

Kurt Weill

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N e w s l e t t e r



Sound on Record and Film

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Kurt Weill

Newsletter

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A variety of opinions are expressed in the Newsletter; they do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. Letters to the editor are welcome.

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Cover photo: Record label from "Lover Man" (later "Trouble Man" in *Lost in the Stars*) from the album, "Six Songs of Kurt Weill" recorded by Bost Records.



Note from the Editor

Arnolt Bronnen's *Katalaunische Schlacht* (1924), an obscure play about the waning days of World War I, and Franz Werfel's *The Eternal Road* would seem to have little in common. A notable exception, of course, is that Kurt Weill wrote music for both works: perhaps as little as five to ten minutes of incidental music for a 1928 production of Bronnen's play—no music survives—and a great deal more for the vast Biblical pageant which opened its doors to the public on 7 January 1937. One of the most interesting features of these two productions is their use of pre-recorded music, for which Weill, in both cases, employed the latest technology available.

This Newsletter issue features documents which shed light on the circumstances of the productions and the different technologies involved. In excerpts from an oral history interview, Herbert Borchardt recalls his experiences recording music for Weill, beginning with *Katalaunische Schlacht*. Bronnen's play featured a gramophone in the last act, where we hear the voice of a resurrected fallen soldier. In order to cut running costs, the play's producer apparently also decided to record the incidental music, for which electrical recording techniques were available that hadn't been around for the premiere production in 1924 (Weill had studied and used the new techniques in January 1928 for the scoring and recording of "Tango Angèle" for *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*). The music for *The Eternal Road*, on the other hand, was recorded with a sound-on-film process that used ultraviolet light. We reprint an article from a 1937 electronics magazine explaining this short-lived technology, which was subsequently (and most prominently) used in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*. In a letter to Leopold Stokowski, it becomes evident that Weill had some reservations about the use of pre-recorded music in *The Eternal Road*.

Two new books on *The Eternal Road* are reviewed in the back section, which also features a number of performance reviews, most notably a production of *One Touch of Venus* by England's Opera North which caused a sensation, garnering unanimous praise from the press.

Elmar Juchem



Top left: Label of one of Weill's test recordings of "Speak Low" (under its working title, "Too Soon"), made by Bost Records. Bottom left: Venus (Karen Coker) and Rodney (Loren Geeting) at the conclusion of "Speak Low" in Rodney's barbershop, from Opera North's production of *One Touch of Venus*. Photo: Stephen Vaughan

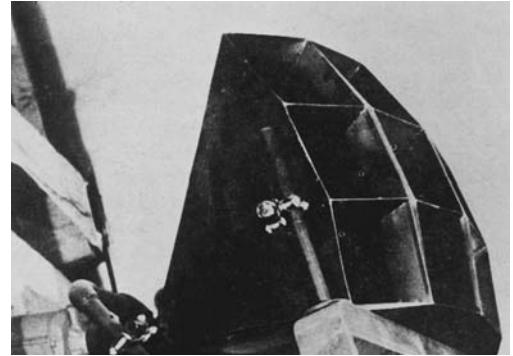


12.9.1935.

Verehrter, lieber Herr Stokowsky,

zu meiner grossen Freude höre ich durch Norman Bel Geddes, dass Sie uns in der Frage einer eventuellen Schallplatten-Wiedergabe meiner Musik zum "Weg der Verheissung" beraten wollen. Ich weiss, dass Sie der grösste lebende Fachmann auf diesem Gebiete sind, und ich bin sehr glücklich, mit Ihnen diese Frage, die für mich überaus schwer zu entscheiden ist, besprechen zu dürfen.

Sie wissen über meine Arbeiten genug, um mir zu glauben, wenn ich Ihnen sage, dass ich seit langer Zeit nach einer Lösung dieses wichtigen Problems suche. Da ich mich fast ausschliesslich mit den Fragen des musikalischen Theaters beschäftige und in allen meinen Werken nach einer neuen heutigen Form der Oper suche, so wäre ich der Bitte, der



On either side of the stage are semi-circular coves extending upward 80 feet. At the base of each and facing is a group of 4 loud speakers. Sound strikes these deflecting coves, reaches the audience indirectly, providing reverberation. Illustration from the original publication of "The Eternal Road" in *Electronics* magazine.

Kurt Weill's letter to Leopold Stokowski dates from 12 September 1935, only a couple of days after he arrived in the U.S. The first page is presented in facsimile to the left, and an English translation of the entire letter is given below. The original letter is held in the Weill-Lenya Papers (MSS 30) at the Yale University Music Library, box 47, folder 14.

Esteemed, dear Mr. Stokowski:

Much to my delight I hear from Norman Bel Geddes that you might advise us on the possibility of using pre-recorded discs to play back my music for *Der Weg der Verheissung*. I am aware that you are the greatest living authority in this field, and I am very happy to be permitted to discuss with you a question that I find terribly difficult to answer.

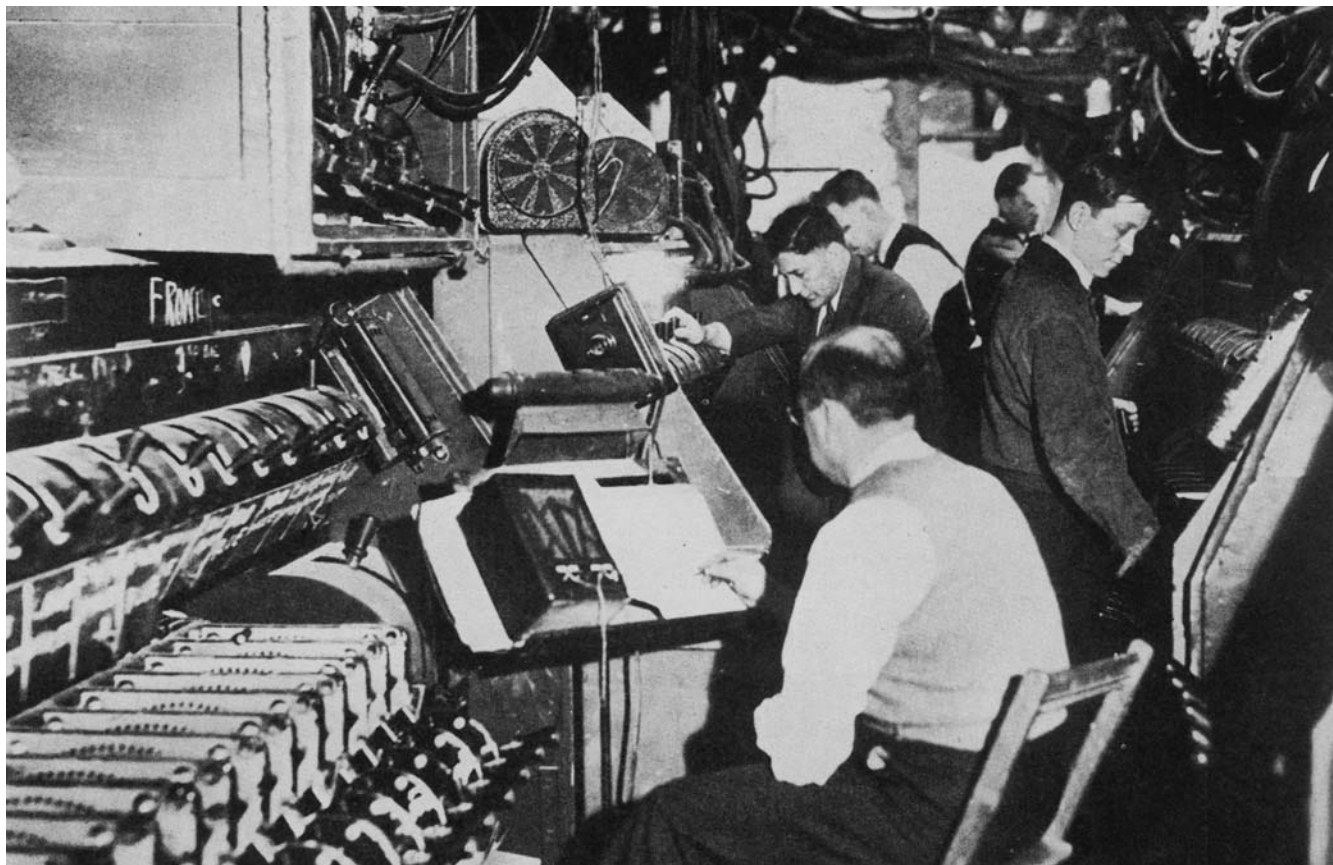
You are familiar enough with my work to believe that I have been searching for a solution to this crucial problem for a long time. Since I have dealt with the difficulties of musical theater almost exclusively, trying to achieve a new, contemporary form of opera in all of my works, I would be the first to embrace happily a path which would utilize the means of modern technology and lower the costs of opera production to a level where opera would become economically viable again.

In Europe, these technological means still lag far behind. But since I have become acquainted with your recording projects, I am convinced that here in America we have the possibility of achieving a truly ideal sound quality from records. In other words, I am aware that by recording my music on discs I will achieve a much better sound quality than in a theater, where I have to face the difficulties of a pick-up orchestra and all the acoustic problems of a theater performance. Therefore, I wouldn't hesitate to employ records for all types of purely orchestral stage music, especially since I have some experience in this area from my work in Berlin (*Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* and *Die Bürgschaft*).

However, in a work that is sung for the most part (arias, ensembles, recitatives, choruses, etc.), I simply cannot make up my mind whether it should be accompanied by an orchestra that has been pre-recorded on discs. How is a singer supposed to develop the music with full intensity and devotion on the spur of the moment, when he is shackled to a tempo relentlessly dictated by a machine? Perhaps one could make the recordings only after all the singers and choruses have been rehearsed so thoroughly that the singer could shape the recording so that all his needs will be met for a live performance of the music. But even then one would lose everything that the night of a performance offers (and each night in a different way), which makes musical theater so exciting.

The reason I am hesitating to use pre-recorded music, especially in the case of *Der Weg der Verheissung*, is the following: In concord with Max Reinhardt and much to his delight, I have tried something here that has often been attempted but never been done so consistently. I have composed about three quarters of Werfel's text in a way that my music, which is being performed mostly by singing actors, not by singers, utilizes the full range between the spoken word and pure singing, including the in-between levels of half-speaking and half-singing. The in-between levels, in particular, which always emerge from the music and blend back into it, will be created only during the rehearsals since they cannot be notated. This kind of musical theater, where the word is always embedded in music, requires of course a sensitive, flexible, and adaptable orchestra, even more than opera does. Do you think this is possible when the music is recorded on discs which will then be used for playback? I would be tremendously interested in hearing your views and in discussing the whole matter with you.

Many thanks in advance and kindest regards from your devoted



Electricians at work, getting orders by loud speaker.

