

# Kurt Weill

Volume 20

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Fall 2002

*Newsletter*

**Weill, Kurt**, \* 2. März 1900 in Dessau, † 2. Apr. 1950 in New York. Weill begann sein Studium unter R. Krasselt und E. Humperdinck an der Hochschule

**WEILL, Kurt** (b. Dessau, 2 Mar. 1900; d. New York, 3 Apr. 1950).

German-American composer. He studied

**Weill, Kurt**, \* 2. März 1900 zu Dessau (Anhalt); machte frühe Kompositionsversuche; sein erster Kompositionslehrer war

**WEILL Kurt**, compositore tedesco (Dessau 2 III 1900 - New York 3 IV 1950). Allievo per la composizione di A. Bing a Dessau, studiò

**Weill, Kurt (Julian)** (b Dessau, 2 March 1900; d New York, 3 April 1950). German composer, American citizen from 1943. He was one of the outstanding composers in the

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Cover photo: Kurt Weill, ca. 1929.

## note from the editor

A popular measure for the historical importance of a person is whether he or she “made it” into a dictionary. Not just any cheap paperback *Who’s Who* that gets updated every year, but a *real* dictionary that comes in several heavy-duty bound volumes, each of which carries enough weight to make your wrist hurt when you try to lift it off the shelf.

Needless to say, by these standards Kurt Weill certainly succeeded. What may be surprising is the fact that we can already mark seventy-five years of dictionary writing on Weill. None other than the composer himself made sure that he wasn’t overlooked when the musicologist and music critic Alfred Einstein prepared the eleventh edition of the venerable *Riemanns Musiklexikon* in 1927. Not wanting to contact Einstein directly, Weill asked his publisher Universal Edition AG in Vienna to handle the matter on 5 September 1927, just six weeks after the succès de scandale of *Mahagonny* in Baden-Baden. Since the publication of Einstein’s article in 1929, many more entries have appeared, most recently just last year in the 29-volume second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. The publication of such a massive enterprise serves as the occasion for this issue’s provocative feature article. Scrutinizing critical standpoints, challenging long-held views, and reflecting on changes that occurred during the extended history of lexicographical portraits of Weill, it takes a look at how Weill fared in this new, major reference source. With its fresh approach, it may stimulate a larger debate.

*Street Scene*, Weill’s “American opera,” has seen some changes in its encyclopedic representation as well. Whether this shift has something to do with a recent surge of performances—especially in the U.S., but also in Europe—is hard to say. Julius Rudel and Horst Koegler, two pioneers who helped with the work’s move from Broadway to the opera house in the 1950s, have been asked to “return to the scene of the crime” almost half a century later.

Elmar Juchem



## Current Research

**Diana Diskin** (University of Southern California, USA)

Premiered in 1932, *Die Bürgschaft* was Kurt Weill’s largest and most ambitious composition before his emigration in 1933, and it continues to be one of his most perplexing and difficult works. The composition of the opera was an audacious move: *Die Bürgschaft* was a grandly operatic thesis that represented his coming-of-age as a composer and a bold political gambit meant to address the ever more ominous concerns of his beleaguered country.

The dissertation will analyze the political intent and unusual musical style of *Die Bürgschaft* as well as trace the opera’s troubled performance history and critical reception from its premiere through its revival in a “neue Fassung” in 1957. It will also explore the circumstances surrounding Weill’s choice of librettist and artistic collaborators, and investigate his degree of involvement in writing the libretto and his participation in plans to revise the work before he died. The research will examine the holograph full score and sketches for the opera as well as several other primary sources, including Weill’s and Lotte Lenya’s correspondence with Universal Edition, their correspondence with Caspar Neher, the opera’s librettist, and materials related to both the 1932 premiere and 1957 revival housed at the Carl-Ebert Archiv at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

**Stephen Hinton** (Stanford University, USA)

The forthcoming book, “Kurt Weill’s Musical Theater: Stages of Reform,” is an investigation of Weill’s musical theater from a number of different angles that include the biographical, the philosophical, the historical, and the music-analytical. The traditional biographical approach would have been to follow Weill’s life and works in strict chronological sequence, describing each career step in turn. An alternative would have been to present aspects of his work for the musical theater systematically, taking key theoretical concepts and applying them to the entire corpus of works. Although both approaches have their merits, the book (under contract from University of California Press) ends up striking a compromise somewhere between the two. The chapters focus, one by one, on the principal forms of theater both adopted and reformed by Weill, while adhering to a more or less chronological sequence in the discussion of individual works. The aim has been to do justice, as far as possible, both to the historical and to the systematic aspects of Weill’s musical theater—“stages” in the twofold sense.

**Tamara Levitz** (University of California at Los Angeles, USA)

The book project, “Visualizing Music: Modern Dance and Music in Europe and the Americas, 1912–1942,” will include a chapter on the relationship between Kurt Weill’s stage works of the late 1920s and early 1930s and the philosophies of expression of contemporary ballet and modern dance, especially German *Ausdruckstanz*. Focusing specifically on *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Die sieben Todsünden*, the study first explores how such famous performers as Lotte Lenya interpreted the gestural content of Weill’s music, before interpreting the cultural meaning of the performances they gave. The broader goal is to place Weill’s work within the North American, Caribbean and European twentieth-century tradition of “visualizing” modern music by connecting it with bodily gesture.

# Putting Kurt Weill in His Historical Place

## The New Grove Articles

By Tamara Levitz

In 2001, a new entry on Kurt Weill appeared in the second edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, co-authored by J. Bradford Robinson, well-known as a translator, particularly of Carl Dahlhaus, and by David Drew, the doyen of Weill scholarship and author of the influential yet controversial entry on Weill in the first edition of *The New Grove* (1980). Packaged in the familiar and thus comforting “life and works” framework, and backed with the prestigious name of Grove, this new entry has all the institutional clout to become an instant standard reference source on Weill’s life and works. It is unlikely to achieve this status among Weill specialists, however. Emerging from the muddy waters of the “two Weill” debate unleashed by Drew’s last *New Grove* article in 1980, Weill scholars of the last generation have grown skeptical and wary. In such a hermeneutically suspicious climate, this article will necessarily elicit from them less a collective affirmation of their belief in the objective truths about Weill stated therein than pensive historical reflection and the impetus for ideological critique. In the following pages, I will consider the 2001 article within the context of the dictionary entries on Kurt Weill that acted as its important precedents, with the aim of helping us to understand its historical place.

The era of dictionary writing on Weill began when the composer himself first typed up his own data for Alfred Einstein in a letter dated 26 July 1928. Understanding his family history as crucial to his local identity, Weill described himself as “descended from Baden” (“badischer Abstammung”), thereby downplaying his family’s actual residence in Dessau. He then characterized his cultural background in traditional European fashion as defined by those masters with whom he had studied, highlighting teachers Albert Bing and Ferruccio Busoni as his main influences, and adding Engelbert Humperdinck and Rudolf Krasselt as an afterthought, scrawled on an otherwise typed letter. The work list that followed emphasized only the distinction between published and unpublished opuses. In his one-page article for the eleventh edition of the *Hugo Riemanns Musiklexikon* (1929), Einstein closely followed Weill’s cues, choosing, however, to replace Weill’s information on his family’s roots in Baden with the less historically conscious fact that Weill was born in “Dessau (Anhalt)” (p. 2002). Einstein also ignored Weill’s distinction

between published and unpublished works and added premiere dates, as well as the compositions *Divertimento* and *Zaubermacht* (recte: *Zaubernacht*) to his work list. Weill, he concluded in a jovial tone, was “one of the most relaxed and talented representatives of New Music” (“einer der unbekümmertsten und begabtesten Vertreter der Neuen Musik,” p. 2002).

Einstein’s friendly summary found a sinister counterpart twelve years later, in the hands of Nazi ideologues Herbert Gerigk and Theo Stengel. Writing for the devastatingly racist *Lexikon der Juden in der Musik*, they transformed Weill from a German into a Jew who was born in Dessau and whose last known residence had been Berlin. Associating Weill primarily with “Jewish-anarchistic tendencies,” primitivism, and entertainment music, the authors of the *Lexikon* singled out in particular the “sensational success,” “plagiarism,” and what Hans Mersmann called the musical “insertions” of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, as well as the supposedly morally despicable text of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (which they failed to note had been written by Bertolt Brecht). Although their wretched article would later be dismissed as blatant and grotesque anti-Semitic ideological distortion, it nevertheless left a deep mark on the dictionary enterprise by cementing the binarisms (Jewish-German, entertainment-serious music, success-seriousness, plagiarism-originality, and eclecticism-organic unity) that would cast their shadow on all subsequent twentieth-century writings on Weill.

By the time the fifth edition of the *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* appeared in 1954, approaches to Weill’s life and works had necessarily changed dramatically. In the twenty-five years since the first Riemann entry, Weill had experienced a harrowing escape from Nazi Germany, exile in France, and immigration to the United States, before dying of heart failure at the early age of 50. Appearing sensitive to Weill’s predicament, the Austrian émigré to Britain Hans Redlich centered his one-and-a-half page article on Weill’s fate as a German Jew who “had to leave Hitler-ridden Germany” because of his “Jewish descent” and “past political record” (p. 238) and whose music was banned there and even failed when revived in Germany after the war (p. 239). Following Weill’s own campaign to define himself as an American, especially as it influenced American journalism in the

decades preceding and following the war, Redlich emphasized Weill's Americanness in spirit, as reflected in his active opposition to Nazism and Hitler, which at that time was more than enough to demonstrate his deep allegiance to American politics, belief systems, and moral values. Within this black-and-white cold-war context, it became relatively easy to redefine Weill's nationality as that of a "German-American composer" (p. 238), especially given that West Germany was now an ally in the American struggle against Soviet Communism. Redlich showed far less knowledge of Weill's music, which he hopelessly scrambled in the accompanying "catalogue of works" (even including Einstein's misspelled *Zauber Macht*, p. 239). As a scholar of Monteverdi and Viennese modernism, Redlich seemed to appreciate Weill's innovations for the operatic stage, and yet expressed clear doubt about his abilities as a composer by spending a long time (half his article) trying to prove Weill's musical worth. He evoked the binary contrast between Weill's "expressionist, abstract and boldly experimental" early works and the again "sensational success" of the *Dreigroschenoper* which he now, as an émigré himself, considers "deeply nostalgic" (p. 238). Then Redlich discussed Weill's influence at length, as if to legitimize him by proving his links to esteemed post-war composers such as Hindemith, Orff, and Britten, among others.

The postwar state of confusion over Weill's historical place as a Jewish German émigré persisted in the influential 1968 *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (MGG) entry on Kurt Weill by Kurt Stone, who, like Weill, had emigrated from Germany to the United States and dedicated himself there to American music, among other subjects. Divided into two untitled sections (reflecting life and style), Stone's two-page article tried to avoid ideological issues in characteristic MGG fashion by emphasizing dates and factual descriptions (even in the miserably typeset work list), playing down Weill's flight from Germany (by mentioning only that he "left" ("verließ Deutschland," p. 385)) and erroneously linking his American work primarily to Hollywood (p. 386). Stone perhaps unknowingly set the tone for much postwar European, and especially Italian, lexicography on Weill by defining his stylistic identity and historical value solely on the basis of his work with Brecht, who, by the Marxist-prone late sixties, had become firmly established in popular German and Italian literary canons (see, for example, Vittorio Fellegara's article in the *Enciclopedia della musica* (1974, 411), and Alberto Jona's article in the *Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti* (1988, 445-446)). Stone mythologized Weill's Brechtian songs by describing them as possessing "exciting vitality, impertinent freshness and a strange, irresistible charm" (p. 389), thereby leaving many future readers nostalgic for the unfulfilled utopia of German communism. The feeling of postwar bereavement for that which had been lost was accentuated by Stone's casual comment that Weill's works "suffered an enormous flattening out" (p. 389) in his American years, which Stone neglected to comment upon further.

## Dictionary entries on Weill

- 1929 Alfred Einstein  
*Hugo Riemanns Musiklexikon*, 11th ed.
- 1954 Hans F. Redlich  
*Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed.
- 1968 Kurt Stone  
*Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*
- 1974 Vittorio Fellegara  
*Enciclopedia della musica*
- 1980 David Drew  
*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1st ed.
- 1986 Larry Stempel  
*The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*
- 1988 Alberto Jona  
*Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti*
- 1992 Stephen Hinton  
*The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*
- 2001 David Drew / J. Bradford Robinson  
*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed.

