

Kurt Weill

Volume 24

Number 2

Fall 2006

Newsletter



Magic

Wright

*Parts
for
Zaubernacht
come to
light*

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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: Detail from program cover for performance of *The Magic Night*, New York, 1925. Drawing by Willy Pogany.

Letters

It was with great dismay that I read the review published in your Newsletter of the Roundabout Theater's production of *The Threepenny Opera* in which I am currently playing the role of Lucy Brown. I was happy with the review itself—I agreed with many of the reviewer's opinions—however, I find it irresponsible to claim that I sing "Lucy's Aria" in "falsetto," a misused term. I am a *sopranist* (not a countertenor) and use a fully supported voice to sing the aria. A sopranist is a rare voice type, usually a tenor who can sing with full voice up through the soprano range, in what is believed to have been the range and tonality of a castrato.

The reviewer, William V. Madison, should have done me the courtesy of researching his claims before publishing them. Hearing a sopranist sing live is a rare thing. I don't proclaim this with great egotism. I merely state it as fact. The readers of your Newsletter are an important audience—and it frustrates me that, for example, they might now believe that much amplification would have been needed to hear me sing the aria (as would be the case *if* I were using falsetto technique).

Perhaps Mr. Madison was not aware of the differences between my singing and a countertenor's because I am singing in appropriate keys, which often tricks a listener since the notes do not sound as high as they really are. If I were singing in a countertenor's range, I would have to drop into more of a masculine tenor sound—a tonal quality *far* lower than the one I use to sing as Lucy.

Again, I appreciate his review, but I had to make you aware of this. I am very proud of the gifts I have been given, and to be described as something I am not is not only disappointing, it is somewhat insulting and disheartening. A theater critic should be aware of *all* voice types—even the most rare.

Thank you for your consideration. I wish you all the very best—as I am a *huge* Kurt Weill fan!

Always,

BRIAN CHARLES ROONEY
New York City

Lenya in the early 1920s in Berlin (around the time she auditioned for *Zaubernacht*).

This fall marks the 25th anniversary of her death.

Photo: Louise Hartung



Note from the Editor

"The intense concentration of Russian theater taught me two things: that the stage has its own musical form whose laws derive organically from the unfolding of the action, and that something significant can be said on stage only with the simplest, most modest means." If we believe Weill's own words, *Zaubernacht* had a decisive impact on his career, which ultimately included more than thirty stage works and made him one of the most prominent theater composers of the twentieth century. Even two decades later in the U.S., Weill recalled the experience of composing and rehearsing his first stage work in 1922, calling it "a stepping stone to success" where his style "finally and permanently reverted to simple and direct theater values."

But destiny's "funny tricks" caused the full score of *Zaubernacht* to disappear. All that survived was a skeletal rehearsal score for piano, which left posterity to speculate about the exact nature of this seminal work. The situation changed in August, when Yale University's Music Library informed the Kurt Weill Foundation that instrumental parts had been rediscovered in the basement of the university's main library. This issue of the Newsletter features a detailed report about this discovery, which fills a major gap. The list of missing works is still long, though. It includes Weill's opera *Na und?*, his setting of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," a symphonic poem after Rilke's *Cornet*, the choral fantasy *Sulamith*, and the orchestral interlude for *Mahagonny* that Weill composed for the 1931 Berlin production; in addition, the original orchestration for *Royal Palace* is still at large. One can only hope that some of them will surface one day.

Zaubernacht has another special significance: it brought Weill and Lenya together for the first time. Their unconventional, almost legendary relationship is the basis for a new musical called *LoveMusik*, with a book by Alfred Uhry and directed by Harold Prince. *LoveMusik* is scheduled to open on Broadway next spring, and all of its music will be by Weill. The creators agreed to tell us about their project, providing rare and exciting insights into their work.

Elmar Juchem

O.K. Alarm Clock Schlagzeug.

Studente
 Pauken in E. A. H. *Introduction Overture*

timpani

repeat good

Triangle

Alarm Clock
Die Gangschlager
Bell
Soll Low G

Tamtam *Tamtam*

ppp

ziemlich stark.

Stark Best to jump Not play to 3 4 + play to 3 6

Die Fee

2nd Act

1st Act

Allegro molto

timpani

timpani

pp

3

▲ 207. 10 Lin.

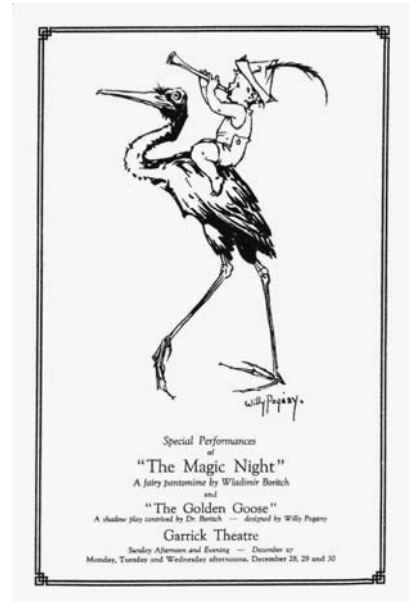
The first page of the heavily marked-up percussion part for Weill's *Zaubernacht*. Aside from timpani, tamtam, triangle and chimes, this page also calls for an alarm clock. From the Wladimir Boritch Collection, Irving S. Gilmore Music Library at Yale University (also image on p. 6).

Lost Orchestration for *Zaubernacht* Surfaces

Frustratingly little has been known about Weill's first professionally produced stage work, composed in the summer of 1922 and premiered on 18 November of that year at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. The discovery of original instrumental parts merits the word "sensation," because it offers the opportunity to reconstruct Weill's full score and finally hear it after more than 80 years. The following pages offer some information about the work in general and a rough description of the find at Yale University, complemented by a selection of press reports about the staging of *Zaubernacht* (under the title *The Magic Night*) at New York's Garrick Theatre in December 1925.

Weill composed his pantomime for children, *Zaubernacht*, during his second year in Busoni's master class. Wladimir Boritsch, the Russian theater impresario who hoped to establish a permanent children's theater in Berlin, had created the pantomime's scenario. Toys come to life while their owners, a boy and a girl, sleep. Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* had successfully explored the same concept exactly thirty years earlier, and its perennial appeal has not waned (as in Pixar Animation Studios' *Toy Story*, 1995). On 1 September 1922, Weill reported progress on his project to his sister Ruth: "After the joys of composing the pantomime, the work will now enter the daunting and upsetting stage of rehearsals, and I'm afraid that in the coming weeks this will make more trouble than the whole affair might be worth. But even that will be a lesson. . . . Further work in this situation is very difficult, especially since the full score for the pantomime will keep me occupied for the next three to four weeks." It seems that Weill approached the rehearsal process with some trepidation, perhaps recalling some of his experiences as a conductor at Lüdenschaid's municipal theater, where he struggled with a broad range of challenges and disasters. His uneasy feelings had not subsided when he sent out an invitation for the premiere to a young fellow composer, Ludwig Brav (who later made a name for himself as a film composer, also collaborating with Giuseppe Becce and Hans Erdmann on a well-known compendium of film music). On the back of a printed invitation Weill wrote, "Dear Dr. Brav, please be so kind as to attend this performance—delivered by forceps—of my children's pantomime. I hope we will soon get together." Weill's humorous tone indicates that he had survived his initiation as a theater composer but wanted to downplay expectations.

Directed by Franz Ludwig Hörth (who would stage Weill's *Royal Palace* in 1927), with a young conductor, George Weller, on the podium, *Zaubernacht* featured choreography by Mary Zimmermann, director of a well-known ballet school whose students had also appeared in a film version of Georg Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1920). Reviews of the performance were generally favorable. Although a more conservative critic doubted that Weill's music with its "unmelodious dominants" was suitable for children,



Program cover for the New York performance

more progressive critics praised his power of illustration that evoked changing moods.

When Weill signed his contract with Universal Edition in April 1924, he included *Zaubernacht* among the works that he proposed to the publisher. He reported on 3 June 1924: "As I've just learned from the author of the book, Dr. Wladimir Boritsch . . . my pantomime for children will probably be produced by [Mikhail] Fokine in New York. As soon as I hear something definitive about this performance, I will create a new orchestral score for Mozartean forces (the full score for the Berlin performance had only nine instruments). Would you be interested in taking over the piece at this point, and would you help to make this New York production happen? The complete material except for the full score is already in America." A month later Weill wrote, "The scenario and the piano reduction of the pantomime *Zaubernacht* are in New York with the impresario Dr. W. Boritsch, c/o Shidlow, 130 William Street; I should receive the detailed English-language scenario any day now, and I will forward it to you immediately." Though no copy of this scenario survives, the Garrick Theatre program includes a detailed synopsis of what was performed in New York.

Nothing survives to document the next eighteen months, until the premiere took place at the Garrick Theatre on 27 December 1925, choreographed not by Fokine but by Michio Ito. Boritsch (as he spelled his name in the U.S.) directed the production and engaged Lazar Weiner as conductor. Since the Garrick Theatre was actually smaller than the Theater am Kurfürstendamm (about 650 seats instead of 800), Weill's orchestration for nine instruments sufficed. After the fifth and final performance of *The Magic Night* closed on 30 December, the work vanished with hardly a trace. Weill's piano reduction, which had served as a rehearsal score, must have been returned to him or Lenya, because it was among the materials that Lenya deposited at the Yale Music Library in 1981. David Drew reported in his *Handbook* that Boritsch's widow possessed a "non-autograph copy of the rehearsal score" when he visited her in 1960 in New York, but "some seven years later Mrs. Boritsch declared that she had given it to an American library; attempts to trace it have been to no avail" (*Kurt Weill: A Handbook*

From the Depths of the Library . . .

In the fall of 2005, the staff of the Yale University Library Business Office needed to move a safe. For as long as anyone remembered—at least 30 years—it had been behind some filing cabinets in a locked cage in a locked room in the basement of the library. Though presuming the safe was empty, the staff called in a locksmith, as the combination was long lost. When opened, however, the safe turned out to be filled with files and papers, which were turned over to the Manuscripts and Archives Department. The staff, upon sifting through them, found both the rare and the mundane: library committee minutes and administrative files, the Sterling Memorial Library silver flatware, and a group of music manuscripts with mostly Russian texts or annotations, outstanding among them a set of parts bearing the title “Zaubernacht” and the name Kurt Weill. These were promptly brought to the Music Library, home of the Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya Papers established by Lenya in 1981. There was no accompanying documentation to indicate when the manuscripts might have been received and how they were related to one another, but the last page of an untitled, unattributed condensed score lacking its first page bore the name Wladimir Boritch. Further investigation has turned up records showing that Mrs. Marie Boritch of New York City gave the manuscripts in memory of her husband to the library in March 1959 to add to the American Musical Theatre Collection.