Music for *The Eternal Road*

While en route to America in September of 1935, Weill learned that the intended set design for *The Eternal Road* at the Manhattan Opera House left no room for a live orchestra. Immediately after his arrival in New York, he pondered the advantages and disadvantages of the situation and also explored new recording techniques. Ultimately, the music was recorded with a new technique developed by RCA for sound on film, but a small ensemble of musicians still played live during the performances. This early stereo recording technique was subsequently used for the Disney film *Fantasia*, but the delicate medium was

prone to defects and was superseded after World War II. None of the sound films for *Eternal Road* has been traced. Since the films' base was a flammable nitrate that can dissolve and emit toxic gases, there is little chance that they have survived. The documents presented here—a letter from Weill to Leopold Stokowski, an article on the process of recording the *Eternal Road* score, and a letter from RCA to producer Meyer Weisgal explaining the maintenance of the sound films and projectors—shed new light on the recording process and Weill's thoughts on employing recorded music for a stage work of such vast musical proportions.

The Eternal Road

by G. L. Dimmick

When Mr. Kurt Weill decided to record the music which he had composed for Max Reinhardt's production *The Eternal Road* and to eliminate the orchestra from the theatre, he set a precedent for the legitimate stage. His decision was prompted by the many real advantages resulting from the use of reproduced music.

More space is made available for elaborate stage settings. The orchestra may be recorded under the most favorable acoustic con-

ditions, and the music to be recorded may be rehearsed until the most exacting requirements of the composer are satisfied. In reproducing the music in the theatre, the volume may be controlled with ease and directional effects obtained by placing several loudspeakers at different positions on the stage.

Film recording was chosen because of its longer playing time and because of the ease of cutting. The RCA ultra-violet push-pull method was chosen because of its large volume range and freedom from distortion. (See March and June 1936, *Electronics*, July 1934 and August 1936 *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*.)

The recording of the music for *The Eternal Road* was done at Liederkrantz Hall, New York City. The Hall is approximately 75 feet long, 50 feet wide and 30 feet high. The internal construction is

largely of wood, providing sufficient acoustic damping to prevent excessive reverberation, but having enough reverberation to give the live quality necessary for most effective reproduction of a large orchestra or chorus. A platform about 4 feet high and large enough to accommodate the orchestra was constructed at one end of the Hall. To secure adequate coverage with the smallest number of microphones, the orchestra was bunched rather closely together. The string instruments were to the front and right, the wood winds to the front and left and the horns to the back. Two ribbon microphones were suspended from booms about 10 feet from the floor, 10 feet apart and 8 feet from the nearest instruments. They were pointed toward the back row of instruments, compensating to a large extent for the different distances to the various instruments. The ribbon microphone is most sensitive in the direction at right angles to the axis of the ribbon and falls off to zero sensitivity in the direction parallel to the ribbon. The fact that these microphones have equal sensitivity on the two sides made it possible to obtain an intimate pickup from one side and a reverberant pickup from the other side. The best balance between direct and reflected sound was obtained by the simple process of varying the distance between the microphones and the orchestra.

The necessary recording equipment, a high fidelity monitoring system and a push-pull film phonograph were assembled in an adjoining room. The output from each of the microphones was fed through cables to a pair of microphone amplifiers. These in turn were fed into a mixing panel with the necessary facilities for mixing the output from the two microphones, for adjusting the level of either microphone and for adjusting the level of the combined signal. From the mixing panel, the signal was fed into the recording amplifier connected to the recording galvanometer. A Neon type volume indicator and a monitoring amplifier were bridged across the recording amplifier. The volume indicator consisted of 13 small neon lamps connected in such a way that as the signal was raised,



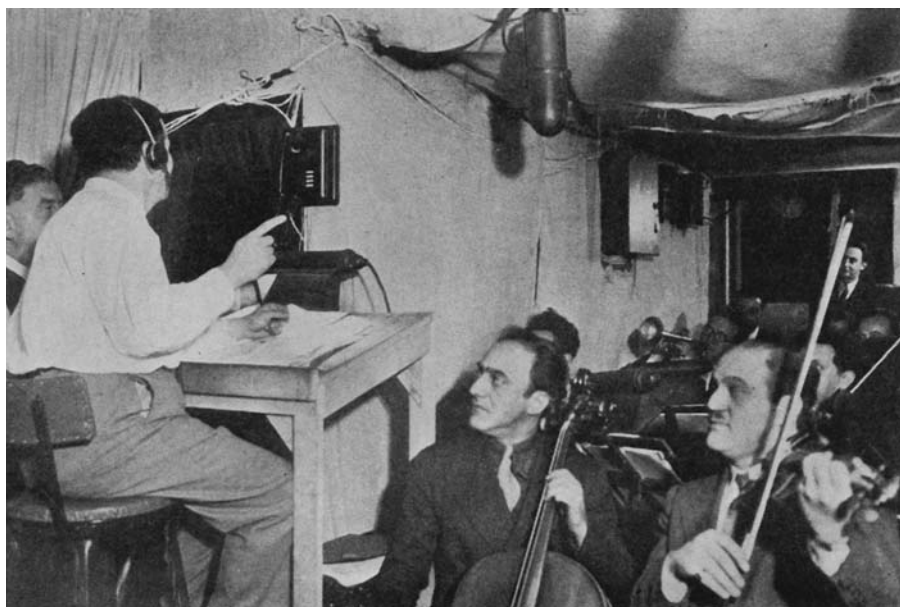
Master control system for all sound apparatus, located in a box on the 4th tier.

each lamp in turn would light at a predetermined level. The indicator covered a range of 48 deg. It was placed just over the mixing panel so as to be easily visible by the mixer. A monitoring speaker at one end of the room was used to judge the quality and balance of the orchestra. The push-pull film phonograph and the recorder were equipped with three-phase synchronous motors, thus insuring perfect synchronism.

During the recording of the orchestra selections, it was necessary to compress the volume range somewhat. The original volume range of the orchestra was about 55 db. It was found advisable to compress this to about 45 db. by allowing the very loud passages to overshoot the sound track as much as 3 db. and by raising the level as much as 7 db. during the very weak passages. So that the time for the loud and weak passages could be known in advance, the mixer followed the musical score and made the necessary volume changes smoothly and slowly.

After the orchestra recordings had been completed, preliminary prints were made for the purpose of synchronizing the subsequent chorus recordings. A chorus of seventy-five voices was assembled in the large hall. Each member was given a Sonatone bone conduction receiver which fastened behind his ear. The director, who was also supplied with a Sonatone receiver, occupied a partially sound proof booth with a window facing the chorus. All of the receivers were connected in parallel and were fed from the film phonograph amplifier. In this way recordings were made of the chorus singing in perfect synchronism with the accompaniment of the orchestra.

The final prints of all the recordings were made on an ultra-violet non-slip



The orchestra plays in a sound proof booth to a microphone. The conductor wears headphones. Twenty-eight giant loudspeakers spray the audience and performers with music, properly mixed.



Sound effect man.

printer. Even though the negatives were perfect, the full quality could not be transferred to the print if intermittent slippage occurred between the films during the printing operation. With the sprocket type printer in common use at the present time, it is nearly impossible to prevent intermittent slippage. The non-slip printer automatically compensates for film shrinkage and insures perfect contact and no relative motion between films. The use of ultra-violet light for printing further improves the quality by restricting the exposure to the surface of the print.

The negatives were recorded on regular positive sound recording film. They were processed to a gamma of about 2.0 and a density of 1.9. The prints were made on regular motion picture positive film and were processed to a gamma of about 2 and a density of 1.4.

Four push-pull soundheads are employed as film phonographs to reproduce *The Eternal Road* music in the Manhattan Theatre. A Selsyn generator supplies the power for the soundhead motors so that they can be interlocked. The orchestra and chorus are reproduced from two of the film phonographs while the other two are used for sound effects. A mixing console has facilities for mixing any or all of the outputs from the four films and for varying the levels. A number of loudspeakers on the stage permit the sound to be directed to the audience from various points. The orchestra may be allowed to come from one direction, the chorus from another and sound effects from still another. In addition to the recorded sound, provision is made for the direct pickup of a small chorus, individual voices, and local sound effects.

Originally printed as "The Eternal Road" in *Electronics* magazine, April 1937. All photos reproduced here, along with their captions, are taken from the original publication. The author, Glenn Leslie Dimmick, worked for RCA in Camden, New Jersey and was credited with a number of inventions that improved the sound quality of the recording technique that he describes.

Letter from Ralph Austrian of RCA (in New York) to Meyer Weisgal, 11 January 1937

Now that *The Eternal Road* has opened and is well under way, there are a few points in connection with the handling of the sound film that I would like to call to your attention. It is most necessary that these suggestions be followed closely in order that any breakdown in the sound shall be avoided.

1. At the conclusion of each performance the reels of film should not be rewound but they should be placed immediately in fireproof and dust proof containers and stored in a safe, cool place until an hour before the next performance, at which time they should be rewound and while rewinding, they can be cleaned and each patch carefully inspected to see that it is good shape and in no danger of opening at the next showing. Your operators have been instructed as to this procedure.

2. At all times when the film machines are not in use, they should be completely and carefully covered with dust proof, moisture proof covers.

3. The film machines should be constantly inspected to make sure that they are free from dust and dirt.

4. It is recommended that if it has not already been done that the floor of the generator room and the film machine room be painted with a rubberized paint, and at all times this floor should be kept free from dust.

5. With good care and careful handling, the two prints with which we have supplied you should run quietly for at least four weeks each. When you desire new prints made up from the negative, we ask that you give us at least one week's notice as all these prints must be made with infinite care and precision.

6. It is suggested that immediately prior to curtain time that the film machines which are selected for use at that particular performance, be run without film for at least five minutes so that they may be thoroughly warmed and lubricated. The amplifier racks should be lit at least five minutes before each performance.



Dual prompters' box facing stage controlling sound and lights. Loud speakers become microphones at throw of switch.

Recording Kurt Weill . . .

. . . *Herbert Borchardt remembers*

Herbert Borchardt (1906–2000) was a recording executive whose professional path crossed Weill's in Germany, France, and the United States. A Berlin native, Borchardt began his career in 1926 in London, working for Brunswick Records, a subsidiary of Deutsche Grammophon. After a brief stint in Berlin in 1927/28, Deutsche Grammophon sent him to Paris to start Polydor Records in 1929. As president he oversaw the construction of the first record manufacturing plant in Paris. When the German army invaded France, Borchardt was placed in an internment camp for Germans residing in France. He managed to escape in September 1941, when he fled with his wife and son to the U.S. Borchardt's family was among 2,000 Jewish refugees who constituted the last group permitted to enter the U.S. during World War II. In New York, Borchardt joined forces with Rudolf Steiner, a businessman, and started Bost Records. The company quickly folded because pressings were difficult to obtain in wartime. In 1943, Borchardt became president of Recoton and continued to work for this company until he retired. The interview was conducted by David Farneth and Kim H. Kowalke on 13 December 1984. The following excerpts have been edited for readability and length.

In Germany

I met Weill back in 1928 when he was making the background music to a play of the Deutsche Schauspielhaus, and [Leopold] Jessner called me up. If we could work out a deal where we would supply the first electronic machines which were built by us [Deutsche Grammophon] together with AEG with loudspeakers and pick-ups, we could record the background music because they didn't want to pay the musicians every night. Jessner was one of the great producers, I would say in English. He was Intendant of the Deutsche Schauspielhaus.¹ He asked Weill to write the background music for a play.

We have a list here. Do any of these plays ring a bell?

