

Magical Night

Royal Opera House London

Premiere: 9 December 2011

There were many admirable aspects to the Royal Opera House's presentation of Weill's ballet-pantomime, which was premiered in Berlin in 1922. This was the first performance in the UK. There was no skimping on the staging in the ROH's Linbury Studio Theatre—the budget was generous, the designs intricate, the production lively and complex. There were 29 performances during the Christmas season given in mornings, afternoons and evenings—the afternoon performance I attended on 10 December 2011 was packed with children and their mothers.

The press reaction was also very encouraging. All the London papers carried reviews, the majority of them initially focusing on the music, as well they might. The one undeniable success of the venture was the outstanding playing of the band of ten under the baton of James Holmes, always sympathetic to the composer's varying idioms—witness his memorable leadership of *Der Kuhhandel* and *One Touch of Venus* for Opera North in recent years. In this studio theatre the sound was ideally crisp and pungent, with the impulsive rhythmic precision pointing most clearly to the more mature Weill.

The excellence of the musical performance gave admirers of the composer much food for thought. Aged only 22, he tended to write in the acceptable modernist *lingua franca* of the day, what might be called “enhanced tonality,” naturally much influenced by Busoni, whose master class he attended. But in flashes of melody, of wit in the dances (especially the atonal foxtrot) and, again, rhythm, you could hear the real Kurt Weill screaming to get out of the straitjacket of that respectable idiom—which he was to do only a few years later with *Mahagonny Songspiel* and *Dreigroschenoper*.

There is a slight problem with *Zaubernacht*, at least in the context of this staging. The original instrumentation was only discovered as recently as 2005, but the detailed 1922 scenario, repeated in New York in 1925, is still lost. That scenario, devised by the Russian impresario Vladimir Boritsch, must have been quite complex, as is obvious from the music that was required to follow the plot and enhance the action as thoroughly as Tchaikovsky did in the first act of *Nutcracker*. There are helpful pointers to be found in the surviving manuscript piano score and in reviews of the first performances in Berlin and New York, but in the end those performing the work today must devise their own scenario.

The version directed by the choreographer Aletta Collins, who was given precedence over the composer in the program, was not entirely successful. It was set in the bedroom of the children Megan and Jason. Mother bade them goodnight after a tussle in which the boy's favorite toy, a monkey, had its tail torn off. As midnight struck, various toys—Tumble Tot, Green Knight, Fire Flame, Mighty Robot—materialized, joined the monkey



The Witch forces the Toy Fairy back into the toy box.

PHOTO: TRISTRAM KENTON

(now a dancer), and played games with the awakened children. To judge from some audience restlessness—myself included—the narrative was less than clear, and it was no help that the Fairy (Yvette Bonner), whose song has to propel the story, sang virtually wordlessly. What was she telling us, or should she have been telling us? Three footballers joined in, briefly, and a deep-sea diver entered with a pizza. The bedroom set opened out into a fantasy landscape.

Matters were no clearer when the girl drew a picture—of Mother?—which turned into a Witch, who darkened the action, planning to eat the boy Jason accompanied by apple pie. Shades of *Hansel and Gretel*. After a general chase to Weill's *Allegro molto* and *Molto furioso* the bedroom set came back, the Fairy “read” a story, the monkey retrieved its tail, and Mother returned to restore normality. Was Mother also the Witch? The program and too-brief synopsis gave no clue. Was the choreographer also playing the Witch? Again, no clue.

In a word, the action was utterly incoherent. Aletta Collins has a long track record as a choreographer, but the dances she devised here were in no way distinguished. The roles of Megan and Jason were triple-cast—wisely, given the number of performances, often three in a day; on this occasion they were Aoife Checkland and Freddie Anness Lorenz. The various toys went through the motions efficiently, but there was one wholly engaging performer in Thomasin Gülgeç as the monkey, conveying character and broad humor despite an all-enveloping furry costume.

So, all praise to the ROH management for mounting *Zaubernacht* and budgeting it generously. Sadly, but maybe unsurprisingly, the scenario didn't work. Maybe Boritsch's original, like the instrumentation, will turn up one day. Stranger things have happened.

Rodney Milnes
London

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Israeli Opera Tel Aviv

Premiere: 12 January 2012

Fifteen years after the first performance of *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* in Tel Aviv, Israeli Opera has again mounted this work by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht. It's the only opera house in the nation, but Israeli Opera does not hesitate to produce works that are unfamiliar or difficult; *Mahagonny*, with its powerful social criticism, certainly qualifies.

Weill and Brecht intended to shock the audience, to prevent spectators from getting comfortable and happily humming along. Omri Nitzan, one of the most talented and experienced Israeli directors, worked with conductor David Stern, the company's music director, on this provocative opera. Nitzan and Stern were too solicitous of the audience. Their conception was designed not to annoy them too much, not to challenge them, and certainly not to shock them.

The staging opens with a Hollywood-style car chase on a video screen. At the end, a shiny pink car pulls up with three escaped criminals inside: Widow Begbick, Trinity Moses, and Fatty. The program notes explain that the director drew heavily on the style of advertising: "We are surrounded by advertisements, and this is an unmistakable characteristic of our generation, which buys and sells unceasingly." Indeed, the majority of scenes imitate the look and feel of advertisements: everything is polished, shiny, smooth. The set designer, Michael Kramenko, contributed greatly to this impression, creating a cold, glossy stage, influenced by television game shows or Las Vegas extravaganzas. Every fold in every dress was perfect, and every hair out of place was deliberately so. Not a single speck of dust dirtied the stage. It was like watching a high-end fashion show, with everything perfectly matched and styled.

