

# The Road of Promise

**MasterVoices  
Orchestra of St. Luke's  
Ted Sperling, conductor**

Navona NV6059

Promoter and impresario Meyer Weisgal set out in 1933 to alert the public to the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany when he conceived a vast dramatic spectacle based on the history of the Jewish people. He sparked the interest of famed director Max Reinhardt, who in turn recruited Franz Werfel and Kurt Weill as collaborators. Werfel came up with the story: a Jewish congregation seeks shelter in a synagogue as a pogrom rages outside, and they fearfully await the dawn. The Rabbi offers consolation and encouragement by recounting cherished stories from Jewish history; his audience includes a naïve Thirteen-Year-Old boy who is full of questions, and an “Adversary” who is full of doubts. Weill’s score, composed after his own escape from Nazi Germany, went far beyond “incidental music,” closer to “monumental music.” After a series of delays, the work finally took the stage (in English) on 7 January 1937 in New York, but its sheer length made it necessary to cut nearly the entire last act (“The Prophets”). Most of the score had to be prerecorded and piped in, because the gigantic set left no room for an orchestra pit.

So, what can we make of Weill’s music, which by his own account he worked on with great enthusiasm and which he deemed the “loveliest music” he had composed to that point? What is its nature, how can it be used, or revived? Based on this recording, we can say with confidence that Ed Harsh’s adaptation of the stage work as a two-part oratorio in fourteen numbers will establish the score firmly in the repertory.

The oratorio version makes it glaringly obvious that in cutting Act IV, the New York production lost one of Weill’s most undeniably beautiful *Lieder*: the tender, comforting “Ye mourners, no judgment which mortals have wrought / Can blot out Israel or bring him to naught,” which opens the final number (“A Vision”). Weill succeeds in finding an immediately touching and deeply moving tone, which expresses consolation, uplift, and confidence all at the same time. Michael Slattery’s rendition certainly helps; he sings it with a quietly fervent, tender expression that urgently tries to convert hope into unshakable certainty. With such an interpretation, the music evokes a state of peaceful harmony and makes it almost palpable—only to be torn away by the harsh voice of the “regime”: “You, congregation of Israel, are to be banished from the land!”

This sequence illustrates the role music must play in a dramatic context as opposed to an oratorio. As accompaniment to

the onstage action, the music adds color to the spectacle and functions as an acoustic backdrop. In the oratorio, however, the music takes on a much larger significance: not only does it unfold the text smoothly with its vastly varying styles and tones, it absorbs the stories into itself, lending them a voice and giving them musical and esthetic life—whether the love between Rachel and Jacob (No. 3), Moses’s declarations (No. 8), David’s guilt (No. 10), building Solomon’s temple (No. 11—at first glance surely the oratorio’s peak of power and sublimity), deceptions of a false prophet (No. 13), or the promise of the Messiah (No. 14). More to the point: Onstage, the music accompanies the action, and may even become something of a distraction; in the oratorio, however, the action comments on the music. For the task of shaping each number, Weill commands an inexhaustible and extravagant wealth of invention. He designed the roles of the Rabbi, the Thirteen-Year-Old, and the Adversary as speaking roles with underscoring—though the Rabbi is generally given synagogue-influenced recitative—in an unmediated present time, whereas the

design of the biblical stories depends more on connecting the distant past to the present and less on displaying the sheer multitude of biblical characters. Weill creates unity and continuity among different levels of temporality and narration through the use of leitmotifs.

Obviously, the plethora of styles presents performance challenges, which are convincingly overcome in this recording. All of the vocal soloists, most of whom must take more than one role (except Anthony Dean Griffey as the Rabbi), endow the biblical figures with life and personality. To name just a few members of this finely balanced group of vocalists: Eli Tokash voices the Thirteen-Year-Old

boy’s questions with appropriate feeling. Lenya Competition prizewinners Justin Hopkins, Lauren Michelle, and Megan Marino (the last two sing multiple roles) bring out the individuality of every character. Mark Delavan makes a definite impression, rendering Abraham and Moses with power and intensity. AJ Glueckert proves a master of adaptability, handling the roles of Jacob, David, Isaiah, and Hananiah. The dedication of all the soloists gives the performance an impetus worthy of the work’s subject and message, doing them both full justice. The enormous but by no means unmanageable choral parts are delivered by MasterVoices to grand aural effect, and Ted Sperling, conductor of this live recording, expertly handles transitions between numbers of widely varying character. The Orchestra of St. Luke’s gives the purely orchestral passages the sort of cultivated playing that makes one wish Weill had written more of them.

**Giselher Schubert  
Hameln**



# “Lift Every Voice” Festival Blossoms into “We Must Not Remain Silent”

“Lift Every Voice!” What better name for a festival striving to be inclusive, inspiring, and educational, while also serving as a call to action?

The Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and its Music Director Jeffrey Kahane planned an unprecedented series of events to explore “the power of music to encourage understanding and promote peace.” Presented 14–29 January 2017 in various venues spread across the Los Angeles basin, the festival comprised four concerts, a film screening, a symposium, and a fully staged production of *Lost in the Stars*. The Kurt Weill Foundation provided significant financial support.

Kahane imbibed political activism from his parents, who escaped Germany on the last boat from Hamburg in 1940. Taking inspiration from the lives of Kurt Weill, Rabbi Joachim Prinz, and Martin Luther King, Jr., he set out to explore the relationships between artistic expression and political action. The resulting programs elicited complex emotional responses from deeply engaged audiences grappling with these issues on personal, national, and global levels. Kahane’s dedication to the project and exacting musicianship lent artistic integrity to the entire enterprise, and he wisely invited British violin virtuoso Daniel Hope to play a major role in the festival’s programming. Hope’s father was a prominent journalist who wrote against apartheid in South Africa; Hope himself has throughout his career championed the music of composers murdered by the Nazis.

Kahane is not only a master of programming but a modern-day Merlin. How else could he have known over a year ago that “Lift Every Voice” would coincide with the inauguration of Donald Trump, followed the next day by millions of Americans marching to demand vigilance in protecting human rights? Actually, the festival was intended as the last act of Kahane’s tenure with the LACO, which he is leaving after twenty years. He writes, “I have always believed that for an orchestra to fulfill its highest potential, it must be an ‘instrument of community.’ We believe passionately that this project has the potential to be a profoundly transformational force.”

The inaugural concert set the agenda for the carefully constructed festival. On 14 January at the West Angeles Church, the Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Leo Baeck Temple Chorus, New Horizons School Choirs, and the USC Chamber Singers joined forces to celebrate Dr. King’s birthday. Program highlights included the hymn “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” four spirituals from *A Child of Our Time* by Sir Michael Tippett, “I Have a Dream” by Charles Dickerson III, and the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.”

The University of Southern California presented “Forging

‘The Knife’: Kurt Weill before Broadway” on 19 January, with selections from Weill’s chamber music (the first movement of the Cello Sonata and the first two movements of String Quartet No. 1, Op. 8) and songs, including “Maikaterlied” (1918), “Alabama Song,” “O Captain! My Captain!,” and “Lonely House,” all given adept performances by USC students and professional musicians. Closing out the first half was Gideon Klein’s String Trio, composed in the Terezín concentration camp in 1944. Klein perished in the Fürstengrube camp just a few months later, in January 1945.

Kahane and Hope had begun the evening with a dazzling reading of “Mackie Messer” arranged for violin and piano by Stefan Frenkel. To close, Kahane led a lovingly detailed and energetic performance of *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. This smorgasbord of Weill works offered a glimpse of his range and his genius for melodic invention. It also introduced largely unknown works to talented students and young professionals.

Sunday, 22 January proved to be a distillation of the festival, when politics and art converged most powerfully. To anchor the festival’s themes historically and culturally, UCLA hosted a day-long symposium under the title “Championing Civil Rights & Resisting Injustice: Rabbi Joachim Prinz and Kurt Weill.” While the link between these two men might have seemed tenuous at first, the participants argued convincingly that both Prinz and Weill were embroiled in the controversies of their times and that their work still resonates deeply. The symposium addressed stimulating and thought-provoking issues, often in the context of current political and social turmoil. The day quickly coalesced into

one of those unique events where everyone in the room felt part of a community of shared values.

Michael Meyer (Professor Emeritus, Hebrew Union College) and Rabbi Jonathan Prinz (Joachim Prinz’s son) provided biographical information about Rabbi Prinz (1902–1988), who served for fifty years as a rabbi, starting in 1926 in Berlin. Prinz challenged the traditional role of rabbis by speaking out on political and social issues, and his congregation grew as a result. He continued to speak out even after Hitler took power and members of the Gestapo began attending every service. After repeated arrests, he fled in 1937 to the United States, where he toured the country lecturing about conditions in Germany, often to skeptical audiences. But he soon resolved to address issues closer to his adopted home, using his post as rabbi of Temple B’nai Abraham in Newark as a forum to decry racial discrimination in America. Prinz saw discrimination against African-Americans as a Jewish problem, and he is probably best remembered today for speaking just before Martin Luther King delivered his “I have a dream” speech at the 1963 March on Washington:

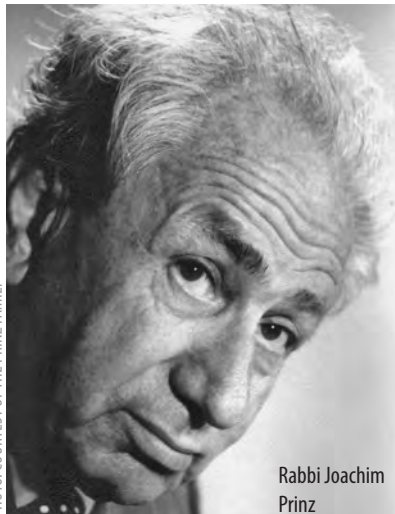


PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE PRINZ FAMILY

Rabbi Joachim  
Prinz

The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances [in Germany] was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful, and the most tragic problem is *silence*... America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent. Not merely black America, but all of America. It must speak up and act, from the President down to the humblest of us, and not for the sake of the Negro, not for the sake of the black community, but for the sake of the image, the idea, and the aspiration of America itself.

Indeed, Rabbi Prinz's experiences in Berlin probably helped him to see more clearly the relationship between American and Nazi policies on race. These linkages continue to be researched by scholars today. One example not mentioned at the symposium is Harvard professor James Q. Whitman's recent book, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, in which Whitman explores the ways that American attitudes and statutes about race helped to provide a road map for Adolf Hitler.

As for Weill, Stephen Hinton (Stanford) and Tamara Levitz (UCLA) explored his persistent engagement with civil rights through music. Hinton discussed Weill's contributions to the "Neue Sachlichkeit" movement in Weimar Germany that sought to support Germany's new democracy. He never stopped seeking to broaden his audience, looking for new outlets and using technology to bring the social criticism inherent in his work to more people. Levitz considered ways in which Weill envisioned music as social criticism and the specific tactics and compositional techniques he devised to achieve it: rhythms that followed accents of speech; use of popular song forms; rejection of traditional venues; forcing the audience to think; and aiming at a mass audience. Kim H. Kowalke cited Weill's own words to explain how he used his work to meet racial prejudice and abuse of power head-on. In a December 1949 radio interview shortly after the opening of *Lost in the Stars*, Weill expressed his musical response to social injustice: "... I seem to have a very strong awareness of the suffering of underprivileged people, of the oppressed, the persecuted.

I can see that when [my] music involves human suffering, it is, for better or worse, pure Weill."

All this the day after the Women's March, which attracted several million participants across the United States and reportedly 750,000 in Los Angeles alone. Several conference speakers modified their prepared comments in response to the question of the hour: "How will Trump's presidency affect human rights in the U.S. and globally?" The pressure of

current events prompted passionate and insightful commentary from both the speakers and the deeply engaged audience.

That night, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and violinist Daniel Hope capped an emotional day with a concert at UCLA's iconic Royce Hall. (The concert had also been presented the previous evening.) It opened with the U.S. premiere of the "Song-Suite for Violin and Orchestra," a new arrangement of Weill songs by Paul Bateman that included "Havanna-Lied," "September Song," "Kanonen-Song," "My Ship," "Speak Low," and "Mack the Knife." One song segues into the next without a break in this well-paced, inventive medley. Hope's virtuosity and the closing swing arrangement of "Mack the Knife" brought the house down. The next work addressed the theme of the festival directly with the West Coast premiere of Bruce Adolphe's Violin Concerto, titled "I Will Not Remain Silent." The two-movement concerto pays tribute to Rabbi Joachim Prinz, specifically the dangers he faced living in Nazi Germany and his subsequent civil-rights advocacy in America. After intermission, American vocalist and actor Storm Large brought to life the two Annas of *The Seven Deadly Sins* with subtle changes of expression, body language, and vocal shadings, all while making the most of a few props and on-stage costume changes. Large communicated the fast-moving plot effectively without compromising musical values. Kahane led a nuanced performance, bringing out seldom-heard details of orchestration and inner-voice harmonies.

Maintaining a focus on racial discrimination, Kahane provided a brilliant climax to the festival nearly a week later with two fully staged performances in Royce Hall of *Lost in the Stars*, which had not been seen in Los Angeles since the post-Broadway tour of the original production in September 1950. Anne Bogart directed the large cast and chorus comprising the SITI Company, the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, and the Los Robles Master Chorale, while Kahane conducted the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.



