

Kurt Weill

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Newsletter



DREIGROSCHENOPER at 75

In this issue

Feature: Dreigroschenoper at 75

Note from the Editor 3

Birthday Tributes 4

Performances

Die Dreigroschenoper in London 6
Andrew Porter

Die Dreigroschenoper in Hanover 8
Markus Frei-Hauenschild

Die Dreigroschenoper in Dessau 10
Andreas Hauff

Die Dreigroschenoper in Pittsburgh 12
Deane L. Root

Die Dreigroschenoper in Augsburg 13
Joachim Lucchesi

Music

Sechs Songs aus der Dreigroschenoper, arr. Formenti 14
Mario R. Mercado

Recording

Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Dreigroschenoper
on Duo-Phon 15
Stephen Hinton

Other Reviews

Books

Kurt Weill: Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition 17
ed. Nils Grosch
Andreas Eichhorn

Musical: Das unterhaltende Genre 18
ed. Armin Geraths and Christian Martin Schmidt
Siegfried Schmidt-Joos

Kurt Weill, Berlin und die zwanziger Jahre 19
by Hyesu Shin
Nils Grosch

Performance

Zaubernacht in Dessau 21
Andreas Hauff

Recording

Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano on Cedille 22
Richard Rischard

Topical Weill 1a–8a

Kurt Weill

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7 East 20th Street

New York, NY 10003-1106

tel. (212) 505-5240

fax (212) 353-9663

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Cover photo: Poster design by Kai Fatheuer for a production of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Dessau, 1998.



Berlin, 1928 (designed by Caspar Neher)



Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999

Note from the Editor

“But young men’s blood goes on being red, and the army goes on recruiting”—famous lines from the “Kanonensong” or “Army Song,” written seventy-five years ago. One could hear them in two very different settings on a cold day in February this year, a day when millions of people took the streets in cities all over the globe to protest a looming war that ignited international objections. A matinee performance of *Threepenny Opera* in London’s Royal National Theatre made reference to the half million people who had gathered in Hyde Park, connecting the real world to the stage. Just the opposite happened in Berlin, where, according to several newspaper reports, a group of protesters at the Siegessäule sang lines of the “Kanonensong,” denouncing militarism of the old boys’ school.

Perhaps nothing could illustrate better that *Die Dreigroschenoper* is alive. Seventy-five years after its premiere in Berlin, Weill’s and Brecht’s famed piece is not just a cultural icon sitting on a pedestal (of indeterminate height). In the German language, it enjoys canonic status, with lines such as “Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral” ingrained in people’s minds like a quote from Goethe, Shakespeare, or—if you will—the Bible. The songs can be heard in every way, shape, and form all over the world. The work has even generated a style of its own with a specific set of images, a Threepenny world. It tends to be a bit gloomier than the original, much of it stemming from the 1931 film version: bowler hat, gloves, and cane (Macheath’s insignia); beggars and whores; knives and gallows; red and black; blood and darkness (a few posters, scattered throughout this issue, may illustrate this). As a musical theater model, it seems to have been more successful on the English-speaking stage, where it had a bigger impact than any of Weill’s American works.

For this birthday issue, we have included five snapshots of the “birthday girl” to see how *The Threepenny Opera* is faring in current productions. Who at the chaotic 1928 dress rehearsal would have bet three pennies on such a long life?

Elmar Juchem

Birthday Tributes

Dreigroschen@75

John Kander, composer

“The production of *Threepenny Opera* at the Theater de Lys in the early '50s certainly influenced a whole generation of theater composers—me included. It was thrilling—years later—to get to work with Lotte Lenya on *Cabaret*.”

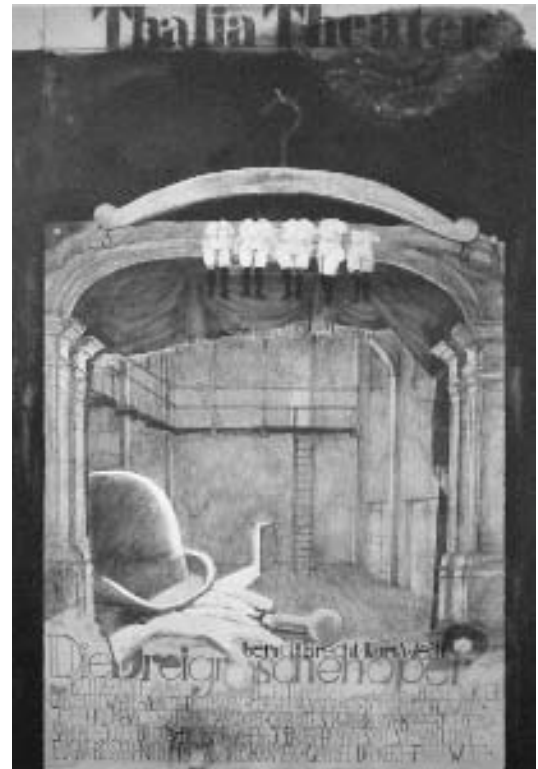
Harold Prince, director and producer

“The thing about *Threepenny Opera* is it brings to mind the old cliché ‘seventy-five years young.’ And that’s because it is as fresh, inventive and *theatrical* as it is courageous. Many have tried to imitate it. No one has succeeded.”

Fred Ebb, lyricist

“The *Threepenny Opera* was, is, and no doubt will continue to be an enormous influence on my work. One can only hope in the course of a career to leave behind something with the enduring beauty, honesty, clarity and artistry that is present in this phenomenal work. Happy Birthday, Threepenny! You are 75 years young.”

Hamburg, 1994



Michael Feingold, critic and translator

“*Die Dreigroschenoper* is 75 years old, and I am 58. (I’ve reached the age at which the mention of anyone’s or anything’s age prompts these instinctive comparisons.) It isn’t fair; I don’t feel nearly as young or as fresh as *Threepenny* still does.

I was 11, or maybe 12, a Chicago child already besotted with the theater, the evening I turned on the radio—there was an FM station that played Broadway cast albums the hour before dinner—and out came this wonderful, scrappy-sweet, not quite dissonant noise like nothing I had ever heard. It was the overture, as played on the old MGM LP of the Off-Broadway cast. I was studying clarinet then, so the two clarinets’ entrance in thirds struck me to the heart, and when they began playing in canon, my happiness knew no bounds. From that day on, I carried inside me a little sign that read ‘Für Weill,’ though I did not realize it was there till I saw the photo of Lenya carrying an identical sign in the first production of the *Mahagonny Songspiel*. Weill became my favorite listening habit.

Brecht came into focus not long after. Between the two of them, I’ve spent much of the intervening 46 years figuring out what is and isn’t in *The Threepenny Opera*; I have seen it or listened to it in half a dozen languages and in at least five English versions, including my own. For all the instant audience rapport it supplies, it is a dense work, easy to misconstrue and even easier to misproduce; yet the rapport makes it extremely hard to ruin: There is so much pleasure and so much fascination in even the most misguided rendition of any of its songs. And its texture is so rich that some fragment of it will jump to the forefront of your mind in response to any external event: All during George Bush’s rants about Saddam Hussein, I have heard my inner voice singing, ‘*Verfolge Unrecht nicht zu sehr*,’ ‘Be careful how you punish wrong.’ I wish that someone had sung it to him.

But I do not think American politicians listen to Brecht and Weill, or to any artists. Or would pay close attention if they did. Art, for all its faults, is humanity’s great success; politics is its great disaster. Because of the elegant way its creators poised it on the precarious divide between the two, *Threepenny* will always stay alert and fresh. It will last out my time, anyhow. And if George Bush and his ilk keep dragging us to the edge of the abyss, it will be one of the treasures left for the excavators of the next Babylon to dig out. Hopefully one of them will preserve it before another George Bush comes along to bomb the ruins. ‘*Denn für dieses Leben / ist der Mensch nicht gut genug*’—but there, you see, any topic and any situation can bring the work back to mind. And nothing is more exhilarating than its strange combination of the darkest negativity and the most sardonic cheerfulness. *Beneidenswert, wer frei davon*—but the answer to that phrase has no lyrics, as if to remind us that the phrase itself is only half the truth, just as the lyric is only half the truth of any song. *Threepenny* acknowledges the existence of the whole truth, which is what makes it greater than most modern works of musical theatre: less likely to be fully understood, and more likely to last. So happy 75th birthday, to the youngest musical around.”

Threepenny@15

Mark Hollmann, composer of *Urinetown*

“It is hard for me to overestimate the influence that *Threepenny Opera* has had on my interest in writing for the musical theater. I was in high school when I first heard the 1950s Off-Broadway cast album, and I distinctly remember how the music and lyrics of the ‘Kanonensong’ startled me. In the words of Marc Blitzstein’s translation, ‘And if the population / Should greet us with indignation / We’ll chop ’em to bits because we like our hamburgers raw!’, that song had the effect of opening a door in my imagination: I realized that there could be a musical theater with a political point of view, and a ferocious one at that.

Later that year, I saw a professional production of *Threepenny* at the St. Louis Repertory Theatre and experienced the full palette of the show as played in a theater. I admired how Brecht and Weill’s technique embraced both humor and bloodlust, both bittersweet ballads and full-throated anthems, jaunty dance tunes and funeral hymns. What a thrill it was for me at the age of 17 to see how much was possible on a musical stage, all grimly yet joyously human.”

Udo Lindenberg, rock musician

“When I think of *Dreigroschenoper*, I think of excellent songs and a funny story with a punch, with a message. Weill and Brecht were rockers. I’m serious. They rocked the establishment and the artsy-fartsy people of their time. They spoke to a mass audience, not just a few connoisseurs. The piece is great, intelligent entertainment and the songs are still first-rate material. A toast to the old lady who appears to be so young!”



New York, 1976

HK Gruber, composer and conductor

“For seventy-five years even the birds have been whistling the *Dreigroschenoper* from trees and rooftops all over the world. That’s not going to change during the next seventy-five years and probably further on. This example of bringing ‘art to the masses’ (Weill, 1925) has exceeded the most daring dreams of the good old Novembergruppe which was founded in 1919 in Berlin. My most heartfelt congratulations! *Hoch, hoch, hoch!*”

Barbara Brecht-Schall, daughter of Bertolt Brecht

“The collaboration between Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill became decisive for each of them in several ways. It was *the* breakthrough for both of them, and even if their careers quickly took different paths, they still shared this common point of origin.”

Julius Rudel, conductor

“Kurt Weill’s *Dreigroschenoper* stands among a very few, unique pieces, not only for the emotional, musical, and political wallop it delivers from the stage, but because it is one of those seminal works that changed music.

Within its tight, sparse structure there lies a composition of immense brilliance, a stage work that when it premiered seventy-five years ago managed in one fell swoop to change the nature of musical theater *and* of opera. The music is at once new and yet still rooted to the great traditions of the past. But of greatest import is the way it tells its story. That was truly revolutionary.”