The use of a deliberately exaggerated set design could be understood as a Brechtian alienation technique, reminding the audience at every moment that they are in a theater, forcing them to think about what they are seeing, preventing them from being swept up by the story and the music. This time, however, it did not work. The colorful costumes, dancing, neon lights, and video screens did not provoke reflection. The audience was drawn into the spectacle, not forced to confront it. The choreography did nothing to disturb the audience, either; it was stereotypical and lacked all innovation. The dance troupe's performance wavered between amateurish and simplistic. Even the dancers' simulation of a sexual act was rendered as a sort of esthetic dance.

The inadequate concept did not preclude a number of great moments. Take the gluttony scene in Act II, where Jack eats him-

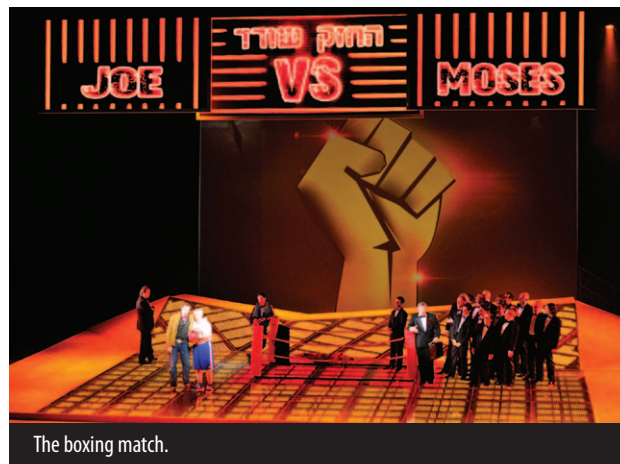


PHOTO: YOSHI ZWECKER

self to death. Nitzan seated the character on an enormous toilet. Here, the director's choice was superb and effectively transmitted the irony of the situation. The vocal and theatrical performance of the Israeli singer, Guy Manheim, was wonderful. In this scene we finally felt that boundaries were being tested. The lighting designed by Avi Yonah (Bambi) was also stunning, lending depth to the events on stage.

The vocalists were superb. Tara Venditti in the role of Widow Begbick sang well and turned the

character into a modern businesswoman. Noëmi Nadelmann in the role of Jenny was spontaneous, sexy, and exciting. The baritone Johannes von Duisburg (Moses) and the tenor Alan Woodrow (Fatty) sang wonderfully, with compelling stage presence. Tenor Wolfgang Schwaninger (Jim Mahoney) was the most impressive singer in this production. His aria, "Wenn der Himmel hell wird," showed that he was the only performer who succeeded in creating a rounded and exciting character. Of the Israeli singers, baritone Noah Briger (Bill), the above-mentioned tenor Guy Manheim (Jack), and the bass-baritone Vladimir Braun (Joe) sang and played their roles with great skill. The orchestra, under David Stern, began the evening somewhat hesitantly, even anemically, devoid of the strong sense of rhythm so essential to Weill's music, but as the evening progressed the playing became sharper and more provocative.

The opera, generally performed in German or English, here was "awarded" an additional language—Hebrew. The actress chosen to read the announcements between the scenes was Rivka Michaeli, one of Israel's most famous theatrical personalities, whose voice is unmistakable. This element might also have been used to create an alienation effect, using Michaeli's unexpected yet familiar voice to force the audience to think about what's happening on stage. As with the set design, however, the effort failed, and it was not clear why the Hebrew text was added.

The huge demonstrations that broke out recently in Tel Aviv and shook Israel, and the social protests spreading throughout the world, reveal more strikingly the relevance of *Mahagonny* and its messages, with its dissection of a corrupt society driven by greed in which poverty is considered a crime. This performance could have done much more to bring that out; nevertheless, the audience did enjoy it. Because Weill's music is seldom heard in Israel, every performance of his works is a kind of celebration, and plaudits are due to Israeli Opera for performing this important work. I hope other Weill works will be included in forthcoming seasons.

Ori Leshman
Tel Aviv

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Wiener Staatsoper

Premiere: 24 January 2012

“*Mahagonny* belongs on the stage of Wiener Staatsoper,” trumpeted the (relatively) new Intendant, Dominique Meyer, at the party following the company’s first-ever staging of Weill’s greatest operatic achievement.

Meyer comes to Wien from the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and has coerced many a French colleague to follow him. In his first two seasons (his tenure began in September 2010), six of eleven scheduled new productions have had French directors, most arriving with their own design teams in tow. Their reception has not, for the most part, been positive.

It took eighty-two years for *Mahagonny* to reach the Staatsoper. Perhaps they should have kept waiting until a director who believed in and respected Weill’s and Brecht’s work could be found. Tongues loosen after a few glasses of *Sekt*, and when I questioned several of the post-premiere partygoers—some of whom had participated in the performance—the answers to most of my questions came down to one name: director Jérôme Deschamps. (Directorial assistance and dramaturgy were credited to Ellen Hammer.)

Off the top of my head, here is a catalogue of some musical changes, none of which were authorized by the Staatsoper’s agreement with Universal Edition AG, Wien, or the Kurt Weill Foundation: some of Jenny’s vocal line in “Alabama-Song” was sung by one of the Girls of Mahagonny; the first verse of “Denn wie man sich bettet” was taken down an octave and its second verse barked and growled in a sort of *Sprechgesang*; the entire “Gott in Mahagonny” sequence was eliminated and replaced by “Benares Song”; the spoken dialogue between Jim and Jenny immediately before Jim’s execution was eliminated and replaced with the text of the “Crane Duet,” spoken, while the underscoring for Jim and Jenny’s dialogue was played.

Unfamiliar with the work, members of Staatsoper’s press office were totally unaware of any changes to the score (let alone permission to make them), but others present offered explanations. (For professional reasons, I must preserve their anonymity.)