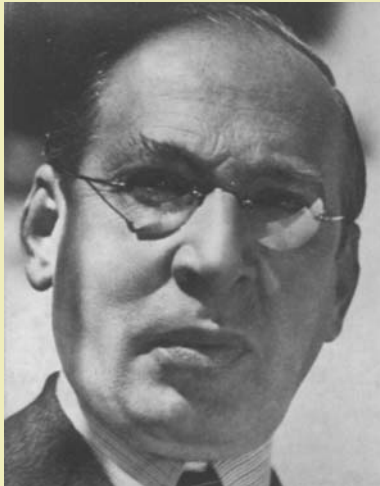
Given the obscurity of most of Weill's works throughout the post-war period, and in view of the inconsistency and incompleteness characteristic of most of his dictionary entries, David Drew's monumental ten-page article on Weill in the sixth edition of the *New Grove* in 1980 must have come as a profound revelation to most people. Drawing on an array of sources unavailable to the public and on his extensive knowledge of Weill, Drew provided the first comprehensive and convincing overview of Weill's life and works, in an article divided into six sections (1. Life, 3 pp.; 2. Reputation, half page; 3. Early Works, 1 p.; 4. Central Works, 3 pp. with pictures; 5. Broadway works, a bit over 1 p.; and 6. The Two Weills, 1 p.), supplemented by a much extended work list and bibliography. Written at the height of North American and European belief in the aesthetic premises of high modernism, Drew's article attempted to clarify the long-standing confusion over Weill's historical worth in the only way possible at that time, by firmly ensconcing him in the German modernist canon. By redefining Weill's works in terms of transcendent modernist values, Drew could extricate them from history, thereby successfully bypassing the issues of Jewish German experience and American immigration that had so unsettled postwar critics. Thus the article begins with a statement that seems intended to clarify Weill's identity once and for all: "Kurt Weill . . . German composer, American citizen from 1943" (p. 220). Now Weill's Germanness derived not from his place of birth, but rather constituted an essential aspect of his compositional character in a way that his seemingly accidental Americanness did not.

Following on this statement, Drew established Weill's historical credibility throughout his article by defining him as an essentially German composer who was "acutely conscious of his roots and responsibilities as a German artist in postwar society" and also "part of the modernist movement and one of its leaders in the younger generation" (p. 307).

In order to establish Weill as a modernist, Drew beefed up Weill's German musical pedigree by augmenting the list of

Weill's teachers with his insider's commentary on what he deems more prestigious modernist influences on Weill's then-unknown early style, which receives a surprisingly long commentary. His revised story of Weill's early musical development included, among others, Friedrich Koch (p. 300, a counterpoint teacher whom Weill disliked, yet who allowed Drew to link Weill to the German contrapuntal traditions of Max Reger, pp. 302, 303), Franz Schreker (pp. 300, 302, an Austrian modernist who was

Weill's letter of 26 July 1928 to Alfred Einstein.



Alfred Einstein (1880–1952) was a prominent force in Weimar Germany's cultural life. As a critic for the *Berliner Tageblatt*, he reviewed several of Weill's works. He liked many of them; notably, however, he dismissed the 1931 Berlin production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*.

Because of his Jewish background, he was denied a prestigious academic position and was forced into the field of editing, where he produced a number of brilliant achievements: *Riemanns Musiklexikon*, *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, and several music editions. In 1933 he fled Germany, ultimately arriving in the United States, where he taught at Smith College. Contrary to a stubborn myth, he was not related to the famous physicist.

Kurt Weill  
Charlottenburg  
Luisenplatz 3  
Tel. Wilhelm 8025

Berlin, 26. 7. 1928

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr.,

anbei sende ich Ihnen die gewünschten Angaben für das Lexikon:  
Kurt Weill (mit zwei ll), badischer Abstammung, geboren 2. März 1900 in Dessau, erster Unterricht bei dem damaligen Dessauer Kapellmeister Albert Bing. ~~1922~~ ~~1922~~ 1918 Berliner Hochschule für Musik, <sup>(Königsplatz - Brandeburg)</sup> aber nur für ein Semester, dann Theaterkapellmeister, zuerst in Dessau, dann am Stadttheater Lüdenscheid (Westf.). 1921 Rückkehr nach Berlin, Schüler von Busoni, bis zu seinem Tode persönlich eng befreundet. Lebt in Berlin.

Veröffentlichte Werke: (alle: Universal-Edition, Wien)

op. 8 Streichquartett, op. 9 "Quodlibet" für Orchester, op. 10 "Frauentanz", 7 Lieder nach mittelalterlichen Texten für Sopran und Bratsche, Flöte, Klarinette, Horn, Fagott. op. 12 Konzert für Violine und Bläserorchester (Paris 1925). op. 15 "Der neue Orpheus", Kantate für Sopran und Orchester. "Vom Tod im Wald", Ballade für eine Bass-~~stimme und Klavier.~~

Bühnenwerke: "Der Protagonist", ein Akt Oper, Text von Georg Kaiser (Dresdener Staatsoper 1926). "Royal ~~Palace~~ Palace", Oper in einem Akt, <sup>(Staatsoper Berlin 1927)</sup> Text von Iwan Goll. "Der Zar lässt sich photographieren", Opera buffa in einem Akt, Text von Georg Kaiser, <sup>(Leipzig 1928)</sup> "Mahagonny", Schauspiel, Text von Bert Brecht (Baden-Baden 1927). Das letztere ist eine Studie zu der demnächst erscheinenden dreiaktigen Oper "Mahagonny", Text von Bert Brecht. Ferner erscheint soeben eine <sup>komponierte</sup> ~~neue~~ Musik zu "Des Bettlers Oper", einer deutschen Bearbeitung der altenglischen Balladenoper "The Beggars Opera" (E Textbearbeitung Bert Brecht).

Unveröffentlicht: Neben einer Anzahl von Früherwerken (darunter eine

Symphonie, ein Orchesterwerk "Fantasia, Passacaglia und Hymnus", ferner Kammermusik und Lieder) ein capella-<sup>(p. 11)</sup> Chorwerk "Recordare", Orchesterlieder nach Rilke, <sup>(p. 12)</sup> eine Ballade "Vom Tod im Wald" für Bass und 10 Bläser. Ausserdem mehrere Schauspielmusiken, u.a. zu Strindbergs "Gustav III.", Bronnens "Katalanische Schlacht", Brechts "Leben Eduards II.". Eine unveröffentlichte <sup>(p. 23)</sup> ~~zweiaktige~~ <sup>(in Weimar bearbeitet)</sup> Oper "Na und?" (geschrieben 1926)

Mit den besten Grüßen

Ihr sehr ergebener

Kurt Weill.

fairly insignificant in Weill's life), Schoenberg (p. 303, crucial in Drew's definition of modernism), and Hindemith, with whom Weill was carefully and strategically compared (pp. 302, 308). Drew not only understated the influence of Lotte Lenya and Busoni (p. 308), whose critical stance towards German modernism played a significant role in Weill's life, but also Weill's Jewish roots, as if such a plural identity would weaken his argument for Weill's essential Germanness. Thus, strangely, Drew even obscured Weill's father's Jewish profession in his 1980 article by labeling him a "Kantor" (p. 300; the German spelling suggests a Catholic or Lutheran position) who wrote "liturgical music and sacred motets" (a generic, non-denominational description of what were actually *Synagogen-Gesänge* and perhaps only one published *Motette*). Drew did not mention Weill's Jewishness again until much later in the entry, when he noted that Weill "left for Paris on 14 March 1933" (recte: 21 March 1933) in "circumstances of some personal danger" (p. 301). Why as gifted a writer as Drew would repeat as innocuous a verb as Kurt Stone's "left" to describe Weill's traumatic flight from Nazi Germany is not clear until one realizes how crucial this rhetorical move was to Drew's modernist strategy. Rewriting history in order to make modernism the cause of the Nazis' wrath enabled Drew, in the spirit of many of his contemporaries, to ennoble it as a cultural movement. By implying that modernist values are transcendent, transnational, and inherently oppositional, he affirmed his belief in the "aesthetic heroism" of modernism as a simultaneous "cultural subversion" and "salvation from the shattered order of modern reality."<sup>1</sup>

Drew underpinned his discussions of Weill's music with the classical criteria of modernist aesthetics, using an implicit definition of the term that includes five specific criteria: 1) formalism and aesthetic autonomy as it is linked to technical mastery and an organic theory of art; 2) aestheticism; 3) earnestness; 4) a dialectical opposition to that which is not functionally modern; and 5) detachment from society. Drew foregrounded modernist formalism by defining Weill from the outset as a "key figure in the development of modern *forms* of music theatre" (p. 300, emphasis my own) and by concentrating on the technical advances of Weill's early works (p. 303). Even less clearly modernist stage works like *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* were noteworthy primarily because of their "new constituency and sharper focus of the harmony, and not for the influence, often overrated, of popular music or even of Brecht," and because they contribute to the "formal experiments of the postwar avant-garde" (p. 303). *Der Jasager* likewise displayed the "extreme" "rigour" characteristic of modernism (p. 305), while *Die Bürgschaft* demonstrated the quintessentially modernist "grasp of large-scale musico-dramatic form," which, in Drew's opinion, was "unsurpassed by any composer of Weill's generation" (p. 305). As a composer motivated by the desire to create "continuous musical structures" (p. 305), Drew's modernist German Weill created "serious" (pp. 302, 305) "works" (p. 302). Weill's dialectical opposition to tradition was most noticeable in his collaborative works with Brecht, whom Drew, unlike his European predecessors, was careful not to single out, and yet who still provided him with an opportunity to mention an appropriately modern "dialectical relationship between words and music" (p. 305). He also described Weill as suitably "taken aback by the acclaim of *Die Dreigroschenoper*," which caused a subsequent "self-protective withdrawal from the suc-

cess" (pp. 304–05). Drew's modernist Weill, like Adorno's, seemingly achieved success in Germany against his own will.

Drew's attempt to legitimize Weill by finding a place for him within German modernism ran into serious trouble when he arrived at Weill's American works. He reacted to the dilemma by setting up America in a rigidly colonialist fashion as the antithesis or even negation of German modernism, thereby creating a binary opposition that he used primarily in order to confirm the dominance of the German side of the equation. Ignoring the interactive and dialectical effects of colonial encounters, Drew remarked that "restricted opportunities and inferior conditions" (p. 306) in Weill's backward home of the U.S.A. forced him to emerge from his self-imposed isolation and become his own antithesis. He thereafter abandoned modernism for its dialectical opposite, "tradition," which Drew defined as "European light music" of Johann Strauss and others (p. 306). The "bare bones" of Weill's music lost their interest, even though his orchestration still emitted a glow of modernist mastery (p. 307). His musical material no longer grew "naturally," i.e., organically, but rather became "prefabricated" (as if on an assembly line) and "imported from elsewhere" (p. 308). Weill forfeited "the creation of 'works of art'" (p. 307) and lost completely his "absolute personal authority" (p. 306), as if cultural miscegenation caused his personality to dissolve into anxious nothingness. Seemingly bewitched by the colonial forces he had encountered in America, Weill denied the "priority of purely aesthetic criteria," repudiated "the concept of a composer as a creator of an essentially individualist and sacrosanct oeuvre," and thereby famously did "away with his old creative self in order to make way for a new one" (p. 307).

In spite of all his eloquently formulated arguments for the superiority of Weill's German modernism, Drew's article seemed haunted by contradiction and doubt. Notably, he spent two sections, a fifth of the article, writing about Weill's reputation, thereby demonstrating the degree to which he shared Redlich's and other previous writers' concern about Weill's historical worth. In the last paragraph of his article, he remarked with regret that Weill "could have become one of the commanding figures of German music—another Weber, perhaps, or even, as Wellesz once suggested, another Gluck" (p. 309). If not so misguided, this comparison could even be considered poignant, in that it tragically evoked the prospect of a utopian twentieth century in which German Jewish composers could have defined the hegemony of German culture. Drew rightly defined Weill as a "might-have-been" in this sense, although he was silent on the larger "might have been" behind his nostalgic vision: Weill might have been a German national figure, if he had not been Jewish, and if a colonial world order had prevailed. The anxious and deeply felt prose indicates to us that Drew was fully aware that in the devastated landscape of twentieth-century Germany, it was virtually impossible for *any* composer to define national identity in such an unquestioning and universal fashion. Thus his modernist argument ended not with affirmation, but rather with gnawing questions and lingering doubts.

Much has changed in the last twenty years, including David Drew himself. Postcolonialists have unraveled the biases of colonialist discourse, high modernism has been interrogated and become historicized within the broader context of twentieth-century music, and Weill research has developed by leaps and

bounds. The first sign of a change in Weill lexicography came in 1986, when Larry Stempel published his two-page article in the *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*. Drawing on the 1980 article by Drew, who contributed the accompanying work list, Stempel offered one of the first positive assessments of such Broadway works as *Lady in the Dark* and *Street Scene*, before resurrecting Drew's binarism with a reminder about the complexity of the two Weills (p. 502). A more significant challenge to Drew's modernist perspective came in 1992, when Stephen Hinton wrote an outstanding article on Weill for *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Characterized by impeccable scholarship, new archival discoveries, eloquent argumentation, and understated humor, Hinton's article set the tone for what Weill scholarship could and should be. Divided evenly into five sections covering 1. Apprenticeship and Early Career, 2. the Weill-Brecht partnership, 3. Exile in Europe, 4. The American Years, and 5. Posthumous Reputation, this five-page article more evenly and accurately considered the various stages of Weill's life than its predecessors had, and dared to correct deeply entrenched, persistent fallacies about the importance of Weill's relationship to Brecht (p. 1125), his work in the United States (p. 1126), and his connection to modernism (p. 1127). Although the article still began with the designation of Weill as a "German composer" and "American citizen from 1943," it otherwise avoids any statements of cultural preference, allowing Weill to move between nations without geographical prejudice. In comparison to Drew's text, Hinton's prose appears unveiled, without mystifying allusions, abstractions, and insider references. After decades of anxious mythmaking brought on by the traumatic displacement of World War II, Hinton reintroduced the fair, critical point of view of a researched text supported by detailed evidence. "To speak of 'two Weills' is [to] radically misconstrue [Weill's] development," Hinton's research allowed him to argue, before he further admonished Drew for applying to Weill an Adornesque "concept of the composer" that "patently does not fit" (p. 1127). In light of such critical acuity and courage, one wishes that Hinton had been given the opportunity to expand this entry in a subsequent *Grove* publication.

