

# “What Makes Weill Weill?”

## A Festival within a Festival at Brevard Music Center

From June to August 2017, Brevard hosted a “festival within a festival” devoted to Kurt Weill which comprised numerous concerts and events dedicated to the composer, including the U.S. premiere of a suite of dances from *The Firebrand of Florence*, recitals of songs and chamber works, performances of *The Seven Deadly Sins* (in concert) and *Street Scene* (staged), as well as special events exploring Weill’s relationship with his contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic. A cluster of events from 10–12 July featured symposia, pre-concert talks, and post-concert Q&As led by a group of scholars, including myself; Kim Kowalke of the University of Rochester, president of the Kurt Weill Foundation; Tim Carter of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and Stephen Hinton of Stanford University. Joseph Horowitz, curator of “Kurt Weill’s America,” part of the “Music Unwound” project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, also participated. The performances of *The Seven Deadly Sins* (see below) and *Street Scene* (see p. 14) formed part of “Kurt Weill’s America.”

The week began with a concert of Weill’s chamber works. The program included the duets “Maikaterlied” and “Abendlied” (1918), the song cycle *Ofrah’s Lieder* (1916), and *Frauentanz* (1924) on the first half. These *Lieder* provided a rare opportunity for audiences to absorb Weill’s early musical language, and revealed his deep-seated (but often submerged) Romantic strain. Long before he encountered Busoni’s New Classicality or Brecht’s acidic satire, Weill immersed himself in the late Romantic lan-

guage of Wagner and Strauss. This is particularly apparent in “Maikaterlied” and “Abendlied,” in which the two soprano voices (Sara Law and Adina Triolo) wound around each other like vines on a trellis, reminiscent of the trio in *Der Rosenkavalier*. Triolo’s sensitive interpretation of *Ofrah’s Lieder* explored another path Weill might have taken; the cycle combines a Schubertian melodic impulse with a Wagnerian flair for sensuality. Law’s fizzy, bubbly voice perfectly suited *Frauentanz*; the small, frequently shifting ensemble reveals Weill’s debt to Stravinsky’s *L’histoire du soldat* and Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*.

The second half was devoted to Weill’s early instrumental music: his *Intermezzo* for piano solo (1917), *Cello Sonata* (1920), and *String Quartet No. 1, Op. 8* (1923). These three works—all written before Weill reached his mid-twenties—show a young composer finding his voice. The *Intermezzo*, played with gusto by Douglas Weeks, is awash in Romanticism like the *Lieder* from the first half. Jonathan Spitz then joined Weeks for the *Cello Sonata*, one of Weill’s most nakedly emotional pieces. It clearly bears the imprint of World War I, and Spitz brought out the stark and sudden contrasts between march-like passages and eruptions of painful, yearning melodies. It was strange to hear such raw emotion from a composer who so often specialized in ironic detachment. The *String Quartet* highlighted Weill’s melodic ingenuity; the piece leaps between moods and idioms, although the transitions are sometimes unconvincing. Corinne Stillwell, Marjorie



The finale of the 12 July concert: Lisa Vroman with members of the Janiec Opera Company beneath a projection of a portrait of Weill and his gravestone

PHOTO: CHUCK DUNN

Bagley, Erika Eckert, and Alistair McRae turned in a crisp, satisfying performance, with precise attention to Weill's rapid shifts of style.

On 12 July, Keith Lockhart and the Brevard Festival Orchestra gave a concert entitled "Kurt Weill on Broadway." The first half featured soprano Lisa Vroman in a semi-staged performance of *The Seven Deadly Sins* with Victor Cardamone, Taylor Rawley, Franklin Mosely, and Timothy Madden from the Janiec Opera Company as the Family. The stage was not large enough to accommodate the piece as originally envisioned, so a mannequin represented the dancer Anna I, and expressionist paintings were projected above the orchestra to set the tone for each sin. Vroman carried the performance beautifully, with an opera singer's tone and a jazz singer's sense of phrasing. The male quartet adopted the appropriate level of nastiness and made a striking contrast to Vroman's world-weary Anna I.

