

Kurt Weill

Volume 20

Number 1

Spring 2002

Newsletter

The image features a background of musical notation on a light green background. The name "Kurt Weill" is written in a large, bold, black, stylized font across the center. The notation includes staves with notes, clefs, and various markings. Labels such as "Violin II", "No 4 Wandering Theme", "Partisan Motive", "No 5 A.", "sordino", "Bridge", and "Nearly segue" are scattered throughout. There are also circled letters 'A' and 'B' and a circled number '3'. The overall aesthetic is that of a musical score or manuscript.

Looking at the Pageants

A Flag Is Born on the
Broadway Stage
Approaching the Music for
A Flag Is Born

A Pogrom Play Unearthed

In this issue

In Memoriam: Ronald Freed 3
by Kim H. Kowalke

Featured Topic

**From Geopathology to Redemption:
A Flag Is Born on the Broadway Stage** 5
by Edna Nahshon

Approaching the Music for A Flag Is Born 8
by Christian Kuhnt

News from the Archive 10

**Retracing *The Eternal Road*:
A Pogrom Play Unearthed** 10
by Elmar Juchem

Kurt Weill: Making Music Theater 12

Books

Die Seeräuberin: Ein Lotte-Lenya-Roman 13
by Pamela Katz
Melissa Müller

Brecht und seine Komponisten 14
ed. Albrecht Riethmüller
Fred Ritzel

Kurt Weill und das Judentum 15
by Christian Kuhnt
Tamara Levitz

Film

Kurt Weill: Ein Film von Sven Düfer 16
Michael Morley

Performances

Die sieben Todsünden in Paris 18
Pascal Huynh

One Touch of Venus in Berlin 19
Rüdiger Bering

Die Bürgschaft and Johnny Johnson in Dessau 20
Guido Heldt

Lenya in Dessau 22
Paul Moor

Recordings

Der Protagonist on Capriccio 23
Bryan Gilliam

Topical Weill 1a-8a

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The Newsletter is published to provide an open forum wherein interested readers may express a variety of opinions. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. The editor encourages the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for inclusion in future issues.

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Cover photos: Background: A second violin part from *A Flag Is Born*.

Note from the Editor

While *The Eternal Road* has received considerable attention among scholars and performers, Weill's subsequent "Jewish" pageants have not. This is hardly surprising. These later works, *We Will Never Die* (1943) and *A Flag Is Born* (1946), have few musical numbers of substance to begin with, and most of them are arrangements of traditional tunes or self-borrowings from the *Eternal Road*. What's more, the music does not survive intact, which represents a hurdle for both scholars and performers, and the material that does survive is unattractive to performers, because of the narrowly focused agenda it was designed to serve. This issue of the Newsletter takes a closer look at *A Flag Is Born*. The feature article sheds light on the pageant's context and the work itself; an additional article zooms in on the music.

Weill did agree to provide music for *A Flag Is Born*, but he devoted little time and effort to the project. This combination of facts may tell us something about his attitudes toward Zionism and perhaps, looking at the big picture, his own conflicted feelings about Jewish culture in a post-war global society. A newly published dissertation on that subject is reviewed in this issue. Readers with a special interest in Lotte Lenya will appreciate reviews of two new fictional homages, a novel and a play, based on her life.

Elmar Juchem



Norman Bel Geddes's set model for *The Eternal Road*, featured in the exhibition *Kurt Weill: Making Music Theater* (p. 12). The model belongs to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas.

Photo: Dave Stein

In Memoriam

Ronald Freed

1937–2002



For those mourners gathered at Brook House on 5 April 1950 (precisely 52 years ago to the day as I write these sentences), Maxwell Anderson set a task: "What Weill left behind must be saved, and we who are still here must save it for him." Five weeks later, Lenya declared to Manfred George that her life's mission would indeed be "to fight for this music, to keep it alive, to do everything in my power for it." She, of course, more than fulfilled that pledge. But by 1977, when Ronald Freed became president of European American Music (a joint venture of Schott and Universal Edition), Lenya had grown weary of the war and welcomed a resourceful and energetic new recruit to the ongoing battles. Even before they concluded a comprehensive agency and publishing agreement in 1981, Freed had taken up the cause, representing Lenya in key skirmishes that had threatened the debut of *Mahagonny* at the Met and of *Silverlake* at City Opera. Though suspicious, if not contemptuous, of most of Weill's publishers, Lenya liked and trusted Ronald. His keen intellect, self-effacing modesty, and broad knowledge impressed her; his wit and humor brightened many a dark day during her final illness. He willingly shouldered most of the legal and contractual burdens she could no longer carry, thereby also assuring her that he regarded Anderson's charge as his own.

After the Foundation had been confirmed as Lenya's testamentary successor, Freed and I met "officially" for the first time to discuss publishing, copyright, and contractual issues. At its conclusion, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Kim, it's a good thing you're younger than I am. What you

want to accomplish is going to take a long time. But we'll do it, one step at a time." I couldn't have imagined then that it would be a full decade before we could divert our concerted attention from urgent tasks to such long-term initiatives as a worldwide promotional plan, publication of a comprehensive works guide, establishing the Kurt Weill Edition, planning for the centenary celebration, transferring Weill's holographs from Vienna to the U.S., and making all of the works available for performance and on recordings. Though we occasionally disagreed, and said so, I cannot recall a single moment of destructive acrimony—testimony to Ronald's integrity, loyalty, dedication, and friendship.

Ronald's devotion was unflagging, his enthusiasm indefatigable. Seemingly insurmountable obstacles were for him merely challenging opportunities. I never ceased to be awed by his encyclopedic knowledge of copyright law, a nearly infallible memory for contractual detail, a phenomenal capacity to juggle countless tasks and yet to find the time to attend so many performances here and abroad, to send a note of appreciation for a job well done or a song well sung, and to give generously of his time and expertise to ASCAP and the Music Publishers' Association. His familiarity with every aspect of Weill's musical legacy and his commitment to protecting its integrity made it difficult to believe that he could represent so many other composers on a comparable level—but then he was on call 24/7, seldom slept more than four hours a night, and took the too-rare vacation only with unnecessary apologies. Ronald's life was his work, and he loved it.