But why did the manuscripts remain in the safe for so many years and never reach the collection? The answer can only be surmised at this point, but it may have been due to several factors. The safe contained documents created by the university librarian and assistant librarian. James T. Babb, librarian from 1945 to 1965, was a great collection builder, who established relations with many donors and brought many wonderful collections into the library. He oversaw the founding of the American Music Theatre Collection (AMTC) and the Collection of Historical Sound Recordings—collections that were quite unusual in a university library by the day’s standard—and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, one of the world’s pre-eminent rare book libraries. In 1953, Robert Barlow donated his collection of musical theater sheet music, scores, and recordings, and became the first curator of the AMTC. He soon enlisted the help of an advisory committee that included Lenya herself, and by 1955 was seeking any materials that shed light on the history of musical theater. In 1959, before the Beinecke Library was built, many manuscripts were stored in safes and locked vaults—it may be that the AMTC, a young collection, had no safe of its own, and so the manuscript was kept nearby in the university librarian’s for safe-keeping. Around this time Barlow, also the managing editor of the *Yale Alumni Magazine*, became quite ill and remained so until his death in 1966. And then, within a few years, Babb retired, followed in quick succession by the next university librarian and the assistant university librarian.

After 1968, the safe seems to have been forgotten, hidden away in the basement, the area surrounding it assigned to a newly-formed business office. And there it stayed, unopened, in the dim recesses of the library for close to forty years, until the need for the space it occupied brought its long-forgotten contents to light.

Suzanne Eggleston Lovejoy
Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University

[London: Faber, 1987], p. 140). Weill’s orchestral score and instrumental parts were deemed lost.

Discovery at Yale

The materials for *Zaubernacht* found this summer at Yale University consist of nine complete instrumental parts and a copyist’s manuscript of Weill’s piano reduction that certainly served as a rehearsal score. The parts were written by a number of different copyists on German music paper (by three different manufacturers), and almost all the parts bear corrections and emendations in Weill’s hand. Numerous non-autograph annotations, cancellations, and paste-ins leave little doubt that the parts were used at the Garrick Theatre; in addition, there is some evidence that the parts may have been used in Berlin as well. The performing forces are as follows:

1. Flute (doubling on Piccolo)
2. Bassoon
3. Percussion
4. Piano
5. Violin I
6. Violin II
7. Viola
8. Cello
9. Double Bass

The non-autograph piano score is presumably the score that Drew saw around 1960. Written on American music paper, it bears the penciled heading “Extra Score” but lacks a title. Evidently copied from Weill’s holograph, the manuscript copy omits the first five pages and thus “Lied der Fee” (Song of the Fairy), *Zaubernacht*’s only vocal number. This was probably intentional, as



An inserted page for the piano part of “Lied der Fee” in Weill’s hand

Weill's holograph score bears a mark in blue pencil on p. 6, exactly at the measure where the copyist began his work. Several pencil entries in Russian, found throughout the score but yet to be deciphered, suggest that the score was used for rehearsal purposes.

Preliminary Observations

Upon initial brief inspection, the materials reveal a number of intriguing details, especially about "Lied der Fee." The various musical materials discovered at Yale also include two musical numbers by another composer in the form of parts for the same orchestral forces. Headed "Prologue" and "Epilogue" respectively, the parts are written on American music paper; the composer's name is given as "K. Galkowsky." Judging from crossed-out sections in Weill's parts, the newly composed "Prologue" replaced his "Lied der Fee" in the New York performance, with a sung "Epilogue" added. The piano parts for these two rather simplistic numbers include English lyrics, the "Prologue" being an obvious adaptation of Boritsch's text for "Lied der Fee." The situation is complicated by the fact that Weill inserted two single sheets with new music for "Lied der Fee" into the bassoon and piano part respectively (see facsimile of the latter on opposite page). The music is entirely in his hand, and he flags the insertion in the bassoon part with the German word "Einlage" (insert). At this point it is unclear, however, if other parts may have contained inserts as well, or if the insertion merely adds to "Lied der Fee" rather than replacing it (no vocal line for such a revised version of "Lied der Fee" is known to exist). It is also unclear whether Weill intended the revisions for New York or, even earlier, for the premiere in Berlin. Aside from the eventual replacement of "Lied der Fee," the New York production appears to have undergone another change: The synopsis printed in the Garrick Theatre's program (see column to the right) lists two new characters, Yawn and Stretch, and a ballet of Good Dreams and Bad Dreams right after the children fall asleep. Neither the characters nor such a ballet are mentioned in the staging cues that appear in Weill's autograph rehearsal score. Music for this additional section is credited in the program to the conductor, Lazar Weiner.

Although a careful study of the manuscripts may shed additional light, even a quick inspection suggests that it is possible to reconstruct Weill's orchestral score from the parts, a fact that makes *Zaubernacht* a viable and thrilling candidate for the Kurt Weill Edition.

Elmar Juchem

Synopsis of The Magic Night

It is a late hour. It is time to sleep, but how to part with toys! There are so many games still left to play. The mother sings her children to sleep. Softly, drowsily come the Yawn and the Stretch, the messengers of dreams. The children are falling asleep. Around their little beds circle the Good Dreams. The children smile happily. The Bad Dreams are envious. Stealthily, shadowlike they crouch; they whirl and they smirk. The Good Dreams grow sad and droop against the walls.

It is good that the fairy of the nursery comes in time. It would not be difficult to recognize her if one looks at her attentively. With a charming song she calls forth the toy world. The good natured Ball bounces. The clumsy Bear tumbles about. The grouchy Kitchen Stove rolls in, and is ready to burn every one who touches her. On the top of the mountain made of blocks whirls the funny Clown. The boasting, swaggering Roly Poly challenges everybody to fight, and he would succeed only The Little Boy and the Clown discover the secret of his strength and snatch away his enormous shoes and he becomes like all the rest of them.

Haensel and Gretel also are here. They came out of the book, happy to get out of the forest. But the Witch turns the page and rushed after them. Just in time all the little toys save them from her.

So we see that the little toy corner which is quiet during the daytime is full of adventures and dangers during the night.

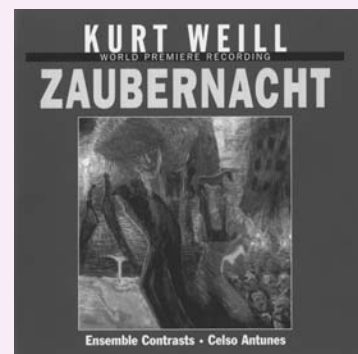
It is no wonder that the children waking in the morning can't understand that those toys they have seen play are the same ones with which they play every day. What kind of dreams were these? Bad or good? Or maybe both? They ask themselves as they look at them one by one.

(Excerpted from the 1925 New York program)

Zaubernacht in the Recent Past:

As Weill's orchestration for *Zaubernacht* was lost, the Westdeutscher Rundfunk commissioned the British orchestrator and Tippett scholar Meirion Bowen to reconstruct Weill's full score. Bowen's orchestration premiered in 2000 in Cologne and has been performed since in Dessau, Essen, and Bregenz. A recording of Bowen's score was released on the Capriccio label in 2002 (reviewed in *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 20, no. 2 [Fall 2002]). In light of the new discovery of Weill's original orchestration, Bowen's reconstruction has now been withdrawn.

The Magic Night Waltz is Bowen's arrangement for violin and piano of the extended waltz with violin solo three-quarters of the way through the *Zaubernacht* score. The three-minute arrangement is published by European American Music.



The 1925 Production of *Magic Night* in the Press

A Preview:

“The Child Mind at the Play”

Parents who are worried by the fondness of their children for moving pictures, even very young children, may learn something to their advantage from Dr. Wladimir Boritch. It is a matter of psychology. “The child understands pure action best,” he says, “and likes picturesqueness most.” Words have as yet a significance and charm somewhat limited, but the visual sense is acute and the imagination far nimbler than it will be by and by in taking up the cues of suggestion. If the moving picture addressed itself only to this child mind, it would do little harm, possibly much good. But it addresses primarily adolescents and adults, who live in the world of matters of fact and occupations. The more keenly the child responds to this pantomime medium, the more surely his mind becomes sophisticated. Even when the moving picture is

otherwise unobjectionable, it quenches the faculty of primitive imagination.

In his Children’s Theatre Dr. Boritch appeals directly and exclusively to the child mind . . . Differences between good and evil that are stamped upon the early imagination persist through a lifetime and exert an influence which is powerful because largely subconscious. Though clarified by mature reason and corroborated by experience, they yet owe much of their vigor and color to the fact that they first took substance in the age of myth and fairy tale. In establishing esthetic sensibilities a properly child-like theatre is important. Too often plays for the young have been carelessly mounted and crudely acted. The colors on Dr. Boritch’s palette and the tempo of his action are those that most delight the wide eye of childhood; but he is mindful that primitive art has a beauty and a rhythm of its own, that esthetically also the child is

father of the man. In an age when sophistication invades the cradle and the pulse of life beats like a drum, his effort is to prolong childhood, to develop and deepen its peculiar faculties to the utmost and to blend them into the maturer moral fibre.

Beginning in Russia and passing to Poland and Germany, Dr. Boritch has already established three permanent children’s theatres, two of them supported by Government educational endowment. His present bill is made up of a pantomime of his own, *The Magic Night*, with settings and costumes by Boris Anisfeld of the Metropolitan Opera House and a shadow play fashioned by Willy Pogany from Grimm’s fairy tale, *The Golden Goose*. Beginning next Sunday there will be four matinees and one evening performance at the Garrick. It is hoped that a permanent theatre may result.

— *New York Times*, 25 December 1925



A scene from the production of Weill’s *The Magic Night* (*Zaubernacht*) at the Garrick Theatre in December 1925. Photo: White Studio (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

Reviews:

New York Herald Tribune*Two Children's Plays at Garrick Thrill Audience*

28 December 1925. . . . The majority of those attending the matinee were children, and during the long life of the Garrick it is doubtful if ever a cast of players appeared before a more attentive audience. *The Magic Night* is a nursery fable in three acts, with the characters including the Little Boy . . . - W. M.

The "notable board of patrons" listed on the back of the program: Multi-millionaire Otto Kahn had bought the Garrick Theatre in 1919 and lent it to the fledgling Theatre Guild, coled by Terry Helburn (who approached Weill for a number of projects from 1937-1942, including a setting of Ferenc Molnár's *Liliom* and *Green Grow the Lilacs*, which became *Oklahoma!*). Mrs.

August Belmont founded the Metropolitan Opera Guild (and in 1949, at age 71, announced Kurt Weill for an appearance on "Opera News on the Air"). Ethel Barrymore and Laurette Taylor were legendary actresses on Broadway.

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THE PLAYHOUSE FOR CHILDREN, INC.

DR. WLADIMIR BORITCH

New York Evening World

28 December 1925. With two performances, afternoon and evening, at the Garrick Theatre yesterday, the first steps were taken toward the establishment of a permanent theatre for children. This beginning was made under the auspices of the Playhouse for Children, Inc., which has Michel Barroy for its manager and announces a notable board of patrons.