Hinton's 1992 article and its tortured predecessors in the twentieth century raised great expectations for the newly published article in the second edition of *The New Grove*. Would the contributors follow Hinton's lead in setting the historical record straight, avoiding the pitfalls of mythologizing Weill by tying him down aggressively in the straitjacket of accepted yet inappropriate stylistic categories, binding him mercilessly to Bertolt Brecht, forcing him to bear the burden of German Jewish history by remembering him with a tear in one's eye, or clamping his limbs to the steel bars of modernism? Would the revised *New Grove* retract its modernist, colonialist position of 1980, and open itself up to a broader and thus more historically justified twentieth-century context? And would twenty years of Weill scholarship be reflected?

Stunningly, Drew's and Robinson's 2001 article does none of these things. The original, unevenly distributed four sections of Weill's life remain, now co-authored by Robinson and retitled 1. Life (2 pp.), 2. Early Works (1 p.), 3. European Maturity (3 pp. with pictures), and 4. American Works (1 p.). Even the shimmer of doubt that made Drew's original *New Grove* article so intellectually appealing in spite of its faults has vanished, the victim of an

editorial or personal decision to leave the thorny question of posthumous reputation and influence (sections 5. and 6. of the article, 2 pp.), as well as the work list and bibliography, to Robinson, a newcomer to Weill research. Whereas the unevenly edited second edition of the *New Grove* allows other émigrés such as Béla Bartók ("Hungarian composer") and Arnold Schoenberg ("Austro-Hungarian composer") to retain their uncontaminated national identities, Weill remains a "German composer" and "American citizen from 1943," thereby joining the ranks of those less easily defined composers like Igor Stravinsky ("Russian composer, later of French (1934) and American (1945) nationality") and indicating that the editors of the *New Grove* still have not given enough thought to this issue. Although Drew and Robinson have corrected errors such as "Kantor" and in general offered more accurate details in Weill's biography, especially the early years, they have made no attempt to address the issue of Weill's treatment in Nazi Germany, nominally one of the editorial objectives of the second edition. Instead of reassessing Weill's experience as a Jew in Germany, they reiterate Drew's argument from 1980 concerning the Nazis and modernism, this time claiming outright that Weill's success as a theater composer "quite apart from his Jewish ancestry and leftist political associations . . . ensured that he and his works became exposed targets when the tide turned against the republic in 1929" (p. 222; cf. 1980, p. 301).

Rather than question the modernist assumptions that mar Drew's 1980 descriptions of Weill's compositions, Drew and Robinson build on and strengthen them. Weill is still introduced as a "key figure in the development of modern forms of music theatre" (p. 220) and still commended for the technical achievement of his early works (p. 223). *Der Jasager* is now not only rigorous, but "self-effacing" (p. 226), while even *Die Dreigroschenoper* has become a "carefully controlled mixture" of "an astonishing range of musical *objets trouvés*," benefiting from "a few sharply delineated motifs that impart a satisfying if fully intuitive sense of unity to the entire work" (p. 225). More than ever, Weill is a "serious modern composer," who self-protectively withdraws from success (p. 225), and who is now "attracted by the lonely example of Schoenberg" even when writing *Royal Palace* (p. 223). Like Rip Van Winkle, the *New Grove* has slept through intellectual developments in the humanities and in Weill scholarship during the last twenty years, awakening with the misguided belief that it can still spread the (now anachronistic) modernist word to the world, even though nobody believes in the gospel anymore.

Whereas in his 1980 article, Drew argued that Weill's German modernism was aesthetically and morally superior to his American cultural achievement, in the 2001 version he and Robinson wisely correct this diplomatic blunder by more successfully masking their preferences, replacing outright rejection of Weill's American works with a more subtle and carefully worded search for modernist values therein. If only proven to be not quite so "American" and to aspire to modernism, Weill's Broadway shows too could become legitimate children and stop being the bastards of an unfortunate cultural mixture caused by unavoidable emigration. Thus Drew and Robinson find "European harmony," a "Pucciniesque bridge," an "*idée fixe*," "gestic" control of dramatic pacing" and "surreal montage" in *Lady in the Dark*, as well as "*verismo*" in *Street Scene* (p. 227). Ignoring enormous advances in American music studies in gener-



al and Weill research in particular during the past twenty years, which have revealed both the extent to which North America was influenced by German musical practices throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the contribution of the large number of European immigrants working on Broadway, Drew and Robinson continue to conclude erroneously that Weill's Europeanness made him essentially different from his American colleagues (see p. 228), and that his "discarded [German] background" gave him "two notable advantages of his popular competitors": an "aural imagination" that allowed him to write brilliant scores and a "highly cultivated sense of musical character and theatrical form" (p. 227). Indeed, they conclude, "superior craftsmanship" and "mastery of musico-dramatic problems" are still the distinguishing (European) features that unify all of Weill's works.

The colonialist perspective of the 2001 *New Grove* article is nowhere more evident than in the last two sections, "Posthumous reputation" and "Influence," in which Robinson makes a rushed and poorly argued attempt to resolve the problem of the "two Weills." He claims that the differences between Weill's German and American works were not caused by cultural or geographical dislocation, but were purely a question of style. He abstracts Weill even further from his historical context than Drew had by defining Weill's two states of being not in terms of Drew's Germany-America (center-periphery) colonialist binarism, but rather with the more critically acceptable polarizing stylistic essentialisms of modernism versus postmodernism (p. 228)—a term he may have borrowed from Hinton's brief philosophical musing at the end of his *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* entry in 1992. Defined primarily as a plurality of styles that breaks down the concept of the autonomous work of art, Robinson's postmodernism is a metaphor for the culture of the colony, however, in the sense that it is without personality or foundation, and excluded from the purer fixed practices of German modernism, which Drew had previously iconicized as authentically indigenous to Europe. Robinson accentuates the colonial status of his postmodernism by suggesting that Weill was searching for "hybrid" forms of music theater (p. 229), adopting a term from the natural sciences that became associated with interracial fertility in the nineteenth century and that is used repeatedly in colonialist discourse to "signal a threat of 'contamination' by those who espouse an essentialist notion of pure and authentic origins."<sup>2</sup> By mixing styles and quoting liberally from varied musical sources, Robinson's Weill not only went against what Drew had earlier described as the "culturally approved hegemony of any one idiom" (approved by which culture, one wants to ask), but also the "Austro-German ideals" of both Pfitzner and Schoenberg (1980, p. 303), thereby, in a sense, becoming musically stateless. Weill had been attracted to "stylistic diversity," "a multiplicity of idioms," and the "radically pluralistic" (p. 223) even as a young man—and in this sense, for Drew and Robinson, had always acted like a colonized subject.

They accentuate Weill's resulting lack of agency by describing him erroneously as having been "expelled from Germany at the height of his powers" (p. 226), thereby ignoring the anxious and unsure circumstances most German Jews faced after 1933 (when very few were actually "expelled" and when it was not at all clear what would eventually happen). In contrast to what Drew and Robinson imply, Weill did have to make choices about whether to

stay in Germany or France, and he also did ultimately choose to remain in the United States. Rather than give Weill this capacity for mature, rational choice, however, they persist in following a colonialist binary logic that requires that Weill remain true to one culture or another.

In light of our present-day insight into twentieth-century colonial struggle, national identity, music and Jewish history, the 2001 *New Grove* article by Drew and Robinson appears anachronistic. In the context of Weill research, it is a travesty. Most tragically, it gives the impression that Drew, Weill's most indefatigable postwar champion (to use Hinton's formulation, p. 1127), no longer cares. If he did, he would not have left his 1980 formulations unreformed, but would discuss Weill's theater pieces as performed events in history, abandoning his prejudices about their worthiness. The 2001 *New Grove* teaches us that it is time to stop seeking a "final verdict" (Drew, 1980, p. 302) on Weill altogether and to start asking why we have been so motivated by questions of reputation in the first place. In writing dictionary entries, we could follow the critical research model established by Stephen Hinton, and take advantage of the wealth of perspectives provided by David Farneth, Elmar Juchem, and Dave Stein in *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents*, which opens up multiple venues for interpretation of Weill's identity by providing a wide array of original and not always ideologically unified documents in chronological order. We could try to describe all of Weill's works within their individual historical contexts, without seeking to elevate one culture above another. And we could consider the dialogue between cultures that took place in Weill's life and its consequences for his art. Whatever we do, we will do well to avoid *The New Grove's* persistent colonialist pitfall of trying to put Kurt Weill in his place.

## Notes

1. See Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 9.
2. Annie E. Coombes and Avtar Brah, "Introduction: the Conundrum of 'Mixing'", in: *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

## Street Scene Pioneers

When *Street Scene* closed fifty-five years ago on Broadway, roughly 200,000 people had seen Weill's quintessential "American opera" on stage. As Weill himself pointed out, this was an impressive record for an opera. Even though Broadway hasn't seen a revival of the opera yet, many more people have had a chance to see the work in opera houses, where it has found a niche on both sides of the Atlantic. In fact, these niches seem to have grown into healthy-sized biotopes, generating an increasing number of productions.

There is a beginning to this development and it can be neatly traced to two distinct points of origin, Dusseldorf, 26 November

1955, and New York City, 2 April 1959: the European premiere and the first performance at the New York City Opera. Two men who were closely associated with these crucial productions have recreated their original roles this year, almost half a century after their first "performances." Julius Rudel, long-time director of the New York City Opera, conducted *Street Scene* at this year's Aspen Music Festival, and Horst Koegler, the eminent German music critic who engaged T. W. Adorno in a now famous argument about *Street Scene* (reprinted in this Newsletter, vol. 13, no. 1), reviewed a new production of the work at the Stadttheater Aachen. We have invited both men to consider a few questions.



### New York City Opera 1959 – Aspen Festival 2002

#### An Interview with Julius Rudel

*Forty-three years after conducting Street Scene at the New York City Opera, what impression does the piece leave today?*

It was refreshing, it was nice. It became clear how strong the piece is, how much it stands up, over time. It has a wonderful variety of things from operatic *scena ed aria* to the "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed" "dirty dancing." It's a well-constructed piece and the audience was very much enthralled by it. Aspen is a peculiar place, because the old people go to the concerts and the young people make the concerts. That's of course a simplification; the audience mainly consisted of older people, but the young people were interested in it, too.

*Are today's conductors, singers, and directors better equipped to meet the demands of the work?*

It's very funny that you ask that. One of the most unexpected hurdles was that the young people who played in the orchestra had no

idea of the style, none. I'm talking about the pop pieces, "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed," "Wouldn't You Like to Be on Broadway?," and things like that. They were okay on the straight, square things, even on "Wrapped in a Ribbon," but when it came to the easygoing, show-tune-type things they were lost. The drum part, for example, says "ad lib." because any Broadway drummer would know what to do, but younger generations need to be coached. It took me a long, long time to get it right with them. Even with those players who claimed to play jazz. I couldn't quite believe it. It took a lot of humming and whistling and blowing and singing on my part to make them understand. I guess most kids have very little exposure to this style. When I say kids, I mean young people between the age of eighteen and twenty-five. Beethoven, yes—but not this kind of music. I found it astonishing. Part of it was also that the orchestra looked down their nose at the "Broadway stuff"; there was perhaps a certain resistance at first. In terms of popular music, they may be more familiar with the current pop music that's being played on the radio. The singers, on the other hand, were quite flexible and receptive. The directing style was realistic, as it was back in 1959. I don't think the piece lends itself to another style, but never ever underestimate the imagination of a good stage director.

*And critics?*

They liked it then, and they seem to like it now. I remember Howard Taubman had to pontificate a little bit, of course. Another critic called the work a "*West Side Story* for parents."

*How did the "cultural climate" change between now and then?*

The situation hasn't changed. We still have an uneven society with lower income classes, so that is not so far apart from those days, and the essential human condition, our experiences and problems, hasn't changed. The piece is certainly closer to a contemporary audience than *Turandot*.

*Assuming that Street Scene were to be given abroad, should it be presented in translation rather than in its original language?*

Definitely in translation. Historically, I go back to 1956 when I did *Kiss Me, Kate* in Vienna at the opera house (it was my return to Vienna). It was a wonderful translation and I wouldn't have dreamed of doing it any other way. Although audiences in Europe clearly understand at least some English, but perhaps not enough to get the subtleties.

*Is the work equally at home in opera houses and on Broadway?*

I saw *Street Scene* shortly after it opened in New York. Polyna Stoska, the original Mrs. Maurrant, was from our company, the City Opera, and I also knew Norman Cordon. Then I got to know *Street Scene* through the published vocal score. I had clear sympathies for this kind of opera, and we did it as part of the American Opera seasons, a project to show that there are operas written by Americans that had viability, that were appreciated and enjoyed. Each season lasted three weeks, and we presented ten works. I knew that *Street Scene* was referred to as an opera, and Weill did, too. Menotti, on the other hand, shied away from the name “opera” because he thought the label was considered “death.” For the bigger house, we increased the number of players but didn’t touch the orchestration. As a matter of fact, it’s very much an operatic instrumentation. In spite of numbers like “Moon-Faced” there are no saxes; it’s strictly woodwinds, so-called “legitimate” ones. It’s nice that the piece found its way into opera houses, where it’s revived and can be seen, rather than drying up and disappearing after one run on Broadway.