Daniel Hope

PHOTO: TIBOR BOZI



Jeffrey Kahane and Anne Bogart preside over a rehearsal of *Lost in the Stars*

PHOTO: REED HUTCHINSON

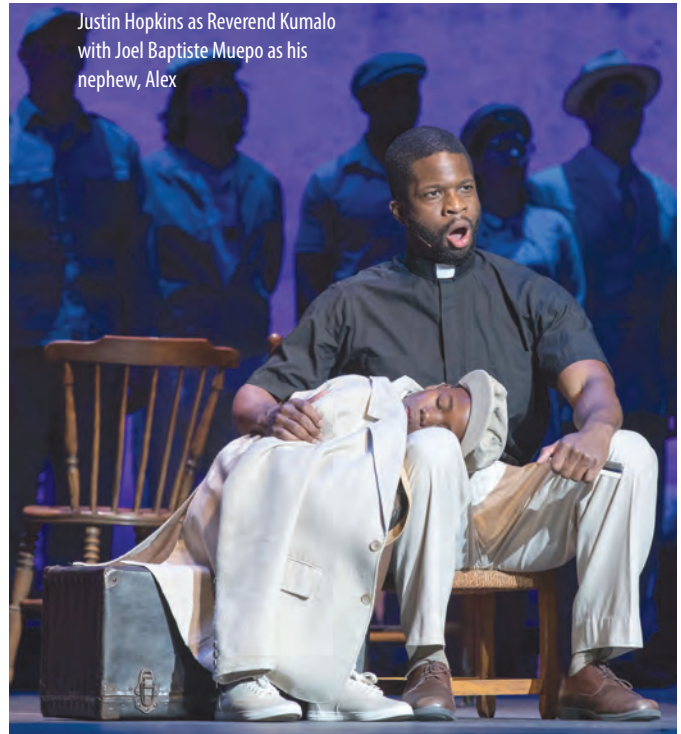


Lauren Michelle  
portrays Irina

In spite of limited rehearsal time, everything came together for a stirring evening of theater: stylish earth-toned costumes contrasting with minimal sets and props; stellar lighting; thrilling choral singing; and affecting performances from the principal singers and actors. Two Lotte Lenya Competition prize-winners stood out from the uniformly excellent cast: Justin Hopkins as the strong yet vulnerable Stephen Kumalo and Lauren Michelle as a conflicted yet faithful Irina. Kahane channeled and shaped all of the forces into a well-paced

and musically dynamic performance. His sensitivity and attention to detail illuminated Weill's score in Technicolor, proving the music is both fresh and relevant to present-day audiences. Mark Swed praised "Kahane's unerring dramatic pace" in the *Los Angeles Times* and asked, "Will anyone step up to pick up a project that offers an example of how to illuminate issues that sting like today's headlines, and which so much went into for only two performances?"

"Lift Every Voice" provided a unique opportunity for participants and audiences alike to interact and develop a



Justin Hopkins as Reverend Kumalo  
with Joel Baptiste Muepo as his  
nephew, Alex

heightened awareness of racial discrimination and social injustice. As the conversations evolved in tandem with the message of the demonstrations in the streets, a consensus seemed to develop around a suitable subtitle for the festival: "We cannot, must not, and will not remain silent!"

**David Farneth**  
Los Angeles

## Will Anyone Step Up?

The production of *Lost in the Stars* that capped the "Lift Every Voice" festival forced critics to confront the work's ongoing political relevance. Here are some samples:

In this, Weill's last work before he died of a heart attack at 50 in 1950, there was an overpowering musical conviction to which the staging was mainly attuned. ... If *Stars* came to be seen as a relic, it no longer seems so.

Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*

I do hope in this time of great need for unity in the world that more chances to see this brilliant production will be planned in the future. ... The time is now to break the cycle of ignorance and hatred so that humanity can prosper. And as long as the arts survive, there is a chance the truth will be spoken and heard.

Shari Barrett, [broadwayworld.com](http://broadwayworld.com)

When a politically powerful work of art performed by world-class artists takes the stage before an audience hungry for justice and truth, the results are electric. ... Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's *Lost in the Stars* speaks to issues of racism in South Africa but travels across time and space, landing, like a gift, to audiences in LA now. One can only hope it travels further, perhaps as far as Trump Tower. ... If you can find a production, run to see it. If you can't, buy the CD, and if you have the interest, beg Jeffrey Kahane and director Anne Bogart to take it on the road: the time is ripe.

Jane Rosenberg, International Review of Music (blog)

Bogart's production is the second of note in recent years. Tazewell Thompson directed the show at Cape Town Opera (2011), *Glimmerglass* (2012), and Washington National Opera (2016), the last with Lauren Michelle as Irina, a role she has rapidly made her own. The momentum propelling *Lost in the Stars* continues to build as we continue to confront racism and injustice.

