Books

Die Seeräuberin
Ein Lotte-Lenya-Roman

Pamela Katz

Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2001. 283 pp.
ISBN: 3-35102903-9

The setting is rather symbolic. The SS *Liberté* is a French cruise liner on its maiden voyage from Europe to the U.S., though one can hardly speak of maidenhood. A new coat of paint and some elegant furnishings scarcely conceal the ship's history as a flagship for Hitler's navy. The book, which presents itself as multi-layered, deals predominantly with more or less successful variations on coming to terms with the past. Its frame is simple: In August 1950, Alison Ritchie, a young American reporter, returns home from a turbulent year as European correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post* and is supposed to deliver a story about the *Liberté*. Rather than the ship's technical gadgets, a headstrong, elderly fellow passenger grabs her interest; she eventually reveals herself as the mother of Lotte Lenya. Alison senses *the* story which may produce her journalistic breakthrough, and during the six-day trip she manages to gather information about Lenya's life from the taciturn woman—small in quantity but sensational for Weill-Lenya research. And yet, Alison is unable to settle the big "mysterious question" which lingers between Lenya and her mother and, in fact, makes the 52-year old artist have her mother of some 80 years come to New York.

From the start it seems difficult to engage with *Die Seeräuberin*, because the critical reader cannot stop questioning the legitimacy of what is being placed before him. The genre of the "historical-biographical novel" is surprisingly popular, and everyone knows that historiography is not an exact science but an affair tainted with subjectivity. "History is the memory of one million imbeciles" are words which Pamela Katz gives to the mentor of her protagonist Alison. Nonetheless, can we blend fact and fiction (thereby treating them equally) about a historical figure who died only twenty years ago and whom many living persons still remember? The answer in this specific case has been provided by Lenya herself with the picture that she began to draw in her autobiographical sketches: Even though she ensured that her correspondence would be saved as a critical source for Weill-Lenya research, she liked herself better as a literary than as a historical figure. She transfigured, abridged, and altered biographical facts as long as it served her purpose of self-mystification. To that extent, Pamela Katz does justice to her. She gives Lenya room in the novel for convincing monologues. Lenya's view of events constitutes the third narrative perspective, aside from Alison's and that of Johanna Blamauer. The novel's most precisely drawn character is Alison Ritchie, a fighter like Lotte Lenya, even though she comes from a radically different social background—an upper-class girl who escaped from her world, but, in contrast to Lenya, can count on the support of her family. Whether or not Alison bears autobiographical traces of the author, as one may suspect, Pamela Katz does understand the "slightly high-strung journalist" very well, lending her an authentic voice. Precisely this kind of voice is missing in the most important character, Johanna Blamauer. We do get a believable picture of Lenya's mother, about whom few facts are known. But when she gets to express herself, and this happens quite frequently, she remains shapeless, even when Katz gives her lines drawn from recollections of the real Lenya. While Lenya never lost characteristic features of her Viennese proletarian upbringing, her mother Johanna Blamauer, as presented here, lacks just such traits. This is why her voice rarely manages to shed its artificiality. She herself remains a fictional character, alien to the reader, even though she's intended as the novel's most important figure. Hence, Alison Ritchie, conceived only as a driving force, gains too much weight for a book that calls itself a Lotte Lenya novel. Taken in themselves, Alison's boo-boos and relationship entanglements may be amusing, at times even exciting, but they distract from the essential. It almost seems that Pamela Katz had noticed this imbalance during the writing process and therefore introduced Lenya's voice.

The novel's most intriguing passages occur when the protagonists deal with their experiences under the Third Reich. One of the tantalizing questions that Katz poses is whether Lenya acted shamefully in early March 1933—Weill's music had already been banned—when she allowed Weill to return alone from Munich to Berlin rather then bringing him out of the country, even against his will. Here, Katz has Alison make a typical mistake for later-born generations—that an astute person could have foreseen already in 1933 that the Nazis' goal was the extermination of the Jews. Johanna Blamauer, on the other hand, who could have spoken from experience, refuses to comment. "Please don't ask for explanations" is, however, a commendable key sentence for a different reason, because Pamela Katz spares herself and her readers theoretically permissible but out-of-place speculations.

That "mysterious question" which Lotte Lenya has for her mother, a question Pamela Katz draws out till the very end of the book, has nothing to do with politics and world events. The question is why her mother never intervened when her alcoholic father abused young "Linnerl," perhaps even sexually. The answer is not delivered; the reader can only speculate. The reader has to decide for herself whether an answer could serve as an explanation, perhaps even as an apology, for Lenya's unstable life and the fact that she only used men, as the mother never fails to emphasize in conversation with Alison.

The novel was written in English, but so far it has been published only in German translation. This is not surprising, since the author lives in Berlin for part of the year. The translation, however, has little to do with the fact that she needs some time to find her style. In the beginning the prose seems stilted, and the forced metaphors are annoying rather than inspiring. Eventually, though, Pamela Katz finds a sure language with good rhythm, and she knows how to build and hold tension. Who the mysterious Lotte Lenya really was she doesn't say. But that doesn't seem to have been her goal.

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Books

Brecht und seine Komponisten

Edited by Albrecht Riethmüller

Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2000. 223 pp.
ISBN: 3-89007-501-0

The essays assembled in this volume are based on papers delivered at a 1998 Berlin conference, "Brecht und die Musik," which celebrated the centennials of Brecht and Eisler. Aside from the multivalent boundary-crosser Weill, only art music representatives are deemed worthy of the label "Brecht composer." There are no traces from the realms of avant-garde or crossover, despite the fact that such interesting artists as John Zorn, Heiner Goebbels, and Alfred Harth have engaged Brecht with great intensity, often inspired by Weill's and Eisler's still challenging settings. Thus the discussion falls a bit short of reflecting the latest aesthetic issues. Is it really true that Brecht is merely a leftist poet overcome by history?

Giselher Schubert shows convincingly that the transition from *Lehrstück* to *Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* has been overlooked by most critical commentary on the work. Also, the quarrel between Hindemith and Brecht about the concept of a didactic play ["Lehrstück"] is well described, and it becomes apparent that Schubert's sympathies lie with Hindemith's position.

Carl Orff began at a relatively early point to set Brecht texts to music. Kim H. Kowalke finds intriguing differences between Orff's Brecht settings and those by Hindemith and Weill. Orff seems to him the composer who was closest to Brecht's poetry, at least some of the time. He views Orff's *Werkbuch* as a precursor to *Carmina Burana* and asks whether Brecht residue found in *Carmina* could have triggered comments such as "a celebration of Nazi youth culture" (Taruskin). The thought is not far-fetched, and, as a hypothesis, seems convincing at first sight.