The second half of the concert featured songs from Weill's Broadway shows, with Lockhart filling in biographical details between numbers. Chelsea Helm and Esther Atkinson (also of the Janiec Opera Company) joined the members of the quartet, and each took turns singing a series of solos and ensembles from shows ranging from *Knickerbocker Holiday* to *Lost in the Stars*. Vroman reappeared to sing several numbers from *Lady in the Dark*. These performances revealed one of the challenges of singing Weill's music: balancing classical and popular technique. Many young singers opt for a more classical sound, but that style often does not allow performers to explore the idiomatic swing and attitude that Weill composed into his songs. Yet it is also possible to tilt too far in the direction of the popular, as in Lockhart's rendition of "I'm a Stranger Here Myself." Far from the light, crystalline number Weill composed for the impish Mary Martin, Lockhart and Helm turned the number into a low-down blues,



Lisa Vroman and Keith Lockhart share a moment during the 12 July concert

PHOTO: CHUCK DUNN

drenching it in unnecessary belting and scooping. However, for the most part, these six young singers succeeded. Helm gave "My Ship" from *Lady in the Dark* and "What Good Would the Moon Be?" from *Street Scene* an artlessness that complemented Weill's straightforward melodies, but she sang with enough gravitas that neither sounded superficial.

Over the course of these three days, Kowalke, Carter, Hinton, and I discussed numerous aspects of Weill's life before attentive and appreciative audiences. We tackled a number of questions, including the vexing "what makes Weill Weill?," and his changing relationship with America and American music. Several themes emerged in the course of our discussions. We observed that Weill's peculiar status as an immigrant who embraced American culture has caused much consternation on both sides of the Atlantic, and that the Germanic preoccupations of musicology have

worked against fair-minded reception of Weill, who has often been accused of "selling out" to Broadway. But as Kowalke noted, Weill's German heritage has also caused him to be too often excluded from discussions of American opera. Finally, as Carter and Hinton pointed out, Weill was always a transnational composer who drew on a variety of national idioms even before he left Germany. We all agreed that despite Weill's multifaceted career, there were numerous consistencies: a tendency towards allusion, a devotion to socially engaged

theater, and an ability to blend styles of musical drama (including Broadway, opera, and film) into forms that redefined the boundaries of contemporary music theater. The entire week proved an enriching and entertaining exploration of Weill's life and music.

**Naomi Graber**  
University of Georgia

## What Makes Weill Weill?

Ironically, four months before he died, Weill himself was asked the question, "What makes Weill Weill?" The occasion was "Opera News on the Air," an intermission feature for a radio broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera's production of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. After host Boris Goldovsky and Weill had discussed "what made Puccini Puccini," Weill responded to the same question about his own work: "I seem to have a very strong reaction and awareness of the suffering of underprivileged people, of the oppressed, the persecuted. So in retrospect, I can see that when my music involves human suffering, it is, for better or worse, pure Weill." Indeed, it may well be that it is compassion for humanity and its inverse, condemnation of the inhumane, which makes Weill's artistic legacy so compelling in our world today. The old esthetic debates pitting one Weill against another seem hollow echoes as the ethical/political ones swirling around the globe suggest that his work has never been more relevant and essential.

Kim H. Kowalke  
from the festival program: "Kurt Weill at the 2017 Brevard Festival"



# A Serendipitous *Street Scene*

It was a great honor to conduct *Street Scene* at Brevard Music Center last summer, working with director Dean Anthony, the head of Brevard's Janiec Opera Company. This production was a key element of the Weill "festival within a festival," supported by "Music Unwound" and the Kurt Weill Foundation, and it confirmed two strong beliefs I hold about *Street Scene*: the opera is at its most poignant when delivered honestly and without artifice; and it is even more timely today than at its premiere in 1947.