*“Seventy-five years from now, Street Scene will be remembered as my major work.” What comes to mind when you think about this comment of Weill’s?*

Well, you know, it’s the same thing with Mahler; he’s certainly appreciated now. *Street Scene* is a very strong piece, but it may have been a remark made off the cuff. But who knows?

## Dusseldorf 1955 – Aachen 2002

### An Interview with Horst Koegler

*Forty-seven years after you first reviewed Street Scene in Dusseldorf, what impression does the piece leave today?*

I see it as one of the two great classics of American music theater—the other one is, of course, Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*.

*Are today’s conductors, singers, and directors better equipped to meet the demands of the work?*

That’s certainly the case in Germany. For one thing, people here working in the music theater have a general gain in experience and are ambitiously aiming for a higher standard of performance skills. In addition, training programs have been established for modern forms of music theater, and these programs go beyond traditional opera and operetta singing, focusing on an all-encompassing theatrical education.

*And critics?*

I’m afraid not! The oldest generation of influential critics—and few of this species remain—still cultivate their prejudices, championing the European Weill and condemning the American Weill corrupted by Broadway. Today, they do this in a more nuanced manner than they did in 1955—with a softened touch, so to speak, if only for reasons of political correctness. The next generation still bears the stamp of the devastating verdict of T. W. Adorno in his infamous obituary. Despite several new studies on Weill and the open-mindedness of a few young European musicologists, the general critical perception of the American Weill remains unchanged. This is in

puzzling contrast to the very positive audience response that the American works receive with each new staging in Germany. Sad, but true!

*How did the “cultural climate” change between then and now?*

It shifted from a general openness towards genuinely American imports in all art forms to a more critical but not necessarily negative approach, in favor of an increased interest in non-Western products from “third-world” countries and from the Middle and Far East. The German critical intelligentsia has developed a full-blown hostility in reaction to cloned musicals in the manner of Andrew Lloyd Webber, and the bankruptcies of specially built venues for musicals are greeted with a certain satisfaction.

*When Street Scene is performed in Germany, should it be presented in translation rather than in its original language?*

I’m fully convinced that in Germany’s theatrical landscape, with its broad base of German-speaking subscribers, foreign-language works should generally be given in translation—that also goes for opera, for Mozart, Rossini, Verdi, and Puccini. I’d make exceptions for the opera houses with international credentials. In Germany these are Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden, and Munich (I would even be inclined to doubt that Cologne, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, and Stuttgart could be included in this list). Those houses can cultivate their ambitions for original-language productions—but should include German supertitles by all means. The situation is a bit different when it comes to musicals. Here I prefer German dialogue and original-language lyrics, since the audience has gotten used to these because of the worldwide distribution of pop music.

*“Seventy-five years from now, Street Scene will be remembered as my major work.” What comes to mind when you think about this comment of Weill’s?*

That Weill erred—no matter whether he made that remark when *Street Scene* premiered in 1947 or shortly before his death in 1950. Now more than half a century has passed, but from a European perspective Weill still operates under the name of *Dreigroschenoper* and *Mahagonny*—*Street Scene*? What’s that again?



continued from p. 3

**Esbjörn Nyström** (University of Göteborg, Sweden)

This dissertation in German Literature deals with the textual history of the opera libretto *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. All available sources, printed material, manuscripts, and typescripts that contain full or partial versions of the text will be thoroughly described. The relations of the different text versions will be shown in a diagram (*stemma*). An additional point of interest is the interpolation of some of Brecht's earlier poems into the libretto.

A "diachronic interpretation" of the libretto is given, partly through case studies of specific scenes or parts of the libretto, partly through comprehensive studies of certain aspects, such as the influence of Weill's composition on the literary text, the strategies for interpolating older material, and changes in the overall dramaturgical conception. The theoretical and methodical basis is Germanist editorial theory, theories of intertextuality, and genre theory of the opera libretto. The dissertation will be completed in 2003. Research visits have been made to the Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, Berlin, and Weill repositories in the U.S. (University of Rochester, Yale University, and the Weill-Lenya Research Center) and some other minor archives.

**Heidi Owen** (University of Rochester, USA)

The term "Broadway opera" is most often associated with Kurt Weill, who used it to describe his 1947 opera *Street Scene*. Yet Weill's musical tragedy was produced during a twenty-five year period when a number of composers and producers endeavored to create a place for serious musical dramas within Broadway's commercial system. Heidi Owen's musicology dissertation, "Broadway Opera and Opera on Broadway: 1934–1958," explores this phenomenon, covering at least fourteen works, from Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* and to Gian Carlo Menotti's *Maria Golovin*. Works like Weill's *Lost in the Stars*, which placed a greater emphasis on music or aimed for a more serious tone than the standard Broadway musical, but whose status as "opera" is less clear, provide a context for the central discussion.

Chapters will examine the circumstances that surrounded the

creation and reception of Broadway operas like *Street Scene* and Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* (1949)—the dissertation's central case study—including: 1) the political, social, economic, and cultural environment that supported these works; 2) the place of Broadway opera within the history of American opera and popular musical theater; and 3) the relationship between generic boundaries and cultural hierarchies in defining "Broadway opera."

Owen's research has taken her to the Weill-Lenya Research Center, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the Museum of the City of New York, and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Future trips are planned to the Library of Congress, the Yale University Music Library, and the Harry Ransom Center in Austin.

**Ricarda Wackers** (University of Saarbrücken, Germany)

T.W. Adorno once labeled Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* the "first surrealist opera." Ever since, the term has circulated through the secondary literature. On the other hand, another Weill opera is also generally considered "surrealist": *Royal Palace*, with a libretto by the French-German writer Yvan Goll, first performed in 1927. The term "surrealist" may very well fit this work, particularly the libretto, if used in the special sense that Goll gave it rather than in André Breton's. But it is often used unreflectively and only in the broadest sense of the term—that is, "absurd" or "incomprehensible."

The goal of the dissertation is to examine this view of *Royal Palace* (and *Der neue Orpheus*) closely and correct it where necessary. In order to do justice to the collaboration between a writer and a composer, the study is designed to be interdisciplinary, with roughly equal attention to literary and musical aspects. In the course of the analyses the two strands merge, allowing a nuanced view of the works which sheds new light on both Weill and Goll. Archival research for this project was conducted at the Médiathèque Municipale de Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, various archives in Berlin and Leipzig, the Weill-Lenya Research Center, and the Library of Congress.

Set design for the first performance of Weill's *Royal Palace*, Berlin, 1927, by P. Aravantinos.



## Books

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### *Kurt Weill on Stage: From Berlin to Broadway*

Foster Hirsch

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. 403 pp.  
ISBN: 0-375-40375-2

Books about Kurt Weill tend to fall into one of two categories. Classically trained musicians, musicologists, and music historians emphasize Weill's European years, his pre-World War I upbringing, his studies with Busoni, his collaborations with major German poet-playwrights, his politically and aesthetically challenging approaches to opera, symphony, ballet, and song forms. For these writers, Weill's American years always have the quality of a letdown; even their struggles to show that the larger Broadway works make "operatic" sense tend to have a slightly defensive tone. The alternative breed of writer on Weill comes to him from an interest in theater or in popular music. With these writers, it's Europe that gets glossed over. Apart from the character of Brecht and the Berlin successes of *Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*, the first half of Weill's career is only a set of empty cue words on the path to the composer's Broadway triumphs and his posthumous adoption as a pop-rock icon. For this latter group, Georg Kaiser and Otto Klemperer are merely busy-work for the fact checkers; Ira Gershwin and Mary Martin are guiding stars.

Foster Hirsch, author of *Kurt Weill on Stage*, comes unashamedly from the second category. A writer on film and theater whose last book was an excellent biography of the Shubert brothers titled *The Boys from Syracuse*, he knows and openly adores old-style musical comedy. The all-too-familiar subtitle of his book, "From Berlin to Broadway," immediately conveys his view of the arc of Kurt Weill's career. Fortunately, Hirsch has virtues that are uncommon in his mode of journalistic biography. His love for his subject is that of a serious-minded aficionado, not a blithering fan. Concerned to understand Weill's work as a whole, he keeps an open mind when crossing the spiritual Berlin Wall that so many have helped to erect between Weill's Broadway musicals and his German operas.

In addition, though unscholarly (at times even slapdash), Hirsch is an astonishingly thorough researcher in the materials that interest him. His work, as its title implies, is meant to chronicle the stage history of Weill's compositions, but the dry documentary evidence from which theater historians usually reconstruct such events has only limited appeal for Hirsch—all the more since he has to come at the German texts secondhand, through translation. Instead, his fascination is with the personal and the visual. The guiding stars of his volume are neither Klemperer and Carola Neher nor Kazan and Gertrude Lawrence, but personal interviews and photographs (though he is almost equally happy with intimate letters and memoirs). The book is less a biography than a banquet of testimonies to Weill's effect on those he knew.

The result, if you already know a good deal about Weill, is a mixed blessing, but a blessing nonetheless. You may, like me, find Hirsch's overall narrative familiar, and many of his specific assertions dubious; his writing is full of tiny inaccuracies and imprecisions

of detail. At the same time, the more you think you know about Weill, the more you are likely to stumble over genuine surprises, straight from the mouths of those who were there. In addition to the eyewitnesses Hirsch was able to interview himself, he has rescued from the archives a series of interviews taped by the music critic Alan Rich for a radio series on Weill in the late 1970s, plus summaries of several interviews made in the mid-1950s for a projected Weill biography by Lenya's second husband, George Davis. Like other recent scholars, he has had access to Weill's letters to his parents and his publishers (of which the Weill Foundation is helping to prepare an edition), as well as to many of those Weill received from his various collaborators. What Hirsch omits or confuses in terms of hard fact, he makes up for by unerringly choosing voices that evoke the spirit of a given moment more strongly than cold data ever could.

His astute assiduity extends to the numerous photographs with which the book is salted. Two large tomes from Overlook Press (*Lenya the Legend* and *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents*) have already given Weill his share of space on intellectual coffee tables, but you may wish that Hirsch, whose visual sense far outpaces his verbal clarity, had junked his narrative and instead produced a volume of interview excerpts and images—he has so many fresh ones to offer. From the enchanting photo of Weill with the two Angèles on the set of *Der Zar's* first production, to the shot of Paula Laurence and the women's chorus singing the title song of *One Touch of Venus* (perfectly illustrating nearby grumbles from S. J. Perelman about the show's tacky costume designs), the volume is a feast for the eye-minded.

There are of course dangers in relying on what people say, especially long after the fact. Memories fade, or get tailored to suit the recollector's pleasure; interviewers may mishear, mistranscribe, or misinterpret. Hirsch also engages, troublingly, in a kind of second-hand musicological analysis—the composer Herschel Garfein is thanked for his assistance in this area—that makes his narrative voice veer wildly between the authoritative and the superficial. (He would have done better to let Garfein, like the eyewitnesses, speak for himself.)

But the complaint is partly a captious one. Though I wish Hirsch had created a book containing only the freshest and most informative elements of this one, the half a loaf he proffers is baked of such tasty ingredients that you gladly brush away the surrounding sawdust. There is no danger of anyone being permanently misled about Weill by Hirsch's work: His evenhandedness and his focus on highly individual voices have seen to that. Readers well up on Weill will find many new sidelights; those who know nothing of him will get a lively overall impression. And the intelligent in that latter group, stimulated by Hirsch's vivid picture, will be too busy exploring further to adopt any of his minor misapprehensions.

Michael Feingold  
New York City

## Books

### *Somewhere for Me: A Biography of Richard Rodgers*

Meryle Secrest

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. 457 pp.

ISBN: 0-375-40164-4

### *The Richard Rodgers Reader*

Edited by Geoffrey Block

New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. 356 pp.

ISBN: 0-19-513954-2

In the film *Words and Music*, “an all-star musical extravaganza based on the careers of Rodgers and Hart,” Mickey Rooney plays a desperate, high-strung Lorenz Hart (his homosexuality goes unmentioned), who is juxtaposed with Tom Drake (Rodgers) and Janet Leigh (Dorothy Rodgers), a couple without qualities: eternally young, flawless in body and mind, and incredibly boring. When the film opened in 1948, Rodgers and his second partner, Oscar Hammerstein II, were already well on their way to becoming an institution and therefore objects of idealization. In her preface to a new (1995) edition of Rodgers’ autobiography, *Musical Stages*, his oldest daughter Mary revises her father’s public image, which was heavily influenced by his music: “There’s a kind of marvelous, rich, emotional quality to what my father wrote that didn’t often manifest itself in his personality. . . . When you come right down to it, my father was an extremely complicated man and deeply unhappy much of the time” (p. vii). Thus she indicates the fundamental biographical difficulty of relating “life” and “work.” Because artistic output and the creative person behind it are not the same, creators of the most beautiful art often appear rather unpleasant in real life (as Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy).