It might have been the *Katalaunische Schlacht* by Bronnen. It was in '28 and I was in Berlin in '28. In 1929 I left for Paris to open up a factory for the Deutsche Grammophon Polyphon under the name Polydor in Paris. Weill invited me to the rehearsals of the *Threepenny Opera*, which I wanted to record, but the director in charge of recordings was a middle-aged fellow from Saxony who was formerly a banker, and he had no interest in modern music. I personally, even though my uncle was the president of the company, I never bought our popular records, because I bought them from the competition which had the right artists. And they didn't know how to pick the artists. When I went to Paris I had all the film artists—*Tonfilm* came—and made the original recordings. And when I had the contacts with the French subsidiaries, mostly of the UFA and which was called ACE in Paris, I believe. And they

wouldn't think to hire these artists. So, in one case I even took an artist from the competition who was singing the French version of a German film, Charell's *Der Kongress tanzt*, because I had under contract the French co-star [Henri Garat] and she made the record for the competition with her German co-star [Willy Fritsch] in German, but she made the record in French for me because she was an old friend of mine, Lilian Harvey. I knew her when she went to school. So I got friendly with Weill, and he invited me for the rehearsals and I met Aufrecht. And I pleaded with the manager in



Weill supervises the placement of a gramophone on stage for the first Berlin production of *Katalaunische Schlacht*, which opened 25 April 1928 at the Staatstheater on Gendarmenmarkt.

charge of recordings to record the whole *Threepenny Opera*, but nothing doing. He wouldn't record this sort of modern music. I had shortly before recorded the whole score composed by another modern composer by the name of [Edmund] Meisel for Piscator, who made the *Soldier Schweik*, and he wanted incidental music and wanted it recorded, so we put up the electronic equipment to have it played and we later made a catalogue of these recordings and sold them so that people could use them for background music, for radio programs, and for incidental music.

Did that happen to Weill's music for this Jessner production of Katalaunische Schlacht?

No, no. That was only recorded. We got publicity in the program and we spent the money for the recordings, and the Deutsche Schauspielhaus and Weill didn't spend anything and it was strictly used for this play. I don't know if the play was then done in other theaters in Germany. Then probably they would have taken the records and would have tried to do it in another city, too. But we never sold the records.

Was this innovative for it to be put on record at this time?

This was at the time they started to manufacture and sell electronic reproducers for recording, which was done at 78 rpm at the time. You put the record and the magnetic pick-up on it, you had an amplifier, and you had loudspeakers. And we were the first company in Germany to have it. In England it was sold by the British Brunswick where I worked in '26 for a year, and they had the concession from the British company, Thompson-Houston. The original patents for this electronic equipment were held by General Electric in America. And they farmed it out to their partners in Europe which was a French Thompson-Houston in France, the British Thompson-Houston in England, and the AEG in Germany. This was the first time that you could play a record in a concert hall. Back then the fair of Leipzig took place every year. We rented the opera house in Leipzig and played for our worldwide customers our records in the opera house on a little instrument which was at center stage.

Now, do you think it would be possible that a recording of this music for this 1928 production of Jessner could possibly have survived anywhere in Germany? Because most of the music for that production is lost.

If it survived, Deutsche Grammophon should have it.² Unfortunately, my colleagues from that time are all dead. And one who was a factory manager later became the head of the company and it was already Polygram. Together with Philips it's in very bad shape.

Do you know if Deutsche Grammophon has an archive where they would keep old recordings like that?

They used to do, but they would be in the factory in Hanover. They used to keep most of the recordings. Not all of them. I remember I had someone who was interested in jazz and we had all the masters from the United States, and he made an album of twenty records with a booklet. And we had some masters which the Germans didn't have anymore. And some masters we didn't have, we never published, but the Germans had them. And then when this album became a tremendous success because suddenly the interest in jazz transpired in the beginning of '30s, we had to send our album and the masters to the United States—at that time Brunswick Records was owned by Brunswick-Balke-Collender, the billiard people, and they published the album here.

What were the rehearsals of the Threepenny Opera like?

I went to the opening night and I was, as a young man, amazed at the type of music and the songs and intrigued by it like the youngsters today love rock and roll. I mean, when something new in music came up, I was extremely intrigued by it. And I loved the music. We later made symphonic recordings of *Threepenny Opera*

with [Alois] Melichar who was our in-house conductor. He made the arrangements, I guess.

In France

When we recorded Marlene Dietrich—that was the first, only recording she made after her recordings in Germany—Weill was already in the United States. I asked him to make songs for a very famous French singer by the name of Lys Gauty. I checked my records; I made a little note. We made a recording of two songs which he did with Maurice Magre, in French, “Complainte de la Seine,” and “Je ne t'aime pas.” I made that record for him and I asked him to write the songs for Lys Gauty, who was under contract with me. There was a company called Coda. The head of the company was a German who came from Berlin and was a head in Berlin of Ufaton. He started the Coda company, and he was a friend of mine. I forget his name, and he worked with me on Weill and Lys Gauty to make these records. That's how we got the record.

Do you know where the records might be?

They might be at Philips in Paris. The record division is called Polygram and the president of Polygram is Mr. Hazan.

You don't have a copy of them, though, personally?

No. I didn't bring a single record, and all the 78 rpm's I gave to my children disappeared.

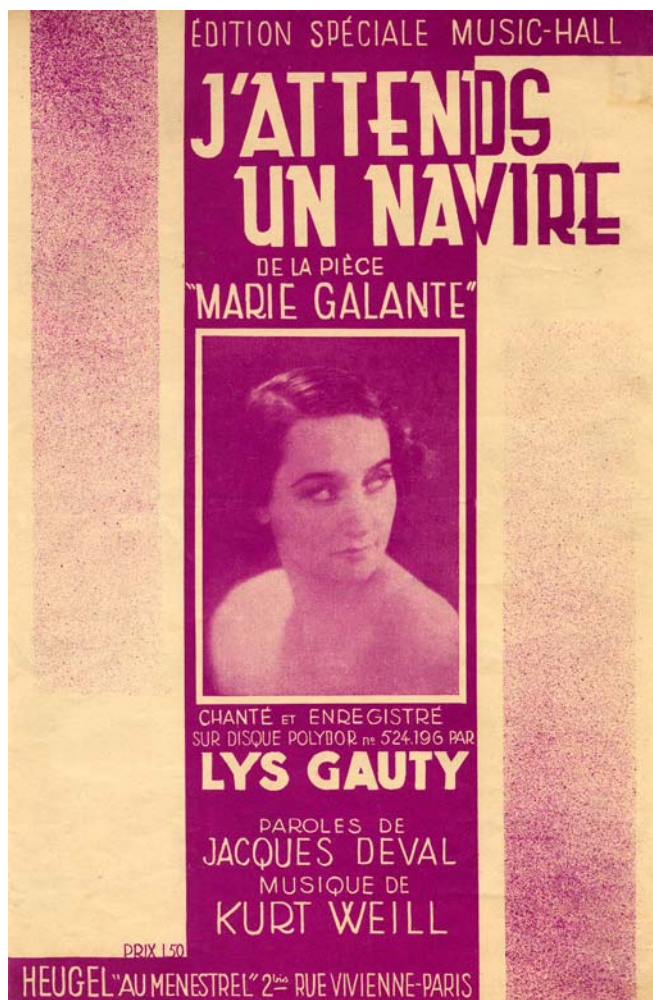
Oh, boy. And how successful were these recordings?

I would say in those times a good sale of a record, unless it was a very great hit, was five to ten thousand records. And it was not a great hit. I mean, a great hit went over a hundred thousand like Al Jolson's record, and then all the records we had from the *Congress Dances*, from Charell. The Ufaton film with Lilian Harvey and Henri Garat. These records sold over a hundred thousand, but normally a record was a good sale when it reached between five and ten thousand, in the French-speaking countries. This one probably sold about that.

What kind of a singer was Lys Gauty?

She was one of the top popular singers in France at that time, with a decent voice, I would say. We made further “J'attends un navire” from *Marie Galante*. With Florelle, another singer, who played the title role in *Marie Galante*. She also did the role of Polly in the *Threepenny Opera*, in the film which was made in Germany by Ufa. But released in France in French. I don't know who was playing besides Florelle, but she was under contract with us for the time I can remember, until the war broke out. She made, first of all, *L'opéra de quat'sous*. She recorded “Chant de Barbara,” “Complainte de Mackie,” “La fiancée du pirate,” and “Chant des canons.” She made these four sides and then recorded from *Marie Galante* “J'attends un navire,” “Le roi d'Aquitaine,” and “Les filles de Bordeaux.”

This film, the French version of The Threepenny Opera film, was made in 1931 at the same time as the German film. So, Florelle would have gone to Germany to film it?



The sheet music cover for this issue of "J'attends un navire" (Heugel) notes that Lys Gauty's recording appears on Polydor.

To film it, yes. She came back and recorded it in Paris. And there is a very cute story about the recordings. We tried to record it and I had an in-house conductor who worked with young composers and arrangers, and he made the arrangements. But somehow we couldn't record. He didn't understand "Kurt Weill," and the arrangements were horrible, and he couldn't conduct Weill's music. Even though he was a great composer. His name was Jean Lenoir, and he wrote "Parlez-moi d'amour." He was originally a Jew from Poland. His name was Jakob Schwartz and he changed it to Jean Lenoir. And he wrote, which was probably the biggest hit ever made in France in the '30s, the song "Parlez-moi d'amour," which Lucienne Boyer recorded.

Who conducted the music then?

I had in the orchestra a young pianist, who was an arranger. Originally from Russia, he studied in Berlin at the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory, and then came to Paris. I asked him if he could make arrangements, compose an orchestra with young, good musicians, and conduct it. And these were the first arrangements and the first recording which he made as a conductor. He's still alive. I saw him six months ago for lunch at his house, in Passy, near Paris. He still works for German radio where he composes music; otherwise he's more or less retired. He's about seventy-five now,

and he was then about twenty, twenty-one. He made the background music and I introduced him to Weill when Weill was in Paris. I believe he did some work for Weill, I'm pretty sure he did the Florelle records from *Marie Galante* and he did the recordings with Lys Gauty, too.

What was his name?

Wal-Berg. Vladimir Rosenberg. His artist name is Wal-Berg.

How successful was the Threepenny Opera in France? Was the film a big hit?

No. The public didn't understand it. Mauprey, who translated the *Threepenny Opera*, his name was André Bloch. He was Alsatian and I knew him very well. He translated all the German operettas and all the important German films and musicals which were played in Paris. I mean, he translated all the Lehár operettas, Kálmán, and whatever was played of German operettas in Paris.

And he did the film translation?

He did the film translation, too, I believe.³

In the United States

Did you know the Aufrichts?

I met him in Berlin when he produced the *Threepenny Opera*. I saw him back in Paris, where his boys went to school, where he tried to produce things but never did anything [successfully]. I saw him again in the concentration camp in France, during the war, and then here in New York. And as I had a recording studio, we started to make a few albums on the Bost label. But we couldn't get pressings, and the pressings we got were not up to the standards which I liked. Nobody would give us pressings, and I didn't know the trick which some people learned who were never in the record business. They went to the Polish army and they said "The Polish army needs Polish records." And they asked the government to force RCA or Columbia or Decca, who had factories, to press for them. I didn't know that trick. I could have done it with the Free French, with De Gaulle, because I did all the production for the Office of War Information.

You did!?