The double bill arranged for the opening performances included a shadow play, *The Golden Goose*, contrived by Dr. Wladimir Boritch from a Grimm fairy tale, and a pantomime ballet, *The Magic Night*, the work of Dr. Boritch, with music by Curt Weill.

It was the pantomime which formed the principal feature, the shadow play being used as a curtain raiser.

In *The Magic Night*, two children, a boy and a girl, go to sleep to their mother's lullaby. They have good dreams and bad dreams. Then, following the visit of a fairy queen, they have a vision in which the Ball, the Clown, the Kitchen Stove, the Doll, the Bear, the Chinese Doctor, and the Soldier appear, along with Haensel, Gretel and the Witch. All these visitors dance, gambol, and cut quaint capers, and the children seem to themselves also to take part in the revels.

This pantomime is picturesquely set, brightly and fittingly costumed and, under Dr. Boritch's own direction, very briskly and smoothly produced. We found it delightfully entertaining, last night, as did the youngsters who formed a considerable portion of the audience. It well may prove a happy opener for the Playhouse project.

The Neighborhood Playhouse is lending quite a body of players to the enterprise at the Garrick, including Felicia Sorel and Sadie Sussman, who are the Boy and the Girl. There are also two dancers from the Metropolitan Opera House, Vera Volkenau and Michael Angelo, who appear as the Ball and the Clown. Dorothy Ruggles, of the Neighborhood company, in the role of the Doll, is petite and fascinating.

Matinees of *The Magic Night* are booked for to-day, tomorrow and Wednesday.

New York World**Another New Play**
Miniature Moscow Art

28 December 1925. With *The Magic Night* the Garrick was transformed yesterday into the earnest aspect of "a playhouse for children" as distinguished from a mere playhouse where children may go if they like.

We must confess that we approach these sanctums of carefully organized juvenile entertainment with a certain trepidation—the trepidation of one who, years ago, was inevitably dragged to these pantomimes for tiny tots by conscientious elders, the sort of elders who beamed down at you from the next seat, watching eagerly to see how you "took it." With the defensive hypocrisy of nine going on ten, we always said it was

beautiful, but our secret enthusiasms were all for the gory adventures of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, where the grown-ups were too busy "taking it" themselves to worry about our reactions. That half-forgotten mood of helpless rebellion came back in full force at yesterday's performance.

It is a venture launched by Dr. Wladimir Boritch, who has conducted similar playhouse for children in Petrograd and Moscow. This imported production is a deft and colorful piece of work, a triumph of Russian aestheticism with music in overtones from Tschaikevsky and settings in the purples and vermillions of Boris Anisfeld. Its pantomime celebrates the not so usual tendency of toys to come to life while the children are sleeping. These toys were about as childlike as Stravinsky and they behaved with that sophisticated and determined artlessness which fools grown-ups

sometimes but not a first-nighter aged five. However, the adults' enjoyment made for a merry afternoon, accompanied by a dutiful patter of small hands from the children for whom it was intended.

A shadow play, *The Golden Goose*, was to have preceded the pantomime but was omitted at the last minute. The explanation, given by a gracious patroness before the footlights, was that the naughty, shy shadows didn't like to come out in the afternoon, but that they wouldn't be afraid to dance at the evening show. Another less engaging theory was that the naughty, shy operators couldn't work the lighting effects until something had been done to the shadow machine. You may take your choice of these alibis with the assurance that the shadow goose will appear at all following performances. - A. S.

Weill and Lenya Come to Broadway

Scheduled for April 2007 is a new musical called *LoveMusik*. Staged by 20-time Tony winner Harold Prince, with a book by Pulitzer-, Oscar-, and Tony-winning playwright Alfred Uhry, the musical features exclusively Weill's music. The story of *LoveMusik* was suggested by *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, edited and translated by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996). Elmar Juchem spoke with the creators.

Harold Prince:

EJ: Tell me about the beginning of this whole venture. What triggered you to tackle a project like this?

HP: What inspired the notion was the letters. When Kim and Lys put the letters in their book so adroitly and then filled in all the blank spots, I thought *this is so much fun*. There's nothing pompous or "important" about any of it, just as there was never anything pompous about Lenya. I never met Weill, but I imagine the same holds true for him. So I thought there is a musical here, and it's *not* epistolary. I hate to go into a theater and see a lectern and know that somebody is going to read letters to me. This will be a *real* musical. As my producer said, it's a page-turner. You really can't figure out what the next move is going to be, because it was one of the most eccentric relationships in the world. It's exasperating. And you say to yourself: how the hell did they stay together? I know they got divorced once, but why didn't they just get divorced permanently? And then you realize, no, it was Weill and Lenya. So Alfred [Uhry] and I said, what a subtle way, to do a musical which says marriage is what works for two people. And that's what this musical is about. I think hypocrisy has prevented people from saying that a long time ago, but obviously that's exactly what marriage is, it's what works for two people. It surely worked for them. But it was stormy and interesting, they were both irreverent and *funny*. There's a line in our show that happened to me and my wife. We went backstage at the Imperial one evening, where *Cabaret* was playing, and we were in dinner clothes. Lenya, who had never seen me in dinner clothes, said, "Oh, kids, where are you headed?" We were rather embarrassed, "caught" in dinner clothes. We said we were going across the street to see Marlene's [Dietrich] opening night. And she said, looking into the mirror without a pause, "Say hello to Miss No-Talent." We put it in the show.

Did you get to see Lenya in the 1954 production of Threepenny Opera at the Theater de Lys?

Yes, I saw *Threepenny*, and I was knocked out. Marc Blitzstein turned out to be a friend of mine, I liked him enormously. The show itself I saw on my own hook. What's interesting about it is that I



Harold Prince

eventually connected to so many people in it. My wife's stepfather, George Tyne, was one of the leads, he played Mr. Peachum. Marta Curro and Jerry Orbach were great friends, and obviously Jo Sullivan, who played Polly, became a friend. An awful lot of people. It's very hard to remember how it all happened on that tiny stage. You can remember the "Moritat" and you can remember Lenya. She was too old to play it, I guess, but she gave validity to everything. That production of *Threepenny Opera* is the only one that I dearly loved. Ultimately, what Lenya did for us in *Cabaret* was humongous. First of all, John [Kander] and Fred [Ebb] wrote for her faux Weill-Brecht songs. "What Would You Do?" is what the show is about. What would you do? My family comes from Germany. I myself went to Germany in 1951, in uniform, landing in Bremerhaven and then on to Stuttgart and Göppingen, where I spent a year. But you know, years later, after *Cabaret*, I went back to Munich and a good friend of mine, who was in

charge of musical theater for the Bavarian radio, said, "I'm going to find your family." I knew a lot of them ended up in concentration camps, and I knew my grandmother paid to bring others over. But one mystery remains: one of them lived in Munich throughout the war, a Jewish person with a Jewish identification card stamped with a Jewish star through 1945 and survived the war. How did that happen? A mystery I will never answer. But in '51, it was a very odd thing, having never been there, to feel immediately a symbiotic connection. And if you look at my work, it's really influenced by German literature and theater, and expressionism.

So would you have liked to work with Caspar Neher?

Oh yes. He was a giant. But there were others. Boris Aronson, a Russian, came from that tradition. The reason I'm making the point at all is that there is a huge connection between how they designed scenery.

Will this influence be visible in LoveMusik?

By and large, the most important thing is to get it rhythmically to work, which I find has a lot to do with the scenery. The young designer is Beowulf Boritt. I first met him at a New York Public

Library clambake and introduced him to my daughter who used him on a show called *The Last Five Years*. He has since had a very successful career, and I knew we'd work together. But what did I want? Well, what I wanted created more false starts than you can ever imagine. Because what I wanted was something I had never seen before, but that would in some way recommend a connection to the way these things used to be done, without being authentically the way they were done. After all, it is 2006 and it's going to be '07. And that's what he delivered. I said the most important thing for you to do is surprise me. I have a lifetime of surprises from Boris. In the opening scene, you meet a man on a dock on the mainland, and a boat comes to take him to Georg Kaiser's house on an island. We're in the green woody lakes of Germany. I can do that myself. I don't want to see that. I want to see something that tells the audience that this isn't what you're getting. And he brought me a sketch for a dock. It's black. On a red polished stage. The minute I saw that, I told him he'd licked the problem.

Can you reveal a little more about the scenery?

We're going to have titles, but they will show up in different places all the time. I want to be able to work in the house, I want to be able to pop stairs out of both sides of the pit, so my cast can suddenly appear as soon as I decide, and act as a chorus and go into scenes. So in the magistrate's office, for example, there is the German flag, you get Kurt, Lenya, and a court stenographer, and then you need another witness, so one of the musicians in the pit climbs the stairs and acts as a witness. And there will be a production number, "Schickelgruber," done by Weill and Brecht, and you will see the Depression in Germany silhouetted behind them. No Adolf Hitler, just the Depression that led to Adolf Hitler.

This reminds me of a scene that was cut from Cabaret.

Yes, that's where it comes from. I've always wanted to do it, and I thought now is my opportunity to salvage it. It makes a marvelous picture and covers the same ground. There will be a Paris scene, involving Tilly Losch, and Act II starts in Hoboken, a Comden & Green Hoboken, with a streetwalker, a milkman, a stevedore, and a policeman. At some point Lenya and Weill will meet George Davis.

Did you know George Davis personally?

No, I never met him. But I think the new book *February House* is extraordinary. He was an amazing man and a brilliant writer. He wrote a novel thirty years earlier [*The Opening of a Door* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931)]. It's wonderful, worth reading, a family memoir. He was a giant. Though he was gay, she married the right man. Marriage worked for them. And that's what he says to her. So we get the opportunity to make the point of the play twice. The hardest thing to do, though, was to kill Kurt Weill off. How do you do that? Because the storytelling is *so strong*. How do you show that a man has a heart attack and dies at a critical, decision-making moment in his life? That's the story, and it's a good story, and it's a true story. I think we found a way. Without ever examining it, you have to know that Lenya lived with it all the rest of her life. Incidentally, we excised the funeral with the "lady in black." That's one of those stories you want to put in a show, but it didn't belong.

Are you aware that the "lady in black" is still alive?

I am. Apparently a beautiful old lady. But it didn't seem relevant. When I did *Evita*, I discovered that Evita had been buried mysteri-

ously. Eleven bodies were sent out when she died, to different cemeteries all over the world. And no one but one general was told which casket had her in it. That story infatuated me. I made them put it in at the end. And in a public sentence Che Guevara says, "Her body disappeared for seventeen years." And it just leaves you there. And the audience says, "What was that all about?" It was taking care of Hal Prince's need to share some hugely bizarre story, but it was an irrelevant tag. Well, that's how I felt about the "lady in black." So she will just have to go unseen.

You didn't get to know Weill personally, but you saw the original runs of some of his shows on Broadway, I believe. Can you tell us a little about your experience?