In his 1998 biography, William G. Hyland discreetly touches on Rodgers’ problematic personality, but the overall thrust of his matter-of-fact book is a description of his artistic career. Not so Meryle Secrest. In *Somewhere for Me*, she depicts Richard Rodgers the human being. Her main biographical interest is “a subject’s secret life, his struggles, his dreams, disappointments, loves and hates. . . . a true story that no one knows” (p. xi). The book’s title and most of the chapter headings are taken from lyrics and employed suggestively. Thus the chapter “Little Girl Blue” contains a long passage with childhood memories of Rodgers’ two daughters. According to Secrest, the daughters suggested this new biography, and their memories, complemented by reports from other family members, made their way into the book. Archival material such as letters and scrapbooks served as additional sources. Dorothy Rodgers, the composer’s wife for over fifty years, receives ample attention. For those passages Secrest used writings and oral history material which Dorothy Rodgers had left behind.

Based on these sources, Secrest places the complicated relationships in Rodgers’ life—with his wife, his daughters, and Lorenz Hart—the discontinuities, and contradictions in the center of her portrait. She depicts a clever, amusing, and sharp-witted man who at the same time could be austere and distant. Hidden behind a disciplined and controlled surface is a delicate and emotional personality, a man who, plagued by anxieties and phobias, draws his ener-

gy from constant work for the musical theater. As an experienced biographer, Secrest treats her subject with sympathy, empathy, and respect. At times she crosses the line into sensationalism, but the book avoids an atmosphere of gossip and ridiculous suggestions which made Joan Peyser’s George Gershwin biography (1993) so off-putting.

*Somewhere for Me* is a popular biography geared toward the aficionado, not the scholar. Musical matters are merely touched upon, and Secrest mostly relies on secondary literature. When dealing with Rodgers’ musicals, she doesn’t go beyond the well-known; instead, she falls back on anecdotes or memories (i.e., quotations from memoirs) from people involved in the productions. The representation of relations between life and work, especially difficult in the realm of popular art, is inadequate. For instance, Secrest comments on the song “Blue Room”: “. . . the depth of the feeling, its direct, unguarded quality, was a demonstration, if such was needed, that the emotions Rodgers had learned to hide during his stoical childhood had found their logical outlet” (p. 78). This is too banal to be convincing.

Kurt Weill and Richard Rodgers may have had more in common than they would have cared to admit. Both liked to experiment, both tried to tighten the elements of a musical in their Broadway works, both used the Broadway musical as a basis for development of a new art form which made both composers think in terms of American opera (Rodgers, however, did not see himself as a serious composer). The fact that Weill saw Rodgers as a rival who had to be defeated is documented in a letter from Weill to Lenya. Rodgers, on the other hand, seems to have ignored Weill altogether. In his 1961 essay, “Opera and Broadway,” Rodgers expressed his belief that the musical had achieved the level of art by means of more serious themes and complex forms, and could call itself “without apology or self-consciousness American opera.” Strangely, he lists Weill’s *Knickerbocker Holiday* and *Lady in the Dark* as examples of musicals with “unusual themes”; *Street Scene*, however, the obvious Weill work for such a list, goes unmentioned.

This most revealing essay is reprinted in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*. Editor Geoffrey Block has assembled a number of different texts, such as excerpts from biographies of Rodgers or autobiographies of his collaborators, reviews, press clippings, letters, and excerpts from historical and analytical works. Some of the texts which Secrest cites in her biography are printed here in full. Block groups his material chronologically according to creative periods: “Rodgers and Hart, 1919–1943”; “Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943–1960”; “Rodgers after Hammerstein, 1960–1979.” A fourth section follows, “The Composer Speaks,” containing texts by Rodgers from the years 1939–1971. This section ends with a highlight: thirty pages of “Reminiscences of Richard Rodgers.” These excerpts from interviews with Rodgers in the years 1967–68 appear here for the first time in print. Within the individual sections, Block arranges the material according to themes (his criteria are explained in the Introduction). He further tightens the connections with knowledgeable introductions to each section, in which he summarizes the most important aspects of various texts and provides additional information, for instance about possible models in classical music of the “Bali Ha’i” motif (p. 163). Both the arrangement of the documents and the commentary provide a multifaceted picture of Rodgers, his work, and his times, without ever seeming arbitrary.

## Books

### *Jazz and the Germans: Essays on the Influence of “Hot” American Idioms on 20th-Century German Music*

Edited by Michael J. Budds

Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002. 213 pp.  
ISBN: 1-57647-072-5

“More recently,” Frank Tirro informs us in the volume under review, “there has been a groundswell of research on ragtime, hot dance music, and early jazz in Germany.” And so there has: Bernd Hoffmann has sifted through Germany’s radio guides for every jazz item broadcast during the twenties; Heribert Schröder has leafed through every issue of *Der Artist*, Weimar Germany’s trade journal for dance musicians, to produce a definition of early German jazz; Hansfried Sieben has unearthed and published countless early record catalogues, allowing us to trace the growth and output of the German recording industry; the tireless Rainer E. Lotz has edited the memoirs of an American jazz musician who took part in no fewer than 17,000 German studio recordings between 1924 and 1939; and Klaus Krüger’s *Fox auf 78*, a magazine for fans of German inter-war dance music, has been publishing microscopically detailed bio-discographies of Germany’s early dance-band musicians for sixteen years. These studies, mainly the work of fastidious amateur scholars, have provided a firmer basis than ever before for writing a reception history of Germany’s “Jazz Age.”

Unhappily, none of this material is reflected in Michael J. Budds’s volume, a collection of papers delivered at a conference in 1995. Instead, we are too often referred to Horst Lange (*Jazz in Deutschland: Die deutsche Jazz-Chronik 1900-1960*, 1966), Albrecht Dümmling (“Symbol des Fortschritts, der Dekadenz und der Unterdrückung,” 1977), Chris Goddard (*Jazz Away from Home*, 1979), and Susan C. Cook (*Opera for a New Republic*, 1988). These secondary sources, as estimable as they were in their day, are no longer at the cutting edge of the field and, if read uncritically, can only propagate misconceptions. It is dispiriting to be informed yet again that the recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band were widely available in Germany from 1923, when in fact a close reading of their catalogue numbers reveals that all but one were pressed after World War II. Must we really be told that Armstrong’s Hot Fives and Hot Sevens were influential in spreading jazz throughout Germany when in fact, of 12,500 jazz titles broadcast in the Weimar Republic, not one was by Armstrong? Too often one has the feeling that the authors are valiantly hacking away at dense undergrowth when smooth roads are available a few steps away.

Yet there are gems to be discovered. Alan Lareau, in an impressively researched essay, is surely right to situate Krenek’s *Jonny spielt auf* in the world of German cabaret and musical revue rather than puzzling over the nonexistence of direct American influences. Exploring early sheet music, shellac recordings, manuscripts, and contemporary iconography, Lareau uncovers a wealth of interesting ties between Krenek’s *Jonny* and Germany’s popular song industry and *variété*. Even if his reinterpretation of the opera as a critical

exposé of jazz culture ultimately fails to convince, this article alone is worth the price of the volume. Kathryn Smith Bowers offers an affectionate eulogy to the composer-educator Mátyás Seiber, head of the world’s first jazz department at an institute of higher education (the Hoch’sche Konservatorium in Frankfurt). Although the information on Seiber’s brief but fascinating German career is fairly well known, she devotes ample space to his writings and compositions to present, for the first time, a fully rounded portrait. All that is missing, perhaps, is a recognition that Seiber never understood the nature of triplet swing and tried quixotically to explain it in terms of dizzyingly complex layers of duple-meter subdivisions. (Small wonder that he ultimately threw up his hands and turned to Balkan polymeters.) David Snowball brilliantly summarizes the reasoning and historical background behind the Nazis’ preoccupation with music, offering many eye-opening facts in the process (although overlooking Hitler’s obsession with his favorite composer, Bruckner). But the article comes to an end too soon to tie in persuasively with the subject of jazz. One would not know, from reading his article, that German culture underwent a “swing craze” in the late 1930s (it was then that most of Armstrong’s Hot Fives and Hot Sevens were released in Germany) or that improvised Dixieland jazz, as opposed to commercial swing music, became a vehicle of antifascist protest during the Third Reich—a story movingly retold in the memoirs of the concentration camp inmate Günter Dischler.

Weill’s *Royal Palace* is singled out for special attention in this volume. However, Dane Heuchemer’s study relies too heavily on secondary sources (Drew, Cook, and Sanders) to offer an independent view of this enigmatic piece. He misses the fact that tango rhythms accompany the heroine from her first appearance, overlooks Weill’s use of a klaxon horn (a quintessential jazz instrument in Weimar Germany), and misunderstands the symbolic nature of the tango, which, proscribed by the Vatican in 1917, was not “degrading” but emblematic of eroticism *per se* for composers of the twenties. When the varied reiteration of the heroine’s name is referred to as a “muddle” rather than an incantatory backdrop to her final deification, we realize that the author is out of sympathy with surrealism.

Rounding out the volume are a pair of interesting memoirs from trumpeter Carlo Bohländer and composer Heinz Werner Zimmermann, both representing German jazz in the second half of the century, a subject which is otherwise, despite the volume’s title, barely discussed. Yet the editor is right to focus the material on the inter-war years, when jazz was a dominant issue in German culture rather than a coloristic adjunct. One only wishes for signs of a stronger editorial hand: when we see *Neue Sachlichkeit* translated as “New Practicality,” the words “brummt ein Niggerchor” taken as evidence of social protest (with *brummt* rendered as “groans” instead of “drones”), Weill calling for a strange instrument labeled a *Histrommel* [recte: *Holztrommel* (wood block)], and a certain Viennese publishing house identified as Universal Editions, we know we are in for trouble.

J. Bradford Robinson  
Hoya, Germany

## Performances

### *Street Scene*

#### *Aspen Music Festival*

13–17 August 2002

Stanley Green in *Broadway Musicals Show By Show* (Hal Leonard Books, 1985) describes *Street Scene* as “the most operatic of all the Broadway productions with music by Kurt Weill, . . . something of a white Northern counterpart to *Porgy and Bess*.” Subtitled “An American Opera” but initially aimed at a Broadway audience, the show was the one Weill seems to have been most proud of—a work of quality that he felt would ultimately gain mass appeal. In the short run, he was perhaps overly optimistic. Even with its vernacular elements and self-conscious and colorful ethnic diversity, *Street Scene* comprises more than the normal dose of sober reality for a Broadway show, not to mention political commentary, a certain amount of incongruously heavy music matched to some light lyrics, an oppressive setting in a working class New York neighborhood, and a finale that ends nearly half an hour after the death of the tragic prima donna.

Such realism had been fashionable for awhile in Depression-era New York, but the wartime optimism and sentimentality of *Oklahoma!* or its post-war variant in *Brigadoon* (which opened only weeks after *Street Scene*) is largely absent from this show. It was only to be expected—with an unfulfilled love interest and such profuse display of orchestral and vocal detail—that the piece, while well-made, would be unlikely to outlast less profound and more fawning vehicles. While it enjoyed fewer performances (only 148 in its initial production) than either *Lady in the Dark* or *One Touch of Venus*, its staying power has been more and more demonstrated over the years. *Street Scene* won a place in the New York City Opera repertory in 1959, and it has been revived fairly often by college and professional companies, both in and outside the U.S.

The Aspen Music Festival’s powerful production fully demonstrated the operatic scope and dramatic depth so characteristic of Weill’s work at its best. The impeccable orchestration, brilliantly realized under the

Daniel Buchanan (Samuel Lowry) sings “When a Woman Has a Baby.”  
Photo: Alex Irvin



practiced baton of Julius Rudel, drove the entire performance, and the student singers’ achievements were impressive indeed. Anna Maurant was movingly presented by Yali-Marie Williams, who possesses a rich, honeyed voice and creates an effective dramatic presence. Her first-act aria, which serves as something of a leading theme for the whole show (“Somehow I Never Could Believe,” reprised with different words by Sam Kaplan in the second act) was up to the highest professional standards. Frank Maurant was also feelingly performed by Randall Levin. The darkness inherent in Elmer Rice’s characterization of Frank, enhanced by Weill’s bass vocal writing, is easy to overplay. But restraint on Levin’s part and excellent stage direction from Edward Berkeley yielded a rounded and sympathetic portrayal, which added precisely the right amount of pathos to the finale, when the wounded Frank is hauled off to jail as he bids good-bye to his daughter.

Most of the supporting roles were handled with aplomb by the youthful cast. There were relatively few weak spots. Polished musical and dramatic characterizations were submitted by the trio of gossip wives (played by Jessica Medoff as Mrs. Fiorentino, Marsha L. Miller as Mrs. Olsen, and Katherine Calcamuggio as the especially waspish Mrs. Jones). A triumphant Ice Cream Sextet, led by Rolando-Michael Sanz as Lippo Fiorentino, was a highlight of the first act. The idealistic young couple Rose (Alison Trainer) and Sam (Andrew Lepri Meyer) were well-matched and consistently lent dramatic strength to the production. Trainer’s voice is sweet and supple, but unfortunately at times both she and Meyer were covered by the orchestra. Meyer also appeared to be somewhat stiff (first-night jitters or overplayed callowness?, it wasn’t quite clear which). His somewhat strained

tenor, it can be hoped, will mellow with age and experience.

*Street Scene*, as much as any work of its time, seems to call for discussion of its disparate parts: Puccinian harmonies, Wagnerian climaxes, spoken dialogue, sung narrative, inserted bits of Broadway via the blues, catchy upbeat tunes like “Wrapped in a Ribbon,” and a jitterbug number. This cast, not surprisingly given its background, seemed to be most comfortable with the full-fledged operatic segments. Henry Davis’s (James Turner) blues, “I Got a Marble and a Star,” was a bit shaky. The snappy song-and-dance duet, “Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed,” never quite got over the footlights. This number could have been a showstopper, but was disappointingly underchoreographed, lacking in vigor and precision.