In German and in French. And there I did it for the Lazareffs (?), and Brecht, Aufricht, and Weill were some of the artists who worked with me on these German and French productions. I had the first recording of "Lili Marleen," and I had to make a hundred copies for the Office of War Information. I called up Marlene Dietrich and Greta Keller if they wanted to record it. And they wanted to. Then I shopped around to see if I could get pressings. Nobody would make pressings for me, I would have sold hundreds of thousands, even during the war, of that German song. But I couldn't get pressings and I didn't know the trick that you have to go through a foreign army, in order to get through the War Department the right to force the record companies to press records.

Now, did Weill write songs for the Office of War Information recordings?

Yes. He wrote songs. And there is one song which was one of Brecht's best songs which we recorded and I don't know if it exists here ["Und was bekam des Soldaten Weib?"]. It's a story about the Germans, that they come to Paris and they buy perfume and dresses and send them back. And they go to all these countries and they ship home food and things and so on. And then the song ends and then they go to Russia. And then they send the body bag to the widow. This song was in one of the productions of the Office of War Information. They wanted to send it over to the German army.

Do you remember a song called "Wie lange noch?" by Walter Mehring and Kurt Weill? Supposedly it was written at that same time for the Office of War Information.

I think I remember. I think we recorded it. You see, what happened here is that Kurt Weill was a friend, and he was not only an old friend of mine, he was a friend of my partner. They became very good friends. My partner was Hungarian and he lived in Paris;⁴ he came here with millions while I came here with five hundred dollars in my pocket. And I came in '41 and he came in '39. He was a frustrated singer who loved recordings. And through a friend of mine I met him and he said, "If you run the company, I'll give the money." We started in '41. I've still got all the recording equipment. RCA would call me up and said "Can you cancel your order? We need it for the war effort." Said "Sorry, others get or might need the equipment." I had a fellow, an engineer who was an alcoholic, who made the Pickering cartridge. He built all my recording equipment and we had a studio on [29 West] 57th Street in the penthouse, and Weill came over. He stayed mostly at St. Regis when he was in New York working. And before he would make a show he

would try out by himself every song, and he very often would change the words. He didn't like the words, even from Brecht. And he would change them. And Brecht would agree with them because they did not fit the music. Weill was very keen on words. He was an excellent linguist, especially in the German language, and he understood it very well. He really collaborated together with a lyric writer more than I have ever seen, and I have seen many composers and lyric writers work together. He gave them ideas. He changed words. And he tried out all these songs, I remember, for *Lady in the Dark*,⁵ for *Liliom*, in our studio. I heard them. He was singing them. He was playing the piano, singing, recording them and then he would listen to the recording which was done at that time on sixteen-inch discs, forty centimeters. And you could record about half an hour.

It's going around about Liliom that he actually did write some songs for Liliom, but it never was produced because he couldn't get the rights from Molnár. Now, if you are sure that he actually wrote some of those Liliom songs, that would be an incredible piece of information.

I remember that he wrote songs for *Liliom* which he wanted to produce. Now, I don't know if they were incorporated into the Hammerstein and Rodgers version.⁶

Probably not, because that was later.

Weill's last show on Broadway was *Lost in the Stars*. I remember, he came up to the studio, sometimes for an hour or two, sitting in the studio below us, and worked at the piano. When he was ready, he asked if someone could make a take, and we recorded it and played it back to him. He listened to it and made changes.

After hearing it sung by himself—isn't that interesting? So, he needed to step back from it and hear it as a performance.

[...]

We did a lot of recordings and maybe we recorded American hit songs translated into German, but then we were given the material by the Office of War Information. We did not make too many shows with Marlene Dietrich because she was mostly traveling in Europe during the war. And if she did recordings, she probably did them with the army somewhere in Europe for the radio stations which the Americans built in Europe. They still exist, and now broadcast behind the Iron Curtain. That was called Radio Free Europe. The network was originally built by the Office of War Information and then taken over by Radio Free Europe, which was under the State Department.

Would you happen to know if Lenya ever made any recordings like this?

I would say that Lenya did recordings for the Office of War Information. Marian Anderson did recordings. But she mostly did classical music which was piped over to the German lines. Greta Keller did recordings in German. That is about all I can remember about ladies who made recordings.



Album cover for "Six Songs by Kurt Weill" (Bost Records BA8).

Other than this song, can you think of any other songs that he might have composed just for the war effort?

This is the one I remember most and which I like best. So others, if he did others, and he probably did others together with Brecht, they weren't as good as this one.

Did Brecht ever come up to your studio?

He worked on songs together with Kurt Weill. They had the songs written, and then they came to listen to it. They recorded them and either Kurt Weill was singing or even Brecht was speaking some.

Can you tell us some things about this set, "Six Songs by Kurt Weill"? Maybe when it was done? Was it done all in one session?

It was done in '42. These were normally recorded in one session. I don't remember, whether it was with orchestra, a small ensemble, or only Kurt Weill at the piano.

So when they were recorded, of course, Kurt Weill came and sat in on the sessions?

Yes. He definitely played the piano. If he didn't play the piano then we used at that time Rudolf Goehr, who went to Israel. He was a composer and I introduced him to Kurt Weill, and he made a lot of arrangements for Weill's musicals. For *Lady in the Dark* and other shows which he did later.⁷

When is the first time you got reacquainted with Weill here in this country?

Pretty fast. I arrived in September '41. I opened my recording studio and the company in December of '41, so in '42 I got in touch with Weill. I believe I got in touch with him through Aufricht; I lived nearby and we saw each other quite often at that time. He came up a lot to our studio. We had a lot of European artists coming up because they had a place to meet and to talk to each other, find out what they can do and how they can get some work. It was a meeting place for people like Oscar Karlweis who was on Broadway here, and who played in *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*. He was a pretty famous operetta singer in Germany and a film artist. And he made films in France. And he came here, made films here, and he played on Broadway. His wife was a French woman [Ninon Tallon], and she was the director of the Rothschild's Theater in Paris. She was a niece of Edouard Herriot, the Prime Minister of France in the '30s.

Are there any perceptions you can share with us as to the difficulties he had when he moved here and the general belief that he tried to become more popular and have his work be approached by a more popular audience than it had once been?

He definitely had, when he came to this country, problems like everybody who came from Europe during the Hitler time and probably didn't speak the language too well and didn't have the contacts and connections, but when I came to this country in '41 he was already well-known and established. And when I met him again he appeared to me as a very modest man who wanted to become an American composer, catered to the American public, and was proud that the American public accepted his music. As a person he was living very modestly, I would say, for the money he was probably making, although he stayed at a good hotel and had a suite because he

worked very hard. But if he would go out for dinner, he would go to a small Italian restaurant and not to the Pavilion or one of the restaurants which were the fashionable places at the time.

When you first met him during the Threepenny Opera, did he ever talk to you about how he felt about the success of that piece? Was he surprised, or did he take it in stride, or did he expect it?

He was a very simple man, and he was never arrogant, and didn't change after his great successes. When I met him in the '30s in Paris he was very simple and he hadn't changed from the time when I met him before he had written the *Threepenny Opera*.

After you had both come here, did he speak to you in German or in English?

I think we spoke in German.

We've been under the impression that after he moved to this country that he tried not to really associate with other emigrants because he didn't want to be identified as a German. He was anxious to become assimilated as an American as soon as he could. Do you have any thoughts on that? Whether that's true?

I would say that he tried to assimilate, but that he would not renege on any relationship with old friends. That was not his character. And it was not Lenya's character, either.

Notes

1. Leopold Jessner was *Generalintendant* of the Berliner Staatstheater (which produced *Katalaunische Schlacht* in April 1928).

2. Bernd Meyer-Rähnitz's *Kurt Weill Discographie: Die Grammophon-Schallplatten, 1928–1961* (Dresden: Bibliophilen Verlag, 1998) lists such a record and describes it as "Blues aus *Die Katalaunische Schlacht* (Bronnen-Weill)" on a "Homocord Testplatte" (p. 40).

3. Mauprey translated the French film version (with Solange Bussy), and both the 1930 and 1937 stagings in Paris (with Ninon Tallon), the latter produced by Aufricht.

4. Borchardt is probably referring to Rudolf Steiner, a businessman who made money from, among other projects, the "15-puzzle," a hand-held early precursor to Rubik's Cube and today's Game Boys.

5. *Lady in the Dark* opened on Broadway in January 1941, nine months prior to Borchardt's arrival in the U.S. Borchardt is almost certainly referring to *One Touch of Venus*. The Weill-Lenya Research Center holds copies of several test recordings of songs from *Venus* that bear a "Bost Reference Recordings" label; the recordings were the source of the *Tryout* LP released on Heritage Records in the 1950s. Borchardt donated the discs to the Research Center in 1984.

6. Weill's plans for *Liliom* came to a halt in May 1937, when Molnár categorically refused to give the musical rights to his play. There is no evidence that Weill composed any music or approached a collaborator. For details see David D'Andre, "The Theatre Guild, *Carousel*, and the Cultural Field of American Musical Theatre" (Diss. Yale, 2000).

7. Rudolf Goehr was also in a French internment camp, fleeing to the U.S. in the summer of 1941. There is no evidence that Goehr arranged any of Weill's works during the composer's lifetime. However, Goehr was a piano accompanist at the Kurt Weill Memorial Concert at New York's Town Hall on 3 February 1951. The concert was produced by Aufricht.

Music

Chamber Music

The Kurt Weill Edition, Series II, Volume 1 Edited by Wolfgang Rathert and Jürgen Selk

New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; Miami: European-American Music Corp., 2004. 192 pp. (Critical Report 107 pp.)
ISBN: 0-913574-63-5

The first two volumes of the Kurt Weill Edition, devoted respectively to *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *The Firebrand of Florence*, set the highest standards of scholarship, presentation, and design. This third volume, which covers Weill's entire output of chamber music, successfully maintains and upholds those standards. Some critical editions of recent years have been vitiated by editorial policies that disregarded the needs and experiences of performers. Here, following the guidelines laid down for the entire Edition, a compromise is sought between the demands of *Wissenschaft* and the (often conflicting) expectations of *Praxis*. Wolfgang Rathert and Jürgen Selk adopt the principle of privileged sources to establish "best-case" readings, to which end they have not only consulted all available manuscript and printed sources, but also checked their findings with prominent exponents of this repertoire, including the cellist Wolfgang Boettcher, the Leipziger Streichquartett, and the Buchberger Quartett (Frankfurt/Main).

Here is a composer at the beginning of his career, intent on finding his own voice, while still in the process of learning about the relationship between notated phrasing and its viability in performance, keen to explore the *terra incognita* of total chromaticism (tending in some passages of the String Quartet op. 8 towards atonality), but still prone to overlook the finer points of musical grammar. Hence, even where the choice of privileged source is clear, that itself is no guarantee of its dependability; indeed some textual problems in these works remain ultimately insoluble. As a rule, the Edition highlights doubtful readings with the aid of footnotes, while square bracketing, *ossia*-staves, and other such editorial tools are largely avoided. Even if the slightly over-liberal curvature of the slurs may raise an eyebrow, the quality of the computer-assisted music engraving further enhances the spacious, uncluttered layout of the scores.