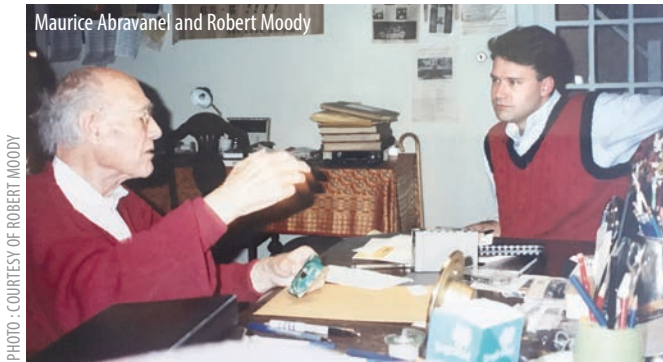


PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROBERT MOODY

## A Quarter-Century in the Making

If you had asked me about Kurt Weill in 1990, I would have said, "Isn't he the guy who wrote 'Mack the Knife'?" But in 1991, as a conducting student at the Eastman School of Music, I found myself serving as assistant conductor to Kim Kowalke for our production of *Street Scene*, and the world of Weill opened to me like a floodgate. After that experience, I was engaged to serve on the conducting staff at English National Opera for their 1992 revival of David Pountney's production, conducted by James Holmes.

In 1993 the Foundation asked me to lead the charge in correcting errata in the full score of *Street Scene*, in which I was aided by two leading lights from the Broadway premiere: conductor Maurice Abravanel and rehearsal pianist/vocal coach Lys Symonette. They both provided vital (and extremely colorful!) insight into the original production, and I will ever recall those interviews with the greatest fondness. I completed the job in June 1994. [Editor's note: Moody's "Notes to Conductor" are still in-

cluded in the rental score.] Also in 1994, tenor Dean Anthony was hired to sing the role of Danny Buchanan in a co-production of Houston Grand Opera, Theater im Pfalzhaus (Ludwigshafen), and Berlin's Theater des Westens. Francesca Zambello's staging, also conducted by James Holmes, yielded an essential DVD.

## Fast Forward to Summer 2017

It was obvious from the first rehearsal that Dean and I were of one mind as to perspective and approach. We set aside the standard *Street Scene* debate—is it an opera or a Broadway musical?—and focused instead on *how* the work should be presented. We came back to the same word again and again: the story must be *real*. Trust the concept envisioned by Elmer Rice, the lyrics of Langston Hughes (plus a bit of Walt Whitman), and the power of Weill's composition. Caricature, paraphrasing the text, or "loose" approach to rhythmic structure (which can be tempting in the jazzy sections of the score), only weaken the power of the work.

It was an absolute joy to watch the young cast at Brevard—singers, actors, dancers—evolve their own approach to Weill, from the overarching story down to details like the "skendels" of the "kepitalist" press, from the pain of living in a "Lonely House" to the power and hope found in "a sprig with its flower we break!" (It was summer in the South, so conveying the humid reality of "Ain't it Awful, the Heat?" came quite naturally!)

Having recently conducted several productions of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, my understanding of how Weill handled character relationships has grown as I made connections between one work and another. There is, for example, a strong correlation between Mrs. Maurrant (*Street Scene*) and Anna I (*Sins*). Anna Maurrant's aria ("Somehow I Never Could Believe") is as powerful a musical creation as "Vissi d'arte." But it's also a nearly spot-on "Reader's Digest" version of the entirety of Anna's (both I and II) journey in *The Seven Deadly Sins*. This "eureka" moment (and others like it) may be mine alone, but it had a great and positive effect on my approach to *Street Scene*. This bigger picture became a daily topic of conversation during the production at Brevard.

## Today and Beyond

Now seventy years old, *Street Scene* continues to increase in relevance. Not simply a period piece, this opera bears directly on modern discussions of race, socio-economic status, misogyny, ethnic and religious bias, and on and on. After Vietnam and Watergate, 9/11 and its aftermath, the linking of the world through social media, and an endless variety of "skendels," the Scene on today's Street is quite complicated. Our world—which couldn't be any more connected, or any more divided—throws paradoxes at us at every turn. Weill's opera tells us about our past but also foreshadows our future. The Brevard production, conversations with fellow artists, and response from audiences have led me to this: *Street Scene* is an authentic and honest work, poised to take a much larger place in the standard repertory. Now more than ever.

