrs. Hildebrand and her very young children is reduced to passing comments and replaced by "Wrapped in a Ribbon, Tied in a Bow." Rice's censure of the inhumanity of institutional charity thus becomes Weill's criticism of a blind optimism of songs like Rodgers and Hammerstein's "You'll Never Walk Alone."

A comparison of the Chautauqua Opera and the Chautauqua Conservatory Theater productions reveals the advantages and problems of mounting a production Weill's *Street Scene* that conforms to current-day "opera industry" standards for gloss and polish that serve spectacle more than drama. For instance, the set was a dazzling representation of a brownstone, with great attention paid to architectural detail and to the interiors behind the windows, where period furnishings and wallpaper offered an inviting and comforting imaginary world, but it conveyed little of Rose's and Sam's world of anxiety and conflict. The costumes also attractively captured the flavor of the period, but Frank Murrant's dark three-piece suit seemed an unlikely choice for the manual labor required of a stage hand. In contrast, the more intimate production of Rice's play succeeded in suggesting a dark, imagined environment behind the dingy windows, and the simple, even ill-fitting costumes drew the audience immediately into the lower-middle-class world of 346 West 65th Street.

The conservatory's college-age cast performed Rice's play admirably, delivering many exceptional performances. Although Aziza Omar never fully settled into her role as Mrs. Murrant, Tien Doman beautifully captured Rose's contradictory innocence, hope and world-weary strength, and Dustin Ross played a convincingly tortured Sam Kaplan. Most striking were the performances of Bill Heck, who presented a frustrated and frightened Frank Murrant, incapable of keeping his family from slipping away, and of Jeremy Rishe, who portrayed Mr. Easter as a lovesick man trapped in a dead marriage. Ironically, it was these interpretations of characters within the *play* that vividly demonstrated the power of Weill's music to delineate character in the *opera*. Through the expressive lens of Weill's score, Frank Murrant's aria "Let Things Be Like They Always Was" fixes his character as an inflexible, unsympathetic tyrant, and Mr. Easter's "Wouldn't You Like to Be on Broadway" deftly defines an office predator's slick attempt to capture Rose as a personal possession. Without the music playing on our emotions, the play demands that we contemplate the nature of individual characters and their relationships. Yet, after viewing the film and the opera, the relative silence of the conservatory's spoken production became oppressive, lacking the symphonic quality described by the playwright, or the richness of Weill's score.

While it may have taken a bit of imagination to accept a twenty-year old conservatory actor in the role of Frank Murrant, it took even more to accept a forty-year-old playing the opera's Sam Kaplan, demonstrating one of the challenges of incorporating a Broadway opera into the mainstream repertory: the increased need for realism. While some may argue that a sixty-year old Pavarotti is able to play a youthful Rodolpho in *La Bohème*, when a middle-aged Sam cowers before the young bully Vincent Jones, he appears not tortured, but pathetic.

Weill's score presents musical challenges as well. Singers must act in speech rather than song, and conductors and musicians must keep Weill's opera-house orchestra below the softer level of the dialogue. This was not always the case at Chautauqua, where the orchestra's careless approach to dynamics (symptomatic of a lax performance overall) often completely covered the dialogue and overpowered the singers. The problem was exacerbated by the acoustics of the hall and was not corrected by the sound engineers controlling the amplification.

The score also requires a conductor and performers who are capable of negotiating its wide range of musical styles. Such versatility was often missing from Chautauqua's production. Throughout the evening, conductor Jack Everly often emphasized

the score's references to Broadway musical comedy at the expense of its operatic allusions. Although "Moon Faced, Starry Eyed" shone appropriately brilliant and brassy, the ensemble in the "Ice Cream Sextet" more closely resembled vaudeville than Rossini, and thus deadened the humorous impact of Weill's ironic use of Italian opera to glorify chop suey and ice cream. Sam's "Lonely House" was similarly flattened by an insensitivity to style, as Everly made a foxtrot out of Weill's slow swing accompaniment, and emphasized dance rhythms that should have remained a hidden treasure behind the operatic facade. Everly's insistence on this tempo (and the tenor's struggles with the aria) robbed much of the expressive power from what Weill once referred to as the "theme song of the show."

Broadway opera may seem, at first glance, the most accessible of genres for both audiences and opera companies, given the "lighter" character of much of the music. Yet it is perhaps one of the most challenging, for it demands that designers, conductors, directors, and performers think beyond their familiar boundaries, recognize the stylistic references, and strive for a flexibility and balance as the work moves from one moment to the next. It demands intelligent acting, sensitive directing and conducting, and expressive and intelligible singing (it was disheartening to hear an audience at an opera sung in English complaining that they could not understand the words). Many in the cast of the Chautauqua Opera met the work's demands admirably; Kate Egan gave us a charming Rose, Pamela South delivered a convincing Anna Murrant and an especially moving performance of her Act I aria, "Somehow I Never Could Believe," and Alan Schneider rendered a quintessential Italian Lippo Fiorentino. Yet, possibly due to directorial problems, others did not find the full depth in their roles; Frank Murrant came across stiff and cartoonish, and Mrs. Jones appeared comic rather than spiteful (a reading compounded by the ill-judged participation of a hyperactive miniature dog).

Despite its problems, Chautauqua Opera presented an entertaining evening, as demonstrated by the audience's thunderous applause. There is clearly an audience ready for Broadway opera. But are our opera companies ready as well?

Heidi Owen

Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester



Jane Shaulis (Mrs. Jones), Chris Groenendaal (Harry Easter), and Kate Egan (Rose Murrant) in a scene before the tenement.

BBC Proms 2000

London

July–September 2000

As the BBC had already broadcast all the concerts in the Weill Weekend from the Barbican earlier in the year, the annual season of Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall did not have the opportunity to include any of the rarer works that had been heard in January. One of the themes of this season was “music inspired by man’s relationship with God,” so the inclusion of the *Berliner Requiem* and the first Prom performance of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* were appropriate.

Prom 18 on 27 July was a late-night affair, conducted by the young English composer Thomas Adès. The *Requiem* was preceded by Busoni’s *Berceuse élégiaque*, the London premiere of a new work called *Wiener Blut* by Gerald Barry, and—the highlight of the evening—Varèse’s *Ecuatorial*.

The *Requiem* was given in a version that began with the “Ballad of the Drowned Girl” and ended with the “Great Thanksgiving Choral.” In the vast space of the Albert Hall, the nineteen-person choir, European Voices, just didn’t make enough noise for their contribution to make the necessary impact. “Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen” was placed just before the finale, and was sung by H.K. Gruber using a microphone. Though his cabaret-style delivery is effective on occasions, here it jarred so much with the choir, and with the mellifluous singing of Garry Magee in the “Second Report on the Unknown Soldier,” that the whole piece just fell apart.

Prom 31 on 7 August was supposed to celebrate the seventieth birthday of Stephen Sondheim. It was an all-American concert conducted with flair by Barry Wordsworth. Gershwin’s *An American in Paris* preceded the Sondheim songs, which were sung by Kim Criswell, joined by Graham Bickley for the duet “Move On” from *Sunday in the Park with George*. This was the only selection that conveyed the full weight of Sondheim’s wordy librettos. The singers were heavily amplified, as were the soloists in the second half, in the first British performance of *Street Scenes*, the arrangement of numbers from the opera made by Kim Kowalke and Lys Symonette. Even the chorus had microphones. Was this really necessary? Orla Boylan, a soprano who is achieving a good reputation, made an effective Anna Maurant, but the miking removed the necessary contrast between her voice and that of Lori Ann Fuller as Rose. The best performance of the evening came

from Mark Richardson as Frank—he has a fine bass voice and conveyed the torment of the character; “I loved her too” made its mark. It has been over seven years since the last complete performance of *Street Scene* in London, so this concert introduced the work to many of the younger people in the audience. Is it too much to hope that it might also encourage English National Opera to revive it?

I was unable to attend Prom 40 (14 August), but by all accounts Isabelle van Keulen gave a fine performance of the Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments, with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Osmo Vänskä. I wish I had missed Prom 70 (7 September) too, the *Mahagonny*, which made me so angry that I could barely talk to my companion (who, to be fair, said he enjoyed it). Here was a great opportunity squandered. In the same season that saw unamplified performances of *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Parsifal*, as well as the closing scene from *Salome* sung by Jane Eaglen at the Last Night, why was it considered wise or necessary to play *Mahagonny* with the soloists and chorus miked? The voices were often so deafeningly loud that the orchestra was completely drowned. The hall was less than half full, so perhaps people had got wind of what they were being offered. Marie McLaughlin, as Jenny, and Kathryn Harries, Begbick, have both sung their roles at the Opéra de Bastille in Paris, where they had no need of amplification. I’m sure the same goes for Gabriel Sadé, as Jim, whose repertory includes the title role in Verdi’s *Otello*. H.K. Gruber conducted, but what his view of the piece might have been was impossible to tell, given the overwhelmingly dreadful balance between voices and orchestra. I am bound to report that the audience received the performance with a good deal of enthusiasm, while I left the hall in the foulest of moods. I seem to recall that when a production company wanted to put on *Mahagonny* in an amplified version, they were given a flat refusal by Lotte Lenya. I think I can imagine what she would have said about this—but it would be unprintable.