Michael H. Kater points out that Brecht's and Weill's political positions did not diverge widely during the Weimar Republic, thus refuting claims that political differences led to their break-up. Kater examines more closely the contacts and project discussions with Brecht in the U.S. Adorno's strange support for Brecht's project of performing *The Threepenny Opera* with an all-black cast is probably viewed correctly by Kater: Weill couldn't forget his bad experiences with Brecht; hence, no new collaboration materialized.

Jens Malte Fischer sees the music for *Happy End* as unjustly marginalized, claiming that only two songs ("Bilbao Song," "Surabaya Johnny") survive. Apparently Willem Breuker ("Song of Mandelay") and John Zorn ("Der kleine Leutnant") have different opinions, and the "Matrosensong" has become an outstanding part of the song genre's core repertoire.

A quote from Hans Mersmann serves to open Albrecht Dümling's paper. Mersmann highlights the Brecht style and matter-of-factness as an aesthetic of its time, reflecting contemporary social reality. Dümling recounts the collaboration between Eisler and Brecht. Their friendship was based on shared views about political, philosophical, and artistic issues. Apparently Brecht viewed the asymmetry between the two partners (typical of his relations with others) as essential, most obviously visible in the unequal division of royalties, which exemplified Brecht's shameless egomania.

Different facets of the Eisler/Brecht collaboration are offered by Jost Hermand. He points out Eisler's many cultural and political activities during his exile years, thereby showing differences in strategy between Eisler and Brecht in the 1930s. In his political work Eisler tended toward the concept of a people's front [*Volksfrontkonzeption*], which Brecht more or less rejected. The *Deutsche Sinfonie* represents in Hermand's view a "parade" of aspects of the "other Germany" (i.e., the non-fascist bourgeois and proletarian), and, by examining the compositional material, he shows convincingly Eisler's political conception of the work.

Claudia Albert presents Eisler as a witty analyst of the musical life of his times. His naive notion of social movement in the "organization of notes" almost invites the conclusion that society could generate "machines" that produce music. Grossly exaggerated seems Albert's claim that Eisler's concept of a revolution of the musical material (he viewed musical progress as a doubly intertwined dialectic process between society and *Materialstand*) was not only realized but even surpassed by the "Western currents of serialism, aleatoric and computer-controlled music under the banner of the Westdeutsche Rundfunk." These currents—hailed by academia—usually led to dead ends of music history. Noteworthy is her argument that Eisler consistently viewed his ambivalent teacher Schoenberg in a positive light, while critiquing Richard Wagner without mercy. One has to agree with Albert that the canon of musical innovations in the twentieth century cannot be reduced to the contributions of Schoenberg; other, more viable, aesthetics emerged on the musical landscape. She justly criticizes Eisler for linking the politically reactionary Schoenberg to the compositional innovator Schoenberg without exploring alternatives. On the whole, her article seems refreshing on account of her provocative opinions.

Composer Tilo Medek uses biographical anecdotes to illuminate Brecht's musical socialization, particularly tracing Brecht's connection to Wagner-Régeny. Extensive information about the postwar era offers several interesting insights into East Germany's musical life, hardly known to Westerners. Regrettably, the interesting question of his article's title ("Did Composers Improve through Brecht?") is not discussed in his text.

Frank Schneider portrays Brecht composer Paul Dessau, who differed from Weill and others by gladly taking Brecht's suggestions and orders, even strictly musical ones. Apparently, Dessau's submission to Brecht's visions worked to his own artistic advantage.

Benjamin Britten's Brecht settings, especially *Children's Crusade*, are explored by Guido Heldt. He illuminates the premiere's circumstances and the strange discrepancy between Britten's intentions and the work's reception. Britten hoped that Brecht's text might have a disturbing effect in the ecclesiastical context. Despite Britten's intentions, audiences and critics didn't seem to be bothered by the juxtaposition of a dark piece and religious pomp.

All in all, the collection of essays provides a substantial overview of the "Brecht composers." No surprising facts are offered, but each chosen angle receives its proper treatment. Today, however, the question arises: What amount of current significance should be attributed to Brecht? This seems especially important for musical life, since Brecht, like no other twentieth-century poet, had a big impact on composers. An overview with some critical distance for our time, similar to Mersmann's splendid assessment for his time (as quoted by Dümling), should have received more courageous consideration.

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Books

Kurt Weill und das Judentum

Christian Kuhnt

Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2002. 184 pp.
ISBN: 3-89727-114-1

With his published dissertation, *Kurt Weill und das Judentum*, Christian Kuhnt offers Weill specialists a much-needed and long-awaited investigation into the nature of Weill's relationship to Judaism. The title of his book mirrors that of Michael Mäckelmann's well-known study of Schoenberg, *Arnold Schönberg und das Judentum* (Hamburg: Wagner, 1984), and yet the objectives of the two authors are clearly very different. Rather than discussing Weill's religiosity or belief in the Jewish faith throughout his life, Kuhnt aims primarily to explore what he calls the "process of change" leading to and following from Weill's most famous Jewish work, *Der Weg der Verheißung* (*The Eternal Road*), with the aim of "gaining from this specific case an understanding for the whole, namely for the problem of being a Jew in the first half of the twentieth century and the type of effect it had on artistic production" (pp. 12–13; all translations my own). Kuhnt hopes that by explaining Weill's relationship to Judaism chronologically through different periods of his life (as his table of contents clearly outlines), he will be able to overcome and correct the "imprecise categorization" that has plagued the existing literature on this topic. (p. 14). His book thus consists largely of broad descriptions of all the events and works in Weill's life that touch in any way on the subject of Judaism, with an emphasis on the detailed history of *Der Weg der Verheißung*. As such it functions more as a biographical "life and works" than as a contribution to critical debates over Jewish identity, music, and history.

Kuhnt successfully documents Weill's known links to Judaism or Jews and the connections his individual works may have to Jewish sources. He does Weill research a great service, for example, by telling us for the first time about the musical and literary sources for early works like "Mi addir" (pp. 22–23) and *Ofrahs Lieder* (pp. 29–30), and about the nature of Zionist and Jewish student groups in the Berlin of Weill's youth (pp. 34–35). Likewise, he offers readers clearly written, accessible accounts of details of the production of *Der Weg der Verheißung* (pp. 79–80, etc.), and of the compositional histories of *Folk Songs of the New Palestine* (pp. 129–31), the ballet project on Billy Sunday's *Great Love Stories of the Bible* for Ruth Page (pp. 131–39), *We Will Never Die* (pp. 140–56), and *A Flag Is Born* (pp. 156–72). Although much of the information in the first part of his book is taken from the now well-known and frequently cited letters Weill wrote to his brother Hans (which Elmar Juchem and Lys Symonette have edited in a beautiful publication presumably available to Kuhnt only at the very last stage before going to press), the second part of his book presents some lesser-known archival sources.