I was given two different answers about the “Crane Duet”: one said that it had been rehearsed, but that Angelika Kirchschlager, the production’s Jenny, could not sing it; another reported that Deschamps felt it held up the action.

“Denn wie man sich bettet” was transposed, it was said, because Kirchschlager could not hit the high A at the end of the line “ein Mensch ist kein Tier.” The second verse was delivered as such, I was told, because Deschamps wanted it to sound like a stereotypical broken-down Weimar-Era *disease* (the names of Lenya and Dietrich were unfortunately and inappropriately conjured).

“Gott in Mahagonny” was eliminated because “the director didn’t like it,” explained a participant, further explaining that



Jenny (Angelika Kirchschlager) with the Lumberjacks.

PHOTO: MICHAEL POHN

Deschamps again felt it held up the action and that “Benares Song” better moved the story along. As for the replacement of the farewell dialogue between Jim and Jenny, I was informed that “the director didn’t like what was written there.”

With the glaring exception of Kirchschlager, the musical performances were a Weill-fanatic’s dream come true: Ingo Metzmacher found just the right tempi, slower perhaps than what we have grown accustomed to, but one quickly fell in love with the dazzling performance he coaxed from the orchestra. Conducting without a baton, Metzmacher magically found the perfect balance between stage and pit (no small feat in this house) and the orchestra, disproving its reputation for stodginess, gave the most absolutely gorgeous performance of this score I have ever heard. Revelation followed revelation. Some small but crucial adjustments, such as having the violin soloists stand during the whorehouse scene, added extra bite. There were delicious, tiny details in the score I’d never noticed before, and they only increased my love for this work (I grew up with the Lenya recording more than 40 years ago and attended more Met performances of it than I can count). Fortunately, Metzmacher is inked to conduct again when the production returns in September. With any luck, he will be able to reverse another of Deschamps’ unfortunate decisions:

relegating the excellent chorus to the wings most of the time, neutralizing its power and importance to the work as a whole.

Vocally, the evening belonged to Christopher Ventris as Jim Mahoney. What a luxury to have a true Heldentenor with such a sweet sound and solid technique in this role! Young, blond, and broad-shouldered, he made a most convincing, charismatic Yukon lumberjack.

Elisabeth Kulman, not long ago the reigning, luscious-voiced Pamina at Volksoper Wien, surprisingly and successfully switched to the mezzo/contralto Fach. While we are used to an aging diva (e.g., Astrid Varnay or Gwyneth Jones) or a musical theater singer (e.g., Patti LuPone) as Begbick, Kulman made her a young, curvaceous vamp capable of luring hordes of young men to Mahagonny in one phrase and then spewing Azucena-like curses in depths-of-hell bottom notes. A *seconda donna* till now, this was the first of what will hopefully be many major triumphs. She, too, is scheduled to return in September 2012. Only Kirchschrager's vapid Jenny disappointed, musically as detailed above, but dramatically as well, as if she had been given nothing to do but face forward and pout. At 46, the sheen is gone from her voice; perhaps too many *Rosenkavalier* Octavians too early in her career have taken their toll.

The ensemble, drawn from the company's roster, offered absolute perfection: Herwig Pecoraro's piercing, acidic Fatty; Tomasz Konieczny's seductive-but-sleazy Dreieinigkeitsmoses; the unmatched trio of Norbert Ernst (Jack), Clemens Unterreiner (Bill), and Il Hong (Joe); Ilena Tonca soared over Kirchschrager, taking the high vocal line in a heavenly, sensuous "Alabama



PHOTO: MICHAEL PÖHN

Elisabeth Kulman as Leocadia Begbick.

Song"; beloved veteran Heinz Zednik assumed the role of the Narrator, listed in the program as the *Regisseur der Bühne* ("Director of the Stage").

So what did this "Director of the Stage" have to do besides utter some Brecht from the side of his mouth? Pull some levers on a large metal box that seemingly put in motion some gears which inexplicably dotted Olivia Fercioni's barren set, which suggested a great deal of nothingness. Vanessa Sannino's cartoon costumes, on the other hand, were simply hid-

eous and could have used more nothingness. The big black polka-dots on fire-engine red overalls for the lumberjacks seemed more a product of Dogpatch than Alaska. The whores' cotton candy wigs and increasingly egregious faux-punk creations looked like they'd been assembled from thrift shop detritus by Cyndi Lauper on a bad LSD trip.

The whole staging foundered on Deschamps' no-concept direction. It seemed as if he looked up *Verfremdungseffekt* on Wikipedia, ran it through Google's translate tool, and decided it meant that the production should be as static and ugly as possible. When asked by Weill or Brecht for some action, Deschamps resorted to the same solution every time: just have everybody do nothing. The opera had no message, no resolution, no jarring denouement, no marching, no banners: the cast merely faced front, blank-faced, and sang.

As of this writing, *Mahagonny* is scheduled to return to the Staatsoper for four performances in September 2012. When this was announced in April, I inquired about the changes and was informed that "a different edition will be used." Among those not returning to the production is Kirchschrager; Jenny is scheduled to be portrayed by the fantastic young Dutch mezzo Stephanie Houtzeel (who was one of the outstanding whores in the January 2012 performances).

Larry L. Lash
Vienna



PHOTO: MICHAEL PÖHN

The company in the final scene, after Jimmy's death.

A considerably shorter version of this review appeared in the April 2012 edition of Opera News; the expanded version appears here with the permission of its editors.