With regard to slurs, their appearance is less of a problem than the determination of their end-points. Editors of early Weill are confronted with an idiosyncratic legato notation, probably influenced by the keyboard writing of Brahms and Reger, whereby repeated notes customarily fall under the span of a single slur. Previous editors have modified or even suppressed this notation, but Rathert and Selk intervene judiciously, consolidating rather than obliterating. The advantages of such restraint are manifest: first, the composer's intentions are represented faithfully; second, many decisions are shared—in the spirit of Weill's subsequent theater experiences—with the interpreter. A typical case is found in the Quartet in B Minor, where, in the privileged source, the phrasing of the first subject appears (over the span of the movement) in five slightly varying patterns. Are these variants of any significance, or do they merely reflect a young composer's lack of know-how? "It

is impossible," writes Selk, "to arrive at a single solution whose representation is incontrovertibly the most plausible of all possibilities" (Critical Report, p. 13/ii). In the upshot, all five variants are listed in the Critical Report, while the score itself offers one consistent reading: a triumph of common sense. Sparsely marked passages, such as the fugato theme of the *Choralphantasie* (op. 8, mm. 414ff.), are left as Weill wrote them, even if some phrasings (in this case, of m. 415 and parallel passages) are never completely defined. A word of appreciation, too, for the retention of Weill's irregular beaming, which many an editor would also have "corrected," thereby eliminating subtle inflections of phrasing and meter.

It can be argued that Weill never succeeded in finding his own voice, that he remained a musical polyglot, capable of adapting himself to, and expressing himself persuasively in, any number of languages. This volume offers plenty of fuel to such fires, for the gamut of style, form, and feeling in these pages is amazingly wide—and this was only the beginning! Hard to believe that all these works (except for the diminutive *Klops-Lied*, included here for want of a more appropriate home) were composed within just five years, from 1918 to 1923. Behind these rapid changes of direction stands the invisible, though ever more palpable figure of Weill's beloved teacher Ferruccio Busoni.¹

Even the earliest works in this volume, the Quartet in B Minor and the Cello Sonata, seem to anticipate Busoni's post-war doctrine of *Junge Klassizität* ("young classicality").² Notably the scherzo of this early Quartet includes material later reworked by Weill in that most "young classical" of all his works, the *Quodlibet* op. 9, while the brittle textures and acrid harmonies of the Cello Sonata finale look even further to the future. As Rathert points out, these scores were influenced by Pfitzner and Reger, above all in the expansive fugal finale of the Quartet in B Minor. It may be wishful thinking, though, to detect the influence of Mahler, and specifically of the "Alma" theme from the Sixth Symphony, in mm. 74ff. of the Quartet in B Minor (Introduction, p. 16/i-ii), since the two have little more in common than their opening gambit. The wistful *Ländler*, on the other hand, which encircles the fugue, seems as clearly indebted to Mahler as anything Weill ever wrote. Yet this, paradoxically, is one of the earliest occasions on which he sings with that voice by which the world knows him best—*vox populi* rather than *vox angelica*, for sure, but that's what makes him inimitable.

Students of Weill may benefit from tracing the evolutionary progress of these works, and will certainly value the exhaustiveness, precision, and insight of Rathert's commentaries. One thing puzzles me, however: the Introduction deals with the works in chronological order, but the printed sequence of compositions differs. Presumably this decision was dictated by a policy of categories (1. chamber music without piano; 2. chamber music with piano; 3. vocal chamber music). Yet these remain undisclosed, and considering that the Cello Sonata was Weill's sole contribution to category 2, chronological order would have been preferable, perhaps even with the original version of the String Quartet op. 8 preceding the revised version.

Be that as it may, no discussion of Weill's progress as a "master-student" of Busoni would be complete without reference to one further composition from this period, the First Symphony, for it was with this work that Weill introduced himself to his new teacher. Later he also performed it, presumably at Busoni's apartment on the Viktoria-Luise-Platz, in a transcription for two pianos. One can well imagine the friendly harangue that followed, probably in the same tone Busoni had adopted towards his friend H. W. Draber in a letter dated 9 April 1919: "The *joy* of making music must come

into [its] own once more. There has been too much brooding and melancholy and subjectivity [in this young century]. Also unnecessary noise.”³ The Symphony was set aside, never to be heard again during Weill’s lifetime. However, Busoni evidently found some merit in the score, for Weill later salvaged the fugato and “wie ein Choral” section of the work (mm. 289 ff.) for the finale of his op. 8 Quartet. While rejecting the extremes of Expressionist discord which prevail in other sections of the Symphony, Busoni had presumably been attracted to this particular passage by its Mozartian root, namely the trudging polyphony of the Two Armed Men in *The Magic Flute*.⁴



Example 1:

a) Mozart, *The Magic Flute*, Act III/xxviii, mm. 7–9

b) Weill, First Symphony, m. 289 (8va, note values doubled), equivalent to String Quartet op. 8, m. 414

Recognizing that comparable ideas are found in the pilgrims’ choruses of Mendelssohn (second movement of the “Italian” Symphony) and Wagner (*Tannhäuser*, act I), Busoni evidently appreciated the Janus-faced aspect of the passage, Weill’s nascent ability to “sift and turn to account all the gains of previous experiments” and his aim to include them in “strong and beautiful forms.” This, as Busoni had explained to Paul Bekker in January 1920, was the essence of “young classicality.”⁵

I have underlaid the passage quoted above with words (“hither, thither, we are marching”) from Johannes R. Becher’s stage drama *Arbeiter Bauern Soldaten*.⁶ As is commonly known, Weill read this play in the fall of 1920 with a view to composing music for it, but to date it has been assumed that nothing came of the project. During the course of researches into the First Symphony, it became apparent to me that Weill must indeed have sketched out music, at least for some of the scenes, and that he later salvaged these ideas for the Symphony. My findings, which are based merely on metrical correspondence between verse and music, are admittedly circumstantial, but the evidence is compelling enough. In the crucial scene of the play (literally crucial, in that Becher calls for two perpendicular beams of light in the sky, forming the sign of the Cross), a multitude of workers, peasants, and soldiers are marching wearily through the desert. A Holy Man (*Der Heilige*) calls to the throng: “Arise! To the Promised Land!” (*Auf! Dem Land der Verheißung zu!*), and voices are heard in the distance, singing praise to the new Savior, the “shepherd of change” (*Hirt der Wandlung*).⁷ Judging by the perfect match of melody, rhythm, and meter, I surmise that these verses correspond to the “wie ein Choral” passage of the First Symphony, hence also to the “Molto tranquillo” section of the op. 8 Quartet:



Example 2: First Symphony, mm. 302–317, equivalent to String Quartet op. 8, mm. 495–510: (“Come, shepherd of change, we can feel your closeness, your peace waters the gorge of our war. O heavenly burner, warmer of the pallid, you rouse the dead and open their canopy.”)

Likewise, the concluding Largo of the Quartet mirrors the closing lines of Becher’s *chorus mysticus*, where the gates of the Promised Land are flung open to receive the eager multitude:



Example 3: First Symphony, mm. 393–399, equivalent to String Quartet op. 8, mm. 522 ff. (ending differs): (“A mighty throng is gathered, a nation assembles, the procession begins.”)

I sympathize with Rathert when he writes, “Opinions may differ as to whether the final, three-movement version of the [op. 8] quartet is, in fact, an improvement on the original four-movement version” (p. 19/i), but find it harder to follow him when he detects Busonian “new classicality” (*sic*, cf. note 2) in the other movements of the work. The concept of “young classicality” is woolly enough, and has in recent years been worked almost to death by commentators on this epoch of German culture. Those passages of op. 8 which Busoni urged Weill to rewrite bear witness, in my estimation, to a lack of *leggerezza* and a tendency to “heavenly length,” pointing perhaps to the influence of Philipp Jarnach. The latter may have counted as Busoni’s closest collaborator, but to questions of aesthetics their approach diverged appreciably. “For my taste,” confided Busoni to Volkmars Andreae on 16 January 1921, “Jarnach writes too many ‘Deutsche Lieder,’ and of the meaningful sort, moreover. . .”⁸ Busoni had never felt at home in the realm of chamber

music, and had indeed written none of any substance since the Second Violin Sonata of 1898–1900. Nor could he summon up much enthusiasm for the German lied (his Goethe settings of 1918–24 remain a sole, Faustian exception). For him, such repertoire brought back unhappy memories of *Hausmusik* in the mansions of the wealthy, of concerts promoted by small-town, arch-conservative *Società del Quartetto*, to which his parents had dragged their infant as prodigy and breadwinner. Here, in Berlin, he was now obliged to present himself as omniscient and progressive master of these very arts, “appearing in armour before a dozen critical youngsters, withstanding each cut and thrust.”⁹

Whatever the case, the mutual devotion of master and pupil is abundantly evident in the last major work of this series, *Frauentanz* op. 10. By now, Busoni’s striving for concision and clarity, founded on a language of contrapuntal and metric freedom, had become an integral part of Weill’s own aesthetic program. This is a score that comes as close as any to Busoni’s ideal of “the unity of music” (*Einheit der Musik*), an art conceived beyond the confines of time and place, floating, as it were, between the nations and the centuries.

Rathert asserts (p. 19/ii) that “Weill’s source for the texts [of *Frauentanz*] has not yet been ascertained,” but the Critical Report knows better, at least in some cases, and informs us that the poems were drawn from anthologies of Middle High German edited by Kurt Moreck, Alfred Rottauscher and Alexander Lernet-Holenia, all of which were published in 1922–23. The Edition is also a little muddle-headed in attributing the authorship of the vocal score first to Weill himself (Introduction, p. 20/ii, but with the exception of the third song, which was arranged by Busoni), and later, in the Critical Report, respectively to E. G. Klussmann (ms. vocal score) and “not named” (first printed vocal score), the latter with the remark, “The remaining songs [...] may well have been arranged by Weill himself.” We are further left in the dark as to whether any passages of Klussmann’s arrangement found their way into the printed edition. But these are minor quibbles, which do little or nothing to diminish the stature of this admirable publication.

Antony Beaumont
Bremen

Notes

1. Busoni returned from Zurich to Berlin not in 1918, as Rathert states (p. 14/ii of the Introduction), but in October 1920, shortly before Weill enrolled in his master class.

2. The original epithet, “young,” should be retained. The translation favored by Selk (p. 18/ii), “new classicality,” runs too great a risk of confusion with “neo-classicism.”

3. Ferruccio Busoni, *Selected Letters*, transl. and ed. by Antony Beaumont (London: Faber, 1987), 284.

4. Busoni himself was to transcribe this music, as the last of *Fünf kurze Stücke zur Pflege des polyphonen Spiels auf dem Klavier*, completed in 1923.

5. All passages in quotation marks adapted from Ferruccio Busoni, “Young Classicism,” in *The Essence of Music and other papers*, trans. Rosamond Ley (London: Rockliff, 1957; reprint, New York: Dover, 1965), 20.

6. Johannes Robert Becher, *Arbeiter Bauern Soldaten. Der Aufbruch eines Volkes zu Gott* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1921), 194ff.

7. *Ibid.*, 204.

8. Busoni, *Selected Letters*, 347.

9. *Ibid.*, letter to Edith Andrae, 13 June 1921, 337.