There were, of course, frustrations. Our almost daily morning phone call about pending Weill matters usually commenced with a hilarious account of a bit of "unintended humor" Ronald had just witnessed professionally, which, he thought, might someday merit inclusion in his projected memoirs, to be published, of course, only after he had safely retired. Every so often, exasperated by bureaucratic imponderables or incompetence, he would rail, with characteristic linguistic economy, about the latest instance of "*Er-ge-berg-rechts*," the categorical mock-German word he had coined in an inspired moment and thereafter summoned whenever sundry obstructions prevented him from fulfilling what he considered his prime directive—to serve as the composer's advocate. As the chief operating officer of an understaffed company that he didn't own, Ronald often found himself the middleman—"a double agent," I teased. But it was in this role that his skills as an unflappable mediator, a consummate diplomat, were most evident. He had an uncanny ability to defuse the tension of heated negotiations by telling an almost-true story that convulsed everyone with laughter and then saving the day by immediately proposing an imaginative compromise which everyone could endorse.

I once asked Ronald what kept him going at unbridled pace. Without any hesitation, he answered: "The music." Indeed, he could recount, down to the color of the peculiar footwear of the prima donna, memorable performances he had experienced thirty years earlier. Ronald was never happier than when sitting at the edge of his seat, riveted to an exciting performance of one of "his composers," Weill in particular. The three-act Paris *Lulu*, Stratas's "Unknown Weill" recital at the Whitney Museum, the Santa Fe double bill of *Zar/Protagonist*, the Stuttgart *Mahagonny*, the Spoleto *Bürgschaft*, the BBC Centenary Weekend: "It was so beautiful!" doubled as his highest praise and self-renewing motivation. Conversely, his sharp eyes and ears made him a tough critic, unable to disguise the personal disappointment and professional affront occasioned by unfulfilled promise, interpretive betrayal, or "artis-

tic" charlatanism. "Why don't these people write their own piece instead of rewriting and ruining someone else's?" he'd lament.

The last time I saw Ronald was at the opening of the exhibition, *Kurt Weill: Making Music Theater*, not quite two weeks before he died. It now seems almost providential that his final public appearance in the official role of "publisher"—dressed, as always, in his trademark dark suit, starched white shirt, and tie—should have been this particular occasion. The curators (each of whom received, of course, a congratulatory note from Ronald the following day) had not restricted the reception history of Weill's stage works to his lifetime, so many of the posters, programs, recordings, and videos on display derived from performances that Ronald had initiated, licensed, or otherwise facilitated. At the reception preceding the tour of the exhibition, he characteristically joked that the room was filled with the smiling faces of people with whom he had done battle on Weill's behalf during the last quarter century. But after viewing the exhibition, Ronald seemed genuinely moved. He drew me aside—in retrospect, as if for a valedictory private moment. He just wanted me to know, Ronald said quietly, that his association with Weill and the Foundation's work was the proudest and most rewarding of his career, something that made all the hard work and ongoing frustrations worthwhile. I reciprocated by telling him how much I valued all he had done for Weill during the last twenty-five years.

It was a telling moment. Ronald's dignified and reserved public persona was not prone to sentimentality, especially not with respect to his own achievements. He looked worn-out and seemed more stressed than I ever recalled seeing him. The following week, as usual, we spoke on the phone several times; on Friday afternoon before the holiday weekend, he complained of terrible headaches, but promised he would see his "blood pressure doctor" in New York the next week. On Wednesday morning, I received a call from UE, Vienna: "Terrible news. Ronald is dead."

For twenty years, Ronald Freed was not only my colleague and collaborator, but also my mentor and friend. The loss of his wisdom and expertise is still unfathomable to me. He was, perhaps, the last of the noble "old guard" publishers of classical music, a genuine musician who viewed his obligations more as an aesthetic calling than as a commercial enterprise, someone as lovable as the music that he loved and served so well. Often during the past several years I had considered proposing to the Foundation's trustees that Ronald be honored with the "Lifetime Distinguished Achievement" award for his pivotal role in the perpetuation of Weill's legacy. But I postponed that recommendation, because his contributions were still so crucial and ongoing that I thought that there would be plenty of opportunities for such recognition in the future. Alas, I was wrong. That award has now been conferred posthumously, the Weill exhibition at the Library for the Performing Arts has been dedicated to him, and the volume of the Kurt Weill Edition currently in press, *The Firebrand of Florence*, will honor his memory, as well.

Anderson's eloquent words of consolation from 1950 again seem apt: *He has left a great legacy in our memory of him. It's tragic that there is nobody of his endowments to take his place. But what he had time to do has such stature and meaning that he will be long remembered. . . . If he were alive he'd poke fun at me for saying these things. I'm afraid I say them for myself, not for him.*

From Geopathology to Redemption

A Flag Is Born on the Broadway Stage

By Edna Nahshon

To Gadi

On Thursday, 5 September 1946, precisely three weeks before Rosh Hashanah, New York witnessed the opening of a unique production. *A Flag Is Born*, at the Alvin Theatre on Broadway, was written by Ben Hecht. The score was composed by Kurt Weill, the director was Luther Adler, and the three stars of the production were Paul Muni, Celia Adler and the young and very good-looking Marlon Brando. Yet its uniqueness derived neither from its famous stars, nor its celebrated playwright or world-renowned composer, but from the name of the producer, the American League for a Free Palestine.

The League was established in New York City on 26 June 1944 as a satellite organization of the delegation of the Irgun Zvai Leumi to the United States, and became widely known as the Bergson Group, named after the alias of its leader, Peter Bergson (whose real name was Hillel Kook). It represented the militant anti-British Zionist underground in Israel, then headed by Menachem Begin who, 33 years later, was to become Prime Minister of Israel. What was the connection between an underground that represented a minority of the Zionist movement (and had been labeled a terrorist organization by the Zionist establishment as well as by the British government) and the glittering lights of Broadway?