Patrick O'Connor
London

Reports from Los Angeles

Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony

Times were when Kurt Weill's music was a lively presence in Los Angeles. Twenty years ago, give or take, there were old friends and collaborators here and there to keep his memory alive—Margot Aufricht, bright-eyed and sassy in her home in Beverly Hills; Felix Jackson (a.k.a. Joachimson) in the Valley; theater companies large and small offering imaginative productions: *Johnny Johnson* here, *Happy End* there. This anniversary year, however, the pickings have been slim: a wretched, gadget-ridden *Happy End* at the Museum of Contemporary Art last May, nothing since—until the first weekend in December. Then, on consecutive evenings, respect duly graced the two major works that bracket Weill's mid-life metamorphosis: *The Seven Deadly Sins* that closed out his European career and *The Eternal Road* that he traveled on to the New World.

Both were delivered in creditable likenesses: the *Sins* performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta; the more modest but full-of-beans Los Angeles Jewish Symphony under Noreen Green presenting excerpts from *The Eternal Road*. Sheri Greenawald sang the music of Anna with Mehta, replacing the indisposed Audra McDonald, with the Hudson Shad Quartet as the folks back in Louisiana—and, in truth, pretty much stealing the show. A large vocal contingent sang along in the *Road* selections, with, if you're ready, none other than Dick Van Patten—the boy Isaac in the 1937 Broadway premiere—delivering the between-scenes narration.

Mehta's take on the *Sins* was, let's say, better than feared. His winds sang their slimy opening phrase as if with garlic on their breath; they whipped up a fine torrent of sound and subsided to an eerie, subtly colored leave-taking. Greenawald used the German text, bolstered with supertitles; McDonald had planned to use the English, so that was a step up. What was missing in Greenawald's defiant, in-your-face rendition was the insinuation that McDonald would probably have delivered (and which remains endearing in memories of Stratas performances). Hudson Shad, however, made up for everything: a group that lays claim to the mantle of the Comedian Harmonists of sacred memory and damn near earns it. Pre-concert, the group gave an enchanting half-hour of Weill in the Chandler Pavilion lobby, including a delicious "Alabama Song," minus the "pretty boy" stanza.

For her *Eternal Road* performance conductor Green culled some seventy-five minutes from the full score, encompassing nearly all of the Biblical episodes and nothing else. The English translation was her own, and not admirable. Still, there was some strong work from three vocal soloists (tenor Evan Kent, baritone Joel Pressman, and soprano Kathleen Roland), and the thirty-eight-piece orchestra—the usual mix of studio freelancers plus a few Philharmonickers on a free night—was beyond reproach. The presence onstage of the very young Andrew Oberstein and the old-but-bouncy Van Patten, the boy Isaac of then and now, added a nice existential touch.

Alan Rich
Los Angeles



Dick Van Patten narrates the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony's performance of excerpts from *The Eternal Road*. Photo: Marvon Steindler.

Salon Series at the Taper

After a weekend of performances of *The Seven Deadly Sins* by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the local contingent of the Weill centenary moved about a hundred yards east to the Mark Taper Forum. Weill's music was celebrated on 4 December 2000 in "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," the ninth of the Taper's annual "Salon" series. Previous installments honored Ira Gershwin, Oscar Hammerstein II, Alan Jay Lerner, Lorenz Hart, Irving Berlin, Johnny Mercer, Yip Harburg, and Noël Coward. The emphasis on lyrics was reflected in this show's subtitle, "Kurt Weill and His Lyricists."

The musical selections spanned the twenty-one years from *Threepenny Opera* to *Lost in the Stars*. Filling in this musical portrait of Weill was a running commentary written by Isaiah Sheffer (artistic director of New York's Symphony Space) and Michael Feinstein. René Auberjonois and Andrea Marcovici read a charming (and revealing) selection of the Weill-Lenya correspondence between 1929 and 1944. Completing the "behind the scenes" picture were a pair of reminiscences. A dazzling Anne Jeffreys recalled how Weill and Maurice Abravanel prevailed upon her to appear in *Street Scene*, and she told of the pleasures of working with Weill. Nancy Livingston joked about her stint as one of Alan Jay Lerner's wives and regaled the crowd with stories about their Rockland County neighbors, Weill and Lenya. It was Lenya who insisted that Livingston join their ongoing card game, promising she would teach her to "kill the guys."

Among the musical highlights: Michael Feinstein's opening set included an irresistible performance of "A Rhyme for Angela," doing poetic justice to the memory of his friend Ira Gershwin. Alvin Epstein gave a sharply-defined, deliciously dry edge to *Threepenny's* "Ballad of Sexual Slavery." The men of Hudson Shad (fresh from *The Seven Deadly Sins*) applied their sparkling harmonies to "It Never Was You" (from *Knickerbocker Holiday*) and "Economics" (from *Love Life*). Andrea Marcovici sang two songs from *Lady in the Dark* with her customary wit and playfulness ("I'm not going to pretend that Kirk Douglas isn't sitting in the front row.") And Nanette Fabray reprised one of her numbers from fifty-two years earlier, "Green-Up Time" from *Love Life*.

Alan Chapman
Los Angeles

Performances

Johnny Johnson

Musicals in Mufti
The York Theatre Company

New York City

20–22 October 2000

Johnny Johnson has always been a problematic show. The premiere by the Group Theatre, rehearsed in a small space and performed by actors with limited musical abilities, was dwarfed by the 44th Street Theatre, the only Broadway house available when the show opened to mixed-to-negative reviews on 19 November 1936. After sixty-eight performances, the show disappeared from Broadway but was selected by Hallie Flanagan in 1937 for Federal Theatre productions in Boston and Los Angeles. A 1956 revival at the Carnegie Hall Playhouse received even more negative press, and a 1971 Broadway revival at the Edison Theatre closed after the first night. *Johnny Johnson's* longest visit to a single place came in 1986 with a thirteen-week run at the Odyssey Theatre in Los Angeles.

Musicals in Mufti has a somewhat kamikaze approach to its semistaged offerings of “Broadway’s underappreciated musicals.” Each show receives five performances over the course of three days, after a scant five days of rehearsal. Actors perform “on book” and piano-vocal arrangements are used.

Over the years, griping critics have labeled *Johnny Johnson* “naïve,” “corny,” “too elementary,” even “irrelevant,” and, I must admit, these adjectives were running through my head when I attended the first of the *Mufti* performances. But by the time a young actor named Miguel Cervantes delivered the “Cowboy Song” totally devoid of affectation, I realized that director Michael Montel and his cast of twelve were serving up Paul Green’s book and lyrics and Weill’s music at face value. Has it really taken sixty-four years to realize that the key to appreciating the enormous charms of *Johnny Johnson* lies in its simplicity and gentle satire?

Unfettered by coyness, overcharacterization, or any attempt to apologize for its content, the *Mufti* production moved over Green’s glib, antiwar message with breakneck speed and found just the right mix of sweet and sour. The level of commitment from the cast generally kept the audience from noticing that the show was enacted on a bare stage, save for a dozen wooden stools, which were used to maximum effect to suggest settings and props. On the musical side, Weill’s brilliant orchestrations were sorely missed, especially in the non-singing numbers, despite Jeffrey R. Smith’s valiant execution of the piano reduction.

Sherry Boone subtly turned Minny Belle from a steadfast, romantic ingénue into a disillusioned, cold woman by the final scene, in which she no longer recognizes her fiancé of many years before. Her silver soprano soared through “O Heart of Love” and

showed the influence of swing on Weill in “Farewell, Goodbye” (which was cut from the original production and published score). Doing double duty (as did the rest of the cast except for the title character), she also played the saucy French Nurse in Act II, attempting to seduce Johnny with a massage in “Mon Ami, My Friend.”

Janelle Anne Robinson wrapped her warm, rich mezzo-soprano around “Song of The Goddess” (largely “borrowed” by Weill from the “Youkali” of his Paris years), and Deborah Jean Templin’s world-weary but resolute “Aggie’s Song” brought the first big ovation of the evening.

Another number new to New York audiences is “The West-Pointer Song,” here administered with biting irony by the baby-faced Steve Pacek, who later proved credible as Minny Belle’s adolescent son. In addition to a delightfully fresh Private Harwood, Cervantes turned the Belgian king into a buffoon with an accent redolent of a Monty Python sketch.