I saw *Knickerbocker Holiday* and remember it vividly, I saw *Lady in the Dark* at the Alvin—sat in the balcony—I lost my mind. Saw it twice. I saw the South African one, *Lost in the Stars*. Mind you, I saw Lenya in *Candle in the Wind* and in *Barefoot in Athens*. But I never met Weill. I became visible in the theater in 1954, when I produced *Pajama Game*. But then he had died. And that's why he is the only one I didn't get to meet. I got to know Moss Hart very well, and also Lindsay and Crouse. I met Robert Sherwood and Rouben Mamoulian.

Did any of Weill's shows influence LoveMusik?

There is a number in the second act that is meant to represent all those concept musicals that I owe great debt to. It will be an abstract production number about success and marriage, influenced by *Lady in the Dark*. And *Love Life*, from which the material comes.

You also saw Love Life?

Oh yes, *Love Life* didn't work, whereas *Lady in the Dark* really did. *Love Life* was too much of everything. And I don't think Gadge [Kazan], whom I got to know, knew how to organize that. I was asked to do *Love Life* again when they did it at the Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia, but I didn't know how to solve its problems. Perhaps because I saw it back then? Why was there a tightrope? Why wasn't it all simplified down to "Let's follow these people through American history"? Why did it have to have the extra stuff? I thought it just got very complicated. But it's wildly talented.

A lot of ideas are in there.

Lord, yes. This whole business about the concept musical that's been pinned on Steve and me—the truth is it did precede us. *Lady in the Dark* is a very good example of what *Follies* became. *Lady in the Dark* is very hard to do now. They are talking about it again, but it's very hard, because it is structured so rigidly.

And you need a really good lead.

You need more than a very good lead. I think you need to break the structure. Or it will never work. I mean Julie Andrews wanted to do it. And I talked to Kitty [Carlisle Hart], and I thought you can't just go scene, dream, scene, dream, scene—it just won't happen. You've got to break the shape of it once and for all. If you had seen *Follies*, you'd see that we created a musical that was like a Fellini movie, with the dreams inside the scenes. What else can I tell you?

When did you start thinking about casting?

Early on. I served as a judge for the Lotte Lenya Competition for Singers, maybe a year and a half ago. And a week before that Kim asked, “Do you have any ideas?” Yes, I said, I know who I want to play Weill. Michael Cerveris. And he leapt out of his seat. So Michael Cerveris it is. And finding Lenya was a bitch of an assignment. Donna Murphy did an exciting reading. Donna Murphy is Lenya. Lenya’s voice was deceptive; odd, but such a voice. And it’s very hard to be as fragile as Lenya and as canny. I had a very good relationship with her—Fred Ebb had a better one, closer. During *Cabaret* she was married to Russell Detwiler, and she came in, battered, and said, “I was walking my dog, and the leash curled around my ankle and I fell,” but I didn’t believe a word of it. And I was right. At one point she had to stop for a bit, because she was so bruised, and at another point she left us to make a movie for the great Sidney Lumet. She went to Rome, made the movie, and then came back. She was loyal, disciplined, very hard-working. Perhaps more interesting than her singing of “What Would You Do?” was her dancing with the sailors. She knew how to take stage in a number with six young men.

When I look at LoveMusik, I see that it’s the story about an artist and his muse. If I wanted to be facetious, I could say that Phantom of the Opera is a story about an artist and his muse. Are there similarities?

No, I don’t think so. It never occurred to me. I guess wherever there’s an artist, there’s a muse. *Phantom* is Svengali. There’s nothing Svengali about Weill and Lenya. She presented his material better than anybody else did. There’s a story I know that is not apocryphal. When I saw *One Touch of Venus*, my favorite number was “That’s Him.” Not so many years ago, on 43rd Street, they named a theater after Cheryl Crawford. And Mary Martin came and she turned a chair around and sang “That’s Him” the way she’d done it. I’m told that she did not know how to do that song. And Lenya said to Kurt, “I could show her.” And Kurt said, “Would you mind if Lenya came in and showed you what to do with that song?” So Lenya came in, put the chair down, turned it around, and didn’t do anything. And that’s the best staging of any song I ever saw. Lenya knew the value of “still.” So did Mary. Mary was a great musical comedy lady, but she had difficulty nailing that song.

If you were pressed to label LoveMusik, would you call it a musical or a play with a lot of music?

I think it’s a musical. The musical comedy thing I gave up years ago. My producer said, “Never in a million years did I think I’d produce this show. But you just want to know from scene to scene what is going to happen to these people. How is this going to happen? It’s totally fascinating!” It’s an entertainment, a musical entertainment. And I think much of the audience may come in not knowing who either of them is. There’s something—always was—there’s something erotic, sexy about Lotte Lenya, and strange and fascinating in their relationship.

When will you open?

We’re scheduled to open in the spring. I think opening small is a good idea.

Alfred Uhry:

EJ: Speak Low is a really thick book. And condensing all those pages and 26 years into a stage work of two hours plus—what was the most agonizing aspect of this task?

AU: The most agonizing thing was figuring out what I could do without, what scene is expendable in a theater piece, because I’m not doing history, I’m writing a story about people. And that was hard, to get enough of what happened in, without going overboard and having long scenes. I didn’t want long scenes. And a lot of it was just to suggest. To raise questions and not necessarily answer them. So obviously the difficult aspect was the selective part. Choosing songs wasn’t hard, they just seemed to come out of there. And there were so many. We could always go back and do version B and have a whole other set of songs.

How did you prepare for your task? What did you read?

I guess I knew about Weill and Lenya, but not a whole lot. When Hal [Prince] sent me the correspondence and practically the same day all these CDs arrived, I was terrified. I tend to speed-read, but I thought how do I do this? I read *Speak Low* many times. And I read a lot of biographies of both of them. And I got into it somehow. My family is from Germany, and Hal also has German and Austrian background, so we got the whole “German” thing. My father’s family is from Alsace and my mother’s side from Darmstadt. My grandmother was born in Atlanta, though. Luckily for me, my next door neighbor for many years—she’s gone now—she was a Viennese woman, and I had her voice in my ear. Of course, there’s Lenya. Weill came alive for me when I saw the film footage that exists. He was a small, very virile, interesting man. I liked that.



Alfred Uhry

I suspect you are too young to have seen Weill’s shows on Broadway, but did you see Threepenny Off-Broadway in the 1950s?

Actually, when I was a kid I saw *Lost in the Stars*, my mother took me to see it. I remember being overwhelmed. And I saw a revival of it as a grown man, in the early ’70s, and it was the same feeling. That was remarkable, too. *Threepenny* I saw while I was in college, but I don’t remember whether I saw Lenya. I kind of feel like I did. We were all hip theater people, wore black, smoked cigarettes, and

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listened to the *Threepenny Opera* all the time. I knew many more songs, of course, like “It Never Was You,” but didn’t know where it came from. So I was determined to find a place for it in the show; that’s one of the best songs, an amazing lyric too, Anderson wasn’t even a lyricist. “Here I’ll Stay” was another one, but you can’t do all of them. It was a big help to me to get these two Teresa Stratas albums, because I never would have found some of the songs, like “Buddy on the Nightshift,” which is remarkable, that lopey kind of swing-along.

Were there other songs you wanted to use or you felt you had to use?

I knew I had to use certain songs, I had to use a version of “Mack the Knife,” I had to do “Alabama Song.” I really wanted to use “September Song.” And that was tricky, because I didn’t want it to sound like it was coming from that show. It’s such a famous song, and I also realized that it really is a proposal about marriage or living together. It’s very difficult to give it a proper lead-in. I think that’s the hardest. That is the most delicate part of the craft of writing a book for a musical, because you don’t want to write a scene that says the same thing as the song says—and then what? You don’t want to sound like it’s shoehorned in, like things in *Mamma Mia!*, which is great for *Mamma Mia!* You have to make it sound like it belongs. And “September Song” is the hardest, because it is so famous.

So, did any of Weill’s shows inform the structure of LoveMusik?

Threepenny certainly informed me. The musical numbers were not really continuing the scene, it was another scene, the songs commenting, which I tried. I also didn’t want to repeat myself. Also *Love Life*, which I didn’t see. But I know it was done with commentary. I really wanted to avoid the Rodgers & Hammerstein thing—which Weill did do sometimes in the ’30s and ’40s. I mean in the “If I Loved You” scene they are looking at each other. I think I wanted to have real singing. And it really comments. There are a couple of places where they don’t do that, but I wanted to do that just to be different. I wanted to do stuff that I thought was true to their style. And whether it is or it isn’t—I don’t know. But I didn’t want it to come out of the scene. Take it somewhere else.

In terms of dialogue writing—with the few lines that you are given—how do you capture their essence? The essence of their relationship?

Well, I hear it reading the letters. And I think playwrights have imagination. And, as I said, I felt it. The letters were really the temperature of the whole thing. And I appreciate that in the letters—and I’m sure in their lives—a lot went unsaid. Deep feelings pretty much went unsaid, which I kind of understand. They were certainly people with huge sensitivities, very private, even though Lenya said she wasn’t, but I’m sure she was. And very vulnerable, both of them, no matter what they said. So, I tried to write a lot of it above the surface—have everything leading to it. Sometimes I quote from the things he said, not much, but some. They really were an inspiration to me because they were so unique. And I came to love them both very much.

To the point that you could identify with them?

It took me a while to understand how Weill could be married to Lenya, knowing that she was sleeping with everybody who came

along. I mean, he did have his own love affairs, real love affairs. Hers were more like, “you tonight, and you tomorrow.” And I thought I don’t know if I could have done that, but I came to realize that I didn’t have to do it. He did, and I think he was very fond of Lenya, she served as his inspiration and wasn’t all at fault. I know that when he was working, he wasn’t there for days and days, and he said from the beginning, “I’m the music, that’s what I am.” I have to believe that they were in love with each other, in their way. And their way was very interesting. But I really came to appreciate what a wonderful composer he was. I can’t imagine what it’s like to write music. I imagine it’s like what I do, I don’t know if it’s a mystery or not, but that’s what I do. I appreciate what he accomplished. And I hope that the audience will understand what it was like to come to this country, and then have—what?—five shows in five years or something like that. Amazing. I also think it’s sad to think that he must have died thinking that *Threepenny* was never going to be successful in this country.

He actually died thinking that most of his European works were lost.

Mahagonny, too?

Yes, Mahagonny, Bürgschaft, and a whole lot more. They all surfaced after his death.—Can you tell us about other characters in the show?

Hal said in the beginning, “I think it should seem like a play, because you know you wrote *Driving Miss Daisy*, a play with few people in it.” And I enjoy that line of work anyway, but it took me a while to pick the characters. Brecht, I wanted him in, and George Davis. And a few more people. Elisabeth Hauptmann and a couple of other women, but they are not really in it. It’s hard. The main problem really is: is it a bio drama? It is, and it isn’t. It is not a strict bio drama, and I didn’t try to show exactly what happened. But I don’t think I invented anything that probably couldn’t have happened.

How was the collaboration with Hal?