Kuhnt's summaries are clear and helpful as an addition to the biographical literature on Weill (although as such it desperately needs an index). As a reflection on German-Jewish history and musical identity, however, his book would have profited from a much more in-depth study of Jewish religious practices (which Kuhnt frequently describes in a rushed and superficial fashion, as on pp. 52 and 114) and of Jewish musical traditions and sources. Rather than interpret Weill's compositions within such specific religious and musical contexts, however, Kuhnt simply lists their links to other works by Jews, and to general themes of Judaism. This methodological approach leads him not only to adopt an unstated and extremely general definition of Judaism (as anything having to do in the broadest sense with the Jewish religion), but also to omit from his book a subject of central importance, namely that of the stylistic relationship of Weill's music to various traditions of Jewish music. His decision to set aside any discussions of these traditions leads to a lack of clarity in his descriptions of the Jewish nature of Weill's music. In the first part of his book, for example, Kuhnt argues repeatedly that the Weill family's dabblings in Christian or German musical practices were "progressive" in the context of Jewish music (pp. 23, 26)—statements he makes without ever giving a clear picture of what "nonprogressive" Jewish musical practices might have looked like in comparison. The lack of information on Jewish musical traditions in his book led me to question whether what he was calling progressive, German, or Christian had actually been part of the North German Jewish rite for a very long time, and thus not necessarily distinguishable from it. Kuhnt's tendency to define the music in these terms leads me to believe as well that he assumes there are separate, easily definable, German and Jewish musical identities in music, and that German-Jewish music can thus be understood as a kind of addition of distinct styles, rather than as a complicated synthesis (an approach that is particularly evident on p. 30). I am not sure whether Kurt Weill would have so easily separated out what he understood to be specifically, purely Protestant, German, and/or Jewish. On the contrary, the very fact that Weill participated in several intertwined cultures and identities at the same time, simultaneously and unremittingly, determined the course of his life and work.

Although Kuhnt does well to emphasize in his introduction that the designation "German Jews" was hardly a "concrete group identity" in Weill's lifetime, and that a diversity of Jewish identities must thus always be taken into account when considering Weill, he does not consistently follow his own advice. Rather, he remains very unspecific about the exact nature of the Judaism he repeatedly evokes. At the very start, for example, he rushes over the open question of whether Weill was raised orthodox or reformed, simply assuming the community in Dessau was "reformed," and neglecting to explain the exact nature of their rituals and practices (p. 18). He likewise borrows secondary commentary on Albert Weill's collection of *Synagogen-Gesänge*, rather than studying them and determining their relation to different Ashkenazi rites (p. 19), and speaks very generally of Albert as being "orthodox" (in the sense of strict more than anything else), "conservative," "liberal," "progressive," and "less orthodox"—words that are not adequate for describing the nature of his religious affiliations and practices (pp. 20, 23). With this background, he concludes that Weill was generally "raised in the Jewish faith (Judentum)," leaving open, again, the question of the specific nature of his religious upbringing (p. 21, see also p. 35). Throughout his book, Kuhnt connects Weill with people who are generally and unspecifically "Jewish," like Ferdinand Hiller (p. 25), Judah Halevi (29–30), Franz Werfel (p. 30), and David Frankel (p. 42), or with Judaism as a religion in general, thereby avoiding the more difficult questions of how Weill's Jewish identity related to issues of masculinity, race, class, aesthetics, history, and social definition. I sorely missed a reflection on the very

nature of Weill's Jewish identity and on the complexities of its cultural representations in the Weimar Republic and later in the U.S.A.

When Kuhnt comes to the central subject of his book, Weill's *Der Weg der Verheißung*, he quite suddenly shifts his focus: instead of continuing to describe all of Weill's connections to Jewish subject matter, he turns to a detailed compositional and production history of various works, thereby abandoning his central subject of Judaism. In fact, although he gives a fascinating description of some (vaguely described!) Jewish musical sources used in *Der Weg der Verheißung* (pp. 114–18), he does not interpret his findings, and spends as much time exploring unrelated topics—for example, what genre the work might belong to (pp. 93–95), how Weill may have responded to musical indications in Werfel's text (pp. 96–100), which themes and motives were used (pp. 104–113), how styles were mixed (pp. 108–113), and how Weill related to Werfel (118–122). He also offers very little interpretation of the composition as a whole, whether in terms of its Jewish content or the relationship to Zionism evinced therein. Such interpretative criticism would have been particularly necessary, especially given Kuhnt's claim (in a chapter title) that this work was an act of "cultural Zionism" (p. 62). This troubled me not only because I felt that Kuhnt had perhaps exaggerated Weill's interest in Zionism earlier on (p. 34), but also because he tends in general to speculate about Weill's feelings concerning religion and politics (25, 29, 39–40, 50–57, 174), often associating Weill with general trends rather than exploring his specific situation (e.g., p. 52) or the possible meanings of the music he wrote. It seems particularly ironic that Kuhnt could conclude that *Der Weg der Verheißung* held "a special place in Weill's oeuvre," and was "unusual" (p. 126), especially given that the central aim of his book has been to show how all of Weill's Jewish experiences can be discussed in relation to this particular work.

In the end, I greatly appreciated Kuhnt's engagement and biographical talent. Yet I also wished that he had offered more insight into Weill's musical response to the complexities of German-Jewish identity and culture. Nearly sixty years after the Holocaust, it is no longer enough just to label Weill's Jewishness; we now need to study, research, explore, interpret and critique its unique, particular, and individual history, and its individual representation and expression in Weill's musical works.

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Films

Kurt Weill

Ein Film von Sven Düfer

Production THEVIKO with SFB in collaboration with HFF Konrad Wolf
Germany, 2001

As chance would have it, this documentary on Weill arrived on my desk at the same time as a copy of *The Hidden Heart*, the recent British documentary on Benjamin Britten and his relationship with Peter Pears. And, coincidentally, both films feature in their early sequences images of rippling waves and water, offering a visual counterpoint to the music on the soundtrack. In the case of the Britten this makes a certain amount of sense, as it comes from *Peter Grimes*, while the Weill film merely appears to be filling time with tastefully chosen piano mood music, which continues to make its unwelcome presence felt throughout the film.