The story dates back to February 1939, when the chief commander of the Irgun Zvai Leumi in Palestine sent several representatives to the United States to raise funds. The small group was headed by Peter Bergson and was run by Itshak Ben-Ami, Shmuel Merlin, Aryeh Ben-Eliezer, Alexander Refaeli and Eri Jabotinsky—all young, penniless Palestinian Jews with questionable visas. In fact, the issue of the legality of their stay in the U.S. was repeatedly raised by both the British government and the Zionist establishment, notably Dr. Stephen Wise, who would exert pressure on the FBI to have them deported.

The Bergson Group underwent several transformations during its decade-long existence. At first it tried to mobilize support for the formation of a 200,000-strong Jewish army that would fight alongside the Allies in Europe and North Africa. In 1943, when the destruction of European Jewry became publicly known, it quickly refocused its activities and began to concentrate on the establishment of an American lobby that would help in the rescue efforts of the Jews of Europe. And from the summer of 1944, it again gradually shifted its focus to the struggle for free immigration to Palestine, then under British mandate. The ultimate goal was the elimination of British colonial rule and the establishment of an independent Hebrew state in Palestine.

The Group was exceptionally effective in its public relations campaign. Its members demonstrated outstanding organizational skills and unparalleled ingenuity in their innovative manipulation of

the mass media. Setting out to obtain the political and financial help of the general American public, they succeeded in winning great support in the political, religious and labor establishments. Major figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, Earl Warren and quite a few cabinet secretaries in the Roosevelt administration gave their endorsement. In the media, the Hearst newspaper organization was conspicuous in its unequivocal backing. The Group attracted to its inner circle of activists many famous writers and artists, among them Dorothy Parker, Langston Hughes, the Norwegian writer Sigrid Undset (a Nobel Prize winner for literature), émigré novelists Thomas Mann and Lion Feuchtwanger, artist and illustrator Arthur Szyk and the sculptor Jo Davidson. Enthusiastic support also came from big names in the performing arts, notably Stella Adler, Will Rogers, Ruth Chatterton, Moss Hart, Billy Rose, Groucho and Harpo Marx.

The Group gained immensely from the recruitment of Ben Hecht (1893–1964), the well-known playwright and Hollywood scriptwriter. In the early 1940s Hecht was at the peak of his career, the winner of three Academy Awards, and the highest paid scriptwriter in Hollywood. His involvement in Jewish affairs started in 1935, when he began to publish articles denouncing German anti-Semitism. In March 1941, after a stirring piece called “My Tribe Is Israel,” he received a letter from Peter Bergson suggesting an appointment. When he met with the Bergsonites, they asked him to head a fund-raising campaign for their committee. Hecht had a pronounced aversion to political involvement and fund-raising activities. However, moved by the sincerity and dedication of the Bergsonites, and frustrated by inaction regarding the growing plight of European Jewry, he agreed to cooperate with the “quixotic Hebrews.”

As soon as he joined their ranks, Hecht devoted himself heart and soul to the cause. He donated his money, his connections, his time, and, most importantly, his talent. In 1943, after it was publicly confirmed that two million Jews had already been murdered by the Nazis, the Bergsonites felt the need for an innovative and daring public relations endeavor. They proposed to Hecht the production of a theatrical representation of the Nazi extermination that would shake up public opinion and exert pressure on Washington. Hecht joined forces with Kurt Weill, Moss Hart, and producer Billy Rose, and the stirring pageant *We Will Never Die* came into being. The production’s success was phenomenal and it was seen across the U.S. by hundreds of thousands of spectators. Its opening night at Madison Square Garden on 9 March 1943 was marked by Governor John Dewey as a day of mourning for the millions of Jews killed by the Nazis.

As the Group entered its post-World War II phase, it focused on the fight for free immigration to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state. Accordingly, Hecht proposed the production of



People gather in front of the Alvin Theatre on 52nd Street where *A Flag Is Born* opened on 5 September 1946. The show ran for 120 performances, three times longer than planned. A limited lease at the Alvin forced the show to move to three more venues: the Adelphi, the Music Box, and the Broadway Theatre.

another pageant that would raise money and enlist public opinion. The new project was named *A Flag Is Born*. Kurt Weill agreed to compose the music, which Isaac Van Grove would arrange and conduct. Luther Adler was chosen to direct, and Paul Muni accepted the lead role. In order to maximize profits and keep costs down, Hecht and Weill gave up all their royalties, and Van Grove, Muni, and the Adlers announced that they were donating their services. Quentin Reynolds, one of America's most famous war journalists, was offered \$1,000 to perform as the narrator, but agreed to do the part without pay. Another big name was Metropolitan Opera tenor Mario Berini, who would sing the liturgical music in the synagogue scene. He too performed without pay because of his sympathy for the cause.

An interesting addition to the cast was Marlon Brando in the role of David, the young, angry survivor. It was Luther Adler who suggested Brando, but it was Stella Adler, Luther's and Celia's sister, who got him the part. "He's damn good," Adler allegedly told Hecht, "no name, but he can act." Brando was no stranger to the League for a Free Palestine. He and Sidney Lumet, who would later replace Brando in the role of David, had been previously recruited and trained by the League to deliver memorized speeches on Manhattan's street corners. Brando also took an active part in fundraising activities. In a letter to his parents quoted in his autobiography, written with Robert Lindsey, *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (New York: Random House, 1994) Brando wrote:

I am now an active and integral part of a political organization. . . . My job is to travel about the country and lecture to sympathetic groups in order to solicit money and to organize groups that will in turn get money and support us (p. 109).

Most of the other parts were cast with professional actors, dancers and singers—seventy of them altogether. The cast and the musicians agreed to take the minimum wages allowed by their unions. Those who could afford it contributed their pay to the League as donations.