London

Dreigroschen@75

The Threepenny Opera

London
National Theatre

8-15 February 2003

Die Dreigroschenoper is set in London, and in London it probably rubs shoulders a little more closely than elsewhere with its progenitor, *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay's piece, in ever new versions, is seldom long absent from the British stage. There have also been plenty of *Threepenny Operas*. But Weill's piece was slow to catch on. It first reached London in February 1935, as *The Tuppenny-Ha'penny Opera*, translated and directed by Dennis Freeman, in a BBC broadcast version that Weill himself called "the worst performance imaginable." It was drubbed as a continental perversion of *The Beggar's Opera*. Weill was still in London for a *Beggar's Opera* revival at the Criterion Theatre in March, and to Lenya he described it as "one of the most beauti-

ful nights I've ever had in the theater, an incomparably more beautiful and more aggressive production than *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and much better performed . . . a theater of perfection such as I've previously encountered only with the Japanese."

Not until 1956 did *Die Dreigroschenoper* reach the London stage: at the Royal Court Theatre, Sam Wanamaker directing, conductor Berthold Goldschmidt, the Caspar Neher décor, the Marc Blitzstein translation. Like most young critics of the time, I gave it an excited review. The work was new to most of us; the Lotte Lenya recording of the original German version had still to come. Frank Howes, "Our Music Critic" in the *London Times*, declared, however, that most of the music "could have been turned out by a hack in Charing Cross Road [British for Tin-Pan Alley]." Weill's music did not leave the influential Howes indifferent. He responded to it very strongly; he told his students at the Royal College that it was "evil"; he was even apt to boast, though not without shame for his offense, that Weill had once challenged him to a duel for suggesting in print that, whatever one

might think of Mr. Adolf Hitler's other ideas, his musical instincts at least were evidently sound. Hans Keller (whose article is reprinted in Stephen Hinton's Cambridge Opera Handbook to *The Threepenny Opera*) took Howes to task, but he thought that Wanamaker's production had "prettified" Weill's piece. I didn't think so; I thought that it brilliantly mingled entertainment and darkness; and Kenneth Tynan called it "loyally Brechtian . . . a musical show in which no word or note is coy, dainty or sugary."

The Berliner Ensemble brought its *Dreigroschenoper* to London's Old Vic in 1965, directed, as in 1928, by Erich Engel, in a sternly Brechtian production that struck me as lacking both charm and bite. (By that time the LP recordings with Lenya on Columbia/Philips had appeared, and Sadler's Wells had staged its memorable, Weill-focused *Mahagonny* conducted by Colin Davis.) In 1972 there was a glossy, flossy *Threepenny Opera* at the Prince of Wales Theatre, with Vanessa Redgrave as Polly, Barbara Windsor (today a star of the soap opera *EastEnders*) as Lucy, and a new translation by Hugh MacDiarmid. In 1976,



The cast as orchestra. Photo: Ivan Kyncl

Threepenny@15

the English Music Theatre company toured a *Threepenny Opera* directed by Colin Graham, using the MacDiarmid translation. A new translation, by Robert David MacDonald—which Hinton calls “bland and unsingable”—was used by Opera North in 1984 and again by the National Theatre in 1986.

That 1986 production was a big affair, with a star-studded cast in the largest of the National’s three auditoriums, the Olivier Theatre. I didn’t see it, but from Hinton I learn that the National’s music director Dominic Muldowney (successor to Harrison Birtwistle) “conducted a first-class band of professional instrumentalists who played, both faithfully and spiritedly, every note of Weill’s full score,” and that there were “talents and resources in abundance—the latter regrettably too much so.” But the National Theatre’s second *Threepenny Opera* is very different. In resources it’s perhaps the least abundant, the most economical full account of the *Dreigroschenoper* ever given. This latest *Threepenny Opera*, an educational production, was played in the smallest of National’s three auditoriums, the Cottesloe, an intimate gal-leried rectangle that can be differently rigged and jugged for each show; for this one it had a stage erected at one end of the hall. Just nine performers compassed both the sixteen named roles and the orchestra of seven. The economy of participants was achieved by some role-doubling, of course, but also by casting the show with young actor-singers who were also able instrumentalists. Polly (Natasha Lewis) could play the trombone. Lucy (Lois Naylor) could play the trumpet. Jenny (Elizabeth Marsh) was a whiz on flute and sax, Brown (James Lailey) on clarinet and sax. And so on. They couldn’t, of course, play and sing at once, and so there were some “adjustments” in the scoring. These had been effected with much skill by Steven Edis, composer/arranger for many National shows. His was no easy-going “arrangement” but one alert and attentive to the



Macheath (Michael Schaeffer) in jail. Photo: Ivan Kyncl

instrumental sounds and colors whereon, Weill said, “the original music depends.” Most of it sounded, and much of it was, “right.” Tim Baker’s unfussy staging brilliantly but unobtrusively disposed the actor-instrumentalists in dispositions that kept the focus on the singers.

Casting choice must have been limited, of course, by the need to find versatile actor-singers who could also play the necessary instruments. The National assembled a good cast: no great voices, but voices excellently true, in tune, trim on the notes, and punchy in communicativeness. And there was a responsive ensemble, since the singers and the players were side-by-side on the same stage.

That every new production needs a new translation seems to be today’s maxim. (There speaks one whose seven slogged-over translations commissioned by the English National Opera, and singer-

worked, were scrapped when new productions arrived.) So this *Threepenny Opera* had yet a new English translation, a joint effort by Anthony Meech (book) and Jeremy Sams (lyrics). Meech took the modern world into account. Not long ago, in what was front-page news before events more important came to prominence, criminal charges against Princess Diana’s butler were suddenly dropped when our gracious Queen, in mid-trial, made public a conversation she’d had with him, and as a result he went free. Worked into the Riding Messenger’s proclamation of Macheath’s pardon, Her Majesty’s intervention into the Burrell trial won an easy laugh. More seriously: the afternoon performance I attended coincided with the million-strong march through the streets of London in protest against Bush’s and Blair’s impending war. Although the connections with Peachum’s threat to disrupt the Queen’s coronation procession are loose, they added overtones to the performance, making people feel they should be out there, protesting, not enjoying a show.

Polly’s Pirate Song at her wedding was shifted to the brothel and reasigned to Jenny (as it has been in every *Dreigroschenoper* I’ve heard, except the Berliner Ensemble’s). Meech’s translation included elements of Brecht’s *Versuche* text, and I guess he worked from it. Sams, hot property as composer, director, translator (he’s been producing a *Ring* in rhyme for the English National Opera), provided snappy lyrics; “capsule” rhymed with “p’rhaps you’ll.” Blitzstein’s lyrics tend to sound on in mind’s ear, because they fit the music so well.

The ten performances at the National Theatre of this buoyant, virtuoso, very portable *Threepenny Opera* crowned a tour of fourteen British cities, where it played more than sixty performances.

Andrew Porter
London

Hanover

Dreigroschen@75

Die Dreigroschenoper

Schauspielhaus Hannover

Premiere: 7 December 2002

The curtain rises; the theater is completely dark. To the sounds of the overture, a red news ticker high above the stage tells us of the delights we can expect: “The Three-penny Opera. A play with music in a prologue . . .” What a nifty staging device—starting the evening with opening titles, just like in a movie. Very promising. The first irritations occur after the title and the famous projection texts scroll by, and we have to watch stage directions, too. These mention a half curtain, of which there is no trace. So far, it’s still amusing. But the fun stops on the heels of the famous announcement, “First, you are going to hear a song about the robber Macheath, called Mack the Knife,” when the text of the far more famous “Moritat” itself crawls by in mute red letters. That’s going a bit too far; apparently we are being deprived of the show’s hit, *the* hit. This is hardly what Brecht could have meant when he spoke of “literarization of the theater” to explain the use of projections. We can read at home. The audience’s annoyed whispers might as well have appeared in the director’s script. Perhaps he’s even sitting in the audience, gloating over our agony? The hard-boiled experts, even now, may enter this staging trick on the credit side as an intended “rupture” and claim that it actually suits Weill and Brecht somehow. Finally something happens: The running words descend from the flies, but our view of them is obstructed by several pairs of legs. The actors have come on stage. When “Morgenchoral des Peachum” also passes without a sound from either the band or the singers, the nervous whispers give way to piqued silence. The actors appear to be lost as well on the now-lit stage. The bleak set, designed by Katrin Nottrodt, consists of green plastic floor tiles; up in the flies hangs a massive white grating. Somewhat mystified in this empty space, the actors stare at the news ticker and finally pick a volunteer from among themselves who is supposed to end this embarrassing situation. He steps to a microphone and utters

in an affected “powerful” voice: “Something new has to happen.”

Relief! At last the silence is broken. The involuntary Peachum continues his speech and gradually discovers that he likes the role. Since there are no beggars around, he keeps talking to us. Actually it is neither Peachum nor the actor Wolfgang Michalek who stands there, but the director, Stemann, using Peachum’s speech to explain why he has tormented us: because we are oblivious to images and messages all too familiar. Even this message is admitted-

assuaged when we eventually hear the first two numbers: stripped of their dramatic function, they have lost all original power.

Whereas many productions over the past decades have dragged along the apparatus of epic theater, sometimes respectfully or timidly, sometimes only to toss it overboard as a purported burden from a bygone era, Stemann uses it as a point of departure. It is not surprising to see his work labeled “post-epic.” Dramaturg Matthias Pees enlightens us in the program notes: In post-epic theater “the characters can step



The news ticker (which reads, “Sensuality!”) serves as a bar for two of the three Macheaths (Fabian Gerhardt, far left and Andreas Ebert, far right) and Polly (Sachiko Hara-Franke). Photo: Thomas Aurin

ly not very original. And yet we have rarely encountered it in such a striking and emphatic way. It is very telling that we were upset more from being denied our entertainment at the onset than by a triptych image of a starving African child, in front of which Peachum, as an eloquent “new economist,” organizes his campaign to disrupt the coronation ceremony in the third act. “Something new has to happen”—Peachum-Brecht as well as Stemann are onto something when they conclude that nothing hurts more than being deprived of an anticipated treat. The pain is hardly

out of their role, leave psychology behind, and reflect about themselves, but this doesn’t solve their problems—let alone the emotional mess in which they, the presenters and masters of discourse, are about to drown.” If *Die Dreigroschenoper* counts as a paradigm of Brechtian epic theater, then Stemann has succeeded in creating a model production of post-epic theater. The category of “role” is the production’s dominating element. The actor’s function as mediator between role and audience no longer works, because the negotiator has run out of credit. After seventy-five years of

Threepenny@15

Dreigroschenoper, he has lost his authority. Stemann no longer believes the actors can show us, or even point to, what's behind or between the play's lines. The actors are no longer the authority, installed by Brecht, that can reveal the many layers of a role, because the actors are still stuck in a role even when they step out of character. Stemann's juggling of the roles' interrelationships begins when the actors come on stage as players without roles, who first of all need to realize that they are acting and discover the parts they are to play.