In fact, tastefulness rears its banal head over every frame of Düfer's film, and when this is linked to Jürgen Schebera's soulful commentary, the viewer knows only too well that s/he is locked into that realm so beloved of German "Dichter und Denker"—what Brecht rightly and dismissively referred to as "tierischer Ernst." I am uncertain whether the director, producer or artistic consultant (or all three) might have been responsible for the overall approach and, it must be said, truly awful musical illustrations that fill out the documentary. But it is hard to understand how Jürgen Schebera, whose contributions to Weill (and Eisler) studies have in the past been notable for their perception and measured scholarship, could have countenanced much of what goes on in this farrago of disorganized facts and crude performances.

In one sense, the viewer might consider him/herself grateful. It is hard to imagine that one would ever hear, for instance, worse performances of "Surabaya Johnny"—from Kathrin Angerer ("Who she?", as one of my teachers used to scribble in the margins when an unfamiliar name would crop up in a poorly footnoted essay)—or the "Matrosen-Tango"—from the Italian diva Milva (or do I mean the Italian milva Diva?). These two demolition jobs can immediately take up undisputed positions as the *ne plus ultra* of coarse Weill performances. In fact, the semiotics of the footage preparing the viewer for the appearance of Milva in full flow is both appropriate and unintentionally comic: entering what in British circles would be referred to as a "nice little pile," the camera peers cautiously over the commentator's (Schebera's) shoulder as he moves through a succession of lavishly appointed and ominously vacant rooms, door after door slowly opening, until—horror of horrors—the viewer and commentator are finally confronted with the perpetrator (I almost wrote axe/song-murderer) in person and *flagrante*.

Alternately draped (presumably seductively) over, standing (ditto empoweringly) on, and finally leaping to the floor (theatrically, perhaps?) from a grand piano, she manages an account of this number which is so triumphantly a demonstration of the singer, not the song, that I could swear that, as the camera panned round the aristocratic portraits on the walls, one of them actually raised a disbelieving eyebrow. Finally, after her part-growled, part-ululated account of the refrain (in *echt Deutsch*, of course), she enthusiastically brought the song to its full climax by falling to the floor and

raising her legs over her head. (At this point, I had to confess temporary defeat in my attempt to deconstruct the *Gestus* of the performance; on reflection, I arrived at a reading which, I think, makes sense, but which residual good taste prevents me from disclosing here).

At the other end of the scale (in all respects, as her "singing" manages to incorporate more wrong notes, some of them never heard before and maybe not even part of the quarter-tone scale, than one would have thought possible in one not over-long song) is Ms. Angerer's little girl lost/perverted nursery rhyme rendition of "Surabaya Johnny." As she is rowed across the lake towards the house once occupied by Georg Kaiser, whining out her faux-naif "interpretation" of one of the great torch songs of the twentieth century, I kept praying (intertextually, so to speak) for that storm from the previous number to blow up . . . but no, she and the boat plowed on to the end, determined to demonstrate the personal truth of the remark with which she introduced the song, and whose connotations are not fully realized in the English subtitles—"Was mir gefällt ist wenn es wirklich was mit mir zu tun hat" ("What I really like is when it's actually got something to do with me")—otherwise known as the "let me entertain you with my real version of that old song written by those dudes from another time who actually wrote it just for me" approach.

But wait, there's more . . . No, sorry, I can't bring myself to describe Udo Lindenberg's "I can be a middle-aged German version of Mick Jagger" smash-and-grab raid on the "Moritat," which I'd have thought amounted to a worse crime than any of those described in the song (complete with his own "improvements" on Brecht's text: the "minderjährige Witwe" now has a name which "keiner—as opposed to Brecht's "jeder"—weiß"—clumsily missing the point of the entire stanza). And Kaja Plessing's rendition of "Youkali" turns this deftly ironic, lightly sketched-in evocation of a latter-day Never-Never Land into something closer to the demented, dark vision of a Kundry on Rohypnol.

Surely the budget for this film could have run to hiring performers who could actually do something (by all means new) with this material, while at least paying some attention to the style and the text? For, to judge from the documentary material included, there was certainly money around to accommodate trips to France, Germany, and the USA for location shots and *in situ* interviews. Not all of these are of equal interest, tending as they do towards the "I remember Weill when he said, etc., etc." mode or the reassuringly hagiographical. An exception here is the interview with Mordecai Bauman, who, while emphasizing Weill's remarkable melodic gift, also suggests that "he couldn't find the rhythm of American life"—a suggestive observation, whose relevance might well be tested against some of the more self-consciously "Americanized" moments in Weill's Broadway works.

There is also some valuable historical footage of Weill himself introducing a program of his works in precisely articulated and by no means heavily accented French, together with a segment from a linked production of *Der Jasager* [from the Paris performance by German schoolchildren in 1932, which Weill helped to supervise]; some instructive shots from *The Eternal Road*; and film footage apparently shot at the time of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, showing Weill, Brecht and Lenya in conversation (it might be interesting to track down the services of a lip-reader to make out what Brecht is saying, as he seems to be dominating the conversation . . .).

But for the most part, this is a documentary of missed opportunities, at times so clumsily old-fashioned that one wonders whether its maker has registered that over the last decades there have been a number of developments in documentary narrative techniques which might have usefully been deployed to tell the story of one of the twentieth century's most distinctive composers. Given the endless footage of intersecting railroad tracks that runs through the film, one might be pardoned for assuming that perhaps the only documentary the makers have recently looked at was Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*. Or is this, coupled with the sequences showing trains arriving or crossing the landscape, a veiled tribute to *Railroads on Parade*? (Unlikely, given the lack of subtlety that elsewhere distinguishes the selection of images).

Essentially, the approach followed in this documentary resembles nothing so much as an unintentional parody of that adopted by Woody Allen in *Zelig*, where the montage of stills and movie footage itself deliberately parodies the cliched conventions of mediocre documentaries. Any number of recent documentaries (on composers such as Rachmaninov and Grieg, the Tony Palmer studies of Shostakovich and John Adams, Christopher Nupen's Sibelius essay, or the portraits of performers such as Richter, Brendel, and Leif Ove Andsnes) suggest that developments in documentary narrative have clearly taken a different train from the one Düfer flagged down for his "filmic journey." At 97 minutes' running time, the documentary could have encompassed a whole range of discourses on Weill, could have used modern techniques to present his career in ways which would have been in keeping with his own extraordinary ability to remake his creative and psychological personality. As it is, the viewer is left with interminable versions of the same basic (i.e., simplistic) technique: historical photographs, plus voice-over, plus a dash of music, plus footage of a city- or nature-scape as it is *now*, plus intermittent commentary from someone who was there, before moving back to—historical photographs, etc., etc.