A Flag Is Born was an unabashed propaganda piece. It focused on what one might call the "geopathological" state of the DPs (displaced persons) and emphasized the Zionist territorial solution, namely unrestricted immigration to Palestine and the Jews' right to restore and be restored in their land. The play's message went out loud and clear: Europe could not be home to the survivors of the Holocaust; the British announcement that survivors should go back to their places of origin was unacceptable; Palestine was the only option for Jewish resettlement; and the establishment of an independent "Hebrew" state there was imperative and non-negotiable. The drama, which in some ways resembles a medieval morality play, was conceived as a pageant with a clear line of action and a scant plot whose core was the Jew's search for geographic redemption. It began in the epic mode with the narrator's eulogy for lost place, for the decimated net of old European *shtetlakh*. Evoked with the sentimentality reserved for a dead parent, the world of the *shtetlakh* was portrayed as quaint, modest and nurturing, an environment which dispensed its intellectual gifts to the world at large with unmatched generosity. The narrator's speech was imbued with a fairy-tale quality which related to the Holocaust not in the direct language of human suffering but rather in geographical terms, describing a world that had been erased from the European landscape.

The prologue, narrated by Quentin Reynolds as himself, made what we now recognize as a prophetic statement. Reynolds, the

journalist who had witnessed the fall of Paris and covered the great battles in North Africa, Sicily and the Pacific, declared:

Of all the things that happened in that time—our time—the slaughter of the Jews of Europe was the only thing that counted forever in the annals of man. The proud orations of heroes and conquerors will be a footnote in history beside the great silence that watched this slaughter.

Toward the end of the prologue, the curtain rose and the scene revealed to the spectators was that of a desolate graveyard. The narrator emphasized the universality of the image and asked rhetorically: “Where is this graveyard? In what land does it greet the pale moon?” He answered his own question: “In a part of the earth where Jews lived and live no more.” Europe, as Hecht presented it, had two distinct and irreconcilable terrains. For non-Jews, post-war Europe pulsed with the promise of rebirth, with the energy of new businesses, with new dreams “hatching in the debris of cities.” However, for the Jew, Europe was a wasteland, a world without streets or faces, a gallows and a limepit with dead relatives lying under every road, its landscape transformed by the Holocaust into a garden of hell whose brooks and rivers emitted the wails of murdered Jewish infants.

The basic set of a crumbling cemetery with three dead trees and three tombstones, two tumbled and one still tottering, remained unchanged throughout the performance. As the play began, two figures—Tevya and his wife Zelda—appeared. They were a weary couple of old *shtetl* Jews whose entire family and community had been annihilated. Survivors of Treblinka, these two post-Holocaust Jews were presented as archetypal figures, their tired feet and broken bodies propelled into compassless motion by only one quest—to find the metaphorical bridge that would take them to the land of Israel. Their life force, their divinity, derived from their connectedness to the land of Israel, that was the spark that enabled them to move their lame bodies.

The story begins at nighttime. We see Tevya and Zelda seeking temporary refuge before resuming their arduous journey. In the graveyard, the only place where they can find temporary rest, they come across David, a young man who has survived the gas chambers and crematoria of Europe. Like them, the angry youth, who, according to Hecht’s stage directions “has the eyes of a lord high executioner,” is searching for the road that would take him to Palestine. Lost in a nether land of no time and place, Zelda figures out that it is Friday night, a realization that leads to a traditional *kabbalat shabbat* among the ruins of the Jewish graveyard. There, in a place which Jews are forbidden to visit on the Sabbath, we see Zelda lighting the candles on top of a broken tombstone. Tevya washes his hands in the cemetery earth, since there is no water around. After some hesitation, when Zelda declares: “You are the *Baal Tefilah*. Who else is there?” he dons his *tallis* and begins to recite the prayer.

Tevya then begins a series of dreams, all of them lavishly portrayed on the rear platform of the stage, as if suspended in mid-air. All are interactive and allow Tevya to transcend the boundaries of time and place and to engage in dialogue with the figures he conjures up. The first vision is of a beautiful service in the synagogue in his native town. The scene was enacted with great splendor, with Berini as cantor accompanied by an eight-man choir. The synagogue dream was followed by two successive visions of ancient glory. In the first we see the heroic King Saul and his entourage discussing the battle of Yabesh Gilead, with the courageous king

choosing the option of full victory or death over that of a humiliating compromise with the enemy. After Saul we meet the poetic King David who recites his biblical compositions. It is now Zelda’s turn to dream. Her dream, which is described but not enacted, is of a Shabbat meal at home with all the children at the table. This is followed by Tevya’s vision of King Solomon and the glory of his temple. The King engages Tevya in conversation and encourages him to voice the complaint he has against the world. This leads to the grand scene in which the displaced and dying Tevya presents the case of the dispossessed and homeless Jews of Europe to the Council of the Mighty, a bitter parody of the Security Council of the newly formed United Nations. As Tevya concludes his naive but emotionally stirring presentation, it becomes clear that the representatives will forever continue their shenanigans and political maneuvering. None of the formally dressed diplomats is portrayed positively, but whereas the American is mostly clumsy and ineffectual, the British are so belligerent and anti-Semitic that Tevya takes them for Germans. The English statesman declares: “I speak for a nation engaged in the blood and sweat and tears of a great crisis—a nation at war with the Jews.” As the scene concludes it becomes clear that the world powers will not bring justice to the Jews. David, fierce in his naked disillusionment, mocks Tevya:

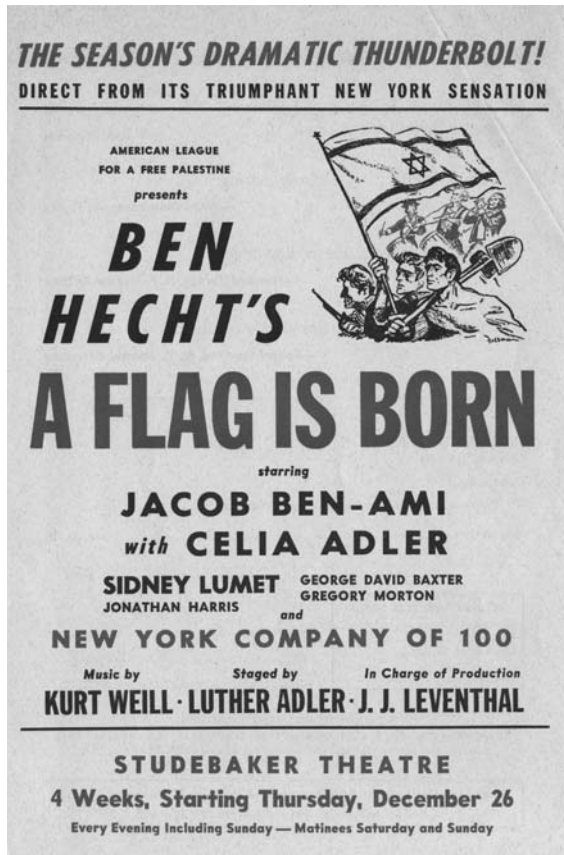
Look at him! Tevya! Holding out his heart like a beggar’s cap! To whom, Tevya? To the hyenas in the night? Listen and you can hear them laughing—laughing at Tevya and his beggar’s cap. With whom are you pleading there. Tevya? With the hyenas? Dead ears, Tevya. The dead and the living have the same ears for the Jew—dead ears.