While the search is successful in Peachum's case, including wife and daughter, the rest of the cast has some calculated trouble. We have no fewer than three Macheaths (who can also take on the roles of Filch and the gang when called for). As Macheath, they embody the protagonist's different sides: Denis Burgazliev represents the young macho lover in jaunty chaps, Fabian Gerhardt the stylishly dressed, seasoned businessman. His Macheath blends into the police chief, Tiger Brown, whom he portrays in the same outfit and manner, so that he sings the "Kanonensong" with his two colleagues in a trio. Lastly, Andreas Ebert's Macheath is the petit-bourgeois, dressed in a bland everyday suit, filled with the everyman's emotions and frustrations. It is he who visits the brothel in Act II (the stage has been transformed into a sterile swimming pool with white tiles). However, he does not run into a tragic hero's disaster but is kissed off by Jenny (Ilknur Bahadir) and her colleagues; humiliated and upset, he insists on his rights as a paying customer. And he is the one who feels the fear of death in Act III, when he is tied to a chair and watches the grid ceiling come down, something that far exceeds his petit-bourgeois tolerance level.

Even the more clearly assigned roles of the Peachum family are consistently tampered with. It is a great achievement of the actors as well as of Stemann's directing that this muddle of roles doesn't turn into complete chaos. The most consistent character is a Lolita-like Polly, played by the petite Japanese actress Sachiko Hara-Franke. Dressed as a

schoolgirl or in lingerie, she represents convincingly the knowing ingénue which Brecht (and Wedekind) liked to associate with young women. Within the role play of this production, she is instructed to show only *one* of Polly's many sides: as an attraction for her father's business, as loving daughter to her mother, and as Macheath's lover. Her character shines through in its purest form during a touchingly longing rendition of "Seeräuberjenny."

Also strong is Susanne Jansen, whose Celia Peachum is marked by her frustration that her role is less prominent than those of her husband and daughter. Her rage over Polly's wedding is topped by a fit of jealousy when her daughter sings two songs in a row. Equipped with a red Milva wig, she snatches Polly's "Barbarasong," only to ruin it with an unbearable amount of passion. Unsuccessfully, she attempts to counter her insignificance with overacting,

now as a hysterical "responsible Mom," now as a supportive businessman's wife, now as diva. She cannot maintain any of these characters (unlike Jansen, who acts with remarkable subtlety); her role of the moment crumbles as soon as it meets any resistance. Mrs. Peachum's adaptability even allows her to beef up the brothel's staff as an additional whore. Then her husband does the same; his guest appearance as a bizarre, messed-up cross-dresser leads directly into his next scene. Angela Müthel's Lucy seems out of place amidst this confusing ensemble. Unexpectedly mature and conservatively dressed, Lucy speaks to her husband's conscience with maternal sincerity and reinterprets the "Eifersuchtsduett" as a confrontation between the wife and the young mistress. Müthel would have had no vocal problems with the revenge aria, but it might have compromised her attitude of superiority.

As much as Stemann stretches Brecht's book, so little does musical director Hans-Jörn Brandenburg touch Weill's score. Led by Peter Müller, a terrific eight-piece band does some beautiful playing, compromised only by an utterly harsh amplification. Aside from a few obvious departures—the "Hochzeitslied" is initially spoken and the "Lied von der Unzulänglichkeit menschlichen Strebens" takes a while to get up to speed—Brandenburg's interpretation is marked by careful attention to detail, revealing a sure, theatrical feeling.

And how does such a production end? It ends as it began: Worn out by the emotional mess, the actors leave the stage while closing stanzas of the "Moritat," borrowed from the 1931 movie version, pass by on the indefatigable news ticker.

Markus Frei-Hauenschild
Göttingen



Polly (Sachiko Hara-Franke), Mrs. Peachum (Susanne Jansen), Macheath (Andreas Ebert), Jenny (Ilknur Bahadir), and Lucy (Angela Müthel) line up for the "Jealousy Duet." Photo: Thomas Aurin

Dessau

Dreigroschen@75

Die Dreigroschenoper

Dessau
Kurt Weill Fest

28 February 2003

Yet another *Dreigroschenoper*? Is it really necessary to make Weill's and Brecht's indestructible success the centerpiece of the eleventh Kurt Weill Fest—even if the 75th anniversary is being celebrated in late August? When leafing through the festival brochure, the skepticism dwindles. Clemens Birnbaum, newly appointed managing and artistic director of the Kurt Weill Gesellschaft, grouped several ancillary events around the *Dreigroschenoper* that illuminated the work from different angles.

The most important and fascinating one was, without doubt, a concert performance of John Gay's and Johann Christoph Pepusch's *Beggar's Opera* in a clever adaptation by Babette Hesse, performed by the baroque ensemble Lautten Compagney (the successful production can be seen again in neighboring Halle during the Handel Festival in June).

The choice of director for the *Dreigroschenoper* was an intelligent one. One can only congratulate the producers for hiring the Slovak mime, Milan Sládek, as artist in residence at this year's Kurt Weill Fest and, as such, the director of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, *Zaubernacht* [reviewed on p. 21], and a pantomime workshop for young people in Dessau. The results of this workshop were presented in a "Festival Café" performance, during which Sládek answered questions about his working methods in general and the *Drei-*

groschenoper staging in particular. He had developed the puppet version during his tenure (1994–2002) as director of the Aréna Theater in Bratislava (Slovakia). A capacity audience at the Anhaltisches Theater was the first to witness this version with live dialogue and music.

How can the *Dreigroschenoper* be staged intelligently nowadays? As far as I can see, four different trends have emerged in German theaters over the last several years:

1) Rely on the fact that the audience will come in any event. No need to bother with a concept.

2) Adopt an extremely grim tone so the social critique can't be missed.

3) Announce the piece as a highly entertaining forerunner of musical comedy and make the staging as shrill and corny as possible.

4) Disregard the story and concentrate on a meticulous performance of Weill's (first-rate) music.

None of these approaches is very telling or particularly entertaining.

When asked about his interest in the piece, Sládek brings up a *Dreigroschenoper* production in Prague staged by his teacher, Emil F. Burian, in 1958. He was struck by the liveliness of the text and the appeal of the score. No doubt the world has grown more complex since the days of the Berlin premiere, but the depiction of the characters is still fresh. Thus, Sládek does not see the *Dreigroschenoper* as "artistic means serving socio-political commentary"—Leo Karl Gerhartz's formulation, which is well within the tradition of German Brecht reception, in his (otherwise remarkable) study *Oper: Aspekte der Gattung* (Laaber-Verlag, 1983). Sládek could have bolstered his point by citing authoritative contemporaries of composer and author. Writing for the music journal *Melos* in 1929, renowned musicologist Hans Mersmann came to the conclusion: "The *Dreigroschenoper* does not make theater (like Piscator) to serve a political trend; rather, it utilizes a political trend to serve the theater."

In the interview, Sládek puts particular emphasis on the reciprocal mirroring of bourgeois and criminal worlds; he adds, however, that the authors portrayed this mutual relationship with tongue firmly in cheek, not in deadly earnest. Here it seems appropriate to cite a noteworthy but little noted statement of the German philoso-



As the actors above the stage provide the voices, Sládek's puppeteers help move the action along.
Photo: Kai Bienert

Threepenny@15



The puppets dance. Photo: Kai Bienert

pher Peter Sloterdijk in his *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (Suhrkamp, 1983) [engl.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987]: “As in a Punch and Judy show for adults, the figures flaunt their amorality and their evil artfulness, sing songs about their own wickedness and about the still greater evil of the world, and use cynical sayings and ways of speaking to educate the public to a mode of expression in which it, too, not completely without pleasure, could speak the truth about itself.” Can we truly assert that a general tone of cynicism prevails again in today’s Germany? Sloterdijk observed in 1983 that the modern cynic succeeded in “building the constant questioning of his own actions into his means of survival.”

What does Sládek’s staging actually look like? The main characters are portrayed by white puppets whose features border on caricature. Mr. and Mrs. Peachum behave a bit like hen and rooster, Tiger Brown’s prominent chin signals an iron will, the Macheath puppet is inspired by E. F. Burian, who played the role in 1958—according to Sládek a small man with a big nose and an authority that brooked no opposition. The puppets’ construction and use are borrowed from the Japanese Bunraku theater. Up to five feet tall, each puppet is operated with great virtuosity by three manipulators. The puppeteers do not hide behind the puppets but work out in the open, sometimes becoming

co-actors, as when they portray Macheath’s gang (of which only Münz-Matthias is represented by a puppet).

The Anhaltische Philharmonie, the theater’s regular orchestra, sits in the pit, playing with zest and precision under the baton of Generalmusikdirektor Golo Berg. Subtleties in the orchestration are worked out to great effect but never seem heavy-handed. The lead characters are sung and spoken from an elevated platform above the stage—an epic fracture of Brechtian proportions. Both music and dialogue are perfectly synchronized with the puppets’ movements; the Slovak puppeteers are so familiar with the German text that they manage, to give one example, to have Mrs. Peachum stroke one hand with the other when she mentions Macheath’s fancy gloves.

One might think that the heterogeneous tone and diction of the eight-piece cast (including Hans-Karl Holzbecher as Macheath, Frido Meyer-Wolff as Peachum, Lorose Keller and Miriam Ternes as Celia and Polly Peachum) would be distracting; but it actually helps us understand the typified characters who cannot show human feelings through facial expressions. Whatever words, thoughts, and emotions move them are translated into walking styles and gestures, reaching the intensity of silent film. Even fine subtleties can be displayed: When Mrs. Peachum sneeringly

bids farewell to the imprisoned Macheath, her leg twitches—in memory of the little dance she shared with the infamous gangster a few days earlier at the Octopus Hotel.

And so the piece takes on an exemplary quality. The distinctive puppet ensemble appears as a panorama of human types; plot and musical interpolations become waxworks of human behavior; when the puppets act, the music also becomes *gestisch* in a naïve and direct way. “What we were aiming to create was the prototype of opera,” Weill wrote in 1929—Sládek’s production shows us what he meant. The human tendency to delude oneself and others is surely the most fertile ground for theater. Time and again the well-rehearsed dialogue reveals that the characters’ lines sound “false” and meretricious, not unlike the folk plays of Ödön von Horváth. And the characters always talk differently than they act and act differently than they talk.

The music carries them, as Sládek demonstrates when he uses the puppets to their full advantage. Unlike clumsy humans, puppets have no trouble rising off the ground and hovering. Polly does this first during the refrain of “Seeräuberjenny.” All of a sudden the staging does not appear to be cynical at all. Rather, it seems romantic in the best and highest sense, when social critique and poetry intertwine. Herbert Jhering, not exactly an apolitical critic, noted presciently in a review of the 1928 premiere that “the tone has been found that neither opposes nor negates morality . . . neither parodic nor serious. Rather, it proclaims a different world in which the barriers between tragedy and humor have been erased.”