Peter Flynn seemed to underplay “Captain Valentine’s Song” but gained hilarity with each verse and, as the nutty Dr. Mahodan, brought the necessary caustic satire to “Psychiatry Song.” With a believable German accent, J. Brandon Savage was touching as Johann, the teenaged sniper befriended by Johnny on the battlefield. Different degrees and varieties of pomposity were employed by Kenneth Cavett as the Mayor of a small town “somewhere in America,” as the English Sergeant who extols the delights of Britain’s favorite beverage in “Tea Song,” and as the American Commander in the “Allied High Command” scene. Mark Aldrich was aptly annoying as the slimy mineral-water salesman and draft-dodger Anguish Howington. Aaron Lazar made his mark as a military officer befuddled by Johnny’s own personal form of logic at a recruiting office, as did Erik Stein in no fewer than four brief but distinctly etched roles.

While each actor shone in his individual assignments, the levels of ensemble acting and musicianship were astounding, considering the brief rehearsal period. Musical director Jeffrey R. Smith delivered particularly touching accompaniments to “Song of the Wounded Frenchmen” and “Song of the Cannons.”

With the script’s *dramatis personae* numbering twenty-nine, few are afforded opportunities to fully flesh out their parts, so it is ultimately left to the title character to hold the piece together. Perry Layton Ojeda’s singing and acting skills fused with near-magical chemistry as he met the challenging role of Green’s and Weill’s impassioned conscientious objector. After some early problems with nailing down a dialect (which seemed to veer from Gomer Pyle to Al Gore), Ojeda gave a powerfully understated performance, never failing to exude Johnny’s homespun humor, compassion, and confusion over his fellow human beings’ obsession with war. Bereft of a solo number until the show’s finale, Ojeda finally got to open up and show his vocal stuff in “Johnny’s Song,” surely one of Weill’s most poignant and gorgeous melodies. He sang with a focus, clarity, power, and conviction that brought tears to my eyes and would have made the show’s creators proud.



Cast of *Johnny Johnson* at the York Theatre. Photo: D.J. Templin.

Performances

One Touch of Venus

London

Lost Musicals

Premiere: 9 December 2000

Lost Musicals, the ensemble founded in 1990 to put on neglected or forgotten musicals from the thirties to the sixties, presented for the second time (after a first production in 1992 at the Barbican Centre) Kurt Weill's *One Touch of Venus* in the Linbury Studio Theatre at London's Royal Opera House. The show saw only five performances, far fewer than the original production, whose 567 performances marked the longest run of any Weill show on Broadway. Still, fifty-seven years later, the Lost Musicals production confirmed that *Venus* possesses original wit, dramatic pace, and musical innovation.

The story is derived from a Roman tale, turned into the novella *The Tinted Venus* by the British author F. Anstey near the end of the nineteenth century. Anstey's version was adapted for Broadway by S. J. Perelman and Ogden Nash. The plot, which depicts an emancipated woman independent of traditional gender norms, is startlingly modern for a story written in America in the early 1940s. One may find its roots in social changes of the period: with America's entry into the Second World War, women were called upon to take over jobs and roles formerly regarded as exclusively male. Whether it was the authors' goal to comment subtly on society in their own time we can only guess. However, we can still sense a compelling timeliness in the plot and are therefore bewildered that one does not encounter Weill's most successful musical more often on either side of the Atlantic.

The show was semi-staged in the usual Lost Musicals manner, with the actors dressed in evening clothes and without props or scenery. The stage was divided into two parts, the one closer to the audience an open space for acting and dancing, the farther one accommodating the orchestra; the two were separated by a row of chairs for the actors spanning the stage. Only the actors involved in each scene got up and performed in the empty space, the rest remaining seated. In the past, Lost Musicals have used only piano accompaniment, but the company has recently become more ambitious. This production employed a twenty-piece orchestra and, as required by the script, a dance troupe.

Ian Marshall Fisher, Lost Musicals director, followed the rental version of *Venus* meticulously, with no major cuts. All songs and incidental music were presented in their entirety, the production lasting three hours including a fifteen-minute intermission. The

staging in general was good, marred only by occasional moments of overacting and overuse of slapstick. At times, Michael Cantwell turned the barber, Rodney Hatch, into a cartoon. Also, his voice was not quite up to the role. Especially in the songs "How Much I Love You" and "Wooden Wedding," he struggled to hold pitch on the high notes and to maintain clear diction. However, the second male lead, Ethan Freeman as Whitelaw Savory, played the wealthy, avid art collector brilliantly with the voice of a consummate singer, especially in his interpretation of the demanding ballad "Doctor Crippen" at the end of Act I. Jessica Martin, as Molly Grant, Savory's secretary, was also right on key. Her singing of the title song was a vocal delight full of wit and charm. Last but far from least, Louise Gold, who also starred as Venus in the 1992 Lost Musicals production, was lusciously seductive, calling to mind the original Broadway *Venus*, the incandescent Mary Martin, physically as well as vocally. The *Venus* role is especially demanding, not only in the "Speak Low" solo but also in the up-tempo swing number "I'm a Stranger Here Myself." Thanks to recordings of the original production, Martin's virtuoso interpretation of these two songs undoubtedly remains the historical standard. Yet Louise Gold was a valiant successor to the legendary Martin and her delivery of these two songs was impeccable.

Kerry Shale (*Taxi Black*), Daniel Gillingwater (*Stanley*), Michael Cantwell, and Ethan Freeman sang the hilarious "The Trouble with Women" in Weill's inspired barbershop quartet arrangement, delivering the climactic last line, "The trouble with women is men," with verve and panache. Hatch's fiancée, Gloria Kramer, played by Lori Haley Fox, could have been more convincing, but her mother, Mrs. Kramer (Myra Sands)—also a cast member in the 1992 production—made up for any of the daughter's inadequacy.

The Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, conducted by Kevin Amos, performed the original orchestration well,

although there were some woodwind intonation problems, and the undersized string section often was not fully together with the wind instruments and singers, resulting in a thin and gauzy string sound.

Lost Musicals took full advantage of recent efforts to reconstruct Agnes de Mille's Broadway choreography, following it closely for the two ballets, "Forty Minutes for Lunch" and "Bacchanale." A troupe from the Central School of Ballet, consisting of dancers sixteen to nineteen years old, was most effective. The "Bacchanale" was particularly striking, because it is an early example of the revolutionary influence de Mille's choreography exerted on musical comedy dance.

I attended the first two nights and found the audience for the second performance more enthusiastic than the opening night crowd, probably because the cast was more relaxed. I hope very much that Lost Musicals' second revival of Weill's *One Touch of Venus* will inspire many more.



Michael Cantwell (Rodney) and Louise Gold (Venus) as Venus comes to life. Photo: Ash Scott Lockyer.

Michael Baumgartner
Cambridge, MA

Performances

Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill

Sydney

National Institute of Dramatic Art

20 June–2 July 2000

By the end of 2000, most Australian concert-goers would have been aware that the year had marked the anniversaries of Bach and Copland, but Kurt Weill's two anniversaries seemed to slip past relatively unnoticed. For, with the exception of a concert performance of *The Lindbergh Flight* at the Adelaide Festival (reflecting Festival Director Robyn Archer's continuing interest in Weill's work), the programming by Markus Stenz of German and exile works with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for the recent Melbourne Festival, and two brief seasons of Weill-Revues in Sydney, his contribution and importance seem to have passed Australia by. It was, therefore, a welcome surprise to find that NIDA, the major performing arts training institution in the country (which has produced, among others, Mel Gibson, Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett and Baz Luhrmann), had programmed a full-scale Weill event for its final year graduation production. Moreover, given his long-standing admiration for Weill's music, the choice of Jim Sharman, the original director of *The Rocky Horror Show* in London, New York and Los Angeles, as well as numerous opera and theater productions over two decades, led one to assume that the production would have something individual to say about the works and their composer.

Alas, the end result was very much a curate's egg, with production style, performances, design, and selection of material almost unrelentingly at odds with each other. The first of many false notes was struck without a bar of music being heard, with the audience being ushered into the performance space by two impeccably attired ship's officers, elegantly, though entirely inappropriately decked out as if they were supers from a production of *Anything Goes*. And the "concept" (rather, conceit) was followed through when, on entering the performance space, the audience found itself ushered into a slightly sunken horseshoe-like arena, with the stage at one end, and surrounded by beautifully sanded and shaped wooden walkways at shoulder level, with small lighting slots inserted for some decidedly odd effects later in the evening. Why the suggestion of a cruise liner, all smooth decks and trim white uniforms, seemed an apt environment for a Kurt Weill revue was but one of many questions for which the production offered no convincing explanation.

Throughout, this was an evening of what came perilously close to what Brook describes as "deadly" theater: design and perfor-

mances were constantly at odds with each other, and not in any productive, commentating sense. The shipboard context was, well, alienated by the use of a number of large white panels mounted above a catwalk which formed the primary acting space, and on which the elegantly attired cast at significant moments used spray cans to graffiti the names of "crucial" and "contextual" names—the one I particularly liked was "Kurfurstendamm" (*sic*). After the segment of numbers from *The Threepenny Opera*, these were transformed into four large photo-posters of Weill, looking, presumably, Berlin-like, exile-like, artist-like, and Broadway-like. And I could swear all four expressions changed after the rendition of "Surabaya-Johnny," delivered by Amie McKenna as a glassy-eyed automaton (numbed, dontchaknow, by her treatment at the hands of the phallo- and pipe-centered male), which culminated in the screamed instruction "Take that chewing gum out of your mouth, you animal!" (!!?) But, of course, for contrast, the refrain was then delivered in a tiny little-girl voice, to reflect her *true* feelings. What is it about the Weill-Brecht repertoire which prompts directors and performers to go to such excruciating lengths to make sure they and we have grasped the message?