As Tevya turns around, he realizes that Zelda has just passed away. He recites the *Kaddish* and welcomes his last vision, the angel of death who has come to take him. With his last breath he bids David, the representative of the militant new generation, to go on and not give up.

David, the last living survivor, feels bitter and defeated. As he is about to plunge a dagger into his heart, three figures dressed as Palestinian Hebrew soldiers appear. They urge David to follow, for they know the way to Jerusalem. The play closes on a triumphant note with David affixing the Jewish star to Tevya’s old *tallis*, then nailing it to a branch and marching off with his flag held high. As the soldiers sing the Hatikva, David crosses the brightly illuminated bridge.

Though the narrator remained on stage throughout the performance, occasionally interjecting his comments and insights, it was mainly through David that Hecht sought to convey the militant message of the play. Angry, without nostalgia and religion, David is willing to fight and thus secures his way out of the graveyard that is Europe to his rightful homeland. It is David who delivers Hecht’s *J’accuse*, speaking directly to the audience. It was a scene of confrontational assault which transcended the stage-auditorium dividing line. David, personified by the fiery young Brando, addressed the audience and said:

Where were you—Jews? Where were you when the killing was going on? When the six million were burned and buried alive in the lime pits, where were you? Where was your voice crying out against the slaughter? We didn’t hear any voice. There was no voice. You, Jews of America! You Jews of England! Strong Jews, rich Jews, high-up Jews; Jews of power and genius! Where was your cry of rage that could have filled the world



Handbill for the Chicago performance of *A Flag Is Born*.

and stopped the fires? Nowhere! Because you were ashamed to cry as Jews! A curse on your silence! That frightened silence of Jews that made the Germans laugh as they slaughtered. You with your Jewish hearts hidden under your American boots. You with your Jewish hearts hidden behind English accents—you let the six million die—rather than make the *faux pas* of seeming a Jew. We heard—your silence—in the gas chambers. And now, now you speak a little. Your hearts squeak—and you have a dollar for the Jews of Europe. Thank you. Thank you!

A Flag Is Born was a major success. Though the notices were mixed—all the reviewers praised the acting, especially Paul Muni as Tevya, but some were less than impressed with Hecht's script—the emotional impact of the production was immense. After fifteen weeks on Broadway (instead of the originally planned four), the production, which earned around \$400,000, the largest single sum of money ever obtained by the League, was taken on a national tour. It went first to Chicago, then to Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston, where it met with demonstrations organized by Reform and left-wing Jewish groups. The production closed after six months, but in the summer of 1947 it began a successful South American tour. In March 1947 it was produced in Hebrew in Cyprus in the very detention camp in which the British kept the Jews who were caught trying to immigrate to Palestine. Plans for a British production were aborted, as the British government and media considered *A Flag Is Born* as the most virulently anti-British play ever produced in the U.S.

Hecht was to pay dearly for his involvement. He was blacklisted in England until 1951 and lost favor with the Hollywood studios, which were eager to avoid conflict with the British market. Because of the British ban, Hecht used his chauffeur's name—Lester Barstow—on the film credit of *Whirlpool* and in 1948 was stripped of credits on *Love Happy* and *Inspector General*.

Reading the play half a century later, when the dust has settled on the old battlefield, is a strange experience. On the one hand it is obviously dated, yet at the same time its emotional intensity and clever construction still have enormous impact. Technically speaking, it is fascinating to see how an effective propaganda play works, to note how a skillful playwright manipulates the spectators' emotions, leading his audience to a psychological pitch that promotes them to support radical and subversive activities. True, the drama has the primary colors and bold lines of the propaganda poster, yet at the same time it appeals to our postmodern sensibility which is largely shaped by concepts of uprootedness, refugeehood and homelessness. In some ways Tevya and Zelda can be seen as precursors of Samuel Beckett's Didi and Gogo. With all of *Flag's* activist propaganda, we also recognize in it the existential angst, the sense of exile and loss, that characterize the voice of our age.

Edna Nahshon is a Senior Associate of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies and on the Faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. She is the author of *Yiddish Proletarian Theatre: The Art and Politics of the Artef* (Greenwood Press, 1998) and *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill's Jewish Plays* (forthcoming from Wayne State Univ. Press).

This article originally appeared in *The Jewish Quarterly* 178 (Summer 2000). Reprinted with permission.

Approaching the Music for *A Flag Is Born*

By Christian Kuhnt

From Kurt Weill's perspective, *A Flag Is Born* can be considered a marginal work. Deeply involved in the composition of *Street Scene*, a work which he considered an important step in the development of an American opera, Weill had little time to spare for the music to *A Flag Is Born*. Source material is scarce. The Library of Congress holds a 16-page piano-vocal score in an unknown hand that contains only four numbers ("Opening," "Partisan," "No. 13 Temple Music," and "#14 Interlude"). It represents the only surviving source that allows insight into the musical structure of at least some parts of the play.¹ In order to gain a clearer picture of the music, one can turn to the text itself; in particular Luther Adler's directing script contains useful information about the music. The work features several musical numbers, and they play an effective role in supporting the propagandistic goals.