Andreas Hauff
Mainz

Pittsburgh

Dreigroschen@75

Die Dreigroschenoper

Pittsburgh Opera Center

Premiere: 22 February 2003

The Pittsburgh Opera Center's production of *The Threepenny Opera*, performed in a gritty industrial building, evoked almost visceral cynicism. The stark yet intimate setting made the opera topical and relevant even for a jaded twenty-first century audience.

The Center provided the cast, ten young professional singers from around the world who are in residence throughout the season of the Pittsburgh Opera and who fill the supporting roles during the main company's season. The "theater" used to be a former processing room in a brewery, now part of an artists' cooperative. The cold two-story concrete and glass-block room, with peeling paint and exposed pipes, was adapted with risers along two sides for the audience, and the orchestra played unseen from an alcove. Brian Garman conducted the singers via a TV monitor.

This production was a collaboration with Quantum Theatre, whose director Karla Boos is noted for staging theater in industrial sites that comment on the play's setting and script. The Brew House huddles by railroad overpasses in a warehouse district off the thoroughfares of Pittsburgh's South Side. The weather on opening night added to the mood, as a cold rain fell on mounds of months-old snow.

Once inside, the atmosphere remained chilly. The audience reached their seats by passing through actors wearing trench coats and pacing the floor or sitting on suitcases, foreboding evil, occasionally staring up as a spotlight raked the floor and menacing announcements blared in various European languages above the recorded martial music of the overture. Actors and spectators alike gave the impression of waiting to be loaded onto trains headed to a concentration camp. The last time I had such a feel-

ing was during a visit to East Berlin before the fall of the Wall.

That association, suggesting political developments that Brecht and Weill could only imagine when they completed the opera in 1928, made for a jarring contrast with the plot, which is less about fascism than about the morals of individuals who make up a society. But the feeling of vulnerability it established with the audience lasted throughout the evening. It was reflected in the sparse set and props: industrial rolling staircases suggesting décor, pliers and hammers simulating food. The sharp clang of the staircases being locked into position—with gunshot intensity—was used to great effect in the choreography of several numbers.

In keeping with the training mission of the Pittsburgh Opera Center, musical director John Mauceri chose to have the singers perform the musical numbers in Brecht's original German, with English paraphrases projected above the stage. The

lyrics were for the most part better articulated and understood than the rushed and under-spoken dialogue (Michael Feingold's translation). The singing was superb, the acting uneven.

The cast's voices were well suited to their roles. Peter Nathan Foltz as Macheath lacked a large voice but excelled in the "Ballade vom angenehmen Leben." The most powerful voice belonged to Krzysztof Kowalewski (Tiger Brown), and Holli Harrison gave a memorable portrayal of Mrs. Peachum. Zara Barrett (Lucy Brown) and Monica Yunus (Polly Peachum) sang convincingly and were especially effective in the "Eifersuchtsduett." Yunus's voice has a marvelous sheen and edge that was a pleasure to hear in a small space. The closed, hard-walled chamber made the cumulative effect of the ensembles overwhelming. Javier Abreu deserves special mention for his physicality in the role of Filch.

Garman's orchestra (2 saxes, flute/piccolo, clarinet, bassoon, 2 trumpets, trombone, cello, bass, percussion, keyboard, and guitar/banjo) played Weill's orchestrations convincingly and sometimes superbly. The opera was presented in two acts, the first ending with Mrs. Peachum's "Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit," the second opening with "Zuhälterballade."

In this time of big-budget, mass-mediated culture and a national preoccupation with terror from abroad, the Pittsburgh Opera Center's industrial-chamber production of *The Threepenny Opera* came like a splash of cold reality. It was a reminder that even forces too great to control begin with our individual moralities and our relationships with the people in our own communities. No matter how much the world may have changed in the 75 years since Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht wrote their "play with music," that message remains true.

Deane L. Root
University of Pittsburgh



Macheath (Peter Nathan Foltz) awaits execution as Polly (Monica Yunus) and Mr. Peachum (Daniel Teadt) look on. Photo: Kevin Patterson

Threepenny@15

Augsburg

Die Dreigroschenoper

Theater Augsburg

Premiere: 23 November 2002

“He who offers abundance will please quite a few.” Is this motto of Goethe’s director in *Faust* good advice? Holger Schultze’s staging of the *Threepenny Opera* aspires to be colorful, cheeky, comedic, free of dust, even free of ideology. “Our version will be very much in the vein of comedy. After all, we live in the ‘fun society’ and the *Threepenny Opera* satirizes society,” the director commented on 21 September in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Aside from the fact that ten days earlier marked the anniversary of 9/11, generally viewed as the end of that “fun society” or *Spassgesellschaft* (a German term introduced about ten years ago to describe an increasingly escapist society), fun has many dimensions. For all the fun of this staging, it is questionable whether the entertainment value of the piece was actually increased. As if in a circus, the crooks toss plates to each other in a slapstick manner while setting the banquet table for the wedding in the stable. Juggling seems to be the skill of the evening (more than singing), but the piece would have fared far better if it had also juggled menace and amusement, or bloodstained wit and smart comedy. What’s offered instead is a comfortable evening’s entertainment with a few effects for show, hardly what Weill and Brecht intended. Rather than utilizing jokes, the work becomes one. Tilo Krügel portrays an

over-the-top, though vocally able Macheath, who is neither threatening nor elegant, neither conquering seducer nor conquered brothel visitor: a clown in the role of a run-of-the-mill dandy who accidentally stumbled into a Brecht piece. Beatrix Doderer’s Polly, a blond ingenue with glasses and a tendency to be vulgar, is misconceived insofar as Act II fails to show her transformation into a competent leader (she becomes the gang’s new boss) and clever businesswoman (she handles the income and bank deals). It’s hard to believe that this Polly could arrange a money transfer or oust her husband Macheath. Furthermore, the scene par excellence of Brechtian epic theater, the second scene in Act I (Polly’s performance of “Seeräuber Jenny” within the performance), is simply missed. Intended as a clever directing trick, her failing memory of the song text becomes ludicrous. The intention may have had a point: Macheath expects his gang to provide festive surroundings for his wedding, something they cannot deliver, and their best efforts produce only some dreadful singing (“Hochzeitslied”). Polly tries to save the situation by offering a song which is meant to soothe her husband’s anger at his incompetent employees. The director indicates the spontaneity of her decision by having her constantly blank on lines. This does get the audience’s attention, but it obscures the fact that Brecht introduces different layers—a play within a play which is not handled properly in the Augsburg production. Alas.

Other staging ideas drew more attention (in the press as well), such as the replacement of the Riding Messenger by the British Queen (without horse), thus creating topical humor. And finally the chorale of the “Drittes Dreigroschenfinale” is delivered with the singers’ eyes directed piously heavenward, while the crooks happily empty the singers’ pockets; things remain the same, no matter how emphatic, maudlin, and conciliatory the ending appears to be.

But these staging ideas, no matter how

effective they may be, fail to establish a connection between the piece and our time. True, Wolfgang Buchner’s set design can be seen as relating to our time with its factory-like concrete walls and hydraulic arm-chairs, but the overall appearance of the staging remains operetta-like and distances the audience. The production used Brecht’s revised script from 1931.

Musical director Geoffrey Abbott conducted the recently published critical edition of Weill’s score, edited by Stephen Hinton and Ed Harsh as the first volume of the Kurt Weill Edition. Thus the audience heard some of the rarely played entr’actes and incidental music given in the edition’s appendix, the fruits of these new source studies. The seven-piece band closely matched the original, but a few instruments were missing, including flute, double bass, cello, and Hawaiian guitar. On the one hand, practical limitations such as the need for very quick changes of instruments led to this decision. On the other hand, as Abbott emphasizes, these instruments do not create a significantly different sound: he replaced the Hawaiian guitar with a mandolin, for example. Some small alterations occur, mainly as a result of staging decisions. While “Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit,” cut in 1928, is reinstated, “Arie der Lucy” and its surrounding scene aren’t, presumably for reasons of length (the Augsburg production lasted 165 minutes including intermission). During the “Kanonen-Song” the entire stage ensemble joined in for the last refrain. The performance was amplified by microphones to ensure that everyone in the 980-seat theater could understand the text.

The overall impression of the production is decidedly mixed: A few creative sparks cannot lift the staging out of its mediocrity, while the Dreigroschen Band deserves high praise. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for Polly and Jenny (Gabriele Fischer), as their singing was not convincing. More appealing was the Peachum couple (Eva Maria Keller, Thomas Schneider). Once more it seems to be proven that the seemingly light is hard to pull off.

Joachim Lucchesi
Universität Karlsruhe



Macheath (Tilo Krügel) shares a dance with Jenny (Gabriele Fischer) in the brothel. Photo: Lioba Schöneck

Arrangement

Dreigroschen@75

Sechs Songs aus der Dreigroschenoper

Arranged for Piano by Marino Formenti

Universal Edition UE 32645

Since *The Threepenny Opera* was one of the most popular musical theater works of the twentieth century, it may seem surprising that Marino Formenti's keyboard arrangements of *Sechs Songs aus der Dreigroschenoper*, "Barbarasong," "Seeräuberjenny," "Ballade vom angenehmen Leben," "Liebeslied," "Zuhälterballade," "Kanonensong" represent the first published arrangements made for the piano in seventy-five years and perhaps the first "serious" ones. Readers of this Newsletter know of countless versions for various vocal ranges or instruments, published or unpublished, recorded and unrecorded, of individual numbers from Weill's score. Who hasn't heard "Mack the Knife" performed by steel bands, or its opening phrase digitized as the ring of a cell phone?

Weill himself encouraged the popular exploitation of his music to address the largest market. Over the years, the music's original publisher, Universal Edition, has issued instrumental arrangements for violin and piano, saxophone quartet, and clarinet quartet. In the 1920s, in the wake of *Threepenny's* tremendous success, UE published two popular arrangements for piano: "Tango-Ballade" (UE 8848) and "Dreigroschenoper-Potpourri" (UE 12663), simplified arrangements of eight selections that though listed in a UE catalogue as late as 1980, are no longer available. Then nothing else for piano until the current publication. It was worth the wait.

Without question, the Formenti *Sechs Songs* stake a claim as one of the best sets of arrangements ever made of a musical theater work. Written by a gifted pianist (a phenomenon according to some critics) and an experienced conductor who has studied composition, the arrangements strike that rare balance between recreating a composer's particular sound world and being wholly effective pianistically.