Die sieben Todsünden

Komische Oper Berlin

Premiere: 12 February 2012

Established in 1947 by Walter Felsenstein, the Komische Oper is the smallest of Berlin's three opera houses; its repertoire includes not only operas but also operettas and musicals. Beginning next season, the house will be led by a new Intendant, Barrie Kosky, an Australian who has frequently served here as a guest director. This season, Kosky led a production of *Die sieben Todsünden* featuring the singer-actress Dagmar Manzel as Anna. Manzel is a darling not only of Berlin audiences: for many years she was a member of the Deutsches Theater, but she also became much sought after for film and television work, for which she has earned many prestigious awards. The *Sins* marks her fourth production at Komische Oper, where she—a trained mezzo—debuted in 2004 as Mrs. Lovett in Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*. In 2008 she played the title role in Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*, and in 2010 she appeared as the Wirtin in Ralph Benatzky's *Im weißen Rößl*.

Weill and Brecht's *ballet chanté*, created in Paris in 1933 for a production choreographed by the legendary George Balanchine, features the seven deadly sins (Sloth, Pride, Wrath, Gluttony, Lust, Covetousness, and Envy)—a moral framework dating back to the middle ages. The plot makes the main character a split persona in a capitalist society: Anna I (the singer, the merchant) and Anna II (the dancer, the merchandise). The sins manifest themselves one by one as Anna seeks work in different cities to earn money that will pay for a house for her family back home. The two Annas are kept apart musically and textually, and they act separately onstage.

So what do we get from stage director Barrie Kosky? He decides that Manzel should perform both roles and appear alone onstage with no support from other dancers. Even the family delivering its commentary remains invisible, singing from offstage. The attempt to convert the work from a "ballet with singing" to "singing without ballet" misfires on several levels. And what happens to the electrifying and expertly crafted dance passages within this infectious score? Their impact is lost entirely because the multi-talented Manzel is many things—but not a dancer. A choreographer (Otto Pichler) is named in the program, but Manzel's movements as Anna II are limited to running around endlessly in circles, constant changes of direction, and embarrassing little skips and hops, punctuated by unmotivated laughing attacks and hectic shrieking. Not surprisingly, all the movement leaves her short of breath, so the transitions to the singing part of Anna I cannot work. And during the vocal passages we miss Anna II as an onstage addressee (Kosky replaces her with a wildly whirling spotlight). One is tempted to paraphrase Brecht here: *es geht auch anders, doch so geht es nicht!* ["One could do it differently, but it doesn't work this way."]

The music is presented much more successfully. Assisted by a hidden microphone, Manzel's rendition of the arrangement for low voice is generally compelling. The Komische Oper's orches-

tra, led by the young Latvian conductor Kristiina Poska (starting next season, she will be a house conductor), polishes Weill's score to a bright shine, even though Kosky has placed the musicians, for reasons unknown, at the back of the empty stage, so that much of the sound is swallowed before it reaches the audience. The family quartet, cast with members of the opera studio, sings convincingly and with impeccable diction.



Dagmar Manzel as Anna I and Anna II.

PHOTO: MONIKA RITTERSHAUS

One question remains: How was the 40-minute work transformed into a full-length evening, that is, which work was paired with *Die sieben Todsünden*? The stage director's concept precludes another short dance piece. Hence Kosky starts the evening with a *mélange* of songs from different phases of Weill's career ("Berlin im Licht-Song," "Surabaya-Johnny," "Youkali," "Nannas Lied," "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," "Ballade von der Höllenlilli," and "Wie lange noch?"), which Manzel sings on the apron with piano accompaniment. Kosky writes in the evening's program: "The songs of the first part are like seven little postcards that Anna sent to herself. Each song addresses one aspect of the woman's life. The songs can be viewed as cautious steps leading to an understanding of Anna's world. Then Anna raises the curtain, the *Todsünden* begins, and all of a sudden we are inside the letter. Seven postcards followed by a letter." Oh heavenly simplicity! The idea's "crowning" finale: when the last measures of the *Todsünden*'s instrumental epilogue have subsided, Manzel closes the curtain. The applause has begun when she pokes her head out one more time, picked out by a spotlight, and the evening ends with Weill and Brecht's 1928 "Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen," a peculiar choice. Perhaps, after postcards and a letter, Kosky wants to send us a final telegram?

At the end of the seventy-minute program, thunderous applause burst forth for Manzel, for the singers, and for the orchestra. The stage director did not make an appearance during curtain calls at the second performance, which this reviewer attended.

Jürgen Schebera
Berlin

Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra, op. 12

[also: Paul Hindemith, Kammermusik no. 4, op. 36/3]

Kolja Blacher, soloist

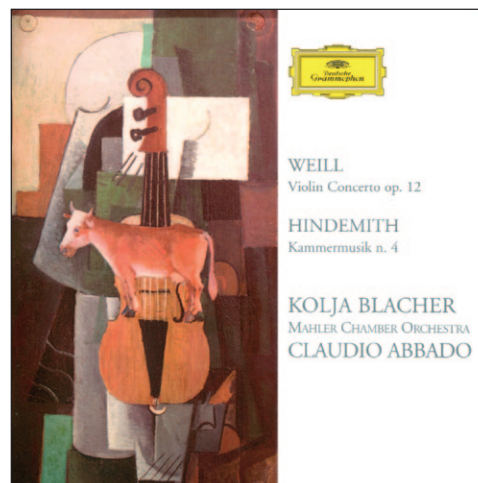
Mahler Chamber Orchestra, cond. Claudio Abbado

Deutsche Grammophon 4764144

The two works combined on this CD have several common features: They were composed around the same time, they were premiered in the same venue (the Friedrichs-Theater in Dessau) in the same year (1925), conducted by the same maestro (Franz von Hoeßlin). To be precise, Weill's concerto received its world premiere on 11 June 1925 in Paris; the Dessau performance marked the work's German premiere. Both works consist of five movements, or sections, connected rather like a suite, and among them are a "Notturmo" (Weill) and a "Nachtstück" (Hindemith). There are even similarities in style: an affinity for unusual or unique instrumental forces, a proclivity for soundscapes alternating between chamber and symphonic music, a penchant for counterpoint and linearity, a preference for colorful wind and brass instruments that contrast strongly with the solo violin (thereby distancing these works from nineteenth-century ideals), and occasionally some harsh-sounding harmonies. There are differences, especially if one steps back from the works themselves and observes their places within the composers' careers. Weill's composition represents an early, exploratory work within his oeuvre—and a style that he would soon leave behind—whereas Hindemith's concerto is a mature work, whose structural clarity seems like a manifesto of the spirit of "new objectivity." Unlike Weill's concerto, which appears on an astonishing number of recordings, Hindemith's op. 36/3 has been captured on disc only a few times. Now combined on one CD, the two works invite comparison.