Books

“*Ein Fremder ward ich im fremden Land. . .*”: Max Reinhardt’s Inszenierung von Franz Werfels und Kurt Weills “*The Eternal Road*” (*Der Weg der Verheißung*) 1937 in New York

Karin Kowalke

Munich: Hieronymus, 2004. 2 vols. 427, 319 pp.

ISBN: 3-89791-330-5, 3-89791-331-3

The Literary, Cultural, and Historical Significance of the 1937 Biblical Stage Play “The Eternal Road”

Jonathan C. Friedman

Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, 136 pp.

ISBN: 0-7734-6325-9

“*Ein Fremder ward ich im fremden Land*” [I have become a stranger in a strange land], Karin Kowalke’s published dissertation in theater studies, offers the results of extensive source studies in clear, unpretentious prose, showing her aptitude for systematic scholarship. In two volumes (the second volume consisting of a complete, annotated transcription of the director’s script), the author attempts a “full account of the multi-faceted genesis of *The Eternal Road*, an analysis of the most important staging elements according to the director’s script, and a comprehensive analysis of the reception at the time” (p. 10). Questions of exile, the religious identities of the artists involved, and reasons why the project failed are also some of the issues that she promises to address within the frame of her study.

A complex work such as *The Eternal Road* has the potential to be a highly rewarding case study for scholars of theater history, German literature, and musicology. But neither the European premiere in the German city of Chemnitz in 1999 and the ensuing dissemination in the media (e.g., television broadcasts), nor the editorial achievements of Edward Harsh have sparked the kind of interest that one would expect. In the same vein as Atay Citron’s dissertation (“Pageantry and Theatre in the Service of Jewish Nationalism in the United States, 1933–1947,” New York University, 1989), Kowalke’s book once again looks at *The Eternal Road* from the angle of theater studies. Literary scholars still have not taken up the challenge, and musicologists have by no means answered all the questions raised by Weill’s fascinating score. Karin Kowalke deserves praise for restricting her scope to Max Reinhardt’s influence on *The Eternal Road*. At the same time it is unfortunate that her approach devotes far more time than necessary

to the work's genesis. This aspect in particular has been thoroughly investigated by scholars since the 1980s. Now we must read again about the uncertainties that plagued the rehearsals, the postponements of the premiere, broken water pipes, and so forth. No doubt Kowalke's archival research has unearthed a significant number of previously unknown documents—the Reinhardt Archives in Binghamton, NY and Salzburg proved to be especially rich fields—but by and large they all seem to confirm what we already knew. A rewarding exception is the way in which Kowalke traces various concepts for the set design, progressing from Werfel through Strnad, Reinhardt, Bel Geddes, and Horner. The set design was an essential component from the very beginning and its ramifications proved difficult to estimate. Reinhardt recognized the importance of the problem: "The terribly long preparation time, the deplorable amount of chatter and newspaper gossip about the costs and the complexity of the set unfortunately have raised the expectations through the roof. We have to be able to offer *something* in this area" (p. 155). Similarly, Kowalke's account of the efforts to rescue the production is based on many intriguing documents hitherto unexplored (p. 147ff.). But generally speaking, the unknown documents rarely shed new light on the work's genesis. This is all the more regrettable since Kowalke's approach reveals a systematic mind whose energy might have produced more valuable results had she gone in a different direction. Still, she manages to show that, of the three unequally matched artists, it was Reinhardt who suffered the most from the dragging preparations, the endless postponements, and especially the production's financial disaster. While Werfel and Weill, after relatively short periods of fiscal crisis, managed to gain a foothold in the U.S., Reinhardt—contrary to his own expectations—never enjoyed another artistic or financial success before he died in 1943.

The fourth chapter finally sets forth the analysis of the *Regiebuch*, indicating the study's potential. Reinhardt's working script is an interpretation of the piece and at the same time a tool for production. It deals with the drama and its theatrical realization in great detail. Along with the score and libretto, the *Regiebuch* becomes an equal part of the work as a whole, and, from Reinhardt's perspective, the director's efforts themselves seemed to be the true work of art. A production such as *The Eternal Road* was first of all a "Reinhardt production"—precisely the reason why the project's initiator, Meyer Weisgal, picked Reinhardt to begin with. Only he carried the required fame for New York audiences, whereas Weill and Werfel were hardly known in the U.S. at that time.

With great precision, Kowalke describes the four volumes of the director's script, now housed in the Max Reinhardt Archive at SUNY Binghamton. Her informed and astute observations document Reinhardt's decisive impact on the New York production. The director reworked Werfel's text to a degree hitherto unknown. While scholars were already aware of most of the (substantial) cuts, it is surprising to find numerous textual insertions that Reinhardt made without Werfel's knowledge (let alone approval), often giving several versions; most of them can be found in the synagogue scenes. But nowhere near all of Reinhardt's changes made it onto the stage of the Manhattan Opera House. In particular, lines that alluded specifically to the political situation in Germany were generally dropped. Kowalke's brief commentary, "Particularly by discarding the thorny passages, he [Reinhardt] missed the chance of making a statement with his production" (p. 234f), is not a satisfying explanation. Of all people, Reinhardt loathed "making a statement" with his art. He clearly stated just how strongly he rejected taking over the theater for the proclamation of political messages

(see Max Reinhardt, "Konzepte für eine Rede," in *Max Reinhardt: Die Träume des Magiers*, eds. Edda Fuhrich and Gisela Prossnitz [Salzburg: Residenz, 1993], p. 165). Also, Kowalke seems to be overwhelmed by the director's creativity, tending to credit Reinhardt with essential stage devices, including music, whereas she assigns Weill only the role of musical assistant. This misjudgment culminates in her remark: "As in many other productions, the staging of *Eternal Road*, too, utilizes music and sound effects as atmospheric background or an evocative element" (p. 293).

Critical issues such as the question of genre remain undressed. An assessment from the vantage of theater studies could have been illuminating, especially since the question of genre might be the key to explaining the work's failure. Yet there can be no doubt that the two volumes of Kowalke's dissertation represent an important source for future research. Thus it is regrettable that she didn't manage to utilize her impressive research and archival work more fully for the understanding of *The Eternal Road*, a singular theatrical work. It seems that the author lost sight of the goals she set in the introduction. In addition to "an analysis of the most important staging elements according to the director's script" and "a comprehensive study of the reception at the time," her purpose was to offer suggestions that would illuminate the issues of exile and religious identity. To state that *The Eternal Road* "is only partly exile theater" (p. 374), since Reinhardt and Werfel emigrated to the U.S. only after the premiere, is just as perplexing as her decision to limit the discussion of "the religious identity of the Bible play's creative team" (p. 372) to a mere two pages. Here, the energy shown by Kowalke in the first chapters would have been far more useful.

The year 2004 saw the publication of another book on the same subject, written by Jonathan C. Friedman, Director of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Associate Professor of History at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. As indicated by the title, Friedman's book sets out to explore the "literary, cultural, and historical significance" of *The Eternal Road*, and in the introduction he already reaches the conclusion that its significance lies "in its singular moment of expression of Jewish pride by several colorful, albeit complicated, *dramatis personae*." Not only does this broad statement lack all support, the publication also seems to be sloppily researched. Claims that *The Eternal Road* "sold out its 153 performances" (p. 1) or that "after two in the morning, the play had finally ended" (p. 105) are simply incorrect. Friedman is also unable to resist the temptation to dedicate far too much space to the genesis of the Bible play, and it remains his secret how this relates to its "literary, cultural, and historical significance." Where the study does raise interesting issues—such as the attitudes of Reinhardt, Weill, and Werfel towards their own Jewish backgrounds—Friedman merely scratches the surface. All in all, the book may serve at best as an introduction to the work, but because of its many factual errors it is difficult to recommend it.

Christian Kuhn
Lübeck

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Bari
Teatro Piccinni

4, 6 March 2005

First staged in Messina, Sicily in 2001, Daniele Abbado's production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* turned itinerant last winter, with more or less the same company moving from Reggio Emilia to Rome and finally to Bari, in southeast Italy, under Jonathan Webb's expert leadership. In each city local orchestras and choruses were used, which must have involved quite a lot of extra rehearsals, but judging by the success of the first performance at the Teatro Piccinni (part of a season organized by the Fondazione Lirico Sinfonica Petruzzelli e Teatri di Bari), it was well worth the effort. It proved in fact to be a remarkably vital and intelligent production, well thought out and spontaneous in every detail, and in this intimate setting (the orchestra pit is so small that the percussion had to be housed in boxes), the rapport between stage and audience was almost tangible.

Giacomo Andrico's set was simple and sufficiently well lit for one to be able to read every emotional nuance on the characters' faces. The city of Mahagonny consisted of makeshift corrugated iron shacks on a dune in the desert. His costumes and make-up were generically 20th century, difficult to pin down to a specific era. Only the German actress Dinah Helal's expert and insinuating Speaker—who occasionally offered some phrases in Italian in her delightful accent—offered a playful parody of the Weimar Republic cabaret style often adopted for this work. The other characters were presented without any distancing “period” effect or expressionistic overlay, and as a result emerged all the more convincingly as real human beings. Jenny and her friends were young and genuinely attractive: in this case (appropriately enough) Mediterranean beauties oozing sensuality. Jenny herself was played by Valentina Valente, the first Italian soprano to sing the role of Lulu in the original language. Her command of the German text was equally impressive on this occasion, and although the center of gravity of her voice is perhaps a bit high for the role, her physique was ideal, and her singing consistently musical and often touching.

It was refreshing to hear the warm and supple voice of Gabriella Sborgi, in a role—Leokadja Begbick—too often assigned to singers reaching the end of their careers. Her ability to do full justice to Weill's music in no way detracted from the jaded cynicism of her portrayal. Arnold

Bezuyen's Jim had the touching naivety of a young Heldentenor (this singer is a habitué of Bayreuth): the voice not always refined, but potent in both volume and diction, compelling the audience to believe in the character and experience his death as much more than a mere ironic twist of fate. The most experienced singer in the company was the American baritone Dale Duesing as Trinity Moses: a complete theatrical performer with a total command of rhythm and word coloring combined with a magnetic, chameleonic stage presence. There was much to admire also in Lorenzo Muzzi's Alaska Wolfjoe (although he incongruously appeared weightier than Duesing's Moses in the deftly staged boxing match) and George Mosley's Bill. Francesco Marsiglia's well-focused tenor voice (as Jack O'Brien and Toby Higgins) proved particularly incisive in ensemble, and Fabrice Dalis offered a well-drawn Fatty.

The opera was performed with one interval (after the first scene of the second act) and a few not too compromising cuts (properly indicated in the program libretto). One could not fail to be impressed by the stylish and assured playing of the mainly youthful Orchestra della Provincia di Bari and by the singing and dancing of the Coro Ente Autonomo L'Opera (Alessandra Sini devised the simple but teasing choreography). And conductor Jonathan Webb succeeded in capturing the contrasting moods of the single scenes within a narrative structure that never lost momentum and reached a rather devastating climax in the final scenes of the opera.