He’s a wonderful collaborator, because he really listens. And he doesn’t steamroll at all, he doesn’t try to write anything, but he pushes the project. There’s nothing in here that he wanted that I didn’t or vice versa. Hal said on the first day, “You’ve been married for a long time, and I’ve been married for a long time. And what interests me is the way people manage to stay together, because I don’t think any two are the same.” And he added, “I don’t want to reveal your secrets or my secrets, whatever they may be, but I think we are equipped to examine these people. Because they managed to make it work for a while.” We couldn’t wait to get together to work on this show, and every time we got together we had such a wonderful time. Patricia Birch, the choreographer—she did a lot of Hal’s things, *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Parade*—she’s a real theater choreographer, she knows everything. When I wanted to have something to do with Tilly Losch, she knew how to do it, she knew what I meant.

What about the title?

For a long time we didn’t know what to call it, and then it occurred to me it should be half in English, and half in German, without making a big deal out of it. Seems like the right thing to do: *LoveMusik*.

Books

Quellen zur Geschichte emigrierter Musiker / Sources Relating to the History of Emigré Musicians, 1933–1950 *Vol 2: New York*

Eds. Horst Weber and Stefan Drees

Munich: K. G. Saur, 2005. XLIV + 465 pp.
ISBN 3-598-23747-2

The bilingual volume under review presents the results of a large-scale research project documenting sources related to émigré musicians in New York City, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. It follows the publication in 2003 of a volume cataloguing sources located in California but, unlike the latter, does not include private holdings, focusing exclusively on collections held by New York City libraries and archives.

The strict selection process of the sources, complemented by a sometimes cryptic system of cross references within individual collections, as well as a standardized and rationalized structuring of the content, prove to be well chosen and implemented. Concise summaries of the text documents, letters in particular, allow for quick browsing and offer a handy overview of the staggering amount of materials (4117 documents are listed) scattered across numerous libraries and archives. Thus, an interested reader will quickly recognize problems, occurrences, patterns, and points for further investigation simply by paging through the volume. A visible thread is formed, for instance, by the often desperate strategies of future emigrants trying to prepare for exile, either by contacting Americans or fellow emigrants who had already arrived in the U.S. In addition, exploring certain collections raises a number of questions that bear on larger issues. One example will have to suffice. Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library holds several collections, among them the papers of George Antheil, one of the most important symphonic composers in the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century. Spending time in Europe in the 1920s, Antheil had mingled with many European avant-gardists who eventually would be forced into exile, and in the 1930s he became their most important contact person, particularly for Ernst Krenek. A four-page letter from Antheil to Hermann Scherchen in 1946 brings a crucial assessment of the émigré composers' importance, especially that of Stravinsky, Milhaud, Krenek, and Hindemith, for American modernism: "It is wonderful to have such great musicians help us start this great musical ball rolling,"—also noteworthy evidence of the significance of modern symphonic works for Antheil himself (p. 417). Also located in Columbia's Rare Book Library are the papers of the publishing house W. W. Norton, which had been a contact for many emigrants seeking to publish their studies in musicology or music theory. Telling examples are the correspondence with Krenek about *Music Here and Now* and with Arnold Schoenberg about *Structural Functions of Harmony*, which is further documented by a lengthy letter of Schoenberg's quoted in the catalogue's appendix. The appendix also offers a remarkable document with no explicit reference to music: Hannah

Arendt's vigorous yet nuanced critique of Zionism in a letter to musicologist Eric Werner in 1945. Generally speaking, the 38 selected letters reprinted in the appendix (where they are grouped chronologically and, alas, without commentary) represent smart and representative test samples for future exile studies, showing which topics could be explored further using these sources.

It would be naive, however, to expect comprehensiveness from such a catalogue, even in the small cross-section given above. "By way of self-reference, the metropolis turns into a document itself. Incident, message and commentary combine into an endless circuit of information" (p. XXXVII), the editors observe. But this closed circuit occurs only in the catalogue and in the archives, not among artists exiled to America. Exile is not confined to the city limits of New York, or to the borders of the U.S., or to those of "serious" music: limits that understandably but not justifiably tend to dominate musicological exile studies. And the selection of the areas of documentation happened neither by chance, nor are they truly representative: archives acquired papers based on active and passive criteria for selection. This explains the predominance of composers, musicologists, and conductors over performers, especially those of popular music, and of people who "made it" in exile compared to those who failed.

Such shortcomings should not be blamed on the project in itself, however, because it requires reasonable limitations, and its concept and methodology are geared towards supplementation and expansion. The form of the book needs to be reconsidered, though. As helpful as it may be to have such fascinating documents at the end of the book, the usefulness of a paper catalogue is questionable when compared to electronic publication. There would have been no complaint, as voiced in the book's introduction, about the impossibility of including collections that did not become known until too late. Multiple categories for searching, beyond those of the name index, would then have been feasible: although key words subdivide the catalogue's excerpts of documents, they cannot be searched. Comparative searches of other catalogues, for instance of the previously published volume on California, would have been possible, as would regular updating of the data (collections may be moved or restructured, thereby rendering the catalogue's information obsolete) and a direct link to the electronic resources that at least some of the libraries offer for their collections. These limitations become especially palpable in the case of Weill and Lenya. Adhering to their guidelines, the editors list only unpublished original documents housed in the Weill-Lenya Research Center, which they rightly consider "among the best documented in the U.S." As a practical matter this decision makes perfect sense, but it produces a peculiar picture: rather marginal events (such as Weill's correspondence with David Putterman about *Kiddush* or with Hans W. Heinsheimer about *Down in the Valley*) suddenly move to center stage. But these entries seem redundant for Weill researchers, because they will always consult additional and more comprehensive catalogues and finding aids, anyway. Hence, the volume's effect can be almost paradoxical. The WLRC's achievements—collecting materials of various provenances (often in form of photocopies) so that researchers can inspect them without time-consuming archival visits or initial comparative studies—are unintentionally neutralized, because the printed format cannot be tied in with existing databases. And one suspects that the catalogue in its inflexible printed form will be available in only a limited number of libraries due to its steep sales price (124.80 euros).

Nils Grosch
Santiago de Chile

Recordings

Hoppla! Die Weill-Lenya Biographie

Ein Original-Hörbuch von Jürgen Schebera

Bear Family Records BCD 16082
F6

Can this really work? More than 500 minutes, longer than our cherished eight-hour work day, nothing but Weill and Lenya, not even predominantly music but texts from letters, newspapers, biographies—not exactly the stuff that glues listeners to the loudspeaker. But *hoppla*, this set of six CDs comes to life. Two lives unfold in front of the ear—and with a little imagination also in front of the eye—and we get a capsule version of Eric Hobsbawm’s “short century” with tensions between New and Old World, between “serious” and “light” music, between religious traditions and agnostic stances, between the political left and right, between the desire to belong and the drive for individuality. There is hardly anything new here for Weill experts, but even they will find it difficult to escape the lure of these two auditory biographies.

An audiobook stands or falls by its acoustic presentation. Editor Jürgen Schebera, who also served as co-director along with Birgit Niels, has shown a sure hand in casting the spoken roles: he limits the number to three speakers, Tom Pauls (Weill), Sophie Rois (Lenya), and Goetz Kronburger (narrator), who guides them with a pleasingly nonchalant touch through the complex material. Pauls offers a youthful, reserved Weill with a slight Saxonian accent that the composer may have acquired during his schooldays in Dessau, but the unchanging youthful tone loses credibility as the biography progresses. Rois convinces with an unobtrusive Austrian accent without exaggerated Viennese slang or *Schmäh*; her voice brims with energy and resolve. It does take time to get used to the fact that both speakers also read quotations from other people, male and female respectively. But their professional training ensures sufficient variety and allows them to stay clear of the dangers of confusion or, for that matter, monotony.



The clever packaging design, which gives the box and the individual CD sleeves the look of a vintage photo album, complements the layout of the 36-page booklet that includes 25 briefly captioned photos, information about the musical examples, and an introduction by the editor. Unlike the Lenya CD set that Bear Family released in 1998, the spoken word dominates this box of CDs. Speech takes up about seven and a half hours, broken up by 27 musical examples whose selection appears to have been guided by two criteria: Lenya as the “authentic” interpreter of Weill and the desire to rescue lesser-known works from oblivion (*The Eternal Road, Die Bürgschaft, Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren*).

The text is divided into eighteen chapters and attempts to apportion fairly the amount of time given to each of their life stories; Lenya’s career after Weill’s death, crucial for the reception of his music, has also been allotted significant time (about 90 minutes). Save for a few factual errors (e.g., the First World War did not end in September but in November 1918), the text convinces with its accuracy of facts and dates, although less could have been more. At times the flood of data threatens to overwhelm the listener. With a focus on original quotations and documents, the audio book favors a positivistic approach, avoiding value judgments, interpretations, or far-reaching analyses. The history of the works and performances stays in the foreground; personal, political, religious and social details take a back seat. This is certainly an asset considering the target audience with an interest in Weill and Lenya. Specialists won’t find any additional or new information that goes beyond what has already

been published, including by Schebera himself. My personal wish list of issues that have not been extensively addressed in publications includes the following: Why wasn’t Weill drafted in 1918 and thus spared the traumatic experiences that informed, for example, much of Caspar Neher’s work? Did the state of Weill’s health have an impact on his works? Or: Why did Weill, at critical points, compose two operettas which were neither successful nor overtly progressive: *Der Kuhhandel* after his escape from Germany; *The Firebrand of Florence* in the last phase of the Second World War? Obviously an audio book cannot (and should not) be a scholarly work, but there may have been room for some critical probing here and there, especially since the selected contemporaries, quotations, and reviews show Weill and Lenya, for good reasons, in the best possible light. Some depth could have been added here. For the (German) listener, the most significant aspect lies in the fact that Schebera portrays Weill and Lenya in their entirety, showing them as artists who remained faithful to their thoughts and feelings, sticking to their ideals of quality and authenticity. There is a “German” and an “American” Weill, though the bottom line is that he was a complex, integral, and important composer and innovator—partly through Lenya’s art of interpretation—and this “truth” forms not only the end of this review but also that of the audio book. Yes, it really worked, and the eight hours passed in no time.

Ulrich Fischer
Frankfurt am Main

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

*Komische Oper
Berlin*

Premiere: 24 September 2006

“Brecht is right . . .” appears in large type on a page toward the end of the program for this production. Even though the words refer “only” to the importance of money (and advertise for the “Friends of the Komische Oper”), they could very well be the motto for the entire evening. Because Brecht, or his corporate identity, is ubiquitous, not only as librettist, but also as theorist: the idea of exorcising any traces of naturalism from stagings with the help of projected titles is outdone by the central idea in this production, where almost all of the stage directions are projected in illuminated letters; furthermore, during more important scenes a voice from offstage reads aloud the texts that were originally intended to be projected.