Formenti conceived the *Sechs Songs* as a cycle for concert performance (though the arrangements can also be played individually). As transcriptions, Formenti's arrangements preserve the strophic structures of Weill's songs. Throughout, Formenti weaves together with pianistic adroitness the subtle counterpoint, voice leading, incisive rhythm and lyrical qualities of Weill's score. In the "Barbara Song," the melody, stated in the treble, and a propulsive inner line, implicit in the keyboard part in Weill's original setting, acquire a special vitality. While the transcriptions never veer toward orchestral reduction for piano, there are clever quotations from the keyboard part of Weill's instrumentation (e.g., Formenti keeps the brusque octaves in contrary motion in the verse of the "Barbara Song" and the flighty arpeggios in the "Ballade vom angenehmen Leben"). Formenti, possessed of an extraordinary sonic imagination, realizes the varied colors of Weill's orchestration with a thorough exploitation of the piano's registers and contrasts in its combinations.

The arrangements also exploit the inherent dramatic quality of the narrative songs. Nowhere is this more evident than in the "Seeräuberjenny" arrangement. The opening ostinatos of Weill's orchestration played by the two clarinets and trumpet, with their

piquant dissonance of a minor second, are stated in a chordal octave pattern for the right hand, out of which grows a quietly intense rendering of Polly's vocal line. The cymbal crash and tutti orchestra that punctuate the first verse are here widely spaced, *sforzato* octaves. And the tension of Pirate Jenny's narrative is all the more striking because of the varied means of pianistic idiom: toccata chordal octaves marked *pianissimo* and broken chords in sixteenth-note patterns.

There are virtuoso touches throughout. Numbers 3 ("Ballade vom angenehmen Leben") and 6 ("Kanonensong") are the most audaciously difficult. In "Ballade vom angenehmen Leben," the broken octaves in sixteenth-note rhythms, sextuplet sixteenth-note arpeggiations, and octaves alternating between right and left hands in a fast, ascending pattern all challenge pianistic technique. Leaps in the left hand involving chords and octaves form difficult patterns both in the "Kanonensong" and "Ballade vom angenehmen Leben." No less challenging is the projection of the melody in the "Zuhälterballade," first in the tenor register of the piano and then the treble. As in Weill's original setting, the keyboard texture becomes more elaborate as the passages relating to the verses in the duet between Macheath and Jenny unfold, all the while underpinned by insistent tango rhythms.

Formenti's arrangements are true to Weill's harmonic language (the transcriptions maintain original keys as well as tempos). And like the songs on which they are based, Formenti's handling of the idiom is inventive, with the occasional harmonic surprise. The "Liebeslied" has an improvisatory quality: a discreet waltz, part parody—as in the stage work—of a romanticized love song, a disjointed episode, brief but impassioned. Within the arch of the six arrangements, the "Liebeslied" suggests a slow movement.

Formenti has stated that his aim was to write transcriptions in a style wholly consistent with the essence of Weill's *Dreigroschenoper*, though divorced from the lyrics and dramatic context. He acknowledges that the technical difficulties of the transcription derive from translation of Weill's idiom—the totality of melody, harmony, polyphony, rhythm, and instrumental color—as well as the distillation of the dramatic nature of Weill's musical settings into compelling keyboard expression. His arrangement, brilliant in pianistic terms, eschews the bravura of, say, Rachmaninoff's keyboard style.

Sechs Songs hint at the prodigious talents of the Italian-born Formenti, a resident of Vienna, where he is the pianist for the contemporary music ensemble Klangforum Wien. In 2002, he created a sensation at the Ojai Music Festival with a four-hour recital comprising the Beethoven Bagatelles, op. 126, the Schubert Sonata in B-flat major, D. 960, works by three Czech composers who perished at the Terezin concentration camp—Viktor Ullmann, Pavel Haas, Gideon Klein—and Morton Feldman's daunting "For Bunita Marcus." Next January, Formenti makes his debut with the Cleveland Orchestra, where he will also give the American premiere of these transcriptions in a solo recital, and offers a three-concert series in April 2004 in New York. In Formenti, who has conducted and performed the keyboard parts of Weill's stage works and chamber music, Weill may have his most ardent exponent for the 21st century, through the solo medium of an instrument the composer neglected.

Mario R. Mercado
New York City

Threepenny@15

History

Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Dreigroschenoper

Hörcollage von Peter Eckhart Reichel

Duophon: Edition Berliner
Musenkinder 07023

Q: When is a book not a book? A: When it's an audio book. An audio book is a book in audio rather than printed format. Yet according to that definition, the CD under review does not really qualify as an audio book either, even though it is billed as one on its cover. What happens when the CD was never a book to begin with? In this case, strictly speaking, there was no original form—or rather, this is it. Its contents are drawn not from one, but from several books, and combined with a number of separate music recordings. Giving it an appropriate shelf mark will be a challenge for music librarians, and it will no doubt end up in bibliographies as well as discographies. Whatever it might be called, it certainly marks a first for Weill studies. That it should be devoted to the genesis of *Die Dreigroschenoper* is not at all surprising. The work is the stuff of legends, like the five high-culture works whose premieres Thomas Forrest Kelly documents in detail in his book *First Nights*: Monteverdi's

Orfeo, Handel's *Messiah*, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (Yale Press, 2000). (*Threepenny*, although not exactly high culture, in spite of this treatment, would be an obvious candidate for inclusion in future editions of Kelly's book.)

The cover of the CD offers the following description: "an audio collage by Peter Eckhart Reichel, including original recordings." The format is familiar from German radio documentaries: a mix of music and historical narration, spoken by actors and/or professional radio announcers, with occasional passages of direct quotation. Such narrative collages with musical interludes have been popular with German public radio stations for years; large numbers of them have dealt with the culture of the Weimar Republic. But this, as far as I know, is the first of its kind to be marketed as a CD. It remains to be seen whether the recipe will be repeated for other works by Weill—or any other composers, for that matter.

As a form of popular musicology, the recipe is attractive, mixing a wide range of secondary literature and reissuing some significant recordings. The recordings interspersed throughout the partly dramatized narrative will be familiar, except for one: Franz S. Bruinier's *Urfassung* of "Das Lied der Seeräuberjenny," recorded by Carola Neher in 1927, almost a year before

Weill wrote his immortal version. This is a rare test pressing from Electrola that, it seems, was never commercially released.

Otherwise the music tracks are mainly from the legendary 1930 sessions with members of the cast from the premiere production. The whole enterprise gets underway with the 1931 Klemperer recording of the "Moritat" and "Das Lied von der Unzulänglichkeit menschlichen Strebens" as they are artfully combined in the *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*.

If anything, the CD comes closest to being an

audio book of Ernst Josef Aufricht's memoirs, published in 1966 as *Erzähle, damit du dein Recht erweist*. Aufricht is introduced in the opening narration, after a travelogue of late-1920s Berlin theater culture, as "our young man." By and large the story told is Aufricht's, supplemented by isolated passages taken from other well-known autobiographical sources: Géza von Cziffra, Blandine Ebinger, and Elias Canetti. Their testimony serves to demonstrate that "the whole truth was multilayered." Why did Carola Neher really drop out of the show shortly before the premiere? Was it because of her husband's death? Or because Villon was his favorite poet and she couldn't stand Brecht's adaptations? Or was it that she felt her part was too small, despite Brecht's efforts to enlarge it? The matter, variously discussed in the sources, is left undecided.

Much is made of the documented doubts about the work's viability prior to opening night and about the various dissonances between members of the production team and cast. Sound effects are also used, if sparingly, for atmosphere. Comings and goings are accompanied by footsteps and closing doors. And the actor playing Brecht (Thomas Pigor) even has an authentic-sounding Bavarian accent. Lenya's German, on the other hand, is way too "high" (Katherina Lange). Nor are all the tracks played without interruption and in their entirety. The "Tango-Ballade," for example, is faded in and out, and the "Overture" is accompanied by a "voice-over," perhaps to keep the CD under 80 minutes (total playing time is 79:45).

So, apart from the Bruinier track, there is nothing really new here. This particular collage may not have appeared in book form before, but as something that amounts to an audio realization of Aufricht's memoir, it succeeds in rendering a written form of oral history finally oral. And even if the "Entstehungsgeschichte" is more story than history, listening to it, music and all, is vastly more pleasurable than merely reading it. I am obliged to note that there is no English-language scholarship cited among the primary and secondary sources, not even the Kurt Weill Edition.

Stephen Hinton
Stanford University



Dreigroschen@1/5



Istanbul, 1988



Nordhausen, 1996



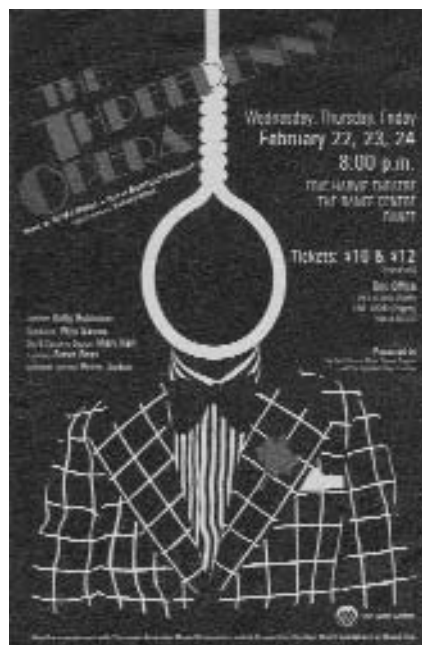
Weimar, 1998



New York, 1989



Villingen, 1998



Banff, 1989

Books

Kurt Weill: Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition

Selected and edited by Nils Grosch

Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002. 526 pp.

ISBN: 3-476-01838-5

So far, two editions of Weill's letters have been made available: the correspondence between Weill and Lotte Lenya (ed. Lys Symonette and Kim Kowalke) and Weill's letters to his family (ed. Lys Symonette and Elmar Juchem). Now Nils Grosch has edited the correspondence between Weill and his publisher Universal Edition, providing us with the third and last large body of central Weill correspondence.

The new edition presents a selection, about 700 of 1,472 letters, and in his introduction the editor informs us of his selection criteria. He preferred to include those letters which touch on "aesthetic, cultural, political, and biographical matters" (p. v). The decision not to print the entire correspondence is understandable in light of the large number of letters which survive. And yet it is regrettable. While the general value of the edition will be appreciated by Weill scholars, there is a drawback: When dealing with detailed questions, researchers will be compelled to examine the omitted letters in one of three archives (Universal Edition in Vienna, the Weill-Lenya Research Center in New York, or Sibley Music Library in Rochester). Perhaps one could have improved this unfortunate situation by including a short summary of each omitted letter in an appendix, even if it meant printing fewer letters in full. This would have ensured a complete overview of the content and facilitated precise searching for specific items of interest.

The letters are grouped by year and span the period from 1924 to 1950. Up to 1932 Grosch has provided a succinct introduction for each year that summarizes the most important events and developments; the years from 1933 to 1950 are presented in two groups, also with introductions (1933–37 and 1946–1950). These introductory notes offer a good orientation to the reader, but they cannot replace commentary on individual letters. The lack of such commentary limits the edition's value to interdisciplinary scholars (a good example of economical but instructive commentary would have been Christopher Hailey's edition of the correspondence between Paul Bekker and Franz Schreker). A comprehensive index of names and work titles offers selective access to the letters at certain points. The decision to include some biographical data in the name index makes up in part for the lack of commentary.