Still, this can occasionally have incidental benefits—as, for example, when the film informs us that Weill had his favorite sheepdog shipped to him in France, and we actually get to see shots of them both, along with commentary pointing out that "this is Kurt, . . . and this is the dog . . ." (Many thanks for clearing *that* up.) And the film does tend to reinforce the always useful notion of relative critical standards. After Mesdames Milva, Angerer, Plessing and Jocelyn B. Smith, whose version of "Lost in the Stars" would have graced any of Janis Joplin's more spaced-out performances, I have adopted a new critical tenet: Come back, Ute, all is forgiven.

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Performances

Die sieben Todsünden

Opéra National de Paris

Premiere: 26 November 2001

In the last six years, two key works from Weill's European period have entered the repertory of the Opéra de Paris. After Graham Vick's controversial production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1995), the sung ballet *Les sept péchés capitaux* has taken its turn to make an impression in a fully staged version created by Laura Scozzi and Laurent Pelly. This production made up the third part of an ambitious program of homage to Boris Kochno (1904–1990), close collaborator of Diaghilev before becoming the artistic director of Les Ballets 1933 with George Balanchine. L'Opéra de Paris, where choreographic tradition and avant-garde lyricism intersected during the era between the wars, spared no expense in marking the event. They printed a deluxe program for the occasion, which brought together a rich variety of photos and reminiscences. A nine-minute film portrait of Kochno (co-produced with Arte France), shown before the program began, explored the brilliant but little-known career of this "survivor" of the twentieth century.

The link between the musical and theatrical aesthetics of Weill, Prokofiev, and Stravinsky unified an evening composed of three very different rhythms. It began with Stravinsky's opera buffa *Mavra* (1922), for which Kochno wrote the libretto. A miniature opera that plumbs the depths of neoclassical transparency, *Mavra*'s liveliness brings it close to the spirit of the Monty Python sketch. Director Humbert Camerlo and set and costume designer Carlos Cytrynowski tried to match this rhythm by deploying a set that slides across the stage, from the garden that the Hussar first enters at one end to the kitchen corner where he finally shaves at the other. It was a good idea, but mediocre singing detracted from the cleverness of the sets. On top of that, Alexei Kosarov (the Hussar) was indisposed the evening of the premiere.

Prokofiev's ballet, *The Prodigal Son* (1927–29), with a libretto by Kochno, was handsome recompense. The lead dancers, Nicolas Le Riche and Agnès Letestu, exalted Balanchine's original choreography, which was further enhanced by Georges Rouault's sets, painted with his characteristic heavy line.

In *The Prodigal Son*, Kochno drew inspiration from the Gospel of Matthew. Weill and Brecht's episodic piece [*pièce à stations*] is based firmly on Biblical allusions, and, in this work also, Kochno played an important role in the weeks leading up to the premiere. We know that he and Weill maintained excellent relations, even though Paris at that time was already troubled and soon to be jealous of the support and success Weill attracted. I awaited young Laurent Pelly's presentation of the *Sins* with curiosity and impatience. In three short years, Pelly has shown himself to be quite a "resource" in the world of opera direction. Now that he has dusted off Rameau's *Platée* and Offenbach's *La belle Hélène* with baroque expert Marc Minkowski, he shows a strong interest in Weill, which he hopes to demonstrate in an upcoming production of *L'opéra de quat'sous*.

The production results from a collaboration with choreographer Laura Scozzi, who worked with Pelly in staging the ballets in *Platée*. The action is moved to the era of Pop Art, reinforced by the loud colors of the props and gigantic backdrops hanging from the flies that foreground the snares of consumer society. Amid the petit-bourgeois trappings of her room, embodied in the shabby lampshade and the daily routine of knitting and thermos bottles, Anna I reviews her trip around America in flashback, danced by her sister. The contrast between sordid reality (Anne Sofie von Otter as Anna I is very convincing in this regard) and the panoply of phantasms that stretch across the stage is extreme. Anna II, with her naughty manner and coltish movements, is truly both the double and antithesis of her sister. One might criticize a tendency already pronounced in Pelly's earlier stagings—overloading the stage with a profusion of action—but his ideas are clever and effective enough (unlike the sheer confusion provoked by Graham Vick's *Mahagonny*) to let us keep up with his conception. Gluttony is represented by a backdrop that shows vast quantities of sausages and *paté en croûte* (the price is marked in Euros!), while the green couch that has been occupied by the family throughout is suspended in the air, circling above the stage like a baroque stage machine. The staging of the Lust scene depicts an orgy, which manages to avoid bad taste, in which a deep-sea diver, a fireman, and other men in uniform dance suggestively. During the pauses in the music, Laura Scozzi supplies unobtrusive choreography that provides breathing room for the audience and reinforces the moral tenor of the action onstage.

If this visual feast of production works, it's because it follows the route laid out by the music. The vocal quartet (Ian Caley, Stefan Margita, Nigel Smith, Nicolas Cavallier) displays great ability, which adds amplitude and bitterness to the story. The singers who play Anna I (von Otter and Ursula Hesse) offer contrasting but complementary visions of the role. In the pit, Alexandre Polianichko keeps the work on track and handles the music just right. There's no doubt that this version of *The Seven Deadly Sins* ushers in a new era of Weill stagings in France. We await eagerly Pelly's and Minkowski's work on *L'opéra de quat'sous*.

Elisabeth Maurin (Anna II) with members of the *corps de ballet* in the Anger scene. Photo: Icare

Pascal Huynh
Paris

Performances

One Touch of Venus

Berlin
Zelttheater am Schlossplatz

Premiere: 23 November 2001

With only a few performances to its credit, a production of Weill's *One Touch of Venus* in a tent theater on Berlin's Schlossplatz was forced to close in mid-December. Producer Frank Buecheler cannot be praised highly enough for bringing a Weill work on stage without the aid of government subsidies. All the more puzzling and frustrating, then, is the careless, at times even amateurish, way in which this production was carried out. First the opening was delayed two weeks, then several performances had to be canceled because some of the singers contracted vocal cord infections (apparently because the tent was poorly heated). Understudies, who could have filled in, simply didn't exist. But aside from such organizational shortcomings, which led to the production's early end, *Venus* also failed to convince on an artistic level.