Both releases present live recordings by the Italian radio of concerts in Ferrara's Teatro Comunale (Weill's on 30 March 2007; Hindemith's back in 1999). The overall impression is extremely favorable: the recordings win us over with the virtuosity of orchestra and soloist alike, and through a transparent, sharply defined, and well-balanced sound. The recording of Hindemith's piece is entirely successful; the grotesque traits of the fourth movement come across beautifully, as does the pensive, melancholy mood of the "Nachtstück," which seems to take Mahler as a point of departure. One could say the same about Weill's tripartite central movement (Notturmo – Cadenza – Serenata), whose varied components are molded into a vivid, almost palpable form on this recording. Blacher and Abbado also make the straightforward third movement of Weill's concerto into a splendid, sparkling finale.

Weill's first movement, however, has a rather complex structure and thus presents a challenge to any interpreter. Nearly all recordings of the work have been bedeviled by the first movement's architecture. It all comes down to one central question: How does the movement's second tempo indication, "Un poco



più andante" (m. 45), relate to the opening tempo, "Andante con moto"? In other words, does "a little more" *andante* call for a faster tempo or a slower one? In the absence of metronome markings, a 1964 recording conducted by Hermann Scherchen for the Westminster label (WST 17087) assumes particular importance. Scherchen knew the concerto well. He had nominated it for the program of a prestigious festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in 1926 in Zurich, and he attended that performance—Weill was there, too—conducted by Fritz Busch, with Stefan Frenkel as soloist. Frenkel had already performed the concerto in 1925 in Dessau, where the composer supervised rehearsals, and he stayed in close touch with Weill until 1933—a period during which he performed the concerto about a dozen times. One such performance, in 1929 in Königsberg, was conducted by Scherchen. When Scherchen recorded the concerto in 1964, his decision was unambiguous: the second tempo is clearly *slower* than the first. And yet nearly all modern recordings take "Un poco più andante" *faster* than "Andante con moto." Abbado/Blacher, too, take the second tempo faster—and by more than a notch!—which nearly causes the structure to collapse. The consequences are stark: they lose the somber allusions to the "Dies irae" (mm. 55ff.), it's impossible to observe the instruction "la melodia molto espressivo" in the *poco più* section, and there is no room whatsoever for a *molto stringendo* in mm. 149ff. In other words, despite the brilliance, virtuosity, and technical perfection displayed by all involved, the first movement, with its strong *espressivo* character, sounds strangely superficial on this recording, almost to the point of parody. Thus even after this latest release, Weill's concerto still awaits a definitive recording.

The CD is accompanied by a mediocre booklet, ill-designed, but with a serviceable text in Italian with an English translation. Rather odd, then, that this Deutsche Grammophon release does not bother to provide liner notes in German.

Andreas Eichhorn
Cologne

Weill's Musical Theater: Stages of Reform

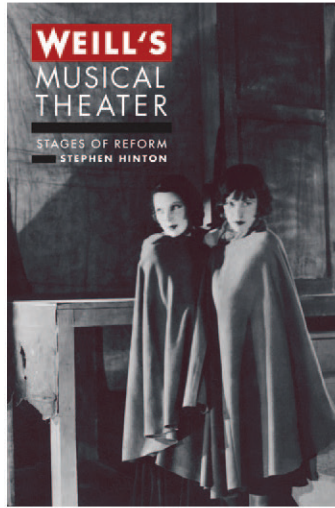
by Stephen Hinton

University of California Press, 2012. 569 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-520-27177-7

There has been a fundamental problem in critical considerations of the art of Kurt Weill. He went into exile in 1933 with the Nazis' rise to power, having written with Bertolt Brecht the works for which he remains best known, *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, and spent the rest of his life first in Paris and London, then in the United States. Probably the most persistent critical question about Weill is whether his compositional career should be considered as a single unit or viewed as two distinct periods: his European period and his American period. Distinguished writers about music and theater (such as Theodor W. Adorno, Harold Clurman, Carl Dahlhaus, and Virgil Thomson) have reached very different conclusions on this issue. More recently, many scholars (Kim Kowalke and Bruce D. McClung, for example) have adopted a position that pays more attention to the American Weill.

Stephen Hinton's magnificent study of Weill's musical theater is unequivocal. Although he allows space for those who believe that the American period must be differentiated from the European period, in line with his effort to provide as much information about the reception of Kurt Weill's art as possible, he himself emphasizes the coherence of Weill's efforts from his earliest musical-dramatic works, composed under the direct influence of his teacher, Ferruccio Busoni, through his final American musical plays, *Love Life* and *Lost in the Stars*. Weill was never at ease in traditional musical and dramatic forms, and sought instead a hybrid art joining together music and drama, with music being the defining partner (Brecht and others decidedly did not agree with this fundamental belief of Weill's). For this hybrid art, Hinton ultimately points to the German *Singspiel* in general and Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* in particular as Weill's model. Yes, in the United States Weill drew closer to the commercial Broadway theater, with its regular structure of dialogue and songs, not to mention to the Hollywood film industry, but according to Hinton, Weill's attitudes were consistent and coherent throughout his career.