**Robert Moody**



PHOTO: JOHN ALLEN

"Wrapped in a Ribbon and Tied in a Bow" from Brevard's *Street Scene*

# Johnny Johnson

## Chicago Folks Operetta

Premiere: 24 June 2017

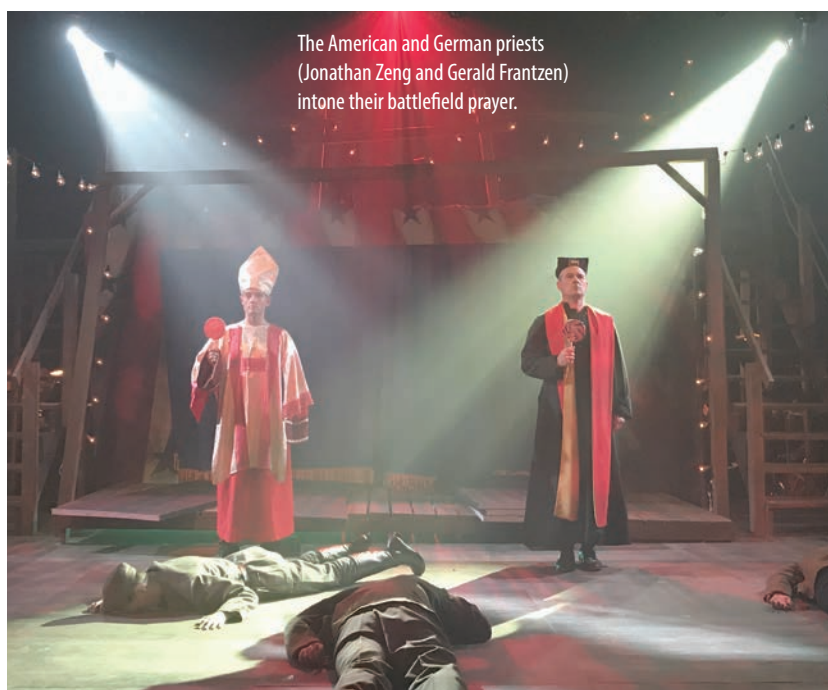
Kurt Weill's first stage work composed in the U.S. dates from 1936, a year after he found refuge here among fellow artists who welcomed him into the theater community, notably the Group Theatre, which presented this anti-war "play with music" with book and lyrics by Paul Green. *Johnny Johnson* ran only 68 performances on Broadway back then; it seems obvious now that it was the wrong time and place to beat the pacifist drum, particularly for Weill, whose first-hand knowledge of Hitler later made him a fervent supporter of U.S. entry into World War II.

Yet *Johnny Johnson* is a remarkable work, an important first step in the composer's unflagging effort to create American opera rooted in popular and folk music, full of top-drawer melodies and laced with trenchant satire. Green's somewhat rambling text may discourage today's producers, but its cheerfully ironic tone gives it chilling topicality in the era of Syria and Afghanistan, when warfare is the only alternative to isolationism. It really deserves to be heard more often.

Weill and Green's satirical fable follows the misadventures of Johnny, a small-town tombstone carver who swallows Woodrow Wilson's pledge that the Great War will bring permanent peace, enlists in the army, is sent to the trenches of France, and plunges into a violent world he cannot understand. He befriends a young German sniper he has been sent to kill. After he tries to stop the war by administering laughing gas to officers of the Allied High Command, he is arrested and sent to a mental hospital. Released years later into a world gearing up for another war, he sings a song of faith and hope for a better future for all mankind, one of the lyric gems in Weill's catalogue.

Chicago Folks Operetta performed a major rescue mission with a worthy production of an essential example of American musical theater (and gave the belated Chicago premiere in the process). Their revival took place exactly one hundred years after America entered World War I; the irony was not lost on the audience. Director George Cederquist relied on the critical edition of *Johnny Johnson* prepared by Tim Carter; aside from minor cuts and rearrangements of the dialogue, the script adhered closely to Weill and Green's intentions. The original orchestrations were retained, apart from the substitution, for practical reasons, of glockenspiel for vibraphone and electric keyboard for Hammond organ. The company presented as musically complete a *Johnny Johnson* as you'll find this side of the 1997 Erato recording conducted by Joel Cohen. The performance, which incorporated numbers cut from the original production, nearly all the dialogue, and an intermission, came in at two and a half hours.