The score is derived from a variety of sources: pre-existing music from *Der Weg der Verheißung*, liturgical music, national anthems and chants, and Yiddish folk songs. The overture begins with music that had accompanied the scene of the temple's destruction in Act IV of *Der Weg der Verheißung*. The first section of the surviving vocal score is an exact copy of pages 411–416 (rehearsal score, Heugel, 1935). In the script, Hecht had called for music that is "wild" and "bold," so it seemed appropriate to reuse this passage, even after it had been employed in the introduction for *We Will Never Die*. The second section is quoted verbatim from the intro-

duction to *We Will Never Die*. It contains Rachel's lyrical song from *Der Weg der Verheißung*, and the *Kol Nidre* melody, played first by an oboe and repeated by a trumpet (rather than by a singer, as in *We Will Never Die*).

David's entrance is accompanied by a number entitled "Partisan" in the vocal score. It is a tango in G major that conveys some of the young man's pride. When David announces that he is not willing to continue living in a place where his brothers and sisters have been murdered and will head for Palestine, a march theme is played that changes gradually into a folk song.

During Tevya's preparations for the Sabbath prayer and the prayer itself we hear synagogue music. The following scene, in which the set changes for Tevya's first vision, also has musical underscoring. Here, the eight-member male chorus is used for the first time, singing "religious music," for which no sources survive. As in the case of the Sabbath prayer, perhaps the *Kol Nidre* theme was used, possibly sung by a soloist after the transformation of the stage into a synagogue. The appearance of Saul and his entourage is accompanied by trumpet fanfares (offstage) and rhythmic figurations in the orchestra. At a later point in Tevya's vision, King David sings Psalm 23 to a melody labeled "King David theme" over the "sound of harps and sweet music." After Tevya's dream has ended, Zelda reveals in recollections of the old Friday night meals and begins to sing the Yiddish folk song "Rozhinkes mit Mandlen."

After the biblical figures' entrance to "robust and hieratic music," Tevya's second vision is accompanied in part by a number headed "Temple Music" in the vocal score.

This music corresponds to Hecht's stage direction which calls for "a strumming of lutes, a sweet cry of fifes—and a beating of cymbals at intervals." For the most part, piano and harp arpeggios accompany the melody, which resembles Miriam's song from *Der Weg der Verheißung*. The vocal score's incomplete No. 14 follows. When the political leaders and their entourage appear on stage after the Solomon scene, the orchestra plays (as described by Hecht): "The music is that of fanfares . . . The fanfares dissolve into a medley of satyrically [*sic*] patriotic themes—the 'Punishment to Fit the Crime,' 'Give My Regards to Broadway,' 'The Marseillaise,' the 'Russian March,' etc." Before Tevya makes an emotional plea for a free Palestine, the "theme of the *Hatikvah*" is heard as well as a folk tune which appears to be a reprise of "Rozhinkes mit Mandlen." The published play and Adler's script indicate that Tevya's speech was underscored with music labeled "*Hatikva* theme" as well as a "Wandering Theme." Supporting Tevya's words, American and British themes are played while he addresses the statesmen of these countries. Tevya mourns Zelda's death with the *Kaddish*, which Weill had already arranged for the finale of *We Will Never Die*.

A Lamento sounds with the appearance of the angel of death near the end of *A Flag Is Born*. When Tevya dies we hear his "death music, all the rollicking folk themes of his past." The entrance of

the soldiers who will lead David to Palestine is accompanied by "martial music, threaded with the *Hatikvah* theme." The director's script at this point mentions that the "Partisan Theme" is used again. The ending is performed by the chorus, drawing on the *Hatikvah* theme, while the bridge leading to Palestine is lit up onstage and David, with his flag raised, marches toward it.

Despite the repeated use of the same musical material, it seems inappropriate to use the same aesthetic standard to compare *Der Weg der Verheißung* with *We Will Never Die* or *A Flag Is Born*. Though Weill could and would go beyond the propagandistic purpose in his collaboration with Werfel and Reinhardt in the 1930s, when nobody foresaw the scale of the Nazi persecution, this was impossible in the case of the later pageants. They are examples of swift and urgent political action in the face of the Holocaust and its consequences.

Even though (or perhaps especially since) Weill spent significantly less time preparing the music for *We Will Never Die* and *A Flag Is Born*—the term "composing" doesn't really apply here—he

strictly adhered to the dramaturgical laws of the pageant genre. He set aside any loftier ambitions and enlisted the support of Isaac van Grove, a conductor who brought valuable pageant experience as composer for Meyer Weisgal's production *The Romance of a People* (1933) and as conductor of *Der Weg der Verheißung*. The two of them were not concerned about musical originality but theatrical effectiveness. The music was intended to give bold support to the pageants' message without taking a prominent role—this meant working within self-imposed constraints, which



Tevya (far right) testifies before the Council of the Mighty. Photo: Lucas-Pritchard

Weill had been unwilling to do for *Der Weg der Verheißung*. The musical means employed are of extremely simple nature: national anthems, folk songs, liturgical music, and a substantial amount of music from *Der Weg der Verheißung*. The latter is the result of a most economical approach: Why invent something new when the material already sits in the drawer? At the same time we sense Weill's realization that in *Der Weg der Verheißung* he had already succeeded in composing the kind of music that people would expect to hear in a pageant. But while he couldn't afford to give up all "artistic" ambitions in favor of a blunt theatrical spectacle in 1937, when he was hardly known in the U.S., he had gained enough self-confidence through the successes of *Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus* to devote himself fully to a cause—even if it wasn't entirely his own.

¹ Since Dr. Kuhnt completed his dissertation, some additional material has come to light, mostly in form of instrumental parts (a description of this material is printed on p. 10).

News from the Archive Performance Material for *A Flag Is Born*

In May, 1999, Gad Nahshon, associate editor of the *Jewish Post of New York*, alerted us that the archives of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel of Tel Aviv contain a significant amount of musical material pertaining to *A Flag Is Born*. A letter from the archivist, Amira Stern, confirmed the report. The Weill-Lenya Research Center acquired photocopies of the music later that year.

Most numbers are represented by at least one instrumental part, but only one number (the Opening) includes an orchestral score, and that is incomplete, lacking the string section. The score is not in Weill's hand; it bears the note, "new version H. [Hershey] Kay." We do not know when this version was prepared, or how often it was used in performance.