But this production, staged by Intendant Andreas Homoki, is in no danger of being accused of realism. The movements on stage are simply too wooden, and there is a tendency—especially during the first act—to overact or sing into the footlights, or to do both at once (Begbick’s “Darum lasst uns hier eine Stadt gründen”). This is hardly the fault of the performers; the opera company has a long tradition of hiring singers with excellent acting skills. Even this evening had passages where one could sense such skills for a moment, as during Jim’s aria at the beginning of the third act. But generally speaking, this staging lacks attention to the striking individual detail that goes beyond the arrangement of crowd scenes as geometrical (mostly triangular) *tableaux*

vivants. Individual characters, no matter how typified their roles, should be directed as individuals, so they are not left to fend for themselves.

In spite of such criticism there are aspects that make this production commendable, most notably the chorus rehearsed by Robert Heimann: they sing phenomenally. Together with an inspired orchestra that clearly enjoys this music, led by *Generalmusikdirektor* Kirill Petrenko, their contribution ensures that Weill’s music makes a much fresher and more ironic, even cynical, impression than Brecht’s libretto. The score’s virtuoso juggling of remnants of musical tradition (a classic case was the country inn music for Jack’s “death by veal” and the crocodile tears in the ensuing lament, “Sehet, Schmidt ist gestorben,” with a quiet reference to Brahms’s motets) does not need to wag its finger at us, still leaving a more lasting impression than the text which, at times, is grossly sententious.

Compared to the chorus, the soloists’ accomplishments are less stellar, though hardly a washout. Christiane Oertel as Begbick is exaggeratedly operatic, but she has good presence—something that Tatjana Gazdik’s Jenny lacks; her “Alabama Song” barely makes it over the pit. Jens Larsen largely convinces as an oily Trinity Moses, as does the quartet of lumberjacks, Jim,

Jack, Joe, and Bill (Kor-Jan Dusseljee, Thomas Ebenstein, Carsten Sabrowski, Martin Winkler). The minimalist set (designed by Hartmut Mayer) also proves effective: during Act I we see a gigantic, rotating 20-foot parcel on stage, whose brown wrapping paper serves as a canvas for slogans painted by members of the chorus. When Jim invents the city’s new rule, the paper gets torn off and voilà, we find painted shower curtains hanging from a huge square frame to form the colorful new Mahagonny. In a moment of true theatrical beauty, the whole thing comes down like a sinking ship while Jim and his dwindling group of followers sing “Stürmisch die Nacht” (“Asleep in the Deep”).

“Mahagonny is a prank,” we are told by Brecht, the great theatrical instructor who wields the tools of the stage. But experience shows that what the teacher and those condemned to be his students—the audience—consider funny are usually two entirely different things. But this staging teaches us something further: The “challenge . . . to find a form of theater that has an impact on the audience similar to Brecht’s theater in its day” (Homoki, quoted in the program), cannot be accomplished without a proper patricide.

**Markus Bögemann
Berlin**



Jim (Kor-Jan Dusseljee), with Bill (Martin Winkler) and Jenny (Tatjana Gazdik) at his side, sings “Stürmisch die Nacht.”

Photo: Monika Rittershaus

Performances

Happy End

American Conservatory Theater
San Francisco

8 June–16 July 2006

One approaches a new production of *Happy End* with some trepidation. Here is what may well be Weill at his most dazzling—“Bilbao-Song,” “Sailors’ Tango,” “Surabaya-Johnny,” “Mandalay-Song,” the hymns, the marches, and a succession of other numbers constituting one of the 20th century’s greatest theatrical scores. And yet this music is joined to a book that is considerably less than Brecht at his best—and in this case, of course, the book is scarcely by Brecht at all but largely the work of his disciple and erstwhile lover Elisabeth Hauptmann, who in turn was masquerading under the pseudonym Dorothy Lane.

Yet the recent production at San Francisco’s American Conservatory Theater confounded at least this reviewer’s expectations, for it worked brilliantly as a whole. Much of the credit for the success of the spoken text goes to Michael Feingold, whose translation (or adaptation) has been much performed for over thirty years. Feingold continued his revisions, which amount to a radical pruning of the text and an elegant sharpening of the wit, in collaboration with director Carey Perloff during the production’s rehearsals. The result is a show that integrates songs and book into a sparkling whole in which the dialogue seems worthy to stand next to the great musical numbers to which it had long seemed a poor country cousin.

Happy End juxtaposes two apparently incompatible worlds located in an imagined 1920 Chicago—which its creators of course had never seen: first, the second-rate gangsters based in Bill Cracker’s bar and, second, a local Salvation Army chapter. It is no surprise to learn that both worlds ultimately join forces with one another, symbolized by the union of Cracker and Hallelujah Lil,

as well as of the gangster leader, the Fly, and the Salvation Army’s Captain Hannibal Jackson—and both worlds, we are told at the end, are products of the same capitalist system.

Perloff’s production stresses the artifice, indeed, what in her program note she terms the “fantasy,” with which these worlds are represented. It is well known, for instance, that the gangster world parodied American silent movies that had circulated in Germany. The gangsters in this production are filtered through a still more intricate lens, for Perloff calls upon her audience’s consciousness of the whole tradition of film noir down to the present. The Salvation Army scenes play on a contemporary audience’s sense of the absurdity of extreme religious stances: a high point of the evening was René Augesen’s delivery of



Lillian Holiday (Charlotte Cohn) leads a service for the Salvation Army.

Photo: Kevin Berne

Sister Mary’s hilariously inept sermon.

The Hosanna chorus, presented here at both the beginning and the end, is no longer the agitprop attack on famous capitalists that it was at the German premiere, in which it evidently alienated many of the opening-night critics. In San Francisco the chorus was thoroughly stylized, indeed choreographed as well, and the laughter evoked by the denunciation of Henry Ford, J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller may well have been sharpened by the audience’s outrage at recent American corporate scandals.

Many have long assumed a discrepancy between text and songs, not only in quality but also in relevance to one another. After all, Weill composed the songs in France without much awareness of the book, and Brecht had done the lyrics quite indepen-

dently of this text. How, for instance, can the earthy words of the “Sailors’ Tango” emanate from Hallelujah Lil?

Yet each song, no matter how irrelevant it may at first seem to the interests of the character who sings it, works here to transform the particular dramatic situation within which it is embedded. In both the “Sailors’ Tango” and “Surabaya-Johnny” we witness Lil’s music in the process of melting down Bill Cracker’s hard-nosed exterior. And the Fly’s so-called “Ballad of the Lily of Hell,” despite the toughness that it overtly expresses, actually exposes the sentimentality we are to see at the base of her character.

The integration at the heart of this production manifests itself scenically as well through the impressive constructivist set designed by Walt Spangler. A movable stairway allows the set to move back and forth seamlessly between Bill’s bar and the Salvation Army hall. The orchestra, its personnel according with Weill’s specifications, sits at the top of the set in full view of the audience.

In terms of musical performance the orchestra, expertly conducted by Constantine Kitsopoulos, and the two leading ladies, Charlotte Cohn as Lil and Linda Mugleston as the Fly, stood out above all. Both these singers coped well with the high tessitura that Weill demanded. Cohn’s voice is sweet and warm, scarcely cabaret-like—yet it was thoroughly persuasive in winning the affections both of Bill Cracker and the audience. The men in the cast,

especially Sab Shimono as the Governor and Jack Willis as Sam Wurlitzer, were fine actors but less successful as singers than the women; their musical mode seemed closer to *Sprechstimme* than to song.

In order to supply Mugleston with a second song, Feingold created what was in effect an entrance aria for her by joining lyrics loosely deriving from Brecht’s poem, “Ballad of the Pirates,” to Weill’s music for Felix Gasbarra’s “Die Muschel von Margate,” a song originally included in Leo Lania’s 1928 play *Konjunktur*. If it is not quite equal to the rest of the score, one cannot begrudge oneself the opportunity to hear still more Weill in the course of an evening.

Herbert Lindenberger
Stanford University

Performances

Die Dreigroschenoper

Admiralspalast
Berlin

11 August – 1 October 2006

Producer Lukas Leuenberger meant to give the city of Berlin a real “event” (and his company’s wallet a strong boost), and he succeeded admirably. His recipe? 1. Take a venue that is at the heart of a public debate: The venerable Admiralspalast near Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse will serve nicely. In the 1920s, the legendary Haller Revue and operetta stars such as Richard Tauber and Gitta Alpar performed here; during 1946–1953 the Deutsche Staatsoper took up temporary residence; until 1990 East Berliners could enjoy their operettas in the same house, rechristened Metropoltheater; closed in the wake of reunification, the building was threatened with demolition but is now rescued with this production—many people would attend just to see the house. 2. Take the theatrical success of a century, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, because according to widespread myth nothing can go wrong with this work. 3. Hire an internationally acclaimed actor who has begun to moonlight as stage director in the recent past: Klaus Maria Brandauer, actor at the Vienna Burgtheater since 1972 and famous for movies such as *Mephisto* (1981), *Never Say Never Again* (1983), and *Out of Africa* (1985). 4. Cast Macheath with a pop icon who is revered by fans all over Germany: Campino, aka Andreas Frege, lead singer of the German punk band Die toten Hosen. All these measures will guarantee maximum media coverage in the form of countless television talk shows battling over star appearances and full-page articles about preproduction matters months before the curtain rises. 5. Add to the mix a number of actors whom the general public will recognize from film and television. 6. Last but not least a) approach a potent sponsor who is making headlines for many reasons these days: Deutsche Bank, criticized for its outrageous salaries for senior management while thousands of jobs are slashed; b) hire a creative PR agency that gets the word out with ambiguous posters and slogans such

as “We’re doing it in the middle of Berlin,” “We’re doing it for just a little while,” or “We’re doing it for the first time.” The result: the projected run of seven weeks in this rather large house (1750 seats) is sold out quickly, and another week is added to accommodate the large demand. When the show closed on 1 October, some 70,000 people had seen it—even the shrewd Ernst Josef Aufricht would feel obliged to tip his hat posthumously.

The artistic result? When in 1989 the British pop star Sting appeared as Macheath on Broadway in a similarly heterogeneous production with comparable media hype, Frank Rich observed in *The New York Times*: “After emerging from the inert gray mass that is Broadway’s *Threepenny Opera*, the first thing you want to do—assuming you don’t drink—is run home and listen to any available recording of the score.” Simply substitute “Admiralspalast’s *Dreigroschenoper*” for “Broadway’s *Threepenny Opera*,” and the verdict is perfectly applicable to this production. Theatergoers in Berlin experienced the “inert gray mass” at each and every level. It begins with Brandauer, who finds neither a convincing approach to the piece nor a coherent style or underlying idea for his staging. Instead, he wavers constantly between a serious approach and a parody of sorts that gratuitously and frequently crosses the line into the dumbest kind of slapstick. This indecision is first encountered in the spoken *Zwischentitel* which Brandauer himself recorded for this production, often with an unmotivated pathos that presumably is meant to be funny (at times he’s openly clowning around), but hardly ever does he hit the style of the texts, which is cold objectivity. The indecision continues in the characters that Brandauer presents: a Mr. Peachum (Gottfried John) who, stripped of all menacing qualities, is required to play the part only as a relentless German schoolmaster or as a children’s storyteller; a Mrs. Peachum (Katrin Sass) who is forced to follow the action like a puppet from Punch and Judy with childish jerky movements; a gang assembled according to body types that is instructed to act like a bunch of complete morons; and a Lucy (Jenny Deimling) who does nothing except run around the stage, shrieking constantly. And rarely do you see a brothel as stuffy as the one presented here, fully adhering to the dated cliché of love for sale, with Jenny (two heads shorter than Campino: Maria Happel) being no exception. Polly is another

example of the director’s incoherent concept of style: while all actors have to deliver their text “theatrically,” Brandauer—adding a dose of hip *Regietheater*—allows the talented Birgit Minichmayr to mumble her lines in an everyday voice (admittedly much to the delight of younger members in the audience). Only Tiger Brown (Michael Kind) is permitted to appear as conceived in the work, a blend of pompous official and sneaky crook.