The ingredients, though, were first-rate: *One Touch of Venus* is one of Weill's most inspired musical comedies, and, with standards like "Speak Low" or "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," it's accessible to many people. Casting Marianne Rosenberg as Venus secured a veritable star singer with cult status in Germany, and Silvia Wintergrün and Cusch Jung count among the best German musical performers. The book by S. J. Perelman and Ogden Nash possesses the charm and wordplay of a good screwball comedy, perhaps a bit dated at times, but nonetheless viable today if intelligently translated and slightly modernized. Jan Oberndorff's adaptation of the book fails in this respect, as does the often awkward translation of Nash's lyrics by Marianne Rosenberg and Marianne Enzensberger.

On stage, high professionalism and sheer dilettantism clash just as hard as two diametrically opposed aesthetics. Any modern touch which this production tried to achieve by casting Marianne Rosenberg or through clever, ironic comments on video panels was thwarted by a stuffy staging concept which reduced the work to clichés of musical comedy or even operetta.

Sabine Thies (Gloria Kramer), Marianne Rosenberg (Venus) and Christian Schodos (Rodney). Photo: Jim Rakete

Director Jan Oberndorff apparently does not trust the work, nor does he like the genre. In his hands *Venus* becomes dilapidated, turning into old hat. What the director had in mind is only too obvious: Each singer lends his or her character a single attitude that is kept throughout the evening. Christian Schodos, in the role of the erotically challenged barber Rodney Hatch, simply continues to act like the Heinz Rühmann he recently portrayed; this he does well but he doesn't add to it. Because the characters are reduced to caricature, their feelings and actions cannot be taken seriously. Thus, not one relationship, not one genuine, true-to-life moment can emerge. The characters merely create confusion onstage, dashing madly about and chattering hysterically. Why should spectators care about these cardboard characters and their doings?

Moreover, some of the minor actors with multiple roles don't even reach professional level. Janet Calvert, Cusch Jung, and Silvia Wintergrün can at least rely on their experience (recalling their splendid performances at the Theater des Westens, where they faced more interesting challenged and received greater support, brings to mind the loss caused by the dissolution of this state-subsidized venue for musicals). The fact that Marianne Rosenberg is no actress proved not to be a liability. On the contrary, she possesses a unique stage presence and her natural, "heavenly" nonchalance could have been a nice contrast to the hectic stage business offered by the other characters. Unfortunately, her voice no longer has the unmistakably clear and ethereal timbre heard on her recordings, which would have highlighted her celestial aura.

The only thing that made the evening somewhat bearable was Weill's music, competently presented by a small band under the baton of Heinz Adrian Schweers. In light of high operating costs, a reduction of the number of musicians appears to be a bitter pill to swallow. But it is a shame that many of the rich colors in Weill's orchestration are lost in Schweers's admittedly clever arrangements, and the individual numbers lose their distinctive character.

The *Venus* production joins an alarming series of flopped musicals in Berlin. Most of these shows had weaknesses in the music or the book; however, Venus represents a masterwork of the genre. Hence it is both frustrating and annoying to see a wasted opportunity for popularizing a part of Weill's oeuvre written in America.

Rüdiger Bering
Berlin

Performances

Die Bürgschaft

Johnny Johnson

Kurt-Weill-Fest Dessau

1–10 March 2002

Despite the fact that the name Kurt Weill is something of a cultural trademark, still evoking a narrow cliché of coolly abrasive songs and Brechtian theater, Weill's work is unusually full of turnings and new beginnings, fault lines and experiments—due to external circumstances as much as to Weill's artistic curiosity and openness to new contexts and ideas.

This year's Kurt-Weill-Fest in Dessau seemed intent on showing this by programming two works which hardly mark the center of the conventional Weill canon and which, though only about five years apart, could not be more different—the post-Brechtian opera *Die Bürgschaft*, Weill's next-to-last work for the German stage, and *Johnny Johnson*, his first work in New York.

Die Bürgschaft, in fact, had been staged only once after the war (1957 in Berlin) before the 1998 Bielefeld production, directed by Jonathan Eaton, who also was responsible for the Dessau *Bürgschaft*. On the whole, the production was clearly a success, and an invitation to other theaters to look more closely at a work which, done competently, will certainly make a great impression. For all its social critique and moralizing, it is grand opera with all its trappings, and the Dessau production managed to convey this to good effect.

But despite the full-throttle approach, the production did not quite seem to trust all the aspects of the work. When the chorus intones "Es ändert sich nicht der Mensch./Es sind die Verhältnisse, die seine Haltung verändern." ("People do not change./It's circumstances which change their behavior."), it does so with solemnly raised index fingers, as if to poke fun at the didacticism of Caspar Neher's plodding text. The same attitude could be read into the great golden ball (of capitalism?) dominating Danila Korogodsky's stage design, or the spray-painted negative print of Johann Mattes' and David Orth's handshake, objectifying their living friendship and decency into an emblem (and at the same time oddly evoking the old Communist symbol of solidarity). There were other signs, letters, mottoes, etc. peppering the stage design, implying meaning without making it precise—cautiously mirroring a libretto whose weightiness is not matched by its intellectual clarity. The verbal gestures may have been a trick, but an apt one for dealing with a work whose socio-political context and aspirations must seem a bit dated today and cannot be taken at face value, but which still claim an earnestness that cannot be subverted too much by irony without losing its *raison d'être*.

From left: Christina Gerstenberger (Luise), Günther Krause (Judge), Lassi Partanen (Jakob).
Photo: Boris Geilert

The mixture of grand gestures, irony, and sometimes outright fun worked most of the time, but not always. The great wall of cardboard boxes tumbling down during the finale made an impressive effect, but like nearly all grandiose effects in the theater, it was also slightly ridiculous. And of course Anna Mattes is a figure of some expressionist pathos (and Margaret Thompson's singing provided it in just the right measure). But her acting—or the way she was directed to act—was not up to this. Is opera really unable to do without desperate hand-wringing and head-flinging? The same goes for Johann Mattes' death scene, rather an anticlimax in the grand sweep of the finale.

But the understated emotionality of his relationship with David Orth was handled well, theatrically as well as musically. Ulf Paulsen's Orth sang with restrained, self-assured dignity, Kostadin Arguirov's Mattes with the amount of nervousness his precarious situation requires. And the slight hoarseness with which Günter Krause sang the judge, whether intended or not, was quite fitting for this representative of the old order. Probably the greatest success (though this is largely determined in the libretto) belonged to the Three Creditors/Blackmailers, etc. Here Jonathan Eaton's direction gave Mark Rosenthal, Taimo Toomast, and Juhapekka Sainio a wide range of actions and expressions, from studied ridiculousness at the beginning through the energetic fun of the chase in Act I (wonderfully staged with racing hand-carts and nifty flying cardboard fish) to their ecstatically brutal, priapic dance near the end.