The diverse score proved to be an ear-opener, in which Weill's borrowings from his European works (including the "Lied vom Brantweinändler" from *Happy End* and "Tango habañera"—later "Youkali"—from *Marie Galante*) rub elbows with



The American and German priests (Jonathan Zeng and Gerald Frantzen) intone their battlefield prayer.

PHOTO: AARON SYLER

pastiches and parodies of patriotic ballads and parlor songs, a tango, a Charleston, and a cowboy song. There also are passages of disturbing theatrical power, most notably the Statue of Liberty's song to the soldiers as they depart for war, a mordant lullaby sung by cannons to the sleeping doughboys, and an episode in which an American and a German chaplain recite the same prayer simultaneously in their respective languages.

*Johnny Johnson* was designed for singing actors (the original cast included Lee J. Cobb, Elia Kazan, and John Garfield) who can deliver long stretches of spoken dialogue intelligibly. Clear diction, alas, was not consistent among the hard-working ensemble of fifteen performers, ten of whom took multiple roles. Cederquist moved traffic effectively between the two levels of designer Eric Luchen's spare unit set and devised several striking set pieces, such as Johnny hallucinating Minny Belle in a gas mask moving like an angel of death across a field of dead soldiers. The music was entrusted to a sometimes scrappy offstage band of twelve players under Anthony Barrese's crisp direction.

Gabriel di Gennaro made an engagingly clueless Johnny, delivering his largely spoken role with assurance and tugging heartstrings with his optimistic final song. Other standouts among the large cast included Maxwell Seifert, doubling as the ladykiller Captain Valentine and loony psychiatrist Dr. Mahodan; Kaitlin Galetti as Johnny's hard-hearted sweetheart Minny Belle Tompkins; Robert Morrissey as the pompous Mayor and various military men; company artistic director Gerald Frantzen as the West Point Lieutenant and other roles; Teaira Burge as the seductive French nurse; and Joseph Frantzen as the terrified German sniper. Christine Steyer appeared to be singing in some strange foreign tongue as Lady Liberty.

**John Von Rhein**  
Chicago



# The Cradle Will Rock

## Opera Saratoga

Premiere: 9 July 2017

Marc Blitzstein's play in music, *The Cradle Will Rock*, received a rare performance with original orchestrations conducted by John Mauceri and directed by Lawrence Edelson in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. The orchestrations have not been heard in the U.S. since the New York City Opera production in 1960, and they prove that *Cradle* not only draws in audiences but deserves more respectful attention both to Blitzstein's musical creativity and the effectiveness of the script.

*Cradle* concerns workers' struggles against capitalism, embodied in Mr. Mister, who controls the imaginary Steeltown, USA and all its activities. The play takes place in a night court on the evening of a union drive. In an impeccable example of stylized agitprop theater, the story of Steeltown unfolds before the audience in ten cartoon-like scenes filled with archetypal characters. Flashbacks present the deeds of Mr. Mister and his Liberty Committee and alternate with explanatory comments from a prostitute and a broken-down druggist. As religious institutions sacrifice principle for earnings and artists sell their work to the highest bidder, the workers find power through organizing to overcome their subjection.

The play has not lost its political bite, as the rather exuberant and idealistic treatment of themes such as unionism, working-class struggle, and anti-immigrant sentiments finds many parallels today. The parodic portrayal of Mr. Mister and his Liberty Committee can't help but remind us of satirical *Saturday Night Live* sketches that entertain millions. Why, then, isn't *Cradle* more popular? Its legendary premiere, which catapulted Blitzstein and the work into celebrity, proved to be a two-edged sword. The Federal Theatre production was abruptly shut down by the government just before the first preview on 16 June 1937. The producers found another theater and marched the cast and the spectators uptown where, without scenery or costumes, actors performed from seats in the audience while Blitzstein himself accompanied them on an upright piano onstage. Blitzstein doubtless believed that the elaborate staging and orchestration of the Federal Theatre production would have enhanced the play, but the stripped-down premiere has defined the work ever since. *Cradle* has appeared on professional, amateur, student, and labor stages