# 25th Kurt Weill Fest Dessau

24 February – 12 March 2017

The Kurt Weill Fest Dessau opened for the 25th time with a brave agenda. “Luther, Weill & Mendelssohn”—the banner under which more than fifty events took place not only in Weill’s birthplace but Magdeburg, Halle, Wittenberg and Wörlitz—restores the émigré composer to his rightful place in Germany’s cultural fabric. Since its inception, the annual event has provided a platform for Weill’s oeuvre in all its breadth, and the Fest has offered many of Weill’s infrequently performed works: the *Suite in E* for Orchestra, *Zaubernacht*, *Der Protagonist*, *Der Kuhhandel*, *Down in the Valley*, *Love Life* (in abridged form), and others. But the festival has also cultivated twentieth-century composers connected with Weill such as Milhaud, Krenek, and Hindemith. While this year’s juxtaposition of Weill and Protestant ethics was a thought-provoking proposition, the program proved more interesting in theory than in practice.

spoken passages in the prologue and subsequent numbers. In the family’s scolding quartets, tenor Falk Hoffmann led with a piercing timbre while bass Gun-Wook Lee used vivid word painting, especially in “Gluttony.” The ambiguous C-major chord which ends the work gave way to Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, whose heroism proved too heavy for Weill despite the rhythmic emphasis of Järvi’s conducting. The cross-references to Stravinsky’s *Symphony in C*, with its obsessive, motivic fabric, were more compelling.

A week later, Järvi and the MDR returned with *Die Verheißung*, an oratorio based on Weill’s *Der Weg der Verheißung* which was first heard in Dessau in 2013. This compact version by Ed Harsh is a precious opportunity to experience the most important passages in Weill’s score, which veers from straight-ahead neo-classicism (including allusions to the Bach Passions) to stage music of an unabashedly popular style. Harsh preserves the narrative in which a 13-year-old boy (Tim Florian Kranhold) and the Adversary (Sebastian Kowski) challenge the Rabbi (fittingly sung by a cantor, Yoéd Sorek) between tableaux from the Old Testament in a drama about the fate of the Jewish people. Justin Hopkins stood out for his earthy baritone in the roles of Abraham, the Dark Angel, and Joseph. Falk Hoffmann was commanding as the voice of God and tenor Matthew Grills moving as Isaiah in the prophets’ duet. The women (soprano Jeanine De Bique and mezzo Edna Prochnik) did not fare so well, not least due to poor diction, although De Bique gave a poignant account of “O König der Welt” in the penultimate scene. Järvi’s rushed tempi again led to muddy textures, particularly in the brass, and drew insufficient pathos from Weill’s wistful melodies; nonetheless, the percussion-driven choral number “Das ist ein Gott” unfolded with fresh energy and tight rhythms.

Järvi’s fast tempi were even more conspicuous in *Braver Soldat Johnny*, a ninety-minute concert adaptation of Weill’s first American stage work, *Johnny Johnson*, rescored by American composer Gene Pritsker and first heard in Dessau two years ago. The ostinato rhythms of “Aggie’s Song” moved so swiftly that the young actress Juliane Elting could barely keep up as she spoke, rather than sang, the words. Elting had similar problems in the prescient “Song of the Goddess,” in which the Statue of Liberty laments the soldiers’ departure for Europe. Even more unfortunate was the waltz “Oh Heart of Love,” which Mimi Fiedler—as Johnny’s fiancée, Minny Belle—sang an octave down in a breathy tone. Although Tom Schimon made a stronger impression as the mayor in the opening number, “Over in Europe,” singing was little more than an afterthought in this semi-staging devised by Bernhard Bettermann (who also played the title role). The six-person cast slipped in and out of different characters with plenty of energy—Judith Hoersch gave a memorable account of the French nurse who tries to seduce Johnny—but given the extensive cuts to Paul Green’s original dialogue, the scene changes were often confusing.

A full-blown staging of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* directed by Michael von zur Mühlen in co-production with Oper



*Die Verheißung*: Matthew Grills, Jeanine De Bique, and conductor Kristjan Järvi

PHOTO: SEBASTIAN GÜNDEL

This year’s artist-in-residence, the MDR Symphony Orchestra under Kristjan Järvi, opened the festival at the Anhaltisches Theater with Weill’s *Die sieben Todsünden* featuring mezzo Angelika Kirchschrager. With its caustic treatment of bourgeois Christian morals and ironic neo-baroque numbers, the *ballet chanté* would have been a natural choice for exploring Weill’s relationship to Bach or Mendelssohn. Instead, the work was framed by Stravinsky and Beethoven symphonies under the rubric of “existential crises” which all three composers underwent. Järvi brought the right dose of swing to the dance rhythms but had an unfortunate tendency to rush the orchestra, leading to uneven brass and woodwinds in “Pride,” “Anger,” and “Covetousness.”