The lack of a score for most of the numbers makes it impossible to determine whether some of the part sets for individual numbers might be complete. It's likely that some numbers were scored for only a small subset of the orchestra, and several of the parts indicate tacets for particular numbers. It seems clear, however, that the material is fragmentary, providing us with some new insights into the musical structure of the pageant and requiring further study. An inventory of the material, by number, is given below.

- No. 1. Opening: incomplete score headed "Overture (Prelude)"; complete set of parts, each headed "Opening" (flute 1-2, oboe, clarinet 1-2, bassoon, horn 1-2, trumpet 1-2, trombone 1-2, percussion, piano-conductor, violin 1-2, viola, cello, bass)
- No. 2. Parts for clarinet, violin 1, cello, bass
- No. 4. Parts for flute, clarinet, trumpet 1-2, trombone, violin 2, cello, bass
- No. 6. *Partisan motive*: parts for clarinet, trumpet 1-2, trombone, drums, violin 2, viola, cello, bass
- No. 7-7a. *Sabbath music*: parts for drums, bass
- No. 8. *Hashkivenu*: part for trombone
- No. 8a-b. Parts for flute, clarinet, trumpet 1-2, trombone, cello, bass
- Coda of 8. Parts for keyboard
- No. 9. *Psalm*: parts for flute, clarinet, trumpet 1-2, trombone, cello, bass
- No. 10. Parts for flute, trumpet 1-2
- No. 13. *Temple music*: parts for flute, clarinet, trumpet 1-2, trombone, drums, viola, cello, bass
- No. 14. *Song of Solomon*: part for bass
- No. 14b. *Finale Act I*: parts for flute, clarinet, trumpet 1-2, trombone, timpani, cello, bass
- No. 15. *Patriotic themes*: parts for flute, oboe, clarinet 1-2, bassoon, horn 1-2, trumpet 1-2, trombone 1-2, timpani, violin 2, viola, cello, bass
- No. 16. *Fading vision*: Part for viola
- No. 18. Parts for oboe, clarinet 1-2, bassoon, trumpet 1-2, trombone, violin 2, viola, cello, bass)
- No. 19. Parts for clarinet, cello, bass
- No. 20. *Partisan finale*: Parts for flute 1-2, oboe, clarinet 1-2, bassoon, horn 1-2, trumpet 1-2, trombone 1-2, percussion, harp, violin 1-2, viola, cello, bass
- No. 21. *Hatikvah*: Parts for clarinet, trumpet 1-2, trombone, drum, cello.

Retracing *The Eternal Road*

A Pogrom Play by Aron Ackermann Unearthed

By Elmar Juchem

The question of the genre of *The Eternal Road* is probably as old as the work itself. What has been labeled "pageant," "opera," "scenic oratorio," or "biblical play" was the result of individual collaborators pulling in different directions. While the musico-dramatic form of the work may have been something new when the curtain rose on 7 January 1937, the underlying grim subject matter was not. The persecution of the Jews had many precedents, and it comes as no surprise that playwrights had dealt with it in theatrical form. Numerous waves of pogroms in Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine between 1881 and 1921—also background for the well-known *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964)—had brought forth a number of plays at the time. Works by Jacob Gordin, Sholem Asch, and others constituted a type that dealt with various, often personal experiences of persecution in a highly dramatic form. In a letter to Kurt Weill, Franz Werfel referred to them as "Östliches Pogrom-Drama" (Eastern pogrom plays), indicating that they had received a fair amount of recognition. *The Eternal Road*, as Werfel pointed out, was not meant to be a pogrom play in this sense, as the epic biblical scenes far outweighed the frame story.

When Weill began working on *Der Weg der Verheißung* in 1934, he was in all likelihood familiar with the kind of drama Werfel had in mind. None other than his own uncle, Aron Ackermann, his mother's older brother, had written a play much in the spirit of *The Eternal Road*. Its history had started thirty years earlier. In October 1905, pogroms in Russia had flared up and reached a new level of intensity after the country had lost its war against Japan. Jews were blamed for the defeat, and those who weren't killed during the mob's first rage were forced to leave their homes. A long stream of refugees poured into Central and Western Europe, creating a set of problems—and tension—in these countries. Germans in general were reluctant to accommodate these impoverished visitors as new neighbors, and even those of the Jewish faith showed little interest in embracing their brothers whose religious practice, language, and everyday culture seemed so foreign. In this climate, Aron Ackermann wrote a play that called for solidarity with the arriving refugees, alerting German Jews to the ongoing horrors and urging them to welcome and support their spiritual relatives.

To be sure, the thirty-two page miniature drama, published in 1906, was on an entirely different scale from *The Eternal Road*. *Die Schwergedrückten* ("The Sorely Tried") was written for a cast of six actors, who could stage the play with almost no scenery or props, some music, and very simple costumes. Ackermann clearly intended the play for amateur performers. A suitable venue may have been a school, or, more likely, the very type of Jewish community center where Weill garnered his first theatrical experience. There is no way of proving that Weill actually knew this particular publication by Aron Ackermann. Weill was twelve when his uncle died. But the family had been in regular contact and close proximity with their learned relative and kept his works on their bookshelves. (At least one letter, written from Kurt Weill to his brother Hans on 26 June 1917, confirms this.) Considering Weill's early interest in literature as well as in the performing arts, it is feasible that he explored the only two plays his uncle had written (the second being a Chanukah play).

In contrast to most pogrom plays, the realistic action in *Die Schmergeprüften* occupies little of the story, consisting of a brief but important frame. Like *Der Weg der Verheißung*, the recalling of Jewish history forms the play's core. Another similarity: the history is told in elevated verse while the frame is written in a simpler form. What stands out today is the relatively highbrow language and literary style of the play, with lengthy monologues for the characters, reflecting the fact that German Jews had long embraced German literature and culture and wished to belong to the *Bildungsbürgertum*. It is the same idealistic spirit in which Werfel conceived his play. He was far removed from any of the "potboiler" tendencies of which he accused Weill when the latter suggested that the synagogue scenes of *The Eternal Road* should be expanded (at the time, in August 1936, Weill had observed the American theater for a year and found differences in audience reaction that he deemed worth considering for the upcoming production).