From here it was a fairly brisk canter past *Johnny Johnson*, "Broadway & Ballads," *Lady in the Dark*, *Street Scene*, and *Lost in the Stars* before the inevitable reprise of the Moritat, partly barked, partly sneered at the audience by Nicholas Berg, whose voice was barely up to the demands even of such an "interpretation." By far the most effective segment of the evening, apart from Michael Tyack's beautifully shaped piano accompaniment to "It Never Was You" (the effect of which was cruelly dissipated by Ms. McKenna's delivering of the last note as a quaver, with a knowing smirk to the audience), was the quartet of numbers from *Lost in the Stars*.

Here one finally had a taste of Sharman's sense of theater: "Train to Johannesburg" was accompanied by an image of six men and women, clad in long black coats and wearing a version of Brecht's "steifer Hut," coming on in pairs, moving slowly and putting white powder on their faces. It was almost as if, given that the piece is almost unknown in Australia, and that this country still has a dreadful history of mistreatment of its indigenous population, cast and director had connected with something which they could make their own without forcing either music or text. It is too much to hope for a revival of the work by any company in the current environment: but it was clear both from the segment itself—in which Ms. McKenna (who seemed to be unfairly highlighted by the production, at the expense of the vocally more talented Andrea McEwan, whose "Barbara Song" was the musical highlight of the whole evening) delivered a disturbingly effective "Trouble Man"—and the public's reactions, that this piece still has the ability to catch an audience in mid-breath.



The cast, from left: Amie McKenna, Andrea McEwan, Nicholas Brown, Genevieve O'Reilly, Steven Rassios, Edith Podesta, Nicholas Berg. Photo: Branco Gaica.

Performances

Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill

New York City
Triad Theater

Premiere: 19 August 2000

What started out in 1972 at the off-Broadway Theater de Lys as “a musical voyage”—a revue that surveys Kurt Weill’s career—has become “a musical journey” at the Triad, located on West 72nd Street in Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Gone are most of the Guide’s nautical allusions; in fact, gone, too, is the Guide and what little singing was assigned to him. Discarding the storyteller is not a great loss, since his major function of delivering the narration is effectively picked up by the four singers. And with one character eliminated, the remaining cast members have more room on a small stage that must also accommodate the musical director-pianist. But less forgiving are other departures from Gene Lerner’s original concept.

The Triad is a pleasant off-Broadway walk-up venue that seats 153 people, mostly at small tables where drinks can be enjoyed. The atmosphere is decidedly cabaret. Unhappily, *Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill*, with its slim story linked to musical settings that attempt to suggest the flavor of the original theater pieces, doesn’t comfortably lend itself to cabaret-style theater. Some moments are just too big. Another compromise was the elimination of Newton Wayland’s excellent Weillian orchestrations. Instead of the original complement of about nine instruments, we have only a single piano, with arrangements by Eric Stern.

A talented cast and the power of Weill’s music can, however, still provide for an enjoyable experience. Quite a lot is expected from the two men and two women who bring us along on a journey that showcases a formidable range of musical styles, from avant-garde German plays with music to modern opera and big, splashy Broadway musicals. In this production’s thirty-two songs (seven numbers were cut entirely), culled from eleven of Weill’s stage works, Triad’s young, attractive quartet performed—for the most part—quite agreeably.

As seems to be the custom these days, whenever singers get hold of “Pirate Jenny” and “Surabaya Johnny,” there is a great temptation to squeeze out every drop of pathos and spit out all the anger inherent in these emotional gems. That’s what soprano Veronica Mittenzwei did with the former, and mezzo Lorinda Lisitza conveyed in the latter. And who could really blame them? These songs work effectively on a high plane of histrionics, to which audiences usually respond favorably; still, one laments the loss of the simpler, arguably more powerful approach established by the young Lotte Lenya and later Gisela May—interpretations that may soon be forgotten.

Otherwise, the women related well to the different styles, performing with great aplomb. Together they had fun with the “Jealousy Duet.” Mittenzwei had several opportunities to demonstrate her versatility, most notably with a plaintive “I Wait for a Ship,” a sassy “That’s Him,”

and a sorrowful “Cry, the Beloved Country.” Lisitza, too, had memorable moments, as she casually tossed off all the sexual innuendoes in “Barbara Song,” delightfully exploited the bumps and grinds in “Saga of Jenny,” and sang a lovely “It Never Was You” (a song that wasn’t in the original production).

Baritone Bjorn Olsson, who has a resume that includes works by Weill-Brecht, scored most significantly with the Berlin songs. He made a dashing “Mack the Knife,” and with Michael Winther performed a rousing “Bilbao Song-Mandalay Song” medley. Olsson also brought a great deal of interpretive brio to “Sailor’s Tango.”

The challenge of singing two demanding operatic arias was only half met by Michael Winther, a tenor with a small voice. At the matinee I attended, he sang a vocally secure “Deep in Alaska” early in the first act. But near the end of Act Two, perhaps due to fatigue, Winther had vocal problems with “Lonely House.” Throughout, he seemed more comfortable with the duets and ensemble numbers, in which he fit nicely with his stage companions.

Keeping everything under masterly control was Eric Stern, who appeared to be having a good time at the piano, conducting and accompanying with gusto. And playing Joe, the usually unseen piano player who is asked to “play the music” in “Bilbao Song,” Stern enlivened the song with a brief bit of vocal support.

For this first commercial New York revival, Hal Simons directed and choreographed adequately, and Suzy Benzinger provided little more than adequate costumes. William Barclay’s set, comprised mainly of theater posters, was something of a curiosity: In the first act (Berlin and Paris), some of the displays represented works that were not excerpted in the show, such as *Berlin im Licht* and *Royal Palace*. (Could it be that the designer simply wanted to visually extend the scope of Weill’s oeuvre?) Act Two’s American show posters were musically represented onstage.

If this basically good *Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill* were more ambitious and not a scaled-down production, it might have been considerably more memorable.

Joe Frazzetta
New York



The four singers—Veronica Mittenzwei, Bjorn Olsson, Michael Winther, and Lorinda Lisitza—strike a publicity pose.

Books

Kurt Weill und Maxwell Anderson. Neue Wege zu einem amerikanischen Musiktheater, 1938-1950

Elmar Juchem

Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000 (Veröffentlichungen der Kurt-Weill-Gesellschaft Dessau 4). 410 pp.
ISBN: 3-476-45243-3

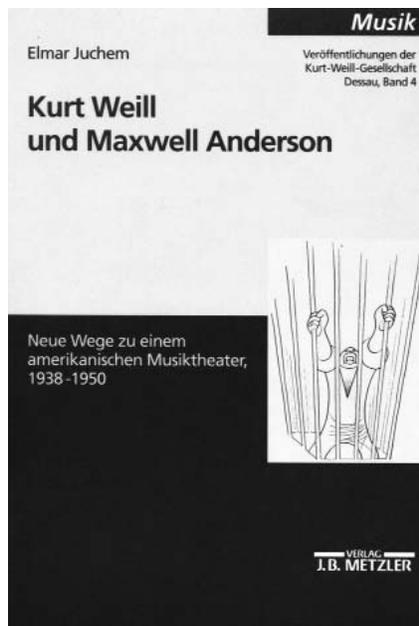
It is amazing to think that between Weill's death and its fiftieth anniversary in 2000 German musicology did not produce a single monograph focusing on Weill's work in the United States (and not that many articles either). Now Elmar Juchem's study of Weill's collaboration with Maxwell Anderson—resulting in *Knickerbocker Holiday*, *The Ballad of Magna Carta*, *Lost in the Stars* and the projects *Ulysses Africanus* and *Huckleberry Finn*—sets out to fill this scholarly gap.

That Juchem does so by analyzing Weill's work with a dramatist makes sense in more than one respect. Naturally, for a composer whose interests were geared towards the stage as much as Weill's, his literary collaborators were of paramount importance. But with regard to the state of Weill scholarship, Anderson may also be seen as a counterweight to Brecht and the almost mythical status his collaborations with Weill have acquired—despite the fact that their relationship was far from frictionless and that Weill worked with a string of important writers throughout his career.