Excellent character work was turned in by expectant father Daniel Buchanan (Samuel Lowry), the catty nursemaids played by Hanan Alattar and Abby Powell, Officer Murphy (Randall Scarlata), Jennie Hildebrand (Kerry Hart), Mr. Jones (Corey Crider), Harry Easter (Matthew Hayward), and the band of children led by Ben Landmesser as Willie Maurant. The ensembles and choruses were never less than superb, and the stage movement was handled with great skill on the impressively detailed set designed by John Kasarda.

Such a high level of execution demonstrates the nobility and emotional scope of Rice, Hughes and Weill’s work. The audience left fully convinced that this piece will survive and flourish, if it is regularly treated with the same respect, thoughtfulness, and dedication as was shown by these Aspen artists. I loved this production.

Thomas L. Riis  
University of Colorado at Boulder



## Performances

### Street Scene

#### Theater Aachen

Premiere: 28 September 2002  
(18 performances)

Eight years after Houston-Ludwigshafen-Berlin's glorious co-production, the new staging of *Street Scene* in Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) marked a return to German *Stadttheater* normality. Opening the 2002–03 season at the Municipal Theater, it was clamorously received by the local first-nighters, with almost every single number applauded while final ovations went on for a quarter of an hour. If there had been an applause-meter, its two peaks would have registered after Stefanie Verkerk's and Andreas Joost's tempestuous "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed" romp, choreographed by Martin Schurr, and in the second act after the grotesquely overdone "Lullaby" ("Sleep, baby, sleep . . ."), performed by Marlene Wick and Petra Weltroth in bloodthirsty cabaret style.

To a seasoned *Street Scene* watcher like myself (I go back to the European premiere in Dusseldorf in 1955), the Aachen production came as a timely reminder of the incredible fecundity of Weill's unique score, so melodiously enticing, so rhythmically gripping, so tightly constructed and so delicately orchestrated—in fact throughout its two-and-a-half-hour duration so intoxicating with its élan vital, that it cost me considerable restraint to sit still

in my tightly corseted Aachen orchestra seat.

And especially so because Aachen's new *Generalmusikdirektor*, the still youngish Marcus R. Bosch, who was unknown to me and who made his local debut on this occasion, kept the performance sizzling with unrelenting high-octane energy. How lovingly he chiseled Weill's instrumental flights of fancy, how dreamily he evoked the various moodscapes of the score (so reminiscent of Mahler in their nocturnal excursions), how avalanchingly he built the big ensembles. And if he did not always avoid overwhelming the singers on the stage with the volume of his energized musicians in the pit, he could be easily forgiven for the galvanizing power he injected into the performance. I wish I could have stayed for his first subscription concert a couple of days later, for which he paired Weill's *Die sieben Todsünden* (featuring Anna Maria Kaufmann from Munich—one of our brightest hopes among up-and-coming sopranos) with Mahler's 1st Symphony. Bosch is definitely a conductor to watch!

I cannot say the same for Bruno Klimek, the director, whose production communicated little of the work's particular New York flavor. Maybe that had to do with *Street Scene* being given entirely in the workable German translation by Lys Symonette. While I am generally in favor of performances in German theaters (addressing German middle-class subscription audiences) given in German, I must admit that in this particular case, with its constant shifts between spoken dialogue and sung numbers, the result was a flattening out of all the work's enlivening range of vernacular idioms. Klimek's only device for suggesting the sultry heat was to have the actors fan themselves and wipe their necks

with handkerchiefs through the whole show. Otherwise he seemed content to arrange decorative groups, while the singers merely faced the audience and performed their songs, hardly moving from their spots. There was no attempt to flesh out individual characters or to distinguish them from one another, even in

the case of ethnic types like the Kaplans or Lippo Fiorentino. Just the usual clichés, with the singers and the choristers (nicely coached by Bernhard Moncado) never hiding their operatic upbringing. Thomas Armster's set looked like a barren rooftop among Manhattan skyscrapers; all entrances had to be made via staircases from below. I found the production singularly dispiriting and lame—but the local papers were definitely of a different opinion (and the audience clearly was, too). Perhaps Klimek should be granted a scholarship to study under Francesca Zambello as her production assistant.

Aachen handled the huge cast of about three dozen soloists' roles impressively, relying entirely—or so it seemed, for there was not one singer listed as guest—on its local stock. Lisa Graf, otherwise Aachen's much admired *Figaro* countess or *Onegin* Tatyana, contributed an Anna Murrant of lustrous voice and deeply involved projection, with Gavin Taylor as her boor of a husband, a singer of distinctly Heldenbariton character. As their daughter Rose, Gundula Peyer won all our hearts through her crystal-clear soprano outpourings—her duet with Michel Ende's sympathetic Sam Kaplan, definitely the local audience's favorite tenor (though I cannot really imagine him in the bread-and-butter Italian repertory, for which his voice seems too constrained), became one of the musical highlights of the evening. I recall from previous performances at German theaters comparable to Aachen many instances where the minor characters—Abraham Kaplan (Willy Schnell), Lippo Fiorentino (Ruben Erazo), Henry Davis (Johannes Piorek), Harry Easter (Klaus Reiher) and Steve Sankey (Jan Doroszko)—were portrayed more vividly. But then it is a common observation at our German opera houses that while the ensembles are more and more internationally recruited (with singers from the Far East quickly gaining ground) their performances get more and more globalized, that is, neutralized. That this alarming tendency was nonetheless swept aside in Aachen through the sheer panache of the music says a lot about the high protein content of Weill's prodigious score.

**Horst Koegler**  
Stuttgart



The ensemble swelters. Photo: Frank Heller

#### Upcoming Performances:

3, 14, 26 Nov.; 8, 13, 26 Dec.; 18, 31 Jan.; 9 Feb.

## Performances

### *Die Dreigroschenoper*

Stratford Festival of Canada

18 May – 2 November 2002  
(75 performances)

The production of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Stratford Festival of Canada, directed by Stephen Ouimette, is pedestrian, uninventive, and unfunny. Apart from the satisfying sounds coming from the orchestra pit (under the control of Don Horsburgh), these remarks would suffice to describe the production as a whole, were it not that it provides an instructive example of why so many productions of this work fail dismally to justify its reputation. It is now generally assumed that the reasons are intrinsic to *The Threepenny Opera*, having to do with outdated politics and dotty theory, summed up in the words of one Toronto critic: “Limited appeal is to be expected when Marxism and audience alienation are part of your stock-in-trade.”

Like a run-down house in a once-fashionable but outmoded neighborhood, *The Threepenny Opera* is seen as full of potential, but needing much improvement. The answer at Stratford, and nearly everywhere else, is to subject this unique, messy, biting, cheeky hybrid to a process you could call genrefication. Weill and Brecht’s collaboration is renovated to become more up-market (fulfilling the audience’s expectation raised by high ticket prices), subscribing through the Broadway Clause to the tenets of the genre currently known as “music theater.” Stratford makes the classification clear in its program: along with *My Fair Lady*, *The Threepenny Opera* is a “summer musical.” Any work so genrefied has a number of clearly recognizable semiotic indicators.

The first essential is that the performers be thoroughly body-miked. Not only does this prove that the theater can afford the latest expensive technology, but it allows actors with inadequate or non-existent voices to be heard—deafeningly—by all. Tom McCamus, Stratford’s Macheath, has, I would guess, the natural vocal range for Sarastro and seems to deliver most of his solos two octaves lower than written. This



Polly (Diana Coatsworth), Macheath behind bars (Tom McCamus), and Lucy (Blythe Wilson).

Photo: V. Tony Hauser

makes for some peculiar sounds in ensemble numbers, such as the farewell duet with Polly or the “Tango Ballad.” But because this voice can’t handle Mackie’s operatic tenor outburst in the finale—“gerettet!” (“retrievèd!”)—McCamus lip-syncs to another singer, whose contribution is unashamedly acknowledged in the program. This virtual performance might have been profitably applied to all Macheath’s singing.

Body mikes pose other dangerous temptations for performers. Effects once possible only in an echoing bathroom are suddenly available to all. In the Stratford production few of the performers can resist the temptation to belt out every number as if competing with Barbra Streisand, with the result that Weill’s delicate, considerate orchestrations, created with singing actors in mind, are frequently drowned by the amplified din. The mike is the death of *pianissimo*.

In Blitzstein’s version, used at Stratford, the “Barbara Song” is allocated to Lucy Brown (Blythe Wilson) who for some reason is dressed all in black as a sort of Victorian dominatrix, complete with whip. Wilson begins loudly and with each repeat of the chorus becomes louder still, to climax with Ethel Merman-proportion belting. Here again, we can see further telling “music theater” characteristics in action. As the singing becomes louder, the vibrato (signifying sincerity) becomes more pronounced (the result of strain). First the articulation and then the meaning of the

words is engulfed by noise and wobble, and finally an overpowering but generalized emotion covers all. What seems to matter in the end is that the singer shows through her enormous straining effort how much she is prepared to sacrifice for our sake (we have paid premium prices), by being willing to tear her passions and her vocal cords to tatters. She has, as they say, “made the song her own.” It is about *her*. Not Barbara, but Barbra.

Naturally enough such belting sets up a competitive atmosphere, not least because the audience responds as programmed with loud applause. So for reasons that have nothing to do with meaning, or with the show, everyone in the cast seems to be vociferously angry with everyone else as they strive to establish their authority through volume in the series of “numbers.” The amplification also has consequences for the spoken dialogue, which is generally treated as something that links the musical numbers, a necessary interruption to get on with the plot. Thus, as in *opéra comique*, the spoken words are delivered in the stilted, elevated manner considered appropriate for a musical.

Musicals, of course, must have dancing. Since *The Threepenny Opera* provides few opportunities, Ouimette interpolates them in suitable numbers, such as Peachum’s “Useless Song,” where Peter Donaldson (one of the few to attempt a subtle performance) does a soft-shoe shuffle while the chorus accompanies him with a tap-dance number, manipulating the prop shoes of the beggars. Macheath’s “Ballad of the Easy Life” is “conducted” by many disembodied white gloves, perhaps to distract us from trying to decipher the singer’s incomprehensible words.

Nothing much can be said about the text and its interpretation because “music theater” of this type is clearly about form and not content. Vibrato means sincerity; belting, passion; effort, honesty. Costumes are colorful, sets atmospheric, and music sets the mood. Here and there the subversive potential of *Threepenny Opera* is hinted at, and gets an immediate response. Macheath’s “What is a picklock to stocks and bonds? What is the robbing of a bank to the founding of a bank?” got an enthusiastic round of post-Enron applause. It was the only moment of real meaning which this otherwise vacuous performance might have explored further.

## Music

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### *The Firebrand of Florence*

Kurt Weill Edition, Series I, Volume 18  
 Edited by Joel Galand

New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; Miami: European-American Music Corp., 2002  
 ISBN: 0-913574-62-7

In the spring of 1944, Kurt Weill embarked on a fresh exploration of “the enormous territory” between opera (which in a 1936 article he had declared “completely isolated from drama”) and musical comedy (“a handful of topical events surrounding a group of hit songs,” according to the same article). He had recently completed *One Touch of Venus* (1943, with S. J. Perelman and Ogden Nash), a commercial success as close to the latter type as anything he ever wrote. Now the search drew him toward “my first Broadway Opera,” imagined as “an entirely new combination of first-class writing, music, singing, and acting.” Weill’s hopes for such a blend steered him toward operetta, where drama could be built through long sections of continuous music. Ready to tackle something whose international flavor might appeal outside the United States, he also liked the idea of a story set in the European past. His attraction, however, was not to the sentimental strain of operetta established on Broadway by the likes of Friml and Stothart’s *Rose-Marie* (1924) or Romberg’s *The New Moon* (1928). Rather, its roots lay in the musical plays of Gilbert and Sullivan, and, more directly, of Offenbach. Satire in these older works addressed the social mores of their day. For one Offenbach contemporary, texts by his librettist Meilhac deftly and agreeably captured “the manners and ways, the tics, catchwords and turns of speech of the frivolous and elegant society of the Second Empire and early Third Republic.” The same thing, writes Joel Galand, editor of *The Firebrand of Florence*, “could scarcely be said about the French aristocrats in *The New Moon* (1928).” But Weill began his new project with an awareness of operetta’s capacity for drama, emotional warmth, and topical bite.

The route to the right vehicle proved a bit bumpy. But once the decision was made to adapt Edwin Justus Mayer’s play *The Firebrand* (1924), Weill pronounced himself pleased with his collaborators. Mayer, a journalist turned playwright, struck him as “a first-class writer” as well as “an awfully nice guy—and so talented.” The lyricist, the famous Ira Gershwin, had already worked with Weill on *Lady in the Dark* (1941), a groundbreaking achievement. “He loves to do things that nobody else does,” the composer had learned, and that only he “has the technique” to pull off. As for the producer, Weill in early 1944 was describing his relationship with Max Gordon as “a real love story,” an affinity that “looks like a long marriage,” adding in a letter to Gershwin, “I never want another producer for a show.”