Aron Ackermann's play is probably not a prototype for *The Eternal Road*. But it does show that Weill had a certain familiarity with the literary genre, a familiarity that may have helped him during the collaborative process. Perhaps more importantly, Ackermann's play provides additional insights into the environment of Weill's upbringing, the spirit that influenced and likely prevailed in his family.

The Play

Aron Ackermann: *Die Schmergeprüften. Ein symbolisch-dramatisches Festspiel. Den Manen der jüdischen Märtyrer in Russland gemidmet*. Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1906. 32 p.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Schemaja, ein russischer Jude (a Russian Jew)
 Rachiel, seine Frau (his wife)
 Chawa, beider Kind (their child)
 Das Altertum (Antiquity)
 Das Mittelalter (Middle Ages)
 Die Neuzeit (Modern Times)

SYNOPSIS:

Father, mother and daughter, wandering through the woods, arrive at a clearing. They have escaped Russian pogroms during which their sons were slain; the remaining family was spared only with the help of a Russian who gave money to the murderers. The three have just crossed illegally into German territory; starved and cold, they fall asleep. (A solo violin plays a melancholy air, then changing to bright major, ending with a questioning turn.)

Antiquity and Middle Ages appear (woman in white and gray dresses respectively) and recount difficult experiences of the Jewish people. It is Modern Times (wearing a black dress symbolizing reform) who provides hope, appealing to the Jewish heart. Once food and shelter are provided, the Word may help in coping with nagging questions, trauma, and doubt. Antiquity and Middle Ages wonder if Modern Times can offer a single answer [*Lösung*] to all this doubting, but she cannot: only the suffering in the history of Israel seems to be a testimony of the high truth of its mission.

The three bless the family and awaken them. Antiquity and Middle Ages disappear. Modern Times becomes a modern person (by changing her voice) and offers the family food and shelter, which they view as the kind act of an angel.



Title page of the 1906 play, "The Sorely Tried."

Aron Ackermann: A Biographical Sketch

Aron Ackermann was born in 1867 in Hochhausen/Tauber, near Würzburg. By 1871 his family had moved to Wiesloch, where his siblings, the twins Emma (Kurt Weill's mother) and Emil, were born. He attended the *Gymnasium* in Heidelberg, and after obtaining his degree in 1886 he took up Talmudic studies in Halberstadt. A year later he enrolled in Berlin University's school of philosophy where he studied for three years with Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg von Gizycki, Friedrich Paulsen, Erich Schmidt, and Eduard Zeller. At the same time he visited the Rabbinic Seminary where he attended lectures by Jakob Barth, Abraham Berliner, Hirsch Hildesheimer, Israel Hildesheimer, and David Hoffmann. In 1893 Aron Ackermann received his doctorate from the University of Göttingen with a dissertation on the history of understanding Hebrew accentuation. His thesis had been supervised by the renowned theologian and orientalist, Julius Wellhausen, and was published by the Berlin publishing house H. Itzkowski. Ackermann's wife, Rebekka Itzkowski, may have been related to the publisher. In the ensuing years, he became a rabbi and continued to publish on a variety of subjects, two of which were the use of the church organ in the synagogue and synagogue chant. From 1896 to 1912 he lived in Brandenburg/Havel where, in 1898, he wrote a letter of recommendation on behalf of his brother-in-law, Albert Weill (Kurt Weill's father), who had applied for the cantor position in Dessau. In 1911, he served a brief term as editor of the weekly *Die jüdische Presse*. On July 18, 1912, Aron Ackermann died at age 44 in Berlin-Lichterfelde, leaving no children behind.

Kurt Weill: Making Music Theater

An exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts



A partial view of two sections of the exhibition, “Musical Comedy” and “Concept Musical.”
Photo: David Farneth

The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, working with the New York Public Library, prepared this exhibition, which was on display from 8 February through 4 May 2002. It was the second of a pair; the first, *Musical Stages: Kurt Weill and His Century*, was on display at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in Spring 2000. Whereas the Berlin exhibition was organized chronologically to give a full survey of Weill’s life and work, the New York version focused on the stage works, grouping them by genre, to show Weill’s extraordinary versatility as a composer for the theater. The explanatory texts from the ten sections are available on the Foundation’s web site, www.kwf.org. The exhibition’s generic categories are:

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Play with Music | 6. Musical Comedy |
| 2. Opera | 7. Concept Musical |
| 3. Incidental Music | 8. One-Act Opera |
| 4. Operetta | 9. School Opera |
| 5. Pageant | 10. Dance |

The *Wall Street Journal* writes:

He worked on everything from a heroic pageant based on the Old Testament to a musical comedy about Old New York featuring Peter Stuyvesant and his wooden leg in a high-kicking chorus line. But you don’t even need to know that Weill (1900–1950) composed the music for *The Threepenny Opera* (including “Mack the Knife”) to enjoy this fascinating show. At listening stations throughout, visitors can hear music clips while viewing letters, playbills, rehearsal notes, photographs, and set designs; TV monitors show interviews and performance footage of Weill and his works. The curators of this exhibition have done a marvelous job of capturing and pinning down his creative genius.

— Stuart Ferguson, 26 March 2002



Copies of banners designed by Caspar Neher for the original production of *Die sieben Todsünden* (1933), on loan from the New York Philharmonic. Photo: G. Juchem

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 boobos 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 than 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.

Melissa Müller
Munich

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.

Fred Ritzel

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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.

Tamara Levitz
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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 (theatrical-ly, 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/perverved 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-naïf “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 clichéd 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 sheep-dog 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.

Michael Morley

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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 neo-classical transparency, *Mavra's* liveliness brings it close to the spirit of the Monty Python sketch. Director Humbert Camerlino 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 Kossaroff (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*.

Pascal Huynh
Paris



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

Photo: Icare

The production results from a collaboration with choreographer Laura Scozzi, who

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 con-

fusion 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 challenges 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" non-

chalance 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 re-

sponsible 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*.

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.



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

Photo: Boris Geilert

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.

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



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

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.

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



Maresa Hörbiger as Lenya. Photo: Jens Schlüter

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 emblemize 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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