Characteristically, Juchem refrains from using Weill-Brecht as a foil for Weill-Anderson. Brecht, and Weill's German work in general, are rarely mentioned at all; Juchem scrupulously concentrates on the American musical theater. After providing a concise overview of the history of American (music) theater up to the mid-1930s, he painstakingly reconstructs the genesis of each of the Weill-Anderson works and projects from the sources, showing how composer and librettist worked within Broadway theatrical conventions on the one hand and on the other tried to adapt them to their own uses (with particular reference to the situation of the

Playwrights' Company which Anderson had co-founded and which presented them both with a set of special conditions within the larger Broadway frame). For those projects that were completed and performed, Juchem also describes the productions and primary reception; and for all five works appendices provide overviews of his sources.

Two things, though perhaps fairly obvious for musical theater, still emerge impressively from Juchem's analyses: i) The complex interplay of factors shaping the individual projects: the wish for social and political comment combined with fears of being misunderstood in light of contempo-



rary events; discussions about the theatrical feasibility and efficacy of plots or about the roles of spoken text and musical numbers; financial considerations; the idiosyncracies of collaborators; the availability of specific performers etc. It seems hardly possible (and often somewhat pointless) to rank each factor by its relative importance for the finished work. ii) The fact that “finished work” is the wrong concept altogether. When Juchem on four pages lists sixteen different selections and orderings of musical numbers for *Knickerbocker Holiday*—stages of Weill's manuscript, rehearsal scripts, the printed score, playbills from tryouts, etc.—one realizes quickly how ridiculously inappropriate the idea of a *Werkgestalt*, a definitive shape of the work, would be for this kind of theatrical phenomenon. (And one begins to pity all those whose task it is or will be to edit such works for the Kurt Weill edition.)

An additional, quite extensive chapter presents analyses of selected songs and overtures/opening scenes from the works. Here, Juchem shows how Weill gave his own twists to Broadway musical forms and customs; and here, too, Juchem makes good use of the sources to reconstruct the development of texts and music, showing the densely interwoven influences of aesthetic and practical theatrical considerations on the final shape of a number.

Juchem's refusal to engage in far-reaching aesthetic and historiographical musings, his concentration on “positivist” source work, may be read as his position toward or within critical discourse on Weill—an implicit critique of the blind spots and imbalances of (largely, but not exclusively German) Weill scholarship, and an attempt to start the discussion of Weill in America anew, unbiased by an aesthetic agenda (as far as such a thing is possible). When he does refer to aesthetic discussions of Weill's oeuvre—as in the introduction to his analyses and in his concluding remarks—he does so succinctly and matter-of-factly. Mostly, the sources speak for themselves, as in the case of the early German reception of *Lost in the Stars* in the 1960s. Juchem shows the curiously inappropriate perspective from which the contemporary German critics approached Weill's Broadway work, a problem that has been mirrored in the scholarly discussion. Most of the critics of the first German production in 1961 simply did not know what to make of the work, which seemed to be neither opera pure and simple nor a clearly identifiable sub-genre (*Singspiel*, verismo opera, operetta, etc.), but instead somewhere between Brechtian epic theater and tragic opera, musical and oratorio. Some were just baffled, others declared the work, and Broadway musical theater in general, simply unfit for European ears (instead of considering that it also might be the other way round). Here, an already established idea of what Weill was like and the evidence of his development in the United States clashed with a force that still reverberates today.

Sometimes, perhaps, one would have wished for a more elaborate contextualization of the Weill-Anderson projects—not so much with relation to Weill's European works, which Juchem avoids for obvious and good reasons, but with relation to other contemporary Broadway composers and writers working in the same institutional context but producing different results. To do this with the same attention to detail as

Juchem employs for Weill–Anderson would have necessitated archival research beyond the scope of a Ph.D. dissertation; anyway, there is no point in criticizing a book for not being what it does not intend to be. But here may be a field for further research, with regard to the historiography of Broadway musical theater in general.

In his preface, Juchem relates that his interest in Weill was awakened in his very first semester as a student at the University of Göttingen, in a course *Music and Musical Culture in Germany 1900–1933*. Though largely by coincidence, the title sums up the background for Juchem’s attempt very nicely—until quite recently, Germany and 1933 more or less demarcated the boundaries of the relevance musicology in Germany ascribed to Weill on the map of twentieth-century music history. Weill on Broadway was “something else,” not quite music history proper. Hardly anyone would dare to admit to such a view anymore, but it remains to be seen whether other German musicologists will take up Juchem’s challenge to reassess Weill—or, not least, to reevaluate their own perspectives.

Guido Heldt
Freie Universität Berlin

Books

Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts

Daniel Albright

Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. 395 pp.
ISBN: 0-226-01253-0

Don’t imagine that Modernism is Albright’s serpent. Or that his serpent is a keyless wind instrument evolved by the French and Germans a good two centuries before the birth of Boulez and Stockhausen. Instead, think of George Antheil (Albright does, too fondly perhaps). But think also and even more of Henry Cowell, who’s barely mentioned, though he’s quite important, and not only to Americans.

From today’s ultra-postmodern perspective, tomorrow is already the day before yesterday. On that very day (at the time of writing) the postmaster from a small town in Scotland was talking to the BBC’s national breakfast-show team about his problems with the undeliverable postcard that’s just arrived by surface-mail from Auckland, New Zealand. The ground-floor apartment to which the card is addressed has been a dental surgery for many a year, and the addressees are a family whose very name is unknown in the neighbourhood. Anyone with information should call the postmaster. But wait, there’s another problem. Correctly and legibly postmarked, but lacking any official explanation for the delay, the card was mailed from Auckland in the summer of 1889.

Daniel Albright is Richard L. Turner Professor in the Humanities at the University of Rochester. He has composed an enthralling book *im alten Stil*, a kind of neo-Modernist concerto grosso, ideal for persons whose very existence is doubted by most publishers in the developed world. It should be read “in the Olden Style,” from cover to cover.

“When I was young,” Albright recalls, “I once spent a summer in which I listened to *Erwartung* every day, often two or three times, without paying attention to the text”. One’s first instinct may be to com-

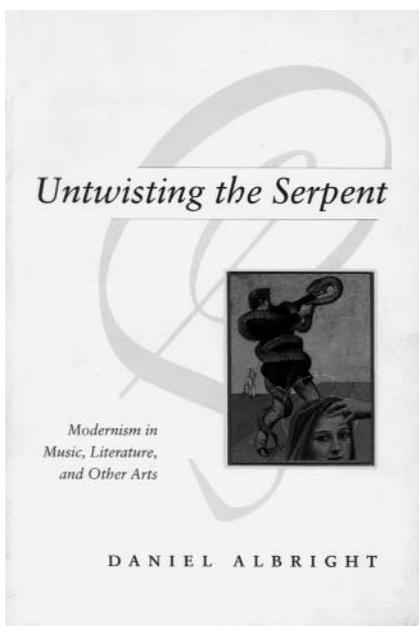
miserate with someone one who was still, in James Agee’s memorable phrase, “disguised to himself” as young. Did he perhaps reflect how different life must have been back in Knoxville that summer evening in 1915? What bearing might Schoenberg’s protagonist and her “primal scream” have on the “iron moan” of Agee’s streetcar? What indeed had the agony of her solitude to do with “people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually”?

It seems axiomatic that anyone who listens to Barber’s *Knoxville* “without paying attention to the text” can’t be paying much attention to Barber either. Albright’s liking for a recorded performance of *Erwartung* (under Hermann Scherchen) that omits the entire solo part seems to entail a judgement about the quality as well as the function of Marie Pappenheim’s text and Schoenberg’s setting (and thus differs in principle and in kind from the approval that used to be given for performances of *Pierrot Lunaire* that omit the Sprechstimme part). Ultimately, Albright’s rejection of Pappenheim and all her works is a tribute to the articulacy of Schoenberg’s music:

I wanted to assimilate its wonders, to understand its discontinuities as occult forms of continuity. As with any repeated succession of sounds, *Erwartung* ultimately became fully predictable; and, slowly, the text started to seem an arbitrary melodrama, a silly hoo-ha uncomfortably fastened to the exquisite music.

There are questions that might profitably be raised about the underlying analytical assumptions and their consequences elsewhere in the discussion of *Erwartung*. Fundamental, however, is an old-fashioned secular faith in the power of music as such, the power that precedes and goes beyond the hermeneutics. Albright well understands that “paying attention to the text” is a discipline whose exactions are multiplied in proportion to the complexity of the interdisciplinary context. And yet: “this book tries to please by holding up to the light the fugitive but powerful creatures born from particular unions of music and the other arts.” It does please; or when it doesn’t, it stirs things up, which is just as good.

Albright’s chosen fields are those in which “the relations among the arts were either unusually tense and hostile, or



unusually lax and tolerant.” The latter, defined as “figures of consonance”, are examined in the first section of his enquiry; the “figures of dissonance” are then introduced (though the antithesis isn’t always clear); and finally, an all-American C major resolution celebrates a marriage of true and fairly truthful minds in the Paris-paradise of 1928.