However wide-ranging the staging and characterization were, all was successfully held together by Golo Berg's musical direction. Weill's music in *Die Bürgschaft* makes this fairly easy, achieving clarity without oversimplification with great formal building blocks and subtle delineation of individual stage personae within a unified framework. Still, it was a fine achievement for the Anhaltische Philharmonie, who managed cool restraint as well as grandeur (especially in the last act). Taken all together, the production was an advertisement for an undervalued part of Weill's oeuvre as well as of 1930s' opera in general.

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Johnny Johnson was not staged in Dessau itself, but in Bitterfeld, 15 miles to the south (as one of the Weill festival productions usually is). The small town is infamous as the center of the former GDR's chemical industry, now largely defunct, and for the staggering scale of environmental sins committed there. The *Kulturpalast* (Palace of Culture), a model example of 1950s' Eastern bloc architecture, stands somewhat forlornly at an intersection on the outskirts of Bitterfeld, encroached upon by the cool neo-modernist concrete, steel, and glass of the city's new vocational school center—a frighteningly apt image of Germany's unfinished reunification. The setting would have been much more appropriate to the socio- and psycho-economic musings of *Die Bürgschaft* than to *Johnny Johnson*'s simpler story. But the impression of a certain innocuousness was not just due to the contrast between works and genres, but strongly exacerbated by the production itself (a co-production with the Neue Oper Wien and the Frankfurter Kleist Forum). Director Dieter Berner's *Johnny Johnson* lacked exactly what Jonathan Eaton's *Bürgschaft* had in (over)abundance—panache.

Stephan Rehm (2nd American soldier) on the battlefield. Photo: Boris Geilert

It began with a strong image, though. As the setting for the whole play stage designer Reinhard Taurer had built an unmistakable visual allusion to the remains of the World Trade Center, made even more obvious by people with masks over their mouths (helpers? tourists?) clambering over the ruins. After the war is before the war: It is a risky but fitting idea for a play which itself stresses the never-ending chain of wars, the circle of horrific experiences and renewed patriotic rallying in the next generation, from Grandpa Joe's Battle of San Juan Hill to the First World War and onward to the Second, which already was casting its shadow over the European political landscape when Weill and Paul Green wrote *Johnny Johnson* in 1936.

But apart from that, the production did not find (or seek) any other strong, overarching ideas or images to imbue the play with a sense of relevance and urgency. Direction, stage design and costumes (Monika Biegler) were merely serviceable. There were some nice touches and successful details: The fighting between the American and German soldiers revolves around a statue of the Virgin Mary, whose devoutly folded hands make a fine support for the rifles of both sides—a dose of shock value also employed when the soldiers find the boot of a German soldier which turns out to contain the remains of his leg. But other scenes are squandered. When, at Johnny's prompting, Minny Belle sings her "Oh, Heart of Love," bemoaning the beloved's absence (although she had urged Johnny to enlist and thereby become absent), Weill's gentle parody of a Victorian palm-court waltz makes musically obvious that she speaks and thinks only in clichés, in socially prefabricated formulas. But Dieter Berner's direction makes the scene into an image of homely simplicity and intimacy—an intimacy which is plainly absent from the relationship between Johnny and Minny Belle. The missed opportunity is unfortunate because Kerstin Gandler as Minny Belle, easily the best singer in the cast, managed to convey this character built wholly from social artifice by singing a little bit more operatically than the others (and certainly more than Dieter Kschwendt-Michael's Johnny).

The more farcical moments of play and production were a bigger problem. The traces of Austrian dialect—and even, in the fight between Johnny and Minny Belle's other suitor, Anguish Howington (Markus Schramm), Austrian expletives—popping up in some scenes, though not particularly felicitous, were not much of a disturbance, either. But preventing the archness of the laughing-gas ploy from becoming tacky is a challenge for any production of *Johnny Johnson*. In Dessau, the challenge was not met successfully; the council of the Allied High Command was as silly as can be. And the (potentially stronger) scene at the debating society of the lunatic asylum's inmates, though better, could have done with fewer antics and more ironic sharpness.

This largely goes for the music, as well. The singing, on the whole, was adequate. Some of the male protagonists (Peter Tunhart's West-Pointer, Josef Krenmair's sergeant, sometimes also Dieter Kschwendt-Michel) may have overdone the anti-cantabile, speech-like aspects of their parts a bit, but at least they brought out the wide variety of musical elements and attitudes in *Johnny Johnson*. But it was in just this respect that Walter Kobéra's musical direction and the playing of the Ensemble Amadeus Wien did not distinguish itself very much. Weill's music in *Johnny Johnson* is chock-full of allusions and ironies, and these have to be stressed and pointed out (without losing the insinuating sweetness holding the music together) to achieve the wit and sharpness that alone can alleviate the impression of naiveté the play has often been charged with. This did not happen in Bitterfeld; although the production provided mildly amusing entertainment, that is not enough to secure *Johnny Johnson* a place in the Weill canon.

Guido Heldt
Freie Universität Berlin

Performances

Lenya

Dessau
Bauhaus

Premiere: 7 February 2002

Bringing any subtly multifaceted personality to life onstage requires a rare combination of literary talent and performing skill. This year's tenth annual Kurt Weill Festival in his birthplace, Dessau, brought together the proven abilities of Michael Kunze, probably the most successful writer of texts for German musicals, and Maresa Hörbiger, a member of a Viennese thespian dynasty comparable to the American Barrymores, in a 90-minute one-woman play with the laconic title *Lenya*. If between them they have not completely succeeded—and this effort falls short, for example, of what Robert Morse attempted with the scintillating personality of Truman Capote—they have probably come about as close to it as anyone could.

In more than one way, Lotte Lenya invented herself—and I know from more than one personal experience that her second husband George Davis actually encouraged her not to let factual accuracy get in the way of a good story, especially when the press was involved. Add to that insouciance about nothing but the truth the auxiliary fact that she had plenty in her squalidly impoverished youth to have good reason to keep quiet about. You will not find it in Donald Spoto's biography of her, but a few friends heard her own account of having taken to streetwalking in Penzing, the Viennese slum where she was born, at the age of eleven. I have known not a few people who have come from that kind of sordidly proletarian background; I have known none who have even come close to approaching Lenya's accomplishment in becoming the unique artist she did.