Which leaves us with Campino. With no formal training as an actor or singer, he manages to escape the challenge of portraying Macheath relatively unscathed. With the help of his good looks, he gets the character’s threatening aspects across, but Mac’s hedonist streak, also part of his character, is simply non-existent. Campino has learned to speak surprisingly well during the weeks of rehearsal with Brandauer, although he rarely manages to introduce nuance to his speech, delivering his text for two and a half hours in the same tone. His body language is necessarily limited too, consisting of a small set of rehearsed poses and gestures. Still, his impact is considerable, and he actually dominates the action, helped by the fact that Brandauer betrays most of the remaining characters. The punk star’s strongest moments come at the end, when he can switch to direct attack in the “Epitaph,” clearly the evening’s highlight. Having authored several songs for *Die toten Hosen* that show strong social



Mrs. Peachum (Katrin Sass) and Mr. Peachum (Gottfried John) talk shop. Photo: Georg Soulek

criticism, Campino is at home here. Asked why he accepted the part of Macheath, Campino replied to an interviewer humorously but not without topical implications, “For a long time I wanted to sing directly into the faces of a bourgeois audience—which doesn’t come to my concerts but which is expected here by the thousands—‘I urge you to smash their nasty faces with heavy iron hammers.’”

Well, he doesn’t quite sing the line, but shouts it instead, which brings us to the musical aspects of this production. Campino has a hard and clear voice with a fairly limited range, forcing him to escape into *Sprechgesang*, often pure speaking, to manage the songs. One is inclined to forgive him, also during the more lyrical numbers (e.g., “Liebeslied”) which hardly go well—after all, he is a punk singer cast as the leading man, and he tackles the task with some bravura. But it’s impossible to forgive the fact that actors who sing very poorly or not at all were hired solely on the basis of name recognition. Here the suave event managers show their blatant ignorance of the music, and reveal that the people in charge still don’t understand the role which Weill’s songs played in turning *Dreigroschenoper* into the successful piece that it is. Gottfried John merely croaks or flees into speech, since the concept of pitch eludes him altogether; Katrin Sass whispers with a thin voice (making the inclusion of “Ballad of Sexual Dependency” impossible); Michael Kind’s singing is similarly limited; Jenny Deimling is all but a catastrophe (turning “Lucy’s Aria” into a shrieking farce rather than brilliant operatic parody). Birgit Minichmayr lacks the required soprano range that lends Polly’s numbers their distinct essence and beauty; only Maria Happel (Jenny) manages to do justice to her numbers.

Under the circumstances, musical director Jan Müller-Wieland was fighting a losing battle, especially since his musicians were members of the Filmorchester Babelsberg, an orchestra that tours the country with dance events and syrupy accompaniments to silent films, lacking any kind of stage experience. Their playing was uninspired, imprecise, and dull. Many passages, particularly the instrumental interludes, sounded like watered-down versions of the original, although they seem to have played most of the notes. Often Müller-Wieland picked the wrong tempo, as in the overture, which was played absurdly fast, so the baroque fugato character was lost, along with some of the foreboding “wrong”



Tiger Brown (Michael Kind) with his old friend Mackie Messer (Campino). Photo: Georg Soulek

chords. The finales, on the other hand, were more successful. Moving the “Moritat” to the middle of the show and having it sung by one of the beggars in a thin falsetto may have been another bright idea of Brandauer’s. Facing unanimous negative reviews in the German press, the producers struck back with a critique of the critics: It was not their intention to mount a production for connoisseurs of Weill and Brecht but for a broad, uninitiated audience, and this audience responded every night with cheers and applause. Ignorance is bliss! This is hardly an argument in an age of “events,” where an increasingly unwitting audience hails even the most absurd nonsense, provided the ad campaign is good enough.

Brandauer himself made a telling statement toward the end of the rehearsal period, when he appeared on a talk show hosted by Norddeutsche Rundfunk: “Oh, you know, we—the ensemble and I—have had a lot of fun during the past six weeks.” This may very well be, and one is glad that they did have fun—but lost on the way was a masterpiece. Thus spake Brandauer, however, and a day after the premiere he was on his way to Cologne, where he began staging Wagner’s *Lohengrin* for the local opera company. Big names are in demand!

Looking toward the horizon, another “event” can be spotted: The Berliner Ensemble (the former Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, where *Dreigroschenoper*

premiered in 1928) has announced that Robert Wilson will direct a new production of *Dreigroschenoper* in spring 2007. Maybe we will get to see the first slow-motion version of the piece. By the way, in 1994 the same theater hired another celebrity director, Peter Zadek, to stage Brecht’s *Jasager* and *Neinsager*, the former without Weill’s music. The director is on record as saying that one could do very well without the score. Any questions?

Jürgen Schebera
Berlin

Performances

Street Scene

Opera Theatre of Saint Louis

15–25 June 2006

Programming *Street Scene* makes good sense. The opera successfully integrates grand opera, operetta, American musical theater, and the social realism of Elmer Rice's original play. Its broad appeal allows American opera companies to introduce a new work into their repertoires and market it as relatively middle-of-the-road, between the extremes of avant-garde style (Glass, Berg, or even Britten) and neo-romantic pandering (Lloyd Webber or Liebermann). Press reports and reviews of recent productions rightly place *Street Scene* in the context of the other important American musical-theater works of the mid-twentieth century, including *Porgy and Bess*, *Oklahoma!*, and *West Side Story*, thereby making it accessible to audiences leery of new operas. In June 2006, two productions appeared in Missouri, of all places, one pair of performances even occurring on the same day: by Civic Opera of Kansas City and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

While set design is not a significant problem, since all the action happens on the same street in front of a New York City tenement, producing an artistically (and, one hopes, financially) successful *Street Scene* is no mean feat, particularly with regard to the critical elements of musical performance and the acting of the singers. In these areas, the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis did a marvelous job.

The intricacies of blocking, vocal dialects (for the various immigrant groups that people the opera), and shifts in musical style are daunting. Departing from the operatic norm, in which only a few characters get the lion's share of the spotlight, *Street Scene* retains the bustling ambience of Rice's play with a total of 32 speaking roles. Kudos go to the diction and dialect coaches, Jonathan Green (who also played Abe Kaplan) and Ben Malensek, who brought out a vibrant range of voices that largely avoided caricature. Finding performers who can move naturally from stand-and-sing, cultivated vocalism to a more swinging style is less problematic these days, as many American-born and -trained opera singers have a range of performance experience, including musicals, jazz singing, show choir, and even "straight" theater.

The conductor's greatest challenge is maintaining necessary dramatic momentum, which is regulated by tempo, the placement of applause, and appropriate performance practice. Congratulations to

musical director Stephen Lord, who assembled and led an orchestra flexible and skilled enough to follow Weill's often sudden changes of style.

Too much applause was a quality of Broadway shows that Weill specifically wanted to avoid, in favor of a flow between numbers. Weill's music itself acts to regulate applause, but the conductor, performers, and indeed the audience must work together as well. A good example of a number warmly received with applause neatly curtailed for a smooth transition to the next number was the crisp performance of "Oy, de moiders" by Jonathan Green (Abe Kaplan) and the tenants.

An ensemble like the "Ice Cream Sextet" calls for generous applause, which ought to be milked. Director James Robinson pushed things further by having the ensemble eat their cones at a break before the last cadence, thereby starting the ovation that much sooner. But it was not weakened at all. The sextet was performed with an infectious joy and earned its acclaim.

The performers of relatively small parts quite often managed to wring dramatic texture—a mixture of clarity, intensity and nuance—from only a few lines or bars of material. Perhaps the most impressive example was Gloria Parker as Emma Jones. She represents the pettiness and rumor-mongering of the mean streets and tenement life that form the show's backdrop. Yet the audience clearly relished every moment with Parker, not only recognizing her type from real life but even sympathizing with her cynicism. Another example was Daniel Fosha as Daniel Buchanan, the anxious husband of a pregnant wife. His performance of "When a Woman Has a Baby" was absolutely winning; he displayed clear diction and musical articulation, and his acting was suitably jittery.

The studious mixing of genres and performance styles that properly dominated the approach of most of the cast was mercifully thrown away by Leah Dexter in "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed," the most Broadway-bound number of the show. With her small but crackling Rosie Perez-type voice (which barely avoided disaster at the climax of the chorus) and a performance with plenty of thigh-showing and butt-shaking, I was initially dubious. But the superior voice and able dancing of Kelly Markgraf (Dick McGann) let the pair uphold the near-tradition of having "Moon-Faced" steal the show.

As for the lead roles, all were well cast, and the actor-singers worked hard to per-



The cast assembled before the set, designed by Bruno Schwengl. Photo: Cory Weaver

form as a true ensemble. Garrett Sorenson played the nervous, earnest lover Sam Kaplan dutifully. In his dialogue he sounded somewhat unsure and even rather listless at first. While singing he had the opposite problem: in trying to sound dramatic, he overused an intense, almost sobbing timbre, where a greater variety of approaches, including a softer head voice, would have made for a more textured performance. For instance, in “Lonely House,” he performed the various iterations of the key word “lonely” with this same timbre, even though Weill notated each one differently in dynamics and phrasing. Yet Sorenson elicited deep sympathy from the audience.

He had an adept partner in Jennifer Aylmer (Rose Maurant), whose acting seemed more seasoned and assured, although it veered toward the hysterical as the drama intensified. In her solo passages, Aylmer and conductor Stephen Lord seemed to play tug-of-war with the tempi, he attempting to move the drama along, she regularly slowing for dramatic effect. At first, she worked awkwardly with Sorenson, but they began to perform more naturally in the “Lilacs Duet” at the end of Act I. A good example of their development occurred after the culminating line,



Anna (Carolyn Betty) sings as Mrs. Fiorentino (Kristin Clayton) and Mrs. Jones (Gloria Parker, in chair) look on. Photo: Cory Weaver



Frank Maurant (Jeffrey Wells) under arrest; Sam Kaplan (Garrett Sorenson) looks on from behind.

Photo: Cory Weaver

“Remember that I care,” when they both looked down modestly, instead of reverting to the more-intense-is-better acting style that sometimes dominated.