In spite of these reservations—which an editor must deal with in deciding to omit letters—the significance of the collection as an important document of cultural and institutional history as well as music history and biography remains undiminished. If readers have the patience to read the letters one by one, they will gain deep insights not only into the ever-difficult relationship between Weill and his publisher, but also into the attempts of both parties to exert a strong influence on the schedules of opera houses for their own financial benefit. The first years show the publishing house in a

poor light. It is striking to see that before 1926 Universal Edition gave Weill hardly any support in promoting his works and, at times, even hindered him: Over and over again Weill has to complain about carelessly produced orchestral parts, late delivery of parts, and late payments of his monthly advances, which sometimes were skipped altogether. Weill had to take it upon himself to promote his works to conductors and theaters. Only after the success of *Mahagonny Songspiel* in the summer of 1927 did the situation change. Then UE not only realized that Weill was the most innovative opera composer of the younger generation but also sensed his market potential. The publisher began to treat Weill as an asset. But the rough times spent acting as his own agent had strengthened Weill's self-confidence, and up until 1933 he proved to be a tough negotiator and matter-of-fact businessman who was very well aware of his own market value.

The correspondence is dominated by business matters, such as production prospects and marketing strategies. Aesthetic issues in the narrow sense are addressed only rarely. In all likelihood, these questions were raised during numerous meetings, especially between Hans Heinsheimer, head of UE's opera division, and Weill (cf. letter 246). (The correspondence between Weill and his publisher forms, by the way, a model of how the letter begins to forfeit its role as primary communication medium in an age of increased mobility and frequent use of the telephone.) Aspects of opera aesthetics surface, for instance, in Emil Hertzka's reservations about *Mahagonny* (letter 292) and Weill's reply (letter 297). A debate about the relation between the entertainment industry and traditional cultural life, begun by Heinsheimer in 1929, is one of the correspondence's most intriguing aspects, as Grosch rightly observes (letters 647, 650). The marketing of Weill's compositions through sheet music, song albums, dance band arrangements, and recordings was pushed by composer and publisher alike, and the letters offer fascinating insights into the mechanics of such marketing strategies.

Considering the large volume of correspondence, it seems appropriate to ask whether the publisher attempted to influence any compositional project or even to propose one in the first place. The answer: not really. Generally, the publisher stayed in the background and Weill remained undeterred in his views. During the early years, the publisher displayed a general lack of interest. Perhaps the biggest exception was UE's rejection of Weill's opera *Na und?* (now lost), a deep disappointment for the composer. In 1929, direct criticism appears for the first time, when Heinsheimer tries to persuade Weill that the song style is dated. Heinsheimer suggests in the same year that Weill should turn to instrumental music and compose an orchestral piece. But decisive artistic input never came from UE.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the correspondence reflects almost seismographically the radicalized political and cultural climate after 1930 that deterred many theater executives from programming Weill's works, thereby eliminating the composer's means of support. While the publisher had relied on Weill's creative energy and good sense of marketing possibilities, it was now Heinsheimer who correctly read the signs of the times and urged Weill to leave Germany.

Andreas Eichhorn
Albertus-Magnus-University of Cologne

Books

Musical: Das unterhaltende Genre

Edited by Armin Geraths and Christian Martin Schmidt

With Rüdiger Bering, Armin Geraths, Michael Hanisch, Peter Hawig, Wolfgang Jansen, Kim H. Kowalke and Christian Martin Schmidt
Handbuch der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert, vol. 6
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According to the editors' introduction, the purpose of this book is "no longer to leave the theoretical or literary discussion of this form of entertaining musical theater to the journalistic profession but to begin approaching this topic with scholarly rigor." This is a heartening resolution, for a fundamental study of the musical, its central works and protagonists—in fact its history of nearly one hundred years—has never been undertaken in German.

Geraths and Schmidt acknowledge that their book is "heterogeneous," invoking the "multifariousness of its topic." Contrasting voices wouldn't necessarily be alarming in a work with seven authors, but even a glance at the table of contents indicates that systematic scholarship is all but absent. For instance, the subject "film musical" is handled not only in Michael Hanisch's chapter on Hollywood, it also receives extensive and essentially contradictory treatment in the articles by Bering, Kowalke, and Schmidt. While Kowalke rightly asserts that syntactical patterns and techniques of Broadway musicals and Hollywood films differ so widely that they should be treated as different genres, Hanisch takes up several pages broaching musical films from Germany, Hungary, and the Soviet Union, thereby completely losing track of his subject, "Passing the Ball between Broadway and Hollywood."

Similar things can be said about Peter Hawig's chapter "Operetta and Its Heritage." On thirty-six of forty-one pages, the author lectures on French, Spanish, English, Viennese, and Berlin operetta of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, until he mentions on the thirty-seventh page, for the first and only time, those American operetta composers whose works he should have discussed as forerunners of the musical: Victor Herbert, Gustav Luders, Ludwig Engländer, Gustave Kerker, Rudolf Friml, and Sigmund Romberg. His assertion of a connection between Kurt Weill and Jacques Offenbach demands dramaturgical evidence. There is no trace of "the inheritances and traditions that led to the entertaining musical theater of the twentieth century" (as the subtitle had promised). "How the genre renewed itself from these stocks is . . . not the subject of this overview" (p. 71).

Those who boast in the preface about the scholarly status of their work must expect close scrutiny of their contributions. Co-editor Christian Martin Schmidt, writing a mere twenty-four pages on the complete oeuvre of George Gershwin, quickly flunks the test. He writes that even in attempting a general description of a musical, and still more in analyzing one, "a scholar faces nearly insurmountable obstacles" (p. 123). The source situation "is so poor that it almost seems futile to approach the subject."

Consequently, he comes up with a trick. Since "any analytical approach to the musical will necessarily remain incomplete and lopsided because basic information on the essential parts of this 'compiled' work of art is missing," he turns to two films produced long after Gershwin's death in 1937: *An American in Paris* by Vincente Minnelli (1951) and Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979). He states, "*Manhattan* is not a film musical, and yet Woody Allen's production reveals an important feature of the genre: The potential, and in principle agreed-upon, multi-functionality of its components, which especially comes into play when these—e.g., the songs—have become so successful and part of everyday life that single parameters—especially the music—can clarify by themselves the overall semantic context (p. 119)." I call such gibberish scholarly pettifoggery and a journalistic con game. A passage by Kowalke several pages later reads almost as direct commentary: "Scholars working on the musical, especially in Europe, have too often conflated the two media and presumed incorrectly that a Broadway musical can be studied from its film adaptation" (p. 156). Musical expert Schmidt, by the way, stubbornly misspells the famed Hollywood director Vincente Minnelli (with only one "n").

Armin Geraths, the other co-editor, whose thirteen bibliographical references—the largest number of entries in the bibliography—show that he is a deeply qualified expert, sets out in the introductory chapter, "The Musical as Genre of Entertainment," to evaluate the genre anew from the inside according to commercial and moral standards. "The development of the musical into the most successful artistic genre of our time no longer leaves room for the commonplace, deeply rooted skepticism toward success as a positive measurement . . . (p. 12); entertainment has a different meaning for the musical than for opera, legitimate theater, and political cabaret . . . (p. 20); 'triviality' as a key term is inevitable when dealing with musicals . . . (p. 23); If the musical sees itself in that way, it will slow down a shift toward melodrama, tragedy, or even agitprop, and retain the primarily serene, comic character of its original manifestation, the musical comedy; in any event it will see that the registers of reconciliation and harmony will triumph to ensure the autonomy of the successful genre at its medium level" (p. 29). Such sentences have to be read twice just to convince us that they are even possible. Geraths pretends to know exactly what is proper for a musical and what isn't. The musical is permitted to amuse in a carefree and trivial manner. But "just as the human eye cannot detect ultraviolet light, the musical is incapable of accommodating certain called-for artistic functions" (p. 23). Thus the musical may not challenge intellectually, provoke, or cause distress, for "a genre can also be abused" (*ibid.*), and the musical can degenerate into an "ominous sign of political ethics completely out of kilter" (p. 21).

In Chapter 6, "Sondheim and Lloyd Webber in the Context of the Musical since 1970," Geraths spends eighty-five pages elaborating on the protagonists of his "good vs. evil" model. In order to set the stage for this fundamentalist Armageddon, the final battle between Andrew's fair land and Stephen's dark depths, the professor of modern English and American literature abandons the scholarly rigor that he had invoked in his preface. He no longer analyzes, but polemicizes, denounces, and slanders. He weaves garlands of adjectives worthy of a Hollywood gossip columnist for his Anglo-angel: "world-wide enthusiasm," "enlightening virility," "surprising density," "joyous self-reflection," "magnificently worked out," "emanating confidence," "top-notch," "grand," "happy," "life-affirming," "phenomenal," "grand world theater *en miniature*." Then there's Sondheim, for Geraths the incarnation of evil, who

“recklessly delivers a plot [*Sweeney Todd*] in which humans are butchered and made into pies, all in the name of a grudge against society” (p. 22). “Sondheim abuses the genre blatantly in *Assassins*,” which Geraths calls “a political campaign piece of the extreme left.” He revives the label “butcher of Broadway” for Frank Rich, Sondheim’s most influential supporter in the New York press, and plays on nationalist feelings: “The fact that Frank Rich praises Sondheim to the skies in the *New York Times* while decrying almost everything from the pen of Lloyd Webber clearly proves him . . . to be a simple-minded patriot” (p. 222). The entertainment expert Geraths also spells the name Minnelli with only one “n,” and he adds another misspelling: Lisa with an “s” instead of the correct Liza with a “z.”

Of the remaining three chapters, only Kim H. Kowalke’s, “The Golden Age of the Musical,” is worth reading. In a welcome departure from the ideology of the editors, it covers brilliantly, concisely, and exhaustively the history and dramaturgy of the musical from the late 1930s through the 1960s in forty-two pages, with all the important artists and shows: “As an unsubsidized, high-risk commercial venture, it sought to balance escalating artistic aspirations with financial exigencies and attempted to gain enhanced cultural capital as the nation’s foremost indigenous theatrical art form” (p. 137). Kowalke puts the overstated significance of the Rodgers & Hammerstein classic *Oklahoma!* in perspective, differentiates carefully all the subgenres, which according to Geraths are not allowed to exist, and places the reviled Sondheim in his proper historical place. Sondheim and director Harold Prince would “radically reinvent the art form for an irrevocably altered cultural landscape.” Sondheim’s *Follies* (1970) was “a requiem for a whole theatrical era and its system of producing musicals—and the American self-image that it had embodied” (p. 145).