Kirchschrager struck a balance between sultry declamation and operatic emphasis, conveying repressed rage toward her shameless alter ego, Anna II, in “Anger” and a mixture of obstinacy and fragility in the penultimate “Envy.” If in “Lust” Anna I seemed to be singing about her teenage daughter rather than Anna II—who shows her “white behind” to the “world’s profane gaze”—the mezzo brought convincing expression to Anna II’s



Ines Lex as Jenny in Act III

Halle adopted an elaborate but ultimately self-defeating concept. Reproducing the interior of a church, the set by Christoph Ernst placed the orchestra atop a faux-marble podium while cast members entered carrying urns. The static, funereal action of the first act had little to do with the rhythmic drive of Weill's score. Jenny (the lush-voiced soprano Ines Lex) broke down in tears before singing the "Alabama-Song." And while fast numbers received crisp performances by the Staatskapelle Halle under Christopher Sprenger, the bizarrely slow tempo of the ensemble number "Aber dieses ganze Mahagonny" was more irritating than dramatically convincing.

The second act replaced much of the action with a video in which the cast played with toy cars and wrapped themselves in clear plastic film. Jim Mahoney (the impressive tenor Ralph Ertel) appeared in person for his aria "Wenn der Himmel hell wird," but the Staatskapelle's dusky phrasing was relegated to the background when he inserted a dildo into his pants. The staging's excesses served the drama only in the final scenes, when the singers battled with toy rifles before guzzling Prosecco, illustrating how a system that relies on the overindulgence of its citizens brings Mahagonny to its ruin. Yet the final exchange between Jim and Jenny was robbed of emotion when Bill (Franz Xaver Schlecht) read their lines into a microphone.

The one-woman show *Die Seeräuber-Jenny* explored the life and career of Lotte Lenya—from her birth into poverty in Vienna, to meeting Weill in a rowboat in Berlin, to her life in the U.S. as a widow—through a mix of anecdotes and songs delivered by Andrea Eckert. The script (Hermann Beil and Felix Losert) covers the huge swath of material in mostly clichéd fashion, particularly when recounting Weill's exile from Nazi Germany. Eckert, while a commanding presence, cannot even begin to approach Lenya's

expressive power in Weill's songs, which ranged here from "Die Moritat von Mackie Messer" to "I'm a Stranger Here Myself!" She was most charming in Viennese folk songs such as the "Wiener Fiakerlied," in which she yodeled to the accompaniment of clarinet and piano (Reinhard Gutte and Wolfgang Kluge).

A concert with the Anhaltische Philharmonie returned to Weill's student years with *Quodlibet*, Weill's own four-movement arrangement of music from the 1922 ballet-pantomime *Zaubernacht*. The dramatic power of Weill's instrumental music was fully formed at that early stage, with a jovial march in the final movement that anticipates a passage in *Der Weg der Verheißung*. Markus L. Frank led a tight, well-accented performance, from the fugal passage of the opening *Andante* to the playful tarantella in the third movement. Schulhoff's percussion-driven "Ballettmysterium" *Ogelala*, which includes almost proto-minimalist textures in "Ivala's Tanz," was also delivered with polished rhythms. Less convincing were the overture to Wilhelm Grosz's *Opera buffa*, whose tonal melodies demanded more arching phrases, and excerpts from Ravel's ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, where impressionist textures were coarse rather than transparent. The program was nevertheless a valuable opportunity to explore a period in which orchestration reached a peak of color and refinement.

A nearly four-hour gala celebrating the 25th Fest traversed the three stages of Weill's career in Berlin, Paris, and New York. The first segment featured everything from the Dadaist song, "An Anna Blume" by Stefan Wolpe, to numbers from the 1930 film *Der blaue Engel* in which soprano Ute Gfrerer gave a mean imitation of Marlene Dietrich with help from her own Die Divenband. The Ensemble Modern also premiered arrangements of Edmund Nick's "Kurt Schmidt, statt einer Ballade" from the radio play *Leben in dieser Zeit* and Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt's *Marsch Alexander des Großen über die Brücken Hamburgs*, originally for piano. The final stop in New York ranged from Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing" (with not so much swing from the Anhaltische Philharmonie under General Music Director Markus L. Frank) to the arrangement of a Swedish folk song by trombonist Nils Landgren (its "soulfulness in a minor key" reminded him of Weill). The Symphonic Nocturne from *Lady in the Dark* featured



Ute Gfrerer and James Holmes at the Gala Concert

homogeneous brass playing in both “Girl of the Moment” and “The Saga of Jenny.”