Maresa Hörbiger as Lenya. Photo: Jens Schlüter

As for inventing herself, that began with her name. Born Karoline Wilhelmine Charlotte Blamauer, she found that tackily Viennese. I once heard Ernst Joseph Aufricht remark: "Who could have ever wanted a more beautiful stage name than Karoline Blamauer?" But Linnerl, as her mother called her, wanted something more "exotic," as she put it, so from Linnerl came Lenya, and from Charlotte came Lotte—but nobody close to her ever again called her anything but Lenya.

Dessau's three performances of *Lenya* took place in the small theater in the world-famous Bauhaus, which lent an extra fillip of hallowed tradition to the occasion but did little acoustically to make the text understandable, especially those frequent passages where Hörbiger, for dramatic effect, dropped her voice to barely above pianissimo. Kunze has constructed his monodrama so as to permit the performer to run a considerable dramatic gamut, and Hörbiger made the most of that opportunity without ever crossing the line into out-and-out ham.

For whatever reason, Kunze has chosen the date 9 October 1964 for us to discover Lenya in Brook House, the charming old Hudson Valley property Kurt Weill bought in New York's Rockland County with the royalties from his first major American success, *Lady in the Dark*. More or less in the manner of free association, as staged by Gabriele Jakobi in Roy Spahn's set, she looks back over the 66 years of her life and lets the audience in on many of their highest points.

The program says Kunze did his research in personal contact with three (named) close friends and associates of Lenya until her death in 1981, as well as in the copious archives of the Kurt Weill Foundation which she founded in 1962, but one occasionally wishes he had also permitted those friends to vet his final version before it went into production. His factual deviations from the documented record fortunately remain peripheral, and probably of no importance to anyone encountering the play without knowing much about Lenya except her professional persona, but in this regard Kunze manifestly did miss a readily available opportunity, which seems a pity.

Those hideous childhood years turned Lenya into a psychologically complicated human being, and Kunze's glancing attempts to present that aspect of her remain disappointingly superficial. The greatest such gap in his script lies in the fact that he makes no attempt whatever to explore her exceptionally severe social masochism: after Kurt Weill's death, she knowingly married not one, not two, but three severely neurotic homosexuals in succession, at least one of whom also physically abused her.

In spite of Lenya's second career as an artist on her own merits, which George Davis almost bullied her into launching, and in spite of a worshipful postwar following in Germany who knew at least the fundamentals of her Berlin triumphs prior to her and Weill's forced emigration, the extent of her present-day fame in Germany does not augur well for this monodrama's future productions hereabouts. But Dessau's annual Kurt Weill Festival deserves generous credit for this handsome homage to a not only exceptionally gifted but also exceptionally valiant woman, who started with absolutely nothing and in spite of almost unimaginable adversities became—without Weill as well as with him—one of the true stars of the contemporary musical stage.

Paul Moor
Berlin

Recordings

Der Protagonist

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin
John Mauceri, conductor

Capriccio 60-086

In 1993 the Santa Fe Opera mounted a production of *Der Protagonist*, which left many wondering why this marvelous work was not recorded. The CD label, Capriccio, has taken care of that recently, celebrating their 20th anniversary with the world-premiere recording of Weill's first major operatic undertaking, composed in 1925. The Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester of Berlin is led by John Mauceri, who recorded *Die Dreigroschenoper*, *Street Scene*, as well as a double-bill CD of *Die sieben Todsünden/Mahagonny-Songspiel* over a decade ago. For Weill enthusiasts, this recording is the most important of Mauceri's contributions, for we can now hear the work that put the composer on the map, his first cogent response to the Wagnerian stage tradition that had seemed to emblematize the Wilhelmine era.

It was not the first post-war opera to challenge Wagnerism; Strauss can be credited with that achievement with his two-act, autobiographical sex comedy, *Intermezzo* of 1924. But Strauss's challenge was not without its problems in its wish to separate itself entirely from the technical aspects of Wagner. *Der Protagonist* proved to be a more far-reaching example of Weimar-era operatic reform. Weill's views on operatic reform were no doubt informed by those of his teacher, Ferruccio Busoni, but unlike Busoni, Weill—with his theatrical gifts—put them into more convincing practice.

Weill was the master of gesture, both rhythmically in the orchestra, and physically on the stage. If anything, *Der Protagonist* is about gesture, a one-act work centered around two pantomimes. A traveling theater troupe in England is asked to perform a lively, cheerful pantomime for the local duke. The rehearsal goes well, a silly story of a husband and wife who find their marriage unraveling: the husband (the Protagonist) takes a lover, and the wife (to spite him) takes up with a monk. The Protagonist gets rid of the monk and keeps both women (mistress and wife) for himself.

But the duke's relative, a bishop, has unexpectedly come to town, and comedy is out of the question; the same basic scenario must take a loftier tragic vein. According to the stage directions, the first pantomime is to be "performed entirely balletically and unrealistically, with exaggerated gestures." Those exaggerated gestures have their sonic counterparts in the orchestra, where woodwinds and brass predominate in such an effective, comic way that one can easily imagine the pantomime through listening and reading the scenario. By contrast the second, the tragic, "is to be played dramatically throughout, with vivid expression and passionate movements." Here, of course, the weight of the full orchestra is applied right down to the violent end.

The focus on gesture cannot be appreciated fully outside the context of Germany's leading position in Europe in film production. Early reviews, indeed, likened the title role to the modern (silent) screen actor. There is another context for this *Literaturoper*, which sets to music Georg Kaiser's expressionistic play: the elusive divide between art and life, in this context between an actor's work (in character) and his actions (out of character). By the end of the tragedy, the Protagonist is unable to distinguish between the two and when his sister interrupts the rehearsal for the second pantomime to tell him she has a lover, he stabs her, afterwards proclaiming that he has just performed his finest role.

The premiere took place in Dresden under Fritz Busch (1926) and—despite its disturbing qualities—it was an overnight success; it helped establish Weill as a leading composer of his generation. John Mauceri does a splendid job conducting this difficult work, a kind of "orchestral opera" given the extensive role of the instrumentalists, especially during the pantomime scenes. Beyond the centrality of the orchestra is the role of the Protagonist, sung by Robert Wörle, who has made an excellent name for himself in this repertoire (having sung other Weill roles as well as those written by Franz Schreker and Ferruccio Busoni), and in *Der Protagonist* he certainly does not disappoint. Also quite admirable is the very fine work of the American soprano, now living in Germany, Amanda Halgrimson, in the role of the sister. This is a great CD, a requirement for anyone interested in the operas of Kurt Weill and a "highly recommended" for those interested opera of the Weimar period.

Bryan Gilliam
Duke University

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