Stephen Hastings
Milan



The opening scene,
with Dale Duesing,
Fabrice Dalis, and
Gabriella Sborgi.
Photo: Vito
Mastrolonardo

Performances

One Touch of Venus

Leeds

Opera North

Premiere: 8 December 2004

Almost the most encouraging aspect of Opera North's undeniable success with this new production were the reactions of both public and press. The humor of the Nash-Perelman book and lyrics is firmly of its time and place, Broadway in 1943, which to a British public sixty years later might seem as remote a setting as Gluck's *Crimea*, despite a helpful glossary in the program book reminding us who Don Ameche was. But maybe the steady diet of '40s Hollywood movies on afternoon television has made it seem less remote; anyway, the first-night audience in Leeds responded from the start with gales of laughter (the gag about Mr. Sciatica got them going) and greeted the final curtain with a prolonged ovation.

Perhaps more surprising were the press notices, from writers largely unfamiliar with the work. The only previous UK airing was in 2001, with severely reduced orchestra (just two, to be precise), and was covered by drama critics. This time, the

Savory (Ron Li-Paz) with the statue of Venus before it comes to life.

London Times reviewer wrote that "it is surely time to acknowledge that his American works represent the peak of Weill's achievement," adding that "this first major British staging . . . confirms again his mastery of musical theatre." In the context of traditional European reactions to the "two Weills," that is something of a turnaround. *The Guardian* critic wrote that "it may be among the most subversive pieces [Weill] wrote," and the *Observer* detected a "quasi-Brechtian anarchy" in the piece, before recommending a transfer to the West End. There is little chance of that, since potential audiences for musicals in London (unlike those in Leeds) have been lobotomized by Lloyd Webber, and something as sophisticated as *Venus* would no longer find its rightful constituency. But it was being taken seriously at last.

And sophisticated is the word for this production. The director Tim Albery is best known here for stagings of such epics as Wagner's *Ring* and Berlioz's *Troyens*, but he lavished just as much care on *Venus* as he did on those mighty projects. Especially impressive was his direction of the dialogue, so often the Achilles' heel of opera companies when they tackle musicals. It



crackled along, colorfully inflected, with the breakneck speed of a Marx Brothers movie. Speed was indeed of the essence: there were no breaks in the action, in which respect Albery was much aided by the witty, flexible décor of Antony McDonald. His ever-adaptable cloths and set pieces paid proper tribute to Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe, and, one touch mysteriously, to Hergé and Tintin. Emma Ryott's costumes were just as helpful; maybe the bright blue Sandra Dee skirts for Ozone Heights were a few years out of period, but they were very funny. The two important dance sequences were brilliantly choreographed by William Tuckett and smoothly performed.

Not the least "authentic" aspect of the production was the blessed absence of amplification, which is in danger of killing off serious music theater. True, there were moments (but only moments) in sung numbers in which the words were covered, but balance could and should be sorted out after the rigors of this first night. In general the orchestra under James Holmes, who loves and understands Weill, were having a thoroughly good time fielding a Big Band sound, and paid due attention to what every Weill-lover relishes in both his German and American scores, the varied accompaniments to verses and in reprises.



Rodney (Loren Geeting), Mrs. Kramer (Carole Wilson), and Gloria (Jessica Walker) perform "Way out West in Jersey."



The duet-reprise of “Speak Low” was truly a moment to treasure.

Opera North had prudently engaged four excellent U.S. singers for the leading roles. If anything, Karen Coker marginally underplayed Venus, which is infinitely preferable to overplaying her, especially in a number like “That’s Him,” in which she yielded little to Mary Martin. Her cool beauty suited the part to perfection, and she sang with the musicianship that Weill demands. Maybe she will find a touch more edge in later performances. Loren Geeting made Rodney much more than just a sad sack, rather someone you cared about, and in the context of a generally satirical work the manufactured “Happy End” was oddly touching. Geeting has a healthy high-baritone voice, and so has Ron Li-Paz, who sang Savory: both could step easily into Howard Keel roles. Li-Paz was given “Who

Am I?” at the opening of the second act, which was cut before the Broadway opening, probably rightly. It is not on the same level as the rest of the score. The fourth U.S. guest was Christianne Tisdale, who all but stopped the show with her biting delivery of “Very, Very, Very.”

The home team declined to be intimidated by these stars, with Carole Wilson’s monstrous Mrs. Kramer, Jessica Walker’s Gloria and Eric Roberts’s hilarious double-act as Taxi Black and Dr. Rook deserving special mention. The Opera North chorus is one of the most versatile in the U.K., and enjoyed themselves as much as the audience. This was a very, very happy evening.

Rodney Milnes
London



Top left: Attended by her minions, Molly (Christianne Tisdale) sings “Very, Very, Very.”

Top right: Venus (Karen Coker) and Rodney in “Wooden Wedding.”

Bottom right: The “Venus in Ozone Heights” ballet is danced in front of a monument to domesticity formed by Brillo boxes.

All photos: Stephen Vaughan



Performances

Kurt Weill Fest Dessau

Happy End
Premiere: 25 February 2005

The Firebrand of Florence
4 March 2005

“What is feminine?” was the headline of the German weekly *Die Zeit*, copies of which were available for free in the lobby of the Anhaltisches Theater in Dessau. A young author, Jana Hensel, describes the way women are portrayed in the media as “pretty, but weak.” How all of this relates to *Happy End*, a comedy written by a certain Dorothy Lane and staged during this festival, raises questions—at least at first. When Silke Wallstein as Miriam, a slightly dolled-up cocktail waitress, steps in front of the curtain to make her first announcement, the theater is immediately silenced by her strong presence. She’s not really pretty, even though she bravely totters on high heels for the three hours of the action, making occasional announcements. When

the curtain goes up, it reveals the wide stage and Marianne Hollenstein’s set: a simple, somewhat shabby hotel lobby which makes clever use of the stage’s dimensions. A window in the background shows the skyline of Chicago and a walkway leads down to the hotel’s entrance.

Just to the right of the window is the hotel band, featuring players of the Anhaltische Philharmonie. Music director Golo Berg conducts in the manner of a suave band leader, but nevertheless with great precision and nuance. The placement of the band indicates a more general tendency: The play rather than the music is featured in the foreground, with Brecht’s workshop (head carpenter Elisabeth Hauptmann) taking precedence over Weill’s compositional approach. Thus, for starters, Bernd Lambrecht as a good-looking Bill Cracker delivers a somewhat tired “Bilbao Song.” Generally speaking, the entire beginning just drags.

But then all of a sudden we hear “Der kleine Leutnant des lieben Gottes” through a bullhorn. A small Salvation Army squadron marches down the walkway, led by Julia Zabolitzky as Lilian Holiday. They pass through the entrance, head downstage, surround and then burst into the headquarters of the gang, whose dumbfounded members look to the audience for help. Director Herbert Olschok makes expert use of the space, showing us the fight for territory that ensues between the gangsters and the Salvation Army,

eventually resulting in a strategic balance between the two parties.

The rather delicate Lilian, clad in uniform with her hair tied back, turns out to be a splendid activist with astonishing skills as a speaker. But her boss (Rainer Böhm), too, has strong leadership qualities. The two successfully represent the religious and moral “high ground” of their organization against the masculine pragmatism of the “cool” Bill Cracker and the staunch cynicism of his boss, the Lady in Gray (Regula Steiner-Tomic). And while the gangsters waste little time in taking a life, the Major and his troops are shrewd and just as quick in recruiting lost souls. The way they convert people into pious worshipers in front of the altar draws laughs from the audience (also because of a hilarious allusion to Da Vinci’s Last Supper), but it is, in fact, an impressive feat of brainwashing. The success of the process is not only guaranteed by the songs but also by the impending Christmas celebrations referenced time and again. And suddenly one notices that the song “Geht hinein in die Schlacht” quotes three measures from a well-known German Christmas carol with the telling title “Morgen, Kinder, wird’s was geben” (“Tomorrow, children, something’s going to happen”).

Who will win the battle remains undecided till the very end. But since Lilian and Bill are more sensitive than their underlings, they are not hampered by ideological blinders or the dulling effects of daily routine. Their initial confrontation turns into a conversation about their worldviews, and behind a mask of virtue marked by charity and chivalry an erotic attraction begins to make itself felt. Lilian proves to be more daring, since she is used to taking initiative as a missionary—thus punching a hole in the cliché of the weak woman. Olschok prepares this development carefully. During the “Matrosen-Song” the music moves to the forefront and carries the entire scene, where the young woman can excel. Zabolitzky assumes a northern German sailor’s accent and makes her story more and more explicit and less and less pious, until she ends by kissing the non-plussed Bill. “The end justifies the means,” she’ll later explain to her boss, after he fires her because of the incident.

In “Surabaya Johnny,” a stonefaced Lilian sits on a chair, playing the betrayed lover. The hardboiled gangster is almost floored. After a while she lets her hair down (literally), the two exchange places like sleepwalkers, and finally she crouches on a



Bill Cracker (Bernd Lambrecht) at right with three Salvation Army soldiers. Photo: Claudia Heyssel

small table. When the music stops, she asks the silent Bill if the music had a gripping effect. He shrugs it off with a casual “nope” and launches into the “Lied von der harten Nuss,” giving an entertaining description of his embarrassment. When, finally, he takes Lilian in his strong arms, the Lady in Gray announces his death sentence, but it is Lilian who protects Bill by stepping between him and the mysterious boss. There are a few departures from the script in this scene, but they all go to show just how strong a female character Hauptmann had created in this play.

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The Firebrand of Florence shares the fate of *Happy End* in that both works did miserably during Weill's lifetime. Sixty years after *Firebrand* flopped on Broadway, the orchestra and chorus of the Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk presented the German premiere of this Broadway operetta in the Anhaltisches Theater. The work was performed in a concert version conducted by Wayne Marshall, this year's artist-in-residence.

Firebrand features a male protagonist, to be sure, the goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini as celebrated troublemaker. The book by Edwin Justus Mayer relocates his escapades from France to Florence and reverses the direction of his flight: Cellini accepts an invitation by the French court, rather than fleeing from it. As a womanizer and daredevil, he resembles *Threepenny's* Macheath, except that the pending execution and the monarch's riding messenger appear in the work's grand opening (this time, we even get to hear the clatter of hooves from the orchestra pit). Regrettably, both the plot line and the role of the music fade towards the end. A comparison to the finales of *Der Kuhhandel* shows just how much potential was lost in a compositional process hampered by a weak book and tight deadlines.

Following *Kuhhandel*, *Firebrand* was Weill's second response to a surge of operettas in contemporary musical theater. Hence, it is not surprising to find the beginning of the national anthem from *Kuhhandel* in *Firebrand's* ducal march. And there are further European echoes. When the Duke pardons Cellini, we encounter a brief descending motif from the “Bananentanz” in *Der Silbersee*. The three chords which Weill uses to mark Cellini's three regrets during his “last” speech reminded me of the beginning of Mendelssohn's overture for *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream. And the finaletto for the first act, where Angela, Emilia, Cellini, and the Duke are expressing their wildly differing feelings, recalls Mozart's *Figaro*, as does the nocturnal hide-and-seek game in the castle garden. Even though Weill's music starts to swing every now and then, the plot and the bulk of the score evoke a fictitious Europe (just as *Happy End* evokes a fictitious America).