Hinton's book is a study of the music, not a biography, although he begins with a chapter entitled "Biographical Notes." The result is that it is not always simple to follow details of the chronology. The musical works are categorized by genre. This is an approach that has many virtues, but it does mean that we are asked to study some works out of chronological order. Thus, we learn about Weill's opera, *Die Bürgschaft*, first performed in 1932, before the so-called "Lehrstücke," including the two versions (the first with music by both Hindemith and Weill; the second by Weill alone) of *Der Lindberghflug* of 1929 and *Der Jasager* of 1930. Likewise, in Weill's American period, we read about his involvement with the motion pictures in Hollywood in



a single chapter, although his film work covered seven years, during which span he was also writing Broadway musicals. There are certainly good reasons to organize the material this way, but for someone not already familiar with the chronology, it makes for rough going.

Hinton provides a good selection of musical examples, and some of his discussions are definitely improved by having music easily available. However, it is not always clear why certain ideas have been illustrated and others not. A number of quotations from works by other composers are shown. Some are convincing to me (particularly the rising semitones of the famous Tristan motive), some are not (such as a connection between a part of the second act of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and the great aria for Anna in *Street Scene*). Hinton employs a rather complex

language of analysis, emphasizing tonal relationships and rhythmic similarities, one that will unquestionably limit the audience that can read his book easily. Still, his arguments will usually convince those knowledgeable about the material.

On the other hand, I find rather objectionable his use of what I must refer to as "zingers," very brief sentences that are supposed to sum up a complex argument. The more complex the argument, the less useful are summaries such as: "Not so Weill" (p. 296), or "He was right, of course" (p. 333), or "Noblesse oblige?" (p. 355). After a while (Weill?), it became almost a parlor game to circle these "zingers," and there are many of them. Perhaps Hinton would have been wiser to simplify his language throughout and avoid these quick summations.

I would like to have understood somewhat better the ways in which Weill's Broadway shows connect to the revolution in the Broadway musical wrought by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, with *Oklahoma!* of 1943 or *Carousel* of 1945. Are we to understand that some of the work done by Rodgers and Hammerstein was adumbrated by Weill? Hinton gives considerable attention to their *Allegro* of 1947 (a notoriously unsuccessful effort), but I must admit that I do not understand from his book its relationship to Weill's *Love Life*. That such extraordinary figures as Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim looked back to Weill did not come as a surprise, but here, too, I would like to have been told a bit more about those relationships.

To be sure, one can only do so much in a book that takes as its goal to explore the entire corpus of works for the stage of a composer as prolific as Kurt Weill. Certainly no treatment of Weill's art can avoid an enormous debt to Hinton's study. This is the baseline from which all future research must begin.

Philip Gossett
Chicago

This review by musicologist Philip Gossett will be complemented in the Fall issue by theater historian David Savran's commentary on this milestone in Weill scholarship.

2012 Lotte Lenya Competition

Four Rising Stars Take Top Prizes

Matthew Grills, tenor, of Rochester, N.Y. won the \$15,000 First Prize in the finals of the 2012 Lotte Lenya Competition, held on 21 April 2012, at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. In a close contest, Justin Hopkins, bass-baritone of Philadelphia, and Jacob Keith Watson, tenor of Wynne, Ark., tied for Second Prizes of \$10,000, and Megan Marino, mezzo-soprano of Malvern, Penn., was awarded the Third Prize of \$7,500.

This is the first time that the top prize in both the Lotte Lenya Competition and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions was won by the same contestant, Matthew Grills, who was one of the five 2012 Met Auditions Grand Winners. While the Met Auditions, as well as most other singing competitions, focus primarily on vocal beauty and power, the Lotte Lenya Competition is unique in its equal emphasis on singing and acting. Contestants must present fully acted, idiomatic performances of repertoire ranging from opera to contemporary musical theater. At the Lenya Competition finals, Grills transitioned with ease from a performance of “Ah, mes amis” from Donizetti’s *La fille du régiment*—an aria with nine high Cs—to a powerfully acted rendition of “If I Didn’t Believe in You” from Jason Robert Brown’s *The Last Five Years*. The other prize winners also presented exceptionally strong performances of repertoire ranging from Mozart, Rossini, Lehár and Weill to William Finn, Andrew Lippa, and Stephen Sondheim.

Judges for the competition were three-time Tony Award nominee Rebecca Luker, Broadway and *Encores!* music director Rob Berman, and Theodore S. Chapin, President of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization and Chairman of the Board of the American Theater Wing.

The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, which sponsors the competition, distributed a record \$58,500 in prizes this year. In addition to the top prizes, judges presented two Lys Symonette Awards of \$3,000 each, named in honor of Kurt Weill’s musical assistant on Broadway. For her performance of Weill’s “Le train du ciel,” soprano Natalie Ballenger of Santa Cruz, Calif., received an award for Outstanding Performance of an Individual Number, and soprano Maria Failla of Scarsdale, N.Y., received one for



(L to R) Matthew Grills, Jacob Watson, Justin Hopkins, and Megan Marino.

PHOTO: KURT WEILL FOUNDATION

Extraordinary Promise as a Singing Actor/Acting Singer. The remaining six finalists each received a total award of \$1,000: Christine Amon, mezzo-soprano, of Bowling Green, Ohio; Douglas Carpenter, baritone, of Woodbridge, Conn.; Briana Elyse Hunter, soprano, of New York; Cecelia Tickin, mezzo-soprano, of Roosevelt, N.J.; Mollie Vogt-Welch, soprano/belt, of New York; and Nicky Wuchinger, bari-tenor of Berlin, Germany.