The honeymoon phase ended quickly, however, and geography was partly to blame. From Broadway, Weill and Gordon urged Mayer and Gershwin, both in Hollywood, to relocate to New York until the show was written, but they declined to move. Mayer’s assignment on a film with director Ernst Lubitsch dragged on long

past its original deadline, and Gershwin assumed his characteristic laggard’s pose. (As Galand puts it, Gershwin wrote Weill in March 1944 that he was, “‘in no rush to rush into anything,’ citing correspondence, taxes, dentist appointments, and poker as prior commitments.”) In the end, Weill traveled to Hollywood, where he found his collaborators short on the creative fire that burned in his own belly. On July 20, 1944, after several weeks in California, he wrote Lotte Lenya: “I must say that so far I have done about 95% of the work on the show. Last night again I had a long session with two tired old men, but I was so full of ideas and energy that they just had to come along.” This comment, perhaps exaggerated by frustration at the team’s slow progress toward a looming deadline, points to two key facts. The first is that the composer took an active part in shaping the story he would set to music. The second is the existence of the comment itself. When Weill made his temporary move to California in June, his wife and confidante Lenya stayed in New York, not joining him in Beverly Hills until September. During their separation, Weill wrote Lenya no fewer than thirty-one letters, and they have much to say about the show’s genesis. Indeed, says Galand, these letters supply more detailed information on the day-to-day “working relationship between the composer and his collaborators” than we have for any other work by Weill.

Weill returned to New York in October and finished the score in December, having started in late November to orchestrate it. Rehearsals began in late January, and in the press of time, Ted Royal, a professional arranger and Weill’s assistant, was brought in to finish the orchestration under the composer’s guidance. A Boston tryout run opened on February 23. It lasted three weeks and sparked a number of revisions. Finally, the show opened in New York’s Alvin Theater on March 22. Reviews, though mixed, were not strongly negative, but receipts declined after a brisk beginning, and on April 28, 1945, Max Gordon closed the show after only forty-three performances. Thus, a major production by an illustrious creative team failed resoundingly. (“That’s the theater,” Weill mused philosophically not long before the closing. “It wouldn’t be so much fun if it weren’t so dangerous.”) With few recordings, no hit songs among its sheet-music issues, and no more performances until the composer’s centenary year of 2000, *The Firebrand of Florence* merits Galand’s label as “one of Weill’s most obscure works.”

What went wrong? Thanks to the critical edition prepared for the Kurt Weill Edition by Professor Galand, who teaches music theory at the University of Rochester, musicians and scholars may now ponder that question. They are likely to do so with a sense of regret that grows as the veil of obscurity is lifted. For Galand’s excellent, deeply researched introductory essay reveals how, for all its strengths—and critic Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune*, for one, proclaimed the *Firebrand* an “eminently satisfying” alternative to Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* (1943), which was then sweeping all before it on the Broadway stage—Weill’s hoped-for “new combination of first-class writing, music, singing, and acting” turned into “one of the great missed opportunities” of his career.

On the writing front, Mayer’s story, set in the city of Florence in 1535 and featuring sculptor Benvenuto Cellini as its hero, lost the edge that had made it an onstage hit two decades earlier. In *The Firebrand* (1924), Mayer had portrayed Cellini as a dashing but callous womanizer, contradicting not only “the sentimental conventions of period swashbucklers” but “the entire Romantic concept of genius.” In *The Firebrand of Florence*, however, Cellini is more like a conventional romantic hero who, in the end, can face the future

only with his favorite model, the beautiful Angela, at his side. Several scenarios were contemplated for the show's last scene. In one that Weill favored, Cellini, unbound by the claims of normal human decency, is acquitted after an extended Florentine trial scene and then abandons Angela. Max Gordon's insistence on a final production number in the French royal court at Fontainebleau prevailed, however, and *Firebrand* ends there with a standard romantic pairing-off.

Then there was the matter of the show's ambiance. In May 1944, Weill wrote Gershwin that he was imagining "an intimate operetta based on charm, humor and warmth." Gordon, though, had other ideas. The director he hired, John Murray Anderson, was a specialist in lavish revues. *The Firebrand of Florence* was performed by a cast of sixty-two, the largest of Weill's theatrical career (as was the expenditure of \$225,000, almost \$100,000 more than *Lady in the Dark* and its costly stage machinery)—proof, Galand thinks, that Gordon from the beginning "had in mind a grand song-and-dance extravaganza." As for the performers, the composer had hoped to find "good singing actors, without big names so that we can send out a second company in case of a success." That hope went unrealized, writes Galand, because Max Gordon failed to assemble "a top-flight cast for *Firebrand*; all four principals were problematic." (Since one of the four was Lenya, for whom the composer had lobbied hard, and whose portrayal of the second female lead got a chilly critical reception, Weill was partly responsible.) Cellini and Angela were played by a young baritone and soprano who never again appeared in a Broadway show; and the role of Alessandro de' Medici, Duke of Florence, was taken by a British actor willing to work for half the salary demanded by the preferred candidate.

Galand does not deny Weill's claim that "the show was killed by production." Yet he also endorses the composer's admission that, whatever the flaws of his collaborators, his own "lack of toughness" contributed to the flop. *Firebrand*, Galand writes, "suffered from a fatal wavering" as "'intimate' operetta was swamped by lavish spectacle." Weill himself proved "uncertain about which tone to adopt, vacillating time and again over the proper characterization of Cellini and the best way to end the second act." Indeed, the show's last twenty minutes "contain only reprises and potpourri ballet movements, mostly in Royal's arrangements." Galand takes this fact as evidence that "Weill's involvement decreased as the operetta approached completion." Once the composer's ideas for "a proper operetta finale" were rejected, "he largely washed his hands of the Fontainebleau production number that had been imposed upon him."

Now that Weill's operetta has been rescued from obscurity, can it be staged? Galand believes that "a revival of *Firebrand* in anything like its original form would be impossible." Yet he is far from dismissive of the score which, using "a classic operetta orchestra: no saxophones, no reed books, and a large string section," achieved its own unique sound. Moreover, he finds particular "musical inventiveness and formal breadth" in the long opening scene that Weill and Gershwin devised—Florentines gather to watch the execution of Cellini, who at the last moment avoids the hangman's noose—and the Finaletto of Act I, where an ensemble vocalizes the emotions of lovers in conflict. The work's virtues, he testifies, were brought to life in recent Vienna and London concert performances that showed "irony and wit in tone, verve in presentation, and star power in casting."

The excellence of Joel Galand's edition reflects the synchrony of (1) an abundantly generous publishing format, (2) editorial policies

tailored to fit the genre and work being edited, and (3) an editor superbly qualified for his task. The score fills more than 900 large-format pages (10.5 x 14.75 inches) in two volumes, the essay more than 40, and the *Critical Report*, published in a third, smaller volume (8.5 x 11), devotes 112 pages to the sources and how they are used in the edition. In physical production as well as intellectual effort, the Kurt Weill Edition is clearly not a cost-cutting enterprise. (On my bathroom scale, the whole package weighs in at about twenty pounds.)

Musical scholarship, privileging the composer as the central creative force in works involving music, is inclined to treat the composer's holograph score as the court of last resort in a critical edition of a musical work. Yet a Broadway show is a commercial collaboration that tends to limit the composer's artistic control. Galand's edition of *The Firebrand of Florence* breaks new scholarly ground by handling its sources with a full awareness of those limits. Broadway shows, we must remember, were collaborations not only among their authors, performers, and business personnel but also between them and the audience—as registered, for example, in the out-of-town tryout run. In the day of *The Firebrand*, shows slated for Broadway were first sent "on the road," not only to remove production and performance glitches but to test audience reaction. A show's "final" form, arrived at in dialogue with customer response, might therefore depart considerably from the composer's holograph, compiled before rehearsals began.

With that in mind, Weill Edition guidelines describe a musical theater work as a composition whose identity—at least up to a point—remains "dynamic," "mutable," and linked to "production and reception history." How is a scholar to deal with that fluidity while still preparing an edition "both critical and performable?" The answer lies in a principle that sets the editorial bar high: the editor must formulate a distinction between "the work" itself and the ways it may have been adjusted and altered for particular theatrical events. That distinction, which may itself be hard to draw, emerges from and guides the editor's use of sources to establish a boundary between the "event" and the musical work represented in the edition.

Sources for *Firebrand* are voluminous, including "sketches, drafts, [and] holograph piano-vocal scores for all of the vocal numbers, holograph piano and short scores for most of the instrumental numbers, the holograph full score with Royal's contributions, and three versions of the script." Among other performance materials are: "several marked copies of the rehearsal score and choral parts that copyists prepared from Weill's holograph piano-vocal score," a complete set of original orchestra parts, and, thanks to scholarly effort, the reconstructed rehearsal score of the show's conductor Maurice Abravanel, in which "interpolated piano versions of otherwise missing pages" may be found. Such richness is welcome, to be sure, but the question of how to use all these sources tests the scholarly skills and the artistry of the editor.

Galand's essay addresses that question and a good deal more in seven major sections: I. Editing a Broadway Operetta; II. Weill, Broadway, and Operetta in the 1940s; III. Genesis and Production (i. The Weill-Gershwin-Mayer Collaboration; ii. Casting and Production); IV. Critical Reception; V. Music and Lyrics; VI. Editorial Challenges and Solutions (i. Privileging Sources; ii. Case Studies); VII. A Future for *Firebrand*. Each of these subjects is addressed expertly and in detail, and Section V is a bonus: the editor's knowledgeable, critical, and often detailed discussion of the work itself as a dramatic entity, a theatrical presentation, and a musical composition.

Galand's discussion of editorial procedures (Section VI) is tied to the Critical Report, introducing and summarizing its thorniest sections. The explanation here of how sources are privileged brings clarity to a complicated subject. Because no one source is complete enough to be the "principal source" on which most scholarly editions are based, a hierarchy has been devised. "The holograph full score, incorporating Royal's scores as amended by Weill, has served as the privileged source for most dimensions of the edition score," Galand reports, "while the holograph vocal score has been privileged for vocal parts and text underlay." To privilege a source, he explains, is to consult that source first, and to follow what it says unless another source contradicts it. When a contradiction is found, the editor must choose, guided by the source hierarchy's extension to lower steps—i.e., for most things, the orchestra parts; for vocal parts, Abravanel's rehearsal score; for sung texts, a particular typescript of the lyrics; and for spoken texts, a particular version of the libretto.

Joel Galand's essay and editorial work inspire confidence in his artistic decision-making—a good thing, as it turns out, for Weill's doubts about the end of *Firebrand* caused him to disengage himself from the score for that portion, leaving its completion to Royal. An editor tackling this work must do more than choose among alternatives: a certain amount of reconstruction is required. The main text of this edition, Galand writes, "endeavors to transmit . . . a version of the work that could actually have been performed—in this case during the Boston run." In his reconstruction, much of the concluding dialogue is spoken over instrumental music. How closely the coordination between the two matches what was actually performed on the Colonial Theater stage in 1945 cannot be known. But in this reader's view, Galand's understanding of Weill and his milieu, his knowledge of *Firebrand* and command of its sources, and the scrupulous musicality underlying this edition make him the ideal agent for a task that dramatizes a scholarly editor's need for skill and imagination beyond the rigorous, fact-finding mentality that is fundamental to the endeavor in the first place.

Indeed, so suitable are the Weill Edition's guidelines and so well does *The Firebrand of Florence* realize the promise behind them that it is hard to imagine a better model—or at least a starting point—for show music editions of the future.

**Richard Crawford**  
University of Michigan

## Recordings

### *This Is New*

Dee Dee Bridgewater, vocalist

*Verve 016 884-2*

We all have our favorite renditions of Weill songs by the great ladies of jazz—Ella Fitzgerald's legendary "Mack the Knife," Billie Holiday's "Speak Low," Sarah Vaughan's "September Song"—but a startling fact greets us on the opening page of the liner notes to Dee Dee Bridgewater's new, lavishly produced all-Weill CD: until now, no major jazz singer has ever recorded a full album of Weill. In many ways, Bridgewater's album (which she produced herself) has the perfect title: *This Is New*.

On the new Verve release, Bridgewater is at the height of her considerable powers, both vocally and as an interpreter of lyrics. "Making this album meant sitting down and finding the spirit of each lyric and then finding how I could communicate to an audience what the song said to me," commented Bridgewater. She comes through with flying colors.

For more than an hour, Bridgewater excels as a great communicator, caressing every vocal line and coloring each word with a rich palette. Backed by a superb, world music-influenced band assembled by drummer André Ceccarelli, she delivers eleven Weill tunes (and then some). With a voice which can modulate from straight tone into a delicate vibrato, and scat with the best of them, she seems to be channeling the best of both Vaughan and Fitzgerald.

"Lost in the Stars" is sweet and meditative, highlighted by a saxophone solo by Daniele Scannapieco. In "My Ship," Bridgewater proves she can hold her own with the great interpreters of this song, offering a delicate, bewitching rendition. A feisty, mambo version of "Alabama Song" includes an extended bit of scat singing (but one wonders why no one pointed out to her that the correct lyric is "Oh, show us the way to the next pretty boy," not "little boy"). "Speak Low" is performed as a samba, with finely spun, gossamer high notes. A funk-infused "September Song" provides a surprising approach, and "This is New" is sassy, punctuated with bongos. Bridgewater relishes every word of an up-tempo "I'm a Stranger Here Myself" and makes a meal of "The Saga of Jenny" with

shifting tempos and styles for each of the verses, and a "sock it" finish.