Rüdiger Bering examines “The Musical between the Wars”—which Kowalke had treated under the subheading “The Musical Play and Its Precedents”—in a bit more detail, but he doesn’t go beyond pre-existing German-language book publications on the subject. The same is true for Wolfgang Jansen’s “Excursion: Musical in Production.” His insights are marked by phrases like “Only a successful musical is a good musical” (p. 274); “Entertainment follows its own set of rules”; “. . . the content of shows like *Kiss Me, Kate* and *Company* is the ever mandatory question of how guys and gals should get along” (p. 272).

And yes, at the very end, on page 325, the name Liza Minnelli is indeed spelled correctly, exactly as the star pointed out unequivocally in her unforgettable 1972 television special: *Liza with a Z*. But a mere twelve pages later, the name index suffers from short-term memory loss and misspells it again.

Siegfried Schmidt-Joos
Berlin

Books

Kurt Weill, Berlin und die zwanziger Jahre: Sinnlichkeit und Vergnügen in der Musik

Hyesu Shin

Berliner Musik Studien, vol. 23

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Kurt Weill’s compositional output and his aesthetic views during the Berlin years can safely be regarded as thoroughly documented and analyzed. It would seem fairly difficult nowadays to develop a scholarly approach that could produce substantially new results about general aspects of this field without the help of clearly outlined premises (structural, theoretical, or otherwise). Thus, it is curious to see “the relationship between music and the audience” as the central topic of a new dissertation just published by Hyesu Shin, a topic which she considers “neglected by Weill scholarship to date” (p. 12). But addressing the audience, which Weill developed into an art form in the 1920s and which became crucial for his entire oeuvre, has been an essential guidepost in Weill scholarship for almost two decades, and scholars such as Kim H. Kowalke, Christopher Hailey, Andreas Hauff, Tamara Levitz, and this reviewer have made it an explicit point of departure for recent studies which Shin does not take fully into account.

In a total of twelve chapters Shin develops a complex array of literature and explores, from various angles, the impact of Weill’s music as well as its strategies and Weill’s theoretical reflections on them, relating all of these issues to a larger sociohistorical context. The explicit, at times overly detailed, recapitulation of Weill’s writings forms the most important basis of her analysis. She rightly observes that “discarding aesthetic autonomy” and “rejecting the individualistic artistic principle” were “decisive changes in Weill’s thinking” (p. 12). But she seems to misunderstand when she concludes that the critique of absolute music necessarily includes self-criticism. One cannot use the terms “autonomous” and “absolute” interchangeably, for they refer to two entirely distinct musical areas in the aesthetic context of the nineteenth century and relate to two very different positions. (Thus an excursion into audience typology, which later in the book originates from this confusion of ideas, is necessarily problematic even though it may be based on a plausible idea: Weill targeted a potential audience that was diametrically opposed to Adorno’s ideal listener.) The recourse to controversies between musical camps in the eighteenth and nineteenth century proves futile, because musical aesthetics and the conditions for music reception were radically different in the 1920s. Furthermore, the aesthetic goals of a so-called “New Music” were so different from Weill’s (as Shin herself makes clear with a pointed quotation from Albrecht Riethmüller) that the comparison produces little more than the simple insight that Weill wanted music “to appeal on both sensual and cerebral levels.” Shin’s use of the term “absolute music”—which Weill, following Busoni, claimed for his own work—is also problematic, because she does not ground Weill’s

understanding of the term in the music itself. In my opinion, Weill used the term in order to gain independence when employing pre-existing musical forms, and his free use of traditional as well as popular models in his works underlines this. What Shin neglects in the analytical chapters (X–XI) is the fact that this use is motivated by dramaturgical issues, even though the musico-dramatic concept, serving carefully calculated effects in the stage works, is essential in Weill's case. Also, Shin's understanding of the word "aesthetic" does not look beyond the composer's own use of the term. When the "communicative aspect became central to his thinking about music," it did not mean that the aesthetic aspect took "a back seat" (p. 207). On the contrary, it meant that the aesthetic sphere was expanded to include the categories of "impact" and "reception."

A few essays by Weill, written in 1936 and 1937, can properly be deemed decisive for his European years, and Weill's historicizing of the term "commercial theater" with regard to the situation of theaters in Weimar Germany is a self-reassuring reflex. What the book fails to convey, however, is Weill's increasing skepticism toward the subsidized system in Germany and the change in his aesthetics to include an economic as well as an institutional category. Thus the latter category cannot be properly considered in a chapter (VIII) about the social structure of the theater audience or in the discussion of the term that Weill favored in later years, "musical theater" [*musikalisches Theater*], which described first and foremost an institutional (and thereby an economic and sociological) aspect and only on a secondary level a stylistic one.

Because the relationship between reception and artistic production brings communication theory into play, the lack of such theoretical reflection cripples this study. Shin's extensive research on Weill and on the theatrical culture of his time tends to lose focus, as do some truly original observations (as in chapter XII, where the "Surabaya-Johnny" scene is interpreted as a dramaturgical model for the impact of music). The observations remain isolated and are not worked into a line of argumentation that could enrich Weill

scholarship with new thoughts and insights. The opposite seems to be the case. Often Shin paraphrases the arguments of other authors step by step (e.g., Kowalke on pp. 39–42), original source studies are largely absent, and occasionally a Weill text in German is even quoted from an English translation (pp. 63, 210). When dealing with critical reception, Shin tends to limit herself to reviews which have been reprinted—and in some cases analyzed—elsewhere. As shown by the correspondence with his publisher, Weill followed critical reception closely, reacting sensitively to it, but on the other hand he was quite aware that this reception was different from that of larger theater and radio audiences. Signs of this awareness could have been found in his works if Shin had considered reception sources in more detail.

Shortcomings of research also manifest themselves in factual errors: That the relationship between Brecht and Weill came apart over the issue of "prima la musica . . ." (p. 177) cannot be accepted unquestioned; neither can the—now-refuted—claim that the *Berliner Requiem* was composed for male chorus (p. 226) or that the "Tango Angèle" was intended only as a "dramaturgical device" (p. 137) for *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* and not for sale in its own right. In the latter case, a more careful look would have revealed a lesson in Weillian aesthetics: The composer actually intended to popularize the tango prior to the premiere through commercial recordings, so that the audience would recognize it during the performance.

Communication theory, especially the reception process, has become a methodological pillar of cultural theory, musicology, and Weill scholarship that can no longer be marginalized. Even though Shin's study shows commitment and makes many laudable points, these points have mostly been made elsewhere with more precision and insight.

Nils Grosch

Deutsches Volksliedarchiv, Freiburg



The protagonist of *Zaubernacht*, played by Lovis Dengler, and the hand that bears him into the fantasy realm (review begins on next page). Photo: Jens Schlüter

Performances

Zaubernacht

Dessau

Kurt Weill Fest

7 March 2003

A seasoned theater patron knows the gulf between intention and reality. One often hears bold, promising statements prior to the opening, only to be let down by artistic disappointment. Was there a chance that the premiere of *Zaubernacht* on the second weekend of Dessau's Weill Fest would follow a different pattern? Shortly before curtain time, arranger Meirion Bowen, conductor Celso Antunes, and director Milan Sládek addressed the audience in the church-turned-concert hall, Marienkirche. Their brief, unpretentious statements showed a conviction that Weill's early ballet pantomime from 1922 is not only an important work but has the potential to earn a place in the theater repertory.

A staging became feasible only in 2000, when Bowen reconstructed the music from a surviving piano-vocal score. That version premiered on 1 June 2000 during the MusikTriennale Köln with Celso Antunes conducting the Ensemble Contrasts, with soprano Ingrid Schmithüsen. Two years later, Westdeutscher Rundfunk and the Capriccio label released a CD with the same artists; its success resulted in an invitation to come to Dessau.

This brings us to the musical aspects of the production. I am not sure whether Ingrid Schmithüsen, who sang with great expression, is to blame for the fact that the text of the "Lied der Fee" could hardly be understood; at any rate, the Marienkirche's acoustics have a poor reputation. The instrumental ensemble came through quite clearly. The musicians from Cologne performed smoothly and transparently, with a soloist's precision but orchestral effect. Bowen's decision to add a clarinet to the original forces of flute, bassoon, percussion, harp, piano, and string quartet (just as Weill used a clarinet in his *Zaubernacht* suite, *Quodlibet*, op. 9) finds a pragmatic justification in attractive solo passages and opportunities to contrast the strings with a three-part woodwind section. Bowen

informed us that he created a philologically more correct version, omitting the clarinet, but preferred the enriched version for its attractiveness.

Bowen seems to have achieved the goal of making the music sound as appealing as Weill presumably intended; the score is colorful, varied, and full of expression without sounding extravagant and contrived. It's startling to hear "pre-echoes" of subsequent works: not only does the "Algi" foxtrot anticipate the sound world of *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren*; at times one even hears elements of *Der Jasager*, *Die Bürgschaft*, and *Der Silbersee*, of *Die sieben Todsünden* and *Marie Galante*.

Weill himself made a few important remarks about *Zaubernacht* in an interview early in 1930. Addressing Dr. Hans Fischer, editor of the newly established music education journal *Die Musikpflege*, he remarked a propos the impending premiere of *Der Jasager*: "The first work in which the simple style can be recognized was probably the ballet *Zaubernacht*. At the time I studied with Busoni. . . . In the following years, artistic experiments, marked by struggles for new harmonic and melodic means of expression, overpowered my work." Accordingly, it was not the expressionist overload of *Der Protagonist* but the seemingly lightweight children's pantomime *Zaubernacht* that formed the foundation of Weill's career as composer *teatralis*. And Antunes is quite right when he says, "This music simply begs to be staged." The manner in which the thirty-nine musical episodes interconnect, and the way the music presses forward from one scene to the next, already proclaim Weill's masterful feel for the rules of pantomime (whose wordless "silence" is broken only by the introductory "Lied der Fee").

It's no accident that Weill cites Busoni in this context. First of all, one can sense from the mysterious alternating chords that Weill was inspired by the opening sinfonia of Busoni's opera *Doktor Faust*. Furthermore, the entire musical layout, with its use of diverse stylistic means, seems to be influenced by the concept of New Classically, which Busoni defined in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1920 as "the mastering, sifting, and exploiting of every achievement of past musical experiments—incorporating them into solid and beautiful forms." The ballet's plot, in which toy and fairy tale figures come to life at night through the powers of a fairy, also corresponds to Busoni's notion of opera as a

"magic mirror" with "dance, masquerade, and the otherworldly," a notion he developed in the fourth chapter of his famous treatise, *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst*.