Inaugurated in 1998 to celebrate the centenary of Lenya’s birth, the Lotte Lenya Competition is an international theater singing contest that recognizes talented young singer/actors, ages 19-30, who are dramatically and musically convincing in a wide range of repertoire. For the 2012 competition, each contestant presented a diverse program that included an aria from the opera or operetta repertoire; two songs from the American musical theater repertoire (one from the pre-1968 “Golden Age” and one from 1968 or later); and a theatrical selection by Kurt Weill. After a preliminary round of auditions by video submission, twelve finalists were selected from a group of twenty-nine semi-finalists who auditioned in New York City for adjudicator/coaches Victoria Clark and Vicki Shaghoeian.

The Lenya Competition will celebrate its 15th anniversary in 2013. Since its inception, the Kurt Weill Foundation has awarded young singers more than \$450,000.



Maria Failla and Natalie Ballenger.

PHOTO: KURT WEILL FOUNDATION

View the winners’ programs on YouTube at
www.YouTube.com/KurtWeillFoundation



JACOB WATSON

"At the semi-finals my judge was Victoria Clark. That was pretty incredible! After I performed, she gave tons of wonderful feedback to take my performance to an even higher level. From then until the finals, I worked on making my performance as nuanced and specific as possible. This competition was so enjoyable because of the shared passions among the performers and judges for storytelling in every way possible. There were opera singers who love music theater and music theater singers who love opera, as well as everything in between. This is something I believe is necessary in the world in which we perform. **People always try to split people up into boxes as either opera singers or music theater singers, when the truth is that we are all storytellers and should know and want to tell stories in every medium possible. My desire is to see those walls begin to break down, and this competition celebrates that ideal.** That was one of the most wonderful things to be around."

JUSTIN HOPKINS

"In this competition, for me the big challenge was to seamlessly combine my singing and acting. I chose very difficult pieces to sing, not only vocally but dramatically. Kurt Weill's "O, Tixo, Tixo, Help Me!" is a long soliloquy that deals with themes of death, paternal love, and loss, and the temptation is to give too much dramatically. It's a fine line, and you have to be calculating in how much you give. That was a big challenge. I think that, by the evening concert, I had met this challenge. **In some of the other competitions, if a person has a good enough voice, the voice of the century, they could get up there, stand there like a block, and win first prize. The Lenya Competition is not like that.**"



MATTHEW GRILLS

"I like singing and performing different kinds of repertoire, and that's why I loved the Lenya Competition. I was able to pull together all of my interests, and was really excited about my program. I think there's a way of bringing character to singing and at the same time being able to sing with good technique. I prepared vocally the same way for the Lenya Competition as for the Met competition, and now I feel even stronger about the fact that I wouldn't alter my vocal technique to sing musical theater. I'd love to do more musical theater, but at the same time be able to sing opera, too."

MEGAN MARINO

"The first time I was in the competition, in 2009, I went in totally blind, a girl singing in a world full of men and women. But this time around I think all my professional experience definitely helped. My coaching session with Victoria Clark was mind-filling, body-opening. This time around, I learned to trust in myself and to not get in my own way. To not give the hard sell, and trust the choices I've made about what the characters feel and think and what the songs mean to me as a person. To be an honest, open performer, comfortable with who I am, and to know that that is enough. **The Lenya Competition emphasizes singing beautifully as well as acting, to really be in your character in the moment. Ultimately that's what people want when they see live theater of any kind.**"



Previous winners – Highlights of recent and upcoming performances:



PHOTO: ERIN BAIANO

Lauren Worsham and **Amy Justman** joined an all-star cast for a concert performance of *The Mikado* at Carnegie Hall with the Collegiate Chorale, conducted by Ted Sperling. L to R: Amy Justman (Peep-Bo), Kelli O'Hara (Yum Yum), and Lauren Worsham (Pitti Sing).



PHOTO: T. CHARLES BRICKSON

Erik Liberman (right) as The Baker in *Into the Woods*, a co-production between Baltimore CENTERSTAGE and Westport Country Playhouse. "Especially impressive is Erik Liberman as the Baker, whose delivery and singing are quite accomplished and whose dedication to his quest is equally believable." — *Connecticut Examiner*



Noah Stewart's debut album with Decca/Universal Records, *Noah*, recently reached the top of the UK classical charts. He sings Radames in *Aida* at the Glimmerglass Festival this summer.

Kurt Weill Edition Releases *Johnny Johnson* (1936)

Weill's first American stage work published in full score

Produced by the legendary Group Theatre, *Johnny Johnson* marked Weill's first contribution to the American musical stage. With book and lyrics by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paul Green, the anti-war musical opened in November 1936 on Broadway as the Group Theatre's first musical production.

Lee Strasberg directed, Cheryl Crawford produced, and the cast boasted a remarkable array of talent: Luther Adler, Morris Carnovsky, Lee J. Cobb, Jules (later John) Garfield, Elia Kazan, Bobby Lewis, and Sanford Meisner all took part. Despite favorable critical and public reaction, the show closed in January 1937. Almost immediately, the Federal Theatre Project took up the work and mounted major productions in Boston and Los Angeles later that year. Although *Johnny Johnson* enjoyed frequent performances in regional and amateur theaters—even a brief Broadway revival in 1971—the work's publication record left much to be desired. Only four songs were available as sheet music, and the published vocal score was deeply flawed.

Musicologist Tim Carter has now prepared a critical edition of *Johnny Johnson* for the Kurt Weill Edition. He drew on a vast array of surviving source materials, including not only Weill's manuscripts but also rehearsal scores and sets of instrumental parts, often containing several layers of chaotic performance annotations. The edition presents *Johnny Johnson* in full score, with the complete spoken text placed between the musical numbers. Carter's magisterial introductory essay illuminates the work's genesis and performance history, the editorial process, and performance issues. Eleven plates with facsimiles illustrate editorial challenges and solutions. A separately published critical report documents every step of the editorial process and provides additional information for future stagings.