The most gala part of the concert, however, was the “Homage à Paris.” After Gfrerer evoked Edith Piaf, conductor James Holmes led the Anhaltische Philharmonie in a new “Song-Suite” he had compiled from Weill’s *Der Kuhhandel*. The operetta about a fictitious Caribbean island, where peace is compromised by the American weapons industry, was written mostly in Paris in 1934, but would be produced a year later as *A Kingdom for a Cow*, in which Weill lightened the style for a London audience. Holmes, rather than attempting to create a narrative, chose numbers that created musical contrast. The suite is framed by the prelude to Act Two, a fandango in which percussion, banjo, and strings set the rhythm, and the General’s “Drinking Song,” where the fandango rhythm is even more pervasive. Dramatic baritone Ulf Paulsen supplied a strong characterization as the General, particularly in “Das Erlebnis im Café.” Tenor Markus Francke made for an appealing enough Juan, whose marriage to his beloved Juanita (soprano Angelina Ruzzafante) is thwarted on two separate occasions when the government seizes his cow (the English waltz “Auf Wiedersehen”).

On the last day of the festival, a late-morning concert at the Marienkirche with the Ensemble Modern under HK Gruber revisited *Marie Galante*. *Chansons des quais*, a new cycle compiled by Kim H. Kowalke, adopts an order different from the Suite from *Marie Galante* which he and Lys Symonette prepared in 1987 and utilizes a male quartet, as in both *Mahagonny Songspiel* and *Die*

*sieben Todsünden*. The new cycle opens with an Introduction reconstructed by Gruber in 1989 and closes with “Le train du ciel,” in which the title character, a country girl turned prostitute, keeps vigil over a dying man. Gfrerer, as soloist, brought authentic diction and convincing expression to Weill’s songs, coming across as both sweet and callous in “J’attends un navire” while revealing the melancholy that lurks beneath the surface of “Le train du ciel.” “Les filles de Bordeaux” was particularly vivid, hovering somewhere between a dance hall and soldier-lined streets. Gruber and Ensemble Modern produced the rhythmic precision, melodic élan, and vitality which distinguish their longstanding collaboration. Unfortunately, the male quartet ensemble amarcord disappointed with forced tone and stilted pronunciation.

After a spacious but elastic account of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* with pianist Ueli Wiget, the orchestra turned to Weill’s Symphony No. 2, completed in Paris within a year of his arrival in 1933. The score veers seamlessly between tightly wrought motivic development and lighter fare evoking his stage works. There is a sense of flight and existential crisis which links the music nicely to *Marie Galante*, but Weill, in typically Mozartean fashion, finds his way back to a life-affirming tarantella in the final *Presto*. The orchestra under Gruber invested every passage with the technical skill and emotional range that this music deserves.

**Rebecca Schmid  
Berlin**

## Two Weill Shows Bend But Don’t Break the Mold

Several years ago, in the pages of the *Newsletter*, I observed that Kurt Weill revues fall into one of two categories: the biographical (*Berlin to Broadway*, for example), and the “Bills Ballhaus,” that treats songs literally and generally features a woman walking into a waterfront bar to sing about what rats men are and how she wound up a prostitute. For seasoned Weill listeners, this binary invariability can get tedious; we begin to wonder whether some obscure ordinance mandates absolute adherence to one or the other of these formats. (Full disclosure: I recently produced a Weill revue that attempted to break the mold.)

However, even while respecting the conventions, two recent performances in New York provided at least a whiff of freshness. Aimée Marcoux-Spurlock’s *Women of Bilbao* tended to the biographical, but lightly, with a few remarks sprinkled between songs in what was otherwise a standard nightclub recital at the Metropolitan Room. A vivacious blonde with a bright, gutsy voice that glides easily into lyric-soprano range, Marcoux-Spurlock offered one rarity, the unjustly overlooked “Susan’s Dream” from *Love Life*, and keenly felt accounts of some of Weill’s greatest hits. Translator Michael Feingold served as creative consultant, and on piano, Doug Martin lent able support. A packed house cheered the diva lustily.

*Love for Sale* (Soho Playhouse) also introduced an appealing performer but proved far more elaborate. In his director’s note, Robert F. Gross rhapsodizes about the romance of cabaret—precisely the sort of thing to set a maven growling, “But Weill wrote hardly any cabaret songs!” *Love for Sale* does include one of those songs, “Je ne t’aime pas,” but the bulk of the program is given over

to theater music. Six of the two dozen numbers aren’t by Weill, so it’s not an orthodox Weill revue, though it comes close. More to the point, perhaps, *Love for Sale* follows a narrative that’s set in a cabaret: a Pigalle dive for Act I, and a Mahagonny-esque nightclub for Act II.

Our heroine does indeed walk into a bar to tell us that men are rats; Kelly Burke plays a naïve American who comes to Paris, runs short of money, and—well, you know the rest. Especially in Act I, I’d have liked more attention to detail: For example, Blitzstein’s “Nickel Under the Foot” may evoke the desired mood, yet nobody acknowledges that a nickel has no value in France.