One can only congratulate the producers for hiring the Slovak mime, Milan Sládek, as artist in residence at this year's Kurt Weill Fest and, as such, the director of *Zaubernacht*. Sládek, who lives and works in Cologne, did not attempt to recreate a historically plausible version of the original choreography, which he could have done by following the notes in David Drew's *Kurt Weill: A Handbook* (Univ. of California Press, 1987). Instead, he favored a scenario appropriate for today's children, adolescents, and adults. By means of pantomime, commedia dell'arte, and black-light theater, he narrates the dream of a little boy imagining stages and images of his future life as a grown-up. While Isidoro Fernandez, Mona Roth, Christina Bauer, and Thomas Georgiadis remain invisible, playing black-clad helpers with inconspicuous perfection, Lovis Dengler is the center of attention. He portrays the muted protagonist beautifully, with childlike openness, anxiety, and curiosity, as well as courage and need of support.

In the beginning, when his mother takes him to bed, everything seems to be in order—except for the fact that the room's objects are strangely fluorescent, and the three hands of the grandfather clock have the same length, so it's impossible to determine the time. And sure enough the objects disappear and the mother turns into a fairy; then an oversized hand abducts the boy into the realm of fantasy—an image of striking depth, just as Sládek's entire concept displays a profound sense of Jungian psychology.

The creative and often fantastic or surreal images hint at experiences of tenderness, sexuality and partnership, of self-confidence, self-assertion, and responsibility. Competing with Arlecchino and Pantalone for Columbina, the boy has his first experience of male rivalry; he observes how fabulous creatures resembling microorganisms under a microscope are drawn to each other and mate; butterflies flutter enticingly to blossoms; when he catches one, he must grasp its vulnerability. A female entertainer in a shimmering golden dress and three attractive ladies of the evening frighten and fascinate him; finally he meets a girl who resembles him, matches him, and loves him. And with a tiny doll as baby the family idyll is complete.

But in this nocturnal realm of motherly protection, ominous things can be dreamed as well. The rocking horse is exchanged for a real one, and the boy goes off to war to the strains of martial music. But sooner than expected, he encounters injury and despair—no different from the soldiers of World War I which had ended a mere four years before the pantomime's premiere. Later on, one of the lively butterflies abducts the baby, and the girl disappears, too. At the end, both reappear briefly, but

conscious, connecting logic that corresponds very well with the score's thirty-nine episodes as listed in Drew's *Handbook*. Sládek's staging does not attempt to parallel the score, which would simply create redundancy, nor does it divorce the plot from the music. What emerges is an effective interplay of static and dynamic. While the music still describes one emotional situation, the staging is already preparing a change in atmosphere, and when the staging is at a standstill, the music announces



The boy encounters a lady of the evening. Photo: Jens Schlüter

the dream has almost come to an end and at dawn the objects resume their old places. He is back to being a good little boy in bed by the time his mother comes to wake him.

Sládek's concept, effectively aided by Ján Kocman's set and Rolf Faßbender's technical support, follows the dream's logic. In a process that appears spontaneous and arbitrary, one scene generates the next, and yet the visions adhere to a subcon-

scious, connecting logic that corresponds very well with the score's thirty-nine episodes as listed in Drew's *Handbook*. Sládek's staging does not attempt to parallel the score, which would simply create redundancy, nor does it divorce the plot from the music. What emerges is an effective interplay of static and dynamic. While the music still describes one emotional situation, the staging is already preparing a change in atmosphere, and when the staging is at a standstill, the music announces

Recordings

Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano: Jewish Cabaret, Popular, and Political Songs, 1900–1945 [includes: *Two Folksongs of the New Palestine*]

New Budapest Orpheum Society
Ilya Levinson, Music Director and Arranger

Cedille CDR 90000 065

Given the genres and dates specified in the subtitle, the collection of songs on *Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano* may appear more coherent than it is. In fact, it is a minor miracle, a rich array of songs in diverse dialects drawn from many unusual sources. Of particular value for those interested in Jewish identity and politics of the period, the performances are entertaining, for the most part, and aesthetically pleasing. The songs are grouped in four sections: I. From the Periphery to the Habsburg Metropole; II. The Crisis of Tradition and Modernity; III. Response and Resistance: Political Songs; IV. Zionist and Pioneer Songs. While all four sections deserve an in-depth review, I will pay special attention to the last one: Part IV features arrangements of pre-existing melodies by some of the leading Jewish composers of the late 1930s, including Weill, Aaron Copland, Darius Milhaud, Ernst Toch, Stefan Wolpe, and Paul Dessau.

Just as *Dancing* is an aural record of many artists from a dizzying range of oral and written traditions, it is also a selective blend of programs the New Budapest Orpheum Society (named after a Vienna-based cabaret troupe active from 1889–1919) has performed since the mid-1990s under the artistic direction of ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman. The performers are a varied crew from the Chicago area, including cantors Deborah Bard and Stewart Figa, mezzo-soprano Julia Bentley, a jazz bassist, a classical flutist, and a violinist. Ilya Levinson's arrangements are exuberant but show clarity and subtlety when called for. Likewise for the perfor-

Andreas Hauff
Mainz

mances, although they tend to err on the safe side.

Given the range of performance contexts (from blues bars to universities), the group and Cedille Records decided to release the same songs on two discs: the first in their original languages (including German, Viennese and Yiddish dialects, Hebrew, and English), the second in American English and Hebrew only. Thankfully, the additional disc and extensive liner notes come without extra cost to the consumer.

This range is very useful, for as Philip Bohlman's liner notes explain, the variety of genres, dialects, and therefore appropriate performing styles on the recording come from Jewish immigrants' attempts to live between two (or more) worlds. Whether immigrants to Vienna, Paris, New York, or elsewhere, the Jews engaged in music shared a struggle to maintain, deepen, and often create new identities. These hard decisions were life-changing and often tragic.

What emerges from these clashes is indeed at times a mishmash, but one suiting the "performing" of histories and counterhistories. Fittingly, many of the songs on *Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano* demonstrate juxtapositions of seemingly contradictory styles. One example, from part IV, is Milhaud's arrangement of "Holem Tza'adi (My Step Resounds)," which utilizes percussive accompaniment patterns meant to resemble a number of Latin-American dances, especially a rumba and a tango (milonga). Bohlman describes the vocal part as "explicitly 'orientalist,'" "redolent of [Milhaud's] Sephardic heritage," even like "the improvisatory opening of an instrumental piece in Arabic classical music [*taqsīm*]."

Part IV, "Zionist and Pioneer Songs," has the most coherent history—a history worth telling. All the songs are creatively performed from an edition by Hans Nathan, *Israeli Folk Music: Songs of the Early Pioneers* (A-R Editions, 1994), an edition that took no less than sixty years to appear. As the Zionist desire for a Jewish state in Palestine grew in the 1920s, there was a need to "invent a traditon" (in the sense of historian Eric Hobsbawm) of Jewish nationalist songs. By the 1930s, such folk songs had developed both as part of an oral tradition on kibbutzim or other collective farms (the texts were sometimes created by well-known poets) and as written/published songs (especially in German-Jewish anthologies). Postcards

were another important vehicle for the wide dissemination of such songs. In the early '30s, Nathan, a Jewish Berliner and musicology student, began to collect postcards from the Keren Kayemeth (Palestinian National Fund) and with great difficulty contacted the diverse composers mentioned above, asking them to compose arrangements for pioneer settlers in the *Yishuv* (pre-statehood Jewish settlements in Palestine).

Quite remarkably, they agreed, even thanking Nathan for the opportunity, although this gratitude did not keep Milhaud from complaining to Nathan on 11 August 1938, "I have rarely seen such a poorly constructed melody." Weill, for his part, seemed very pleased, describing his restraint in making the arrangements "diverse" and artful, but not "too complicated" (selected letters are available in the preface to the edition). Characteristically, as demonstrated in Weill's choice of tunes, the arrangements, and in two letters to Nathan, he was well aware the songs were intended for people who needed an image of future hope (the "glory of the nation" and "peace unto the weary") but also had to deal with daunting daily realities, including hard labor, as in "Havu L'venim (Bring the Bricks)," and threats to security, in "Ba'a M'nucha (There Comes Peace)."

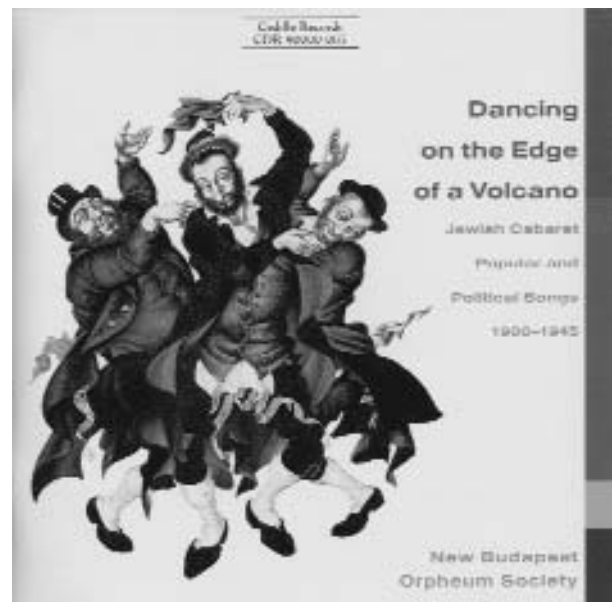
Since "Havu L'venim" is a kind of work-song, Weill chose a "restrained march rhythm" and typical chromatic alternations in the inner voices of chords. Although Weill wrote a first and second ending so that the whole (two longish "verses" with a "refrain" of "Bring the bricks") would repeat, the performers also choose to internally repeat this refrain, which does add extra emphasis to those words (and time to the track), and make some other modifications. The feeling of community is implied by the two singers involved (Bard and Figa) performing first in antiphony, then in unison.

"Ba'a M'nucha (There Comes Peace)," on the other hand, has a more straightforward strophic text and music (three strophes with refrain). In a dramatic twist, which must have attracted Weill, the opening lines evoke

peace and slumber in the Jezreel Valley in Galilee, but the refrain ("What of the night? . . . Slumber, valley . . . We are thy sentinels") refers to the constant threat of attack from native Palestinians not so pleased with Jewish gains (which cannot help but bring to mind contemporary struggles). Weill delivers a still, lullaby accompaniment in D minor, to be sure, but sets the B-natural of the tune against the recurring D-C-Bb-A descending line in the bass (played a touch menacingly by the double bass on the recording). Although there are shifts in accompaniment for the second and third strophes, we keep returning to the refrain, the last two lines of which ("Slumber, valley . . . sentinels") repeat. This produces a recording of over four minutes. Bard is not quite able to sustain the needed mix of reassurance and terror.

All told, the New Budapest Orpheum Society has produced a wonderful offering. While the music on the recording may sound at first like mere stereotypes, and in fact the early 20th-century Jewish performers and composers depended on them to some extent, their performances constituted a complex and dangerous dance, one that continued even into the wartime ghettos and concentration camps. The modern-day performers here have done a great service by bringing these seriously playful artists to life again.

Richard Rischar
Dickinson College



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