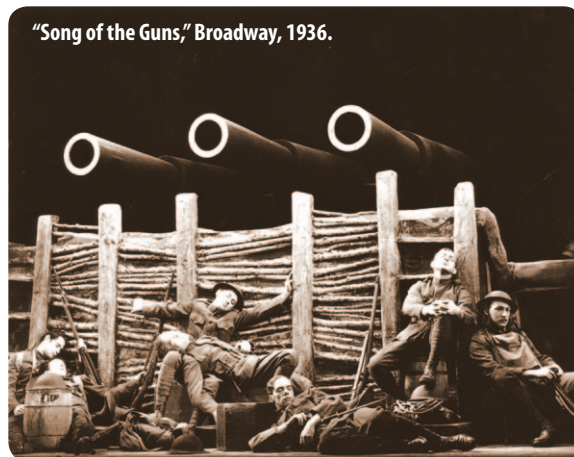
Weill's ingenious orchestration for *Johnny Johnson*, recalling those for *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny Songspiel*, requires 11 players: clarinet, alto sax, 2 trumpets, trombone, 2 violins, cello, guitar, percussion and Hammond organ. New performance materials (parts and vocal score) derived from the edition will be available for rental in autumn 2012.

Tim Carter, David G. Frey Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is an expert on early baroque opera, Mozart's operas, and Broadway musicals. His landmark study of *Oklahoma!* was published in 2007 by Yale University Press.

Kurt Weill Edition (Series I, Volume 13): *Johnny Johnson*, ed. Tim Carter (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music / European American Music Corporation, 2012). Main Volume: 348 pp.; Critical Report: 116 pp. ISBN: 978-0-913574-69-0. Sales Price: \$440 (\$295 for subscribers). Order no. KWE 1013.

22. Song of the Guns

Andante non troppo



"Song of the Guns," Broadway, 1936.

PHOTO: ALFREDO VALENTE

Kurt Weill Edition Wins Paul Revere Awards

Each year the Music Publishers Association of the United States confers Paul Revere Awards for outstanding examples of graphic design in music publishing. The previous volume in the Kurt Weill Edition, *Music with Solo Violin*, received two 2011 Paul Revere Awards: the Critical Report won First Prize for Book Design in Educational Folios; and the score won Second Prize for Full Score Music Notesetting. These mark the eighth and ninth Paul Revere Awards conferred on volumes of the Edition.

Foundation News



PHOTO: KURT WEILL FOUNDATION

Signing the documents authorizing transfer of fifty percent of Marc Blitzstein's musical and literary copyrights to the Kurt Weill Foundation: Stephen E. Davis (center left), nephew of Marc Blitzstein, and Kim H. Kowalke (center right), President of the Kurt Weill Foundation. Witnesses were Theodore S. Chapin (left), President of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization, and Victoria Clark, Broadway leading lady and new trustee of the Kurt Weill Foundation. The Foundation is also pleased to welcome Corey Field (not pictured), a specialist in entertainment and copyright law, as a new trustee.

Kurt Weill Fest Dessau

The twentieth annual Kurt Weill Fest Dessau ran from 24 February through 11 March 2012. This year's theme: "Hommage à Paris." The festival featured the usual varied and exciting programming, with soprano Ute Gfrerer taking a leading role as Artist in Residence. Highlights included a revival of last year's successful double bill, Pagliacci and *Der Protagonist*, and a concert given by Ensemble Modern featuring music of Weill and his friend Darius Milhaud. Gfrerer gave three song evenings, one a concert in honor of Piaf, Garland, Dietrich, and Lenya with musical direction by James Holmes, and closed out the festival with a concert performance of *Die sieben Todsünden*. The Fest opened with a powerful new ballet, Hotel Montparnasse (pictured below), choreographed by Tomasz Kajdanski, with Gfrerer singing numbers from Weill's *Marie Galante*.



PHOTO: CLAUDIA HEYSEL

2012 Kurt Weill Foundation Grants

Upon recommendation from an independent review panel, on 19 December 2011 the Board of Trustees of the Kurt Weill Foundation awarded funding to the following eleven applicants:

Professional Performances

Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, Baton Rouge, LA. Violin Concerto.
Orchestre symphonique de Trois-Rivières, Trois-Rivières, Québec, Canada.
Symphony No. 1.

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Newark, NJ. Symphony No. 1.
Glimmerglass Festival, Cooperstown, NY. *Lost in the Stars*.

Kurt Weill Fest, Dessau, Germany. Symphony No. 2, *Marie Galante*
Concert Suite, *Der Protagonist*, Violin Concerto, Cello Sonata, *Suite panaméenne*, *Frauentanz*, *Die sieben Todsünden*.

Community Performance

New York City Community Chorus, New York, NY. *Lost in the Stars*.

University Performances

Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL. *Street Scene*.

Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, NC. *The Threepenny Opera*.

Educational Outreach

London Philharmonic Orchestra, London, UK. Young artist mentoring and pre-concert performance of *Mahagonny Songspiel*.

Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA. Panel event in connection with *Der Jasager* performance.

Research and Travel

Carol J. Oja, Cambridge, MA. *Street Scene* related research for book *Performing Racial Desegregation: Broadway Musicals and Progressive Politics in the 1940s*.

NEW ON THE WEB

Go to kwf.org/current-news for coverage of two Weill performances that made news recently. On 30 April, Tony Bennett sang "*Lost in the Stars*" at the UN as part of International Jazz Day celebrations. The broadcast of NBC-TV's "*Smash*" on 7 May featured Anjelica Huston singing "*September Song*." (Her grandfather, Walter Huston, was the first to perform the song as the star of *Knickerbocker Holiday* in 1938.) See our news pages for videos and for all the latest in the ever-expanding world of Weill.



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