Pianist Charlie Alterman becomes a character, too, following our heroine to Mandelay, where “Everything’s Permitted” while warplanes buzz overhead and the whole place is about to collapse. This is a refreshing concept, and Gross and Burke have fun with it. One senses, however, that they’re just beginning to explore the possibilities—though *Love for Sale* has also seen performances in London and Edinburgh. The evening succeeds principally in showcasing Burke’s lean, supple voice and dramatic talents.

Ultimately, this may point to the best argument in favor of Weill revues: The composer’s catalogue contains a wealth of opportunities for versatile artists, whether the audience has heard the songs before or not. But the more imagination, the better. Please.

**William V. Madison  
New York City**

# LoveMusik

## Oper Leipzig

Premiere: 21 January 2017

1996 saw the publication of the complete correspondence between Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya, edited by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke. When legendary Broadway producer and director Hal Prince finished reading the hefty volume, he made up his mind: This must be transformed into a musical. The result, with a book by Alfred Uhry and directed by Prince, opened in May 2007 on Broadway to mixed critical reaction, but John Simon's review of the production in the *Newsletter* concluded, "*Love-Musik* should be with us forever." Ten years later, the German premiere. I attended the second performance—sold-out house, fifteen minutes of frenetic applause at the end. It's safe to say that *LoveMusik* has arrived in Germany, where, I am quite sure, it will reach new heights.

Director Cusch Jung has enjoyed a long career in German musical theater, beginning in the 1980s with Helmut Baumann's famed ensemble at Berlin's Theater des Westens. Guest engagements ensued, as Tony in *West Side Story*, as Che Guevara in *Evita*, and as the lawyer Flynn in *Chicago*. His first directing job came in 1996; in the fall of 2015, he became *Chefregisseur* at Leipzig's Musikalische Komödie.

Jung's staging tips its hat to a few of Prince's devices but succeeds thanks largely to the cast. Hans-Georg Pachmann and Anna Preckeler resemble Weill and Lenya not only visually but vocally. When Pachmann softly intones "That's Him" in front of the curtain, we are transported back to Weill's own recording in 1943. Or take Preckeler: Her rendition of "Seeräuberjenny" gives you an idea of why Ernst Bloch was mesmerized by Lenya's voice in her Berlin days—"sweet, high-pitched, light, threatening, cool, with the light of the crescent moon." Jung himself offers superb singing and acting as Brecht, sporting the trademark worn leather jacket and cap and conveying the poet's self-confidence, not to say arrogance, when he issues commands in a raspy voice. His songs are delivered in splendid *Sprechgesang*. From conductor Christoph-Johannes Eichhorn's first downbeat in the opening number, a quartet arrangement of "Speak Low," it is clear that both cast and orchestra know their business.

That opening scene, with rich use of colored lights, gives us a touch of Broadway before we turn to

the beginning of the story in Berlin. It's one of the strong suits of the play: Songs from the American period are cleverly interwoven with action in Germany and vice versa. For example, Weill and Lenya have just arrived in the United States (their first adventure is a trip to Hoboken, which they have mistaken for Harlem—hilarious!), and the composer dreams of success and the money that comes with it. Light change, and suddenly a group of singers takes us back to Berlin with "Hosiannah Rockefeller" from *Happy End*. Or: A flashback to Lenya's youth, when her father sends her out on the street to turn tricks. A figure rises from the pit and sings "Nannas Lied," composed in New York in 1939. One more: On the heels of "Mackie Messer" we hear "Schickelgruber" (1942) to comment on Hitler's rise (Jung stages the number as a shadow play behind a white curtain, following Prince's original conception).

Costume designer Silke Wey is chiefly responsible for creating a visual sense of the play's various times and locations. She came up with no fewer than 120 exquisite outfits for the nine actors—a stunning achievement. The staging thus gets by with few props, simplifying the numerous scene changes. Three projection panels upstage offer additional room for atmosphere and succinct indications of time and place. Equally original and entertaining is the idea (again based on Prince) of alluding to well-known photographs of Weill and Lenya. For example, the group photo that shows Weill and Lenya arriving in New York harbor: The lights come up and the actors stand motionless, then suddenly "awaken" and start singing the "Alabama-Song." Later, Weill and Lenya have publicity photos taken in New York. Weill first sits down in an armchair, his pipe in his mouth, while Lenya leans over his shoulder, exactly as in a familiar image shot later in New York. They hold the pose for a moment—a special treat for Weill connoisseurs.

After Brecht lands in California, Weill pays him a visit. The projection reads "Brecht's beach house in Santa Monica," with huge photos left and right of the Pacific. Sorry, folks, Brecht never lived that close to the beach. But never mind. The bottom line, to paraphrase John Simon, is: Congratulations, *LoveMusik* is with us!

**Jürgen Schebera**  
Berlin



Hans-Georg Pachmann as Weill and Anna Preckeler as Lenya during Act I

PHOTO: TOM SCHULZE