Yet Weill's pride in his score is still understandable. We find delicious compositional subtleties not only in the tongue-in-cheek allusions to Renaissance vocal

uations recur throughout in slightly altered groups of characters and no individual undergoes any real development. The fact that the 1945 Broadway run featured three ballets with commedia dell'arte dancers headed by the French star dancer Jean Guélis, shows, on the one hand, the overloaded staging concept, but on the other it reveals the right instinct for the work's style. It is a comedy of types that depends on the stage presence and theatrical instincts of the protagonists. If Lenya indeed had had Walter Slezak at her side, the operetta might have added a few weeks to its meager run.

Strong stage personalities also graced the performance in Dessau, even though the plot was given only by a narration. Rodney Gilfry portrayed a Cellini with a strong baritone and physical charisma; only in the very last measures did his voice show some strain, and he seemed to enter a bit late in a few passages. Alexander Günther embodied the type of the powerful but dense monarch. The audience went wild over Kim Criswell's mezzo; she embodied the Duchess with great virtuosity as a most unusual type, that of a comic femme fatale. Anna Maria Kaufmann delivered Angela as a true ingenue; her voice tended to be a bit thin, but she made up for it with her charm and acting. The concert version would have benefited if the other singers had shared her expressiveness.

Several soloists from the chorus expertly divided the remaining parts among themselves. Marshall got the orchestra swinging with his vigor and evocative gestures; he ensured precision and a balanced sound, and he handled the pauses and transitions cleverly. With great wit Friedhelm Eberle read the ironically colored narration, whose authorship remained undisclosed in the program. Of course, it's regrettable that a large part of Gershwin's ingenious lyrics is lost on a German audience. One wonders about the viability of the piece on the German stage. The first prerequisite would be an intelligent recreation of Gershwin's lyrics in German. This doesn't seem a hopeless task. German hip-hop and the enduring nostalgia for the 1920s (including new compositions in that style, as popularized by Max Raabe and his Palastorchester), have resuscitated an appreciation of this kind of verbal wit.

Andreas Hauff
Mainz



Cellini (Rodney Gilfry) and the Duchess (Kim Criswell). Photo: Jens Schlüter

polyphony and in the use of the whole-tone scale in the sphere of the Duchess, but also in the frequently deployed descending melodies that are raised cleverly time and again. The humming male quartet as the background choir for the Duchess ironically reflects the women's chorus for Cellini. And the main chorus is used with great wit: Whether prompted or not, it comments on and interrupts the action, often at surprising moments. The main characters can hardly enjoy a moment of privacy. Ultimately, the choristers are told by the Duke that now is not the time for “studies in counterpoint.”

The many reprises employed by Weill do not necessarily detract from the score's merit. The farcical workings of the piece turn repetitiveness into a principle, playfully juggling different stereotypes. A few sit-

Performances

Die sieben Todsünden

Potsdam

Hans Otto Theater

(Schlosstheater im Neuen Palais)

Premiere: 11 February 2005

"How sad the triumphs will be," reads the program heading for the double bill of Claudio Monteverdi's dramatic madrigal, *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624), and Kurt Weill's ballet chanté, *Die sieben Todsünden* (1933). Taken from *Combattimento*, the motto appears to be the only specific clue to the thought process that led to the combination of these two considerably different pieces (aside from a vague reference to the emotions or "gestures," anger and pride, which play a crucial role in both Weill's and Monteverdi's pieces). The "sad triumph," achieved by the crusader Tancredi over the Saracen Clorinda (he kills Clorinda, whom he loves, when she faces him in battle disguised by her armor) is seen as a link to the social ascent which can be had only for the price of self-renunciation in the *Sins*. This somewhat forced analogy comes across as a weak conceptual bracket for Gisbert Jäkel's double bill (the cast was identical for Monteverdi and Weill).

A more obvious parallel between *Combattimento* and *Sins* lies in their "epic," narrative nature, but in addressing this aspect the director chose a path that ultimately pointed out differences rather than similarities. The scenic representation of the narratives—adhering in part to the original scenario for the *Sins*—seemed to be an unnecessary duplication in *Combattimento*, whose music possesses a strong illustrative quality that was further enhanced by the lively playing of the Lautten Compagny.

A bridge from Monteverdi to Weill was attempted by way of music: Prior to the *Sins* we heard a "Monteverdi Overture"

arranged by Gisbert Näter for the orchestral forces of Weill's work (the program offered no further information) that didn't quite suit what followed, while the "family" assembled for a group photo in front of the pit. Anna I (Stefanie Wüst) and her alter ego, Anna II (Geta Bahrmann), began and ended their journey to "the big cities," which led through sepia-toned film-noir scenery, in a kind of waiting area. The set, also created by Jäkel, gained more concreteness in "Pride" (a cabaret) and "Anger" (a film studio). The 1940s setting contrasted with the scenes for the family quartet (Christian Immler, Tye Maurice Thomas, Maximilian Schmitt, and Henning Kaiser), who were equipped with timeless and current insignia of the underprivileged: curlers, a bathrobe, sweatpants, and a baseball hat.

Despite an announcement that certain singers were indisposed, Stefanie Wüst

cabaret scene. Weill's music took well to this artificial split, as the score's transparency seemed to be heightened.

The *Seven Deadly Sins* is a very timely piece in today's Germany, where society is undergoing a neo-liberal transformation. The sermons of political and economic elites nowadays on topics such as "covetousness," "sloth," and "envy" are fatal reminders of the paradoxical intensifications which Brecht uses for exposing the Christian concept of sin as an essential moral component of capitalism. Citizens are supposed to accept dwindling wages but spend more money on consumer goods and save more for retirement; they should have more children but stay "mobile" and "flexible"; they should get ready to work till a later retirement age while the HR divisions are ruled by a youth cult; they should relinquish their social "privileges" while the truly privileged expand their wealth in

unprecedented ways. The Potsdam production, regrettably, does not utilize the *Sins*' potential for illuminating such contradictions, instead focusing on individual tragedy. The "Gluttony" scene was played with great comic effect: Seated on campstools, the family members gorge themselves on the contents of a cooler, suggesting that Anna's hard-earned money didn't go to construction of the house but was wasted on sheer consumption. In the end, everybody except Anna II sits in the waiting area, and Anna I, all by herself for



For the third sin, Stolz (Pride), Anna II (Geta Bahrmann) dances in the cabaret flanked by two men in sharks' heads. Photo: Bernd Uhlig

once, might be in for a rude awakening. This interpretation leaves a shallow aftertaste: Contempt for the so-called lower classes is a conformist stance that is easy to come by and doesn't open any new perspectives. This criticism aside, the Potsdam theater delivered a solid, splendidly cast, and worthwhile staging.

Tobias Faßhauer
Berlin

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Staatstheater Darmstadt

Premiere: 22 October 2004

Why has *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* found a home on at least one German stage every season for the last fifteen years? Let's go inside the mind of a program executive: Unlike many other musical theater works of the twentieth century, Weill's opera is entertaining and its content is still highly charged; capitalism, consumerism, corruption, and crisis dominate our times just as they did in the late 1920s. Ex-chancellor Helmut Kohl's notorious talk of the "communal amusement park" (1993) seems to have been the cue for the escapist "fun society" that ensued, but these days German society has reached the depressed stage of the opera's third act ("There is no money in this land"). When John Dew, new head of Darmstadt's Staatstheater, decides to program *Mahagonny* as the season's second offering (after Monteverdi's *Orfeo*), we can safely assume that he is committed to socially relevant musical theater.

Philipp Kochheim, the new *Oberspielleiter*, directed the new production. In his program notes he underlines the critical message and the "quasi-intellectual mobilization of the audience" which requires a modernization "appropriate for the work": "Daily life in Mahagonny would be marked by a health and fitness craze, by an overwhelming ubiquity of modern mass media and communication devices, and by improvised politics of fear and compensation, similar to those of George W. Bush. One would watch Michael Moore's films, savor hamburgers and sushi (rather than chew tobacco), and click one's way through video game characters and cyberspace."

The hall's atmosphere evokes a movie theater before the performance starts, with lounge music coming through the speakers. The gangster trio's founding of the city happens in virtual reality. They sport 3-D glasses and stare at the audience as they operate a cyber glove. But the true virtual player of the evening is the director whose

uninhibited stream of ideas produces one figure after another in the green artificial space created by set designer Thomas Gruber. The stage is gradually populated with scantily-clad women and men in business suits. Four joggers do laps around the stage, and in the background we see a woman undergoing plastic surgery. Finally, the four lumberjacks jump onto the stage from a metal grid in the back, but the opera's plot seems to be performed only for the sake of form.

The overture is performed expertly by the orchestra under the baton of Raoul Grüneis. But soon after, the sounds from the pit turn rather dry, the music stays in the background and fails to fulfill its dramatic purpose. Perhaps the acoustics of the small house make the sung texts incomprehensible throughout the evening; at any rate, they don't seem to interest the director. The songs are played only briefly; multiple-strophe musical numbers are cut down to one stanza as a rule. I can't recall having seen singers and actors of a *Mahagonny* production performing in such a pale, nondescript, and insignificant way. There is nothing between Jenny and Jim that would suggest any kind of relationship (the "Crane Duet" was omitted). But even when Jenny (Anja Vincken) starts to sing the hit "Ich kenn die Jimmys aus Alaska schon," nothing is set in motion—except four go-go dancers on the upper stage level who are shot one after another by two gangsters with cowboy hats.

When Jim (Kor-Jan Dusseljee) goes ballistic, he simply slashes the throat of a little boy who happens to run across the stage. But it doesn't matter; in Act 3 the boy surfaces again, as do the four restless ladies. Under the banner of "Du darfst," Jim campaigns briefly for Bush II while being filmed by Michael Moore. But this, too, remains a small idea that goes nowhere.

Is the sequence of "eating, loving, boxing, drinking" more exciting? Jack O'Brien (Jordi Molina Davila) eats from McDonald's bags, but spends most of his time on a toilet throwing up. The brothel scene is done without any passion whatsoever. In the boxing scene we have Trinity



The boxing match between Trinity Moses (Hans-Joachim Porcher) and Alaska Wolf Joe (Andreas Daum) in act II. Photo: Barbara Aumüller

Moses (Hans-Joachim Porcher) dressed as a Ronald McDonald-type clown; the fight is staged as a comical promotional event, and Joe (Andreas Daum) is left spinning at the end as if his computer program had frozen. The bar and trial scenes come out labored. Jim sings "Wenn der Himmel hell wird" in an orange prisoner suit. Time and again Dusseljee's pleasant tenor is drowned by the clanging of his chains. To compensate he is spared execution at the end, grinning happily from the electric chair. And since he doesn't die there is no reason for demonstrations. Instead, the director has the whole ensemble come on stage one more time accompanied by the music for the protests.

Kochheim explains in the program that Jimmy sees through the workings of Mahagonny: "We watch him stripping away masks, denouncing hypocrisy, and putting the Begbickian principle into overdrive, knowing that it might bring his own downfall." It would have been nice to see at least some of that onstage. Overdrive? What we saw in Darmstadt was at best a leisurely stroll. Something is missing. On the occasion of the opera's premiere in Leipzig, Weill mentioned that the work dealt with "the great concepts of human coexistence that have been expressed in all times and in all the arts: friendship and betrayal, poverty and wealth, acquiescence and resistance, fear and courage." But Kochheim's cyberworld is devoid of human relationships and thus he pulls the rug out from under his social criticism.

Andreas Hauff
Mainz

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