As for the serpent of the title, its origins are nautical and divine, its home is the Vatican’s famous statue of Laocoön and his sons, and its relevance for Albright begins with Lessing’s epoch-making essay of 1766, *Laocoön*. Richard Brilliant’s *My Laocoön: Alternative Claims in the Interpretation of Artworks* (University of California Press, 2000) is only the most recent instance—too recent to be cited by Albright—of a debate that has continued and often raged since Raphael and Michelangelo began it almost as soon as the statue was unearthed in 1506.

Lessing’s essay is subtitled, “On the Limits of Painting and Poetry.” Limits, boundary lines, category distinctions of every sort, these are the serpents Albright is grappling with; and yet music enjoys his special favor. No passage in his expository section on Hieroglyph is better qualified to stand for the book as a whole than the one that contemplates Liszt’s circumambulatory masterpiece *Il penseroso* (no.2 in the Italian volume of *Années de pèlerinage*). Not only from the statue Michelangelo carved for the tomb of Lorenzo de Medici but also from the poem he inscribed on it, Liszt draws a music whose prophetic freedom does honor to both. Paraphrasing Schiller, Busoni (who doesn’t appear in Albright’s pantheon) famously declared that music is born free, and that its destiny is to free itself again. The music Liszt won from Michelangelo’s inscribed poetry and carved stone is informed by that spirit of freedom. Implying a certain belief that all music aspires to the condition of art and life, the *Années de pèlerinage* in their entirety begin to suggest—it’s a “modern” idea—that even the poorest music can dream of playing with the richest.

Is that why Albright tries to banish Nietzsche’s Dionysus and elect the Phrygian satyr Marsyas in his place? Marsyas taught himself to play the aulos, which Athene had invented but then thrown away in disgust after finding that it distorted her face when she played it. Marsyas doesn’t care about his face. He challenges the lyre-playing Apollo to a contest of skill. According to one often-sculpt-

ed version of the myth, Apollo tied Marsyas to a tree and flayed him alive for his presumption; according to another, the satyr was tried and acquitted by King Midas, whose reward from Apollo was a pair of asses’ ears fit for many a music-journalist of our own day. He was given a cap to cover his shame.

As far as ears are concerned, Albright has little to be ashamed of. In value-free alphabetical order his favored composers are Antheil, Poulenc, Satie, Schoenberg, Virgil Thomson, and Weill. Of the two poets to whom he grants honorary status as composers, one turns out to be the North Star in his firmament: Ezra Pound. The other is Brecht.

In *Untwisting the Serpent*, Brecht is introduced as a bit of a twister himself. Concerned about the historical placing of “most of Brecht’s best plays,” Albright corrects himself: “perhaps I should say most of the best plays published under the brand name ‘Brecht.’” The kind of aside that gets an easy laugh at student seminars may no longer earn its keep when a serious point is being overlooked: among the thirteen musical notations forming the appendix to Brecht’s *Hauspostille*, by far the most memorable happens to be the only one that speaks a musical dialect remotely akin to that of Pound’s “opera” *Le testament*. Albright is rightly preoccupied with the “Mahagonny-Lieder” and their “gestic” implications for Weill. But immediately preceding the “Lieder” is the tune for the “Ballade von den Seeräubern.” Whatever the poem may owe to Wedekind, Ringelnatz, & Co., is paid off by the old French *chanson* “L’Étendard de la pitié” (The Banner of Compassion). Later converted into a banner for Mother Courage, the song and its superbly incisive arrangements and formal variations by Paul Dessau achieved international fame after the Berliner Ensemble’s triumph at the International Theatre Festival in Paris in 1954. Brecht had another two years to live, and Pound another four to endure in his Washington hospital.

Meanwhile Dien Bien Phu had fallen, and Marx’s reading of Laocoön as an image of the human race struggling in the coils of capitalism was finding new adherents. For an old warrior like Hermann Scherchen, there was a logical progression from the individualist “expectation” of The Woman in *Erwartung* to the collective aspirations of Brecht and Dessau in their opera *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* (whose controversial premiere in Communist Berlin in 1951 was

conducted by Scherchen).

More reticent in the political sphere than in many others, Albright would seem to incline to a Rorty-like quietism. After an early and ominous reference to “the political operas of Brecht and Weill,” he leaves well alone until *Der Jasager* brings him, for just a moment, perilously close to a land mine.

His escape is providential. The account he gives of Weill’s collaboration with Brecht, and vice versa, may or may not change the course of Weill scholarship; it will certainly enrich its findings. Again Pound is the guiding star. But the new angle reveals Yeats close by; and it is the involvement of Pound and Yeats with Noh theatre that allows Albright to discuss Britten’s *Curlew River* (1964) long before Weill’s *Der Jasager* (1930), and at a conveniently safe distance from it.

His routing is flawless. Perhaps unwittingly, but if so, with a rare intuition, he approaches *Der Jasager* from a position indicated forty or more years ago in a radio broadcast by the Austrian-born composer and scholar Egon Wellesz. A former student and biographer of Schoenberg, and a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford since 1938, Wellesz was best known for his work in the field of Byzantine music and notation, but had recently published an edition of Troubadour songs. As composer of the once admired but long neglected stage works *Alkestis* and *Die Bacchantinnen*, and also of the recent Congreve opera *Incognita* (1951), Wellesz was broadcasting a talk on the history of dramatic composition. In the course of it, he spoke of Weill, and compared his achievement in the field of operatic reform with that of Gluck. There were no apologies for airing a view that might have made sense a quarter of a century earlier in the musical Germany of Alfred Einstein and Paul Bekker, but was likely to perplex or enrage the majority of his British listeners (Edward Dent excepted!) in the 1950s.

Albright is equally unapologetic. As if in tribute to Wellesz, he brilliantly adduces Schoenberg’s tonal masterpiece of 1929, the unaccompanied male chorus “Verbundenheit” op.35, no.6, before proceeding to examine *Der Jasager* in terms of Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice*. In general, and beyond the boundaries of Weill’s opera, his account is so illuminating that the shadow of doubt cast by his only comparative music example can safely be ignored. Like other such examples in the book, it is less convincing than the general point it is intended to

illustrate. More important is what *Der Jasager* comes to represent in the double context of Laocoön's struggle with the serpents, and classical humanism's engagement with pre-Christian antiquity. Whereas pilgrims and scholars of a former generation would flee from the "bourgeois leftism" of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Mahagonny* and wend their way up the dusty mountain track to the narrow ledge from which *Der Jasager*—half read but quite unheard—could be lightly tossed as they headed for the clouded summits of *Die Massnahme*, Albright stays at home, listening, reading, and paying attention to the text. For him *Der Jasager* becomes the quintessential Weill, a goal, a terminus.

Weill's relationship to Gluck—to *Don Juan* as well as to *Orfeo*—is incontestably a part of his inheritance from Busoni, Liszt, and Mozart. The critical importance of his cantata *Der neue Orpheus* has been so widely recognized since the publication in 1986 of Kim H. Kowalke's important essay, "Looking Back: Towards a New Orpheus," that Albright can perhaps afford to take it for granted. A more surprising absence, apart from two brief allusions, is that of Cocteau's *Orphée* (1926).

Suppose that Weill had read the play at the time of his talks with Cocteau in 1933–35, and had then in 1949 seen the "new" and renewed film version with its Gluck-blessed score by his former admirer Georges Auric? What might the omnipotent, indivisible, and Protean Weill of current theology have made of all that?

Albright's Weill doesn't tell us; he seems to have closed up shop after *Die sieben Todsünden*. And yet Albright corrects himself just in time, with one of the most telling *aperçus* in the entire book:

behind any of Weill's stage pieces there lies a nest of other stage pieces, opening out onto everything from *The Play of Daniel* to Rodgers's *Carousel*. To learn what is the common property of all music theatre, listen to Weill.

To learn some of the things Weill's music theatre did not have in common with, say, Virgil Thomson's, listen to Albright on *Four Saints in Three Acts* (whose composition was precisely coterminous with that of *Die Dreigroschenoper*). But if you want to learn why Weill's happily named film-musical *Where Do We Go From Here?* (1944) has little in common with the film scores his good friend Antheil was writing a year or two later, Albright

won't help you much. You'll have to access the movies, and while you're about it, listen to the recent recordings of Antheil's symphonies. You may or may not be disappointed

One of the many virtues of Albright's book is that readers will wish to seek out or rediscover music that has barely been touched upon (or not at all), even as they are persuaded, whether by stealth or sheer enthusiasm, to explore the mixed-art collaborations it so dazzlingly elucidates.

David Drew
London

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This review is an excerpt from a wider-ranging essay which will be published in due course and included, in a revised form, in the author's projected collection of reviews and essays covering music, arts, and politics in the period 1917–2001.

Books

Die Musik der Neuen Sachlichkeit

Nils Grosch

Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999. 288 pp.
ISBN: 3-476-01666-8

Nils Grosch did not intend his 1997 Freiburg dissertation as a contribution to the history of terminology for the field of "Music of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*." Rather, his goal was to show "how during the middle years of the Weimar Republic the changing structures of musical life and reception led to new aesthetic concepts and how this aesthetic rethinking manifested itself in compositions" (p. 20). From this perspective Grosch deals in turn with three "institutional or functional preconditions which determine, as it were, the structure of the study."