Casting Jeffrey Wells as Frank Maurant was a logical choice. Maurant has to have dramatic weight; his acting needs to instill fear—suitable delivery of his dialogue full of prejudice and paranoia being of utmost importance—and his vocal numbers require a rich bass. Wells has all this in spades, and his considerable stage experience is palpable. On the other hand, his lack of vocal variety led to problems with diction, forcing me occasionally to refer to the supertitles screen. Wells certainly looked the part, with dark Mephistophelean hair and a goatee, but his acting regularly lapsed into melodrama from the moment of his first entrance. For his aria, “Let Things Be Like They Always Was,” lighting designer Mark McCullough increased the quasi-Satanic mood by lighting Maurant from below, like a flashlight under one’s face at a campfire. This display of undiluted malevolence made it nearly impossible to sympathize with Maurant in the second act, especially after he has murdered his wife and asks his daughter (and the audience) to believe that he always loved her mother.

Carolyn Betty (Anna Maurant) expertly delivered the confusion and impotence of a woman whose life had gotten away from her, whose marriage had left her

utterly barren inside. Yet Betty also showed hints of the character’s undecayed idealism, not rooted in nostalgia but focused on her hopes for others, first in her aria and later in the song, “A Boy Like You,” to her son Willie. Betty sang with a slightly forced richness at times, to the detriment of vocal clarity. Even worse, her tendency toward slowing the tempo in this number drained away the action’s momentum toward her murder.

Unfortunately, conductor Stephen Lord went along with this tendency. When played too slowly, Weill’s music loses its agonizing beauty and becomes lugubrious. This made everything after Anna’s murder little more than a postlude, further weighed down by long pauses between lines. Even the splendidly tart “Lullaby” could not provide a spark.

Richard Rischar
Kansas City

Performances

Festival Kurt Weill “De Berlin à Broadway”

Opéra de Lyon

June 2006

Nearly seventy-five years after his exile here, the French understand Kurt Weill but poorly; he languishes in Brecht's shadow, and his American works are unknown, apart from a few jazz standards. Serge Dorny, general director of Opéra de Lyon, sought to remedy this, with a mini-festival that included the French premiere of *One Touch of Venus* and a double bill of German works that explore American popular mythology, *Der Lindberghflug* and *Die sieben Todsünden*. In this context, Weill's career on Broadway seems neither a betrayal nor a mystery, as many French intellectuals prefer to view it, but a natural expression of his lifelong fascination with American culture. There are other connections, too, for those who are willing to see them: the line between “Seeräuber-Jenny” and “Dr. Crippen” is short. A fourth production, *Der Jasager*, featuring members of the company's young-artist program, as well as a local children's choir, was paired with Brecht's *Der Neinsager*. (The company cancelled the matinée performance I was scheduled to attend, on June 10.) With so much focus on scores with texts by Brecht, *Venus* carried a heavy burden as the only truly American work on the bill, in a country where Broadway showmanship, to say nothing of barber-shop quartet-singing, is hardly second nature.

Venus, here called *Signé Venus*, was a co-production, for which the orchestra of Opéra de Lyon and a good deal of the company's technical support (costumes, scenery) joined forces with a local theater, the Théâtre de la Renaissance in the suburb of Oullins. More resources will be required, however, if the work is to take

hold in the French imagination. The venue, in a community arts center, boasts some 500 seats, but the stage itself is quite small, and with a cast of twelve, the production couldn't meet the show's demands.

This was most notable in the two crucial ballets, “Forty Minutes for Lunch” and “Venus in Ozone Heights.” Stage director Jean Lacornerie and choreographer Philippe Chevalier used silhouettes and projected transparencies, in a valiant yet ultimately vain attempt to depict the crowds and haste of a Manhattan lunch break, and the picture-postcard simplicity of a Staten Island household. It was difficult to see what was going on, and “Lunch” lacked specific movements to illustrate the trysting of its three couples. More straight-



Venus (Hélène Delavault) invades Rodney's (Gilles Vajou) apartment.
Photo: Franchella / Stoffleth

forward non-narrative dances, such as “Way Out West in Jersey” and the Art Students Ball, proved more successful, thanks especially to the swinging baton of Scott Stroman.

Stroman, an accomplished jazz musician and teacher, led an invigorating musi-

cal performance: even seemingly throw-away numbers, such as “Catch Hatch,” were thrilling here. Doubtless it helps that the Opéra orchestra is accustomed to varied repertoire, but Stroman really liberated these players. They delivered a loose, high-spirited reading, while managing to bring out the melancholy and urgency that make this work so compelling. For all the superficial frivolity of the plot, *Venus* is a product of wartime, when victory was uncertain and death ever-present. The goddess commands mortal New Yorkers to make love *while they still can*; it's a message that must have resonated on Broadway in 1943, as it could have during the city's more recent crises, too: in the AIDS-ravaged 1980s, for example, or in the aftermath of 9/11.

Though Lacornerie updated the work's setting to the present day, he focused mainly on Savory's aesthetics, getting easy laughs with jibes at contemporary artists (Andy Warhol, Catherine Millet); other possible links between *Venus* and modern life remained untouched. More mystifyingly, Lacornerie made scant use of the simple stagecraft (lighting effects, flashpots, glitter) that, even on a budget, could've made *Venus*'s magic tricks satisfying, or at least comprehensible. She didn't zap Rodney's landlady, she just walked away; instead of transforming the lunchers into lovers, she stood aside and watched. This raised a serious problem. If *Venus* isn't magical, then she's just like everybody else—and there's no story.

What the Oullins audiences saw, then, was a light, charming entertainment, not a masterwork. Robin Chemin's colorful costumes enlivened the proceedings, and Lacornerie revealed a genuine, well-informed appreciation of American humor and character types, eliciting energetic performances from his players.

Literally statuesque, and in spike heels to boot, Hélène Delavault towered over the rest of the cast, and she made a delicious goddess, underplaying her lines in a gentle murmur and singing her numbers in a lilting alto. A respected pop singer, she also adapted Ogden Nash's lyrics to a hybrid of French and English; her translations proved ingeniously faithful to the originals and would make an excellent starting point for future French productions.

Gilles Vajou made Rodney's vision of humdrum home life seem irresistible, singing "Wooden Wedding" while he hopped on the furniture and turned handstands. Trading Savory's snobbery for decadence, the shirtless Jacques Verzier proved a strong musical-comedy singer, delivering "West Wind" as something like a Jacques Brel ballad—it was Stroman's only concession to local culture, and it worked. Among the supporting cast, Mimi Roussin's pint-sized, green-haired Mrs. Kramer stood out, with hilariously Brooklyn-accented French; Gilles Bugeaud turned in an amusingly proto-Anatolian Zuvetli. Florence Pelly's Molly didn't crack wise or sing loudly enough, though she, like all the cast, was miked.

Back at the opera house on June 24, *Lindbergh* and the *Todsünden* revealed a coherent artistic vision and a profound respect, perhaps even affection, for the music. These qualities are rare in French opera houses today, and painfully lacking in most productions of Weill's works, anywhere. Yet director François Girard has a proven gift for matching image to sound (as seen in his films, including *The Red Violin*), and he staged the double bill with luminous taste and imagination, seconded by the unusually sensitive conducting of Roberto Minczuk. I've never seen Weill better staged.

Lindbergh's moody score was accompanied by a somber set (designed by François Séguin), across which were ranged black chairs and the chorus, in street clothes of the 1920s (designed by Thibault Vancraenenbroeck). Negotiating the fluid rhythms of the score with opulent ensemble, the chorus also participated in the action, limning simple gestures and, during a nighttime sequence, pretending to sleep, while the Speaker (actor Damien Bigourdan) roamed among them. Five old-time radio microphones were suspended along the proscenium, in a nod to the work's origins as a radio program; upstage, a silhouette map of the North Atlantic framed Peter Flaherty's telling video images (water, weather). Lindbergh (tenor Kurt Streit) slowly flew across the stage in a tiny replica of *The Spirit of St. Louis's* nose; when he arrived at his destination, the map's North America and Europe neared one another, while a shower of dollar bills rained down from above.

Streit, best known as a Mozart tenor, proved an ideal interpreter for this music. Though it can't have been easy to sing while suspended some ten feet above the stage,



Lindbergh (Kurt Streit) rides the nose of the Spirit of St. Louis. Photo: Bertrand Stoffleth

Streit ably reflected Lindbergh's naïve confidence, and his clear, radiant lyricism poured effortlessly into the auditorium.

Todsünden is a more familiar and arguably more challenging work than *Lindbergh*, and it occasioned Girard's biggest gamble: Anna II was portrayed not by one dancer but by seven, one for each sin. As choreographed by Marie Chouinard (like Girard, a Canadian), the Anna IIs embraced a vibrant variety of dancing styles, including hip-hop and striptease, as well as classical and jazz, and Vancraenenbroeck's costumes allotted a different animal trait (claws, fangs, whiskers, a tail) to each sister. This might have diffused the tension of what is already an episodic work, but a tuxedo-clad team of male dancers helped bind the episodes together, and Minczuk lent unexpected assistance from the pit. Indeed, the sisters' misadventures seemed to grow in urgency and desperation when embodied by so many women, and this multiple-personality Anna commanded ever more fear and pity.

The Annas' white dresses contrasted with the set, entirely black and littered with the remnants of Lindbergh's dollar bills. Upstage, viewed through a black-metal outline of the map of the United States, a lurid red cyclorama provided a backdrop for a corporate boardroom, which was elevated as the sisters' odyssey progressed. In pinstripe suits, the Family (bass Dario Süß, baritone Urban Malmberg, and tenors Jeroen de Vaal and Andreas Jaeggi) didn't break their severe demeanor until the journey's end, when they cut loose in

exultation; the male dancers then scrambled up the map and hung from its boundaries as though it were a jungle gym.

In both works, Minczuk shaped supple lines, far removed from the hacking Weill aficionados too often endure. He reveled in *Lindbergh's* gorgeous counterpoint, recalling the oratorios of Bach, and the orchestra's lush, dark-hued textures effectively suggested the mighty ocean that is central to this piece. The shifting rhythms and styles of the *Todsünden*, a booby trap for most, didn't faze him in the least. Indeed, he made the episodes of the *Todsünden* flow naturally, one to the next, creating a clearly delineated musical-dramatic arc that rose to a hair-raising climax in "Neid."

As if unaware of the conductor's unifying vision of the score, soprano Gun-Brit Barkmin dove headlong into the stage concept, portraying Anna I with multiple voices. Speaking, snarling, and bellowing, sometimes singing, sometimes inaudible, she'd already run the vocal gamut in the Prologue, and "Neid," rather than bringing out new force and fury, found her doing more of what she'd done all night. Her dramatic interpretation was of a piece. This Anna was a hectoring harridan who bullied her sisters mercilessly, albeit with a dancer's grace. It was an exhausting performance, but the Lyon audience went wild for her, rewarding her with thunderous ovations.

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