While there is not a weak moment on the CD, three songs stand out. This may be the most sensual "Youkali" you will ever hear, delivered in perfect French and accompanied by Juan José Mosalini on bandoneon. Here, Bridgewater employs a huskier timbre and long, elegant vocal line. Ten minutes might seem a bit long for "Bilbao Song," but after an extended flamenco introduction by Louis Winsberg on guitar and Minino Garay on percussion, Bridgewater lavishes sultry details on Michael Feingold's translation, and you wish the song would go on even longer. A ravishing rendition of "Here I'll Stay" backed by only guitar and percussion may be the most gorgeous six minutes of recorded music this year.

But don't be so quick to pop in another disc! After a minute of silence at the end of the last track, Bridgewater gives us a surprise, bubbly nightcap: a spontaneous and apparently unrehearsed "Mack the Knife," ranging from mock "little-girl" voice to overblown operatic diva. She repeatedly goes up on the words (or invents some of her own), scats, and does her imitation of a trombone in this romp of a jam session which ends with a cascade of laughter.

Bridgewater has been touring in support of the album, and her sold-out appearance on 5 May at Vienna's Konzerthaus found her in fine form—funny, charming, and dynamic. Backed by the same octet as on the album, she looked stunning and sexy in a red gown and introduced her program as featuring songs by "one of the most brilliant composers of our time." In her between-numbers patter, she revealed that none other than Chick Corea gave her the idea to sing "This is New" as a mambo. She introduced "Lost in the Stars" as having a particular "message relevant to today," and, in a mock French accent, explained that "Youkali is a place where we can go where is no Le Pen maybe," referring to the elections which took place that day in France. Bridgewater danced, camped, and vamped while her exuberant band members took solos which included improvised quotes from the theme to "Mission Impossible" in "Alabama Song" and Chopin's "Funeral March" in "The Saga of Jenny." After holding the audience rapt for two and a half hours, she announced, "That's all the Weill we've learned so far, but I think it's a good beginning." It is indeed, and we anxiously await her further exploration of Weill's magic.

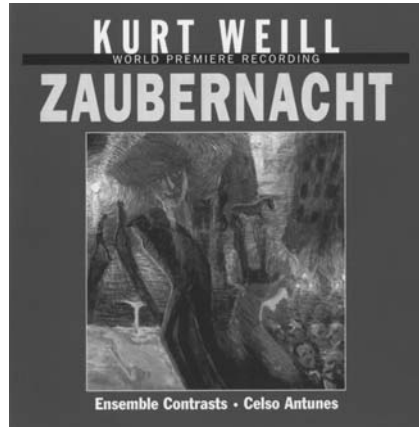
**Larry L. Lash**  
Vienna

## Recordings

### *Zaubernacht*

Ensemble Contrasts  
Celso Antunes, conductor

*Capriccio WDR 67 011*



Posthumous reconstructions of works left in a less than obviously “final” state by their creators serve as a playground for the exercise of traditional obsessions about authenticity and authority. Such re-creations excite polarized reactions: those thrilling to the one extra work from the pen of the master versus those appalled at the encroachment on the purity of the master’s true oeuvre. Meirion Bowen’s laudable new orchestration of Kurt Weill’s early composition *Zaubernacht* (1922) may bear the tacit burden of this polarization. However, the realization of his work in the form of an excellent new recording should have an agreeably demagnetizing effect.

Bowen’s orchestration is the basis for the recently released recording by Ensemble Contrasts Köln, conducted by Celso Antunes. Soprano Ingrid Schmithüsen is featured prominently on the cover as well, although the hour-long *Zaubernacht* offers only a cameo appearance for the vocalist. That turns out to be a shame in this instance. Schmithüsen sings the brief “Lied der Fee” at the opening of the work with such quiet verve that one wishes she could stick around a little longer. The instrumentalists, who hold center stage throughout, likewise impress, with solid ensemble playing and accurate intonation. They bear up well under the unblinkingly close miking favored by the recording’s producer, an approach that pays off nicely in a warm and present sound where the alternative could easily have been cold asphyxiation.

Antunes provides solid leadership, setting convincing, evocative tempos and keeping his ensemble carefully balanced. The variety of his choices in articulation add an important dimension. Though Bowen is more careful than Weill usually was to notate articulation consistently, he certainly does not overmark his score. The one general criticism that could be voiced about the interpretation involves dynamics,

which hover in a range too narrow for a work depending so heavily on pantomime.

Performance and orchestration together succeed in revealing that *Zaubernacht* was an early work only in the sense of coming early in Weill’s working life. Like other of his stage works of this period (most notably *Der Protagonist*), it confirms that he was born in at least mid-career as a theater composer. He just had to wait for his body to grow up enough for him to write it all down. *Zaubernacht* displays his almost spooky command of gesture and timing, even if the gestures involved are of a somewhat familiar, stock character.

Bowen’s work avoids orchestrational heroics, steering a more sensibly restrained course. Throughout Weill’s career, the greatness of his orchestration lay not in Respighian flash (as enjoyable as that can be) but in the more subtle realm of unflinching “rightness”: right instrument, right register, right figuration. Since flash is actually easier to simulate, Bowen’s achievement (and likewise his disciplined avoidance) is that much more to be esteemed.

Five “Notes on the Instrumentation” in the CD booklet outline generally the editorial decisions represented in this newly orchestrated version, based on Weill’s surviving piano score with instrumental cues. Two describe decisions that are so obviously straightforward and correct that they need no further comment: the doubling of the flutist on piccolo, and the choice of percussion setup. A third, regarding the addition of clarinet to the scoring suggested in David Drew’s *Kurt Weill: A Handbook*, involves a slightly larger editorial leap, but is equally defensible. Without the presence of the clarinet as a mediating (and highly flexible) presence between the registers of bassoon and flute, the strings would have borne an overly heavy duty. With the wood-

wind role reduced to a few characteristic solos, the resulting textural invariance in such an extended work would most likely try a listener’s patience.

In the fourth note, the orchestrator explains his reliance upon the composer’s models, when available. *Quodlibet* is the primary source for these, although Weill’s characteristic self-borrowing offers assistance as well. The section marked *Etwas zögernd* is an interesting case in point. It bears out Bowen’s professed adherence to the models while demonstrating the liberties he properly takes when those models prove less appropriate than they seem. In the middle of this section lies a passage of several dozen measures lifted directly from the B Minor String Quartet. Just as suggested by the note, these bars appear identically in the new orchestration. On the other hand, the presence of the preceding and following measures in *Quodlibet* turns out to be a red herring. Therein, the forces of the orchestra allow for an equal opposition of strings against winds and brass in successive statements. Bowen wisely goes in a different direction, setting the two statements both as mixed tutti of his smaller band.

Bowen’s fifth and final note describes very briefly his actions in response to the two missing pages in Weill’s piano score. Working forward and backward respectively from either end of the gap, he is able to derive twenty-five bars from corresponding passages in *Quodlibet*. Given the fairly modest amount of missing music that can be estimated from the example of other pages of Weill’s score, only a small additional splice is necessary. Bowen chooses to add a nearly note-for-note reprise of a passage from an earlier section (*Tranquillo*). The duration and musico-dramatic weight of the complete “reconstruction” does not seem out of scale with the larger structures of which it is a part, and the interpolated passage fits harmonically into its surroundings without too jarring a disruption.

Is this reconstruction and reorchestration “authentic”? The answer depends on how one furnishes one’s playground. Better perhaps to judge the work by a more dependable standard: usefulness. By this measure, Meirion Bowen’s re-creation is to be admired. *Zaubernacht*, as represented by this new score, is ready to be realized on the working stage.

Edward Harsh  
New York City

## Recordings

### *String Quartet in B minor* *String Quartet, op. 8*

Leipziger Streichquartett

MDG 307 1071-2

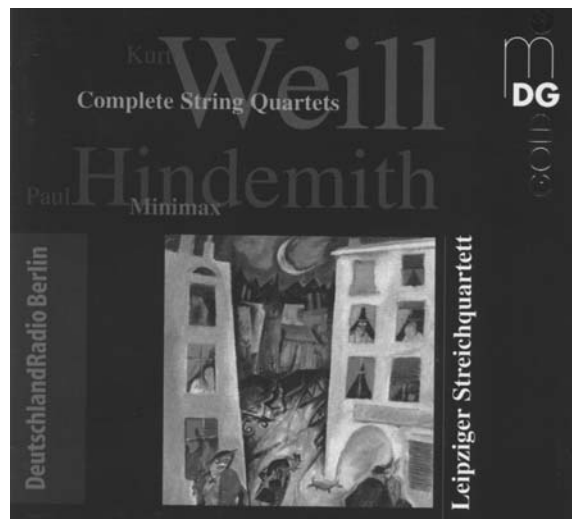
A new recording by the Leipziger Streichquartett offers some lesser-known chamber music of the early 1920s, three string quartets by two young composers, Weill's B minor (1918) and op. 8 (1923/24), and Paul Hindemith's humorous *Minimax: "Repertorium for Military Music"* (1923) which premiered at the Donaueschingen Festival in 1923, performed by the Hindemith-Amar-Quartett. While the militaristic satire *Minimax*, punning on a fire extinguisher brand and the nicknames of Max Prinz zu Fürstenberg (Maxi) and his wife Wilhelmine (Mini), already shows Hindemith as a seasoned writer of chamber music (and mass producer thereof), Weill's string quartets still have the air of discovery. Mostly composed during Weill's studies with Humperdinck at the Berlin Musikhochschule, the B minor quartet appears to be a true *Jugendwerk* much in the same way as the early Mendelssohn quartets, op. 12 and 13. Characteristic of a youthful work are an unmistakable relation to classical models, such as the allusion to Mozartean themes in the first movement, and an over-ambitious approach, the tendency to "overload" individual movements, especially the first. At the same time, though, Weill displays a surprising feel for aesthetic ambivalences of early 1920s' modernity, with references to a variety of "addressees" such as the Mahlerian idiom in the scherzo (a typical "Mahler folk sound") or the Regeresque idiom in the contemplative fugue finale (compare, for instance, the A major-6/8-Mozart *gestus* of K. 331, appearing almost verbatim, strongly suggesting Reger's *Mozart Variations*, op. 132, as a model for the first and last

movement). The B minor quartet's harmonic language, on the whole, refrains from forced late-romantic *Apotheose* despite some scattered Straussian reminiscences, instead favoring an almost post-expressionist language. This language is appropriately underscored by the transparent playing of the Leipziger Streichquartett (all the more remarkable considering the "audiophile" label's policy, which forbids "any sort of sound-modifying manipulation with reverberation, sound filters, or limiters"). The ensemble avoids a late-romantic sound orgy and focuses adequately on the dialogue between individual parts. The beginning of the third movement, *Langsam und innig* [slow and contemplative] is especially well played, for instance, with a well-balanced conversation between first violin and viola. The ensemble also succeeds in countering some of the B minor quartet's youthful clumsiness, such as the decidedly "academic" elements in the fugue finale (see, for instance, the slightly rigid *stretto* in mm. 244ff.), whose genesis is revealed in part by a postcard written from Weill to his brother Hans on 21 June 1918: "In my piano lessons I am playing extremely interesting suites by Bach, very good for the fingers. The score playing makes slow progress; now I've worked my way up to Beethoven symphonies. Following Bing's advice, my study of counterpoint will simply consist of writing a fugue as the last movement of the string quartet."

Four years later, under Busoni's tutelage, Weill composed his second and last string quartet. The work received an opus number (op. 8), which marked it as a major work, and Universal Edition published it

shortly after the premiere at the Frankfurt Chamber Music Festival for New Music in June 1923, where it was performed by the aforementioned Amar-Quartett. Responding to a suggestion from Busoni, Weill reduced the work from four to three movements, giving the work a more pronounced profile and proclaiming a big leap in the creative development of the young composer still in his early twenties. At the risk of abandoning musico-historical common sense altogether, I can't help hearing this piece, in a peculiar way, as a spiritual counterpart to Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* (1926), as "meta-personal" music, very much in the sense of Busoni's neoclassicality, something that is visibly reflected in the provenance of the movements' models. Aside from the motoric Scherzo, it is particularly the Choralphantasie which, as a "hard-working" fugal movement, embodies Busoni's historicizing aesthetic in an exemplary fashion. Respecting the work's more intense nature, when compared to the B minor quartet, the Leipziger Streichquartett takes a more gripping, edgy approach that still maintains a balance between the many rhapsodic passages within individual movements. Thus their playing reflects the tension that is built into the Choralphantasie between the "running" passage in mm. 24ff. (restless "urban music" which would have done honor to Shostakovich), and the "ethereal" *Recitativo* beginning in m. 57, which differs considerably in its compositional texture. Beyond the diversity within individual movements, the ensemble also manages to do justice to the work's underlying principle of "a one-movement piece in three movements" without sacrificing the desired tension.

All in all, this successful recording, complemented by a well-crafted booklet, can be highly recommended. It adds another piece to the puzzle of the quartet genre in the first third of the twentieth century. Furthermore, it offers a good view of Weill as a composer of instrumental music (even though the composer seems to foreshadow his later theater works with the measured opening, *Sostenuto, con molta espressione*, of the first movement, *Introduktion*, a homophonic, ritardando passage that could easily pass for a tongue-in-cheek interlude in the *Dreigroschenoper*).



Joachim Brüggé

Universität Mozarteum Salzburg

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