The music division of the Berlin-based *Novembergruppe* forms his first topic. Drawing on many little-known documentary sources, Grosch outlines the history of this young composers association that counted among its members Max Butting, Hanns Eisler, Philipp Jarnach, Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, Heinz Tiessen, Vladimir Vogel, Kurt Weill, and Stefan Wolpe. He describes the group's early attempts to cultivate an audience for their works through special concert series and the gradual shift toward more popular media and idioms such as music for radio, mechanical music, *Gebrauchsmusik*, and popular music. The second part of his study ("*Zeitoper* as a popular medium of musical theater") focuses on Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* and *Das Leben des Orest* as well as Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* and *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*; Paul Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage* and Ernst Toch's *Der Fächer* are also considered in passing. For these works Grosch furnishes evidence of a "medial character" (p. 103) which he considers the main characteristic of the *Zeitoper* genre: the "integration of different musical styles" produces for Grosch such a "medial character" by alluding to works of other composers and to popular music, or by incorporating technological media into the plot (radio in *Jonny*



spielt auf, gramophone in *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren*). The third part of the dissertation treats music composed for radio. With the help of essays by Max Butting and Walter Benjamin, Grosch develops a “musical radio theory of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.” He postulates that exigencies of reception and of the medium itself influenced the eventual make-up of work composed for radio more than musical considerations. “Thereby, functionality turns out to be the overriding aesthetic principle of mass-reproduced art and—in our case—[it] reintegrates original radio music into both the realm of *Gebrauchsmusik* (since this music is defined as a commodity for the masses) and the aesthetic dispositions of *Neue Sachlichkeit*” (p. 194). According to Grosch (p. 213), radio composition was characterized not only by the limitations on orchestration imposed by the transmission quality of the time but also by the formal structure of the works, as he attempts to demonstrate with radio pieces composed by Butting and Schreker. Especially in Butting’s radio compositions the author discovers “a formal and compositional concept in which the melodic and harmonic structure replaced the cyclic character with a linear one” (p. 226). As an additional characteristic he mentions the severe compression of individual movements which ultimately are heard as short musical units representing themselves rather than as parts of a larger work. He goes on to argue that not only did the ordering of individual movements become flexible but also the entire shape of the work. The concluding examination of *Der Lindberghflug* leads Grosch to the claim that the differences between Weill’s and Hindemith’s contributions can be ascribed beyond “stylistic divergences” to differences in the “basic concept of radio composition” (p. 244).

In his dissertation as well as in previous publications Nils Grosch has shown himself an enthusiastic supporter of composers like Butting, Krenek, Stuckenschmidt, Tiessen, and Weill, all of whom he considers to be unjustly marginalized by previous music historians. Such enthusiasm has a touching charm but proves problematic for his study in many respects. All too often Grosch succumbs to the danger of adopting uncritically the position of those he is writing about. Such is the case in his discussion of a public controversy about mechanical music that broke out in 1925 between Stuckenschmidt and Erwin Stein (p. 51), or in the chapter about Weill’s futile efforts to find a publisher for his operetta

project *Na und?* in 1926 (p. 109). In these cases, as in others, Grosch fails to see that autobiographical documents, with their inevitable tendency toward self-creation, can serve only up to a point as reliable scholarly sources; at times Grosch is not shy about making them a point of departure for wild speculations. For example, he arrives at the absurd accusation that Hindemith intentionally prevented Stuckenschmidt and Toch from collaborating on the music to Oskar Schlemmer’s *Triadisches Ballett*: “. . . the history of original compositions for mechanical instruments was meant to list his name first, it was meant to be written without the names of Stuckenschmidt, Toch, . . . Stravinsky, and Antheil” (pp. 56–60). Just as problematic is his tendency to draw conclusions from inadequate source materials (for instance in the reconstruction of the *Novembergruppe*’s nineteenth concert in April 1927, pp. 73ff).

One may choose to ignore Grosch’s journalistic support for “his” composers even though it sometimes leads to unjustified accusations against other people (such as Erwin Stein or Hindemith) that are not supported by the cited documents. More inexplicable, however, are the author’s seeming misunderstandings of basic music theory revealed in his analytical passages. He does not seem to know what syncopation is (pp. 122), he writes “transposing” where “varying” is probably meant (*ibid.*), and he detects chromatic intensification in a simple succession of diatonic triads (p. 130). It remains unclear what “rhythmical power” (p. 94) comes into effect in Weill’s *Berlin im Licht*, a song that consists almost entirely of quarter notes. Descriptions of musical issues (e.g. Krenek’s *Stilzitat*, p. 117) often appear vague and confusing, as are other non-musical statements such as a definition of “*Amerikanismus*” (p. 149). And finally one might dispute the propriety of launching a general attack against Carl Dahlhaus, Rudolf Stephan, and Hermann Danuser in the concluding remarks of a dissertation, while ignoring the fact that recent discourse on the music of *Neue Sachlichkeit* has not evinced the polemical tone that Grosch believes is still the norm.

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Books

Walt Whitman and Modern Music: War, Desire, and the Trials of Nationhood

Edited by Lawrence Kramer

New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 179 pp.
ISBN: 0-8153-3154-1

New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music

Jack Sullivan

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. 262 pp.
ISBN: 0-300-07231-7

The interactions of music with the other arts have long been recognized but rarely discussed in print. Daniel Albright, the Richard L. Turner Professor in the Humanities at the University of Rochester, has attempted to address that lacuna by offering a series of books under the general title *Border Crossings*. The series is intended to investigate consonances and dissonances in the arts of modernism, and its range of offerings is quite wide, including themes such as *Bronze by Gold: The Music of Joyce*; *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg*; and *Black Orpheus: Music in African-American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison*.

The tenth volume in the series, *Walt Whitman and Modern Music*, examines a variety of musical responses to Whitman’s poetry. John M. Picker’s “‘Red War Is My Song’: Whitman, Higginson, and Civil War Music” compares and contrasts Whitman’s *Drum-Taps* with Higginson’s *Army Life in a Black Regiment*. Picker discusses how Higginson’s valiant efforts at transcribing spirituals transforms musical sounds into written language while Whitman’s poetry does the opposite. In “‘No Armpits, Please, We’re British’: Whitman and English Music, 1884-1936,” Byron Adams explores Whitman settings by Vaughan Williams,

Holst, and Delius. Werner and Walter Grünzweig document and discuss various German composers' settings in "Eros, Expressionism, and Exile: Whitman in German Music." They survey well-known works by Hindemith, Weill, and Karl Amadeus Hartmann, but also lesser-known or unknown music by Franz Schreker, Othmar Schoeck, Hans Werner Henze, Ernst Toch, Johanna Müller-Hermann, Eduard Zuckmayer, Ernst Hermann Meyer, and Gerd Kühr. Of the unknown works, Müller-Hermann's mammoth 1930 lyric cantata, *Lied der Erinnerung: In Memoriam*, which the authors note is a "late representative in the tradition of Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*" that quotes several Native American melodies, should be investigated for its performance potential. Kathy Rugoff's essay, "Three American Requiems: Contemplating 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd,'" chronicles Whitman settings by Crumb, Sessions, and Hindemith. Lawrence Kramer's essay, "Like Falling Leaves: The Erotics of Mourning in Four *Drum-Taps* Settings," examines various musical interpretations of Whitman's poem and its effect on music by Vaughan Williams, Rorem, John Adams, and the author.

The remaining essays are devoted to individual composers—Blitzstein, Hindemith, and Weill. In "Reclaiming Walt: Marc Blitzstein's Whitman Settings," David Metzger examines the significance of the composer's youthful songs that "embrace and promote Whitman's homosexuality." A detailed description of the music follows; the four songs are included on the audio CD that accompanies the volume, and it is necessary to refer to it when reading this essay since the music is still unpublished and no musical examples are given in the text. Philip Coleman-Hull's "A Visionary Backward Glance: The Divided Experience in Paul Hindemith's *When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom'd: A Requiem For Those We Love*" presents the genesis of Hindemith's setting, tracing his emigration to America, his positions at Yale, Cornell, and Wells, and his philosophy of composition. The essay concludes with a "reading" of the piece. Kim H. Kowalke offers an examination of the events that led to the composition of Weill's Whitman Songs in "I'm an American!: Whitman, Weill, and Cultural Identity." Through letters and an investigation of other primary documents, Kowalke explains the fascinating genesis of these songs.

In this excellent collection of essays, the authors have shown how Whitman's poetry has intrigued musicians, both American and European, from the time of its publication through the latter part of the twentieth century. One suspects that there are many additional works to be explored that will reveal even more facets of this fascinating relationship of poetry and music. In addition to the effective performance by Joan Heller and Thomas Stumpf of songs by Blitzstein, the CD includes Weill's *Four Whitman Songs*, Crumb's *Apparition*, and Kramer's *Three Poems by Walt Whitman*.

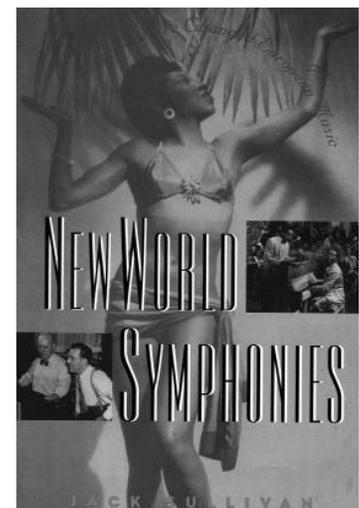
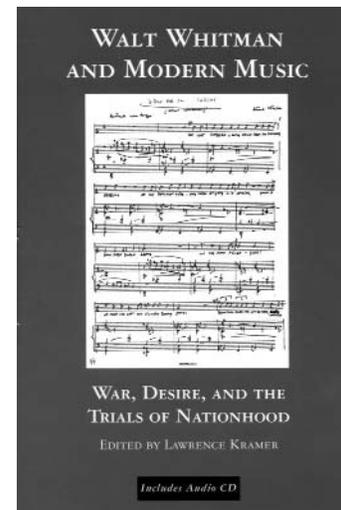
Jack Sullivan's interesting *New World Symphonies* is generally complementary to Kramer's collection of essays, though it takes a somewhat broader view of the interaction of the cultures of the Old and New Worlds. His thesis—that American culture has widely influenced European composers since the mid-nineteenth century—is supported by examination of several central topics that focus on the transmission of musical idioms. In "The Legacy of the Sorrow Songs," Sullivan looks at the relationship of African-American spirituals to the music of Dvorák, Delius, and Coleridge-Taylor. In particular, he compares the uses of American plantation songs in Dvorák and Delius, noting how their lives in the United States differed. Of interest also is Sullivan's discussion of Delius's two American operas, *The Magic Fountain* and *Koanga*, and Coleridge-Taylor's *African Romances* and his brief opera, *Dream Lovers*, both on texts by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Sullivan's look at Coleridge-Taylor's music suggests that there are hidden gems in his oeuvre that need to be seen once again.

Three chapters, "Hiawatha Fever: The Legacy of Longfellow," "New Worlds of Terror: The Legacy of Poe," and "New World Songs: The Legacy of Whitman" survey in some detail the Longfellow connection to Dvorák's "New World" symphony and several Coleridge-Taylor works, including *Scenes from the Song of Hiawatha*; Poe's appeal to Ravel, Debussy, Messiaen, Poul Ruders, and Rachmaninoff; and Whitman settings by Vaughan Williams, Delius, Holst, Weill, and Hindemith.

The final chapters are concerned with American vernacular music. In "Broadway, Hollywood, and the Accidental Beauties of Silly Songs," Sullivan changes his focus to examine how European composers who came to the United States combined the

music of their own heritage with American sounds. His discussion of Weill, Korngold, Tiomkin, and others takes issue with the perception that these composers did not produce their best works in America. This point is examined in detail with regard to Weill's Broadway shows. In "New World Rhythm: The Spread of Jazz," Sullivan starts by noting the influence of Gottschalk on mid-nineteenth-century Europeans and then surveys the jazz-influenced music of many twentieth-century composers, including Ravel, Milhaud, Krenek, and Lambert. There are many thought-provoking ideas in this volume. While one may not agree with all his conclusions, Sullivan has certainly raised issues that need to be discussed by music historians.

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Recordings

Sonatas for Cello & Piano Shostakovich – Falla – Weill

Jan Vogler, cello
Bruno Canino, piano

Berlin Classics (Edel) 0017062BC

Chamber music from the first half of the 20th century offers cellists only a few, and therefore all the more significant, soloistic challenges, represented for the most part by the sonatas for cello and piano of Barber, Carter, Debussy, Hindemith, Kodály, Poulenc, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich, as well as Maurice Ravel's sonata for violin and cello. (Max Reger's monumental third cello sonata op. 78, composed on the eve of modernity in 1904, should not be overlooked either.) Kurt Weill's sonata, composed in 1920, remained unknown until its first modern performance in 1975 at the Berliner Festwochen and its American premiere four years later at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Since then it has gradually gained recognition, primarily among cellists, as an additional *chef d'oeuvre* within this relatively slim repertoire. This status is confirmed by the prominent pair of performers who appear on this recording: Jan Vogler, undoubtedly the best German cellist of his generation, and the Italian master, pianist Bruno Canino. Their complete 1995 recording of Beethoven's cello sonatas, also on the Berlin Classics label, has won wide international acclaim.

Vogler's and Canino's experience with the classical and romantic repertoire set the basic tone for their interpretations of Weill's and Shostakovich's sonatas, which are supplemented on this recording by Maurice Maréchal's brilliant transcription of Manuel de Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas*. Vogler and Canino avoid extremes and retain awareness of tradition. This approach serves well their

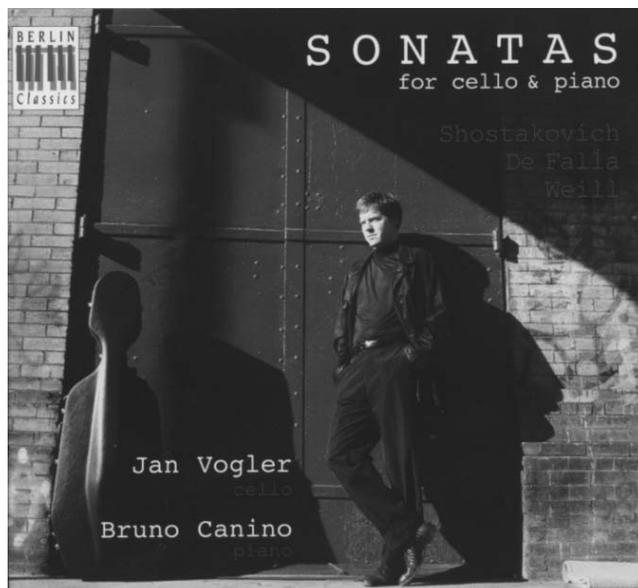
interpretation of the Shostakovich sonata (composed in 1934 around the same time as the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*), whose classicism in form, syntax, and tonality is apparent. Highlighted against this background are the ironic-sarcastic elements of the first movement (development section and coda), the Scherzo's demonic nature, the Largo's elegy, and the rondo-finale's seemingly serene neo-classical *Motorik*, permeated with allusions and subliminal aggression, all of which are clearly revealed in Canino's and Vogler's performance.

Interpretation becomes more complicated, however, with Weill's sonata. This work possesses little stylistic unity but rather shows evidence of ambivalent, even contradicting, musical influences and experiences. The particular historical period of upheaval from which the work emerged is easily perceived: Weill composed the sonata in Dessau in 1919–20 following his studies at the Berlin Musikhochschule. The reverberations caused by the new democracy's state of fermentation and the accompanying intellectual uncertainties are audible in the music. Weill was drawn to new artistic forms of expression to the extent that he questioned his teachers' ossified concepts of music. Like other young German composers, he was fascinated by the *Novembergruppe* (established in commemoration of the November Revolution in 1919), an association of experimental and

expressionist artists, musicians, and writers. Among Weill's compositions from this period (some of which are lost), the cello sonata represents one of the most important. He experiments with a variety of stylistic means without reaching or even aiming at a synthesis. During the course of the three movements, Weill calls into question the late-romantic idiom without entirely forfeiting it. (David Drew has pointed out a connection to *Die stille Stadt*, Weill's August 1919 setting of Dehmel's poem.) The form seems rhapsodic, almost aimless, dominated by contrasting moods. The harmonic structure is indistinct due to the constant hovering between major and minor; in the second and third movements even fourth chords take on an important role. The third movement, with its rhythmic and contrapuntal energies, presents itself as completely anti-romantic for long stretches. Nevertheless, after a sharp break in m. 352, the work is bent back into romantic sonorities with a hymn-like coda.

Performers of Weill's sonata are forced to walk a tightrope, balancing individual episodes against the larger form while maintaining the overall sonic balance, which, in view of the massive and demanding piano part, proves to be tricky. Canino and Vogler succeed admirably in the latter; the slow movement's subtle sound sphere, supported by superb recording techniques, emerges transparent. However, I find their approach to the sonata's stylistic heterogeneity and expressive internal tensions to be too diplomatic and smooth. For example, at the beginning of the final movement Weill provides the performance indication "Wild bewegt, grotesk vorzutragen" (fiercely, in a grotesque manner); the coda is marked "In höchster Extase" (with extreme ecstasy). In this interpretation, however, the players lack the utmost enthusiasm and intensity required to highlight the aesthetic tensions that exist between a crude, almost primitive, sonority and an enraptured but already seemingly unreal melodic pathos. Yet it is precisely in this collision that Weill shows his sonata belongs to those later compositions which would lead him on the path to the "promised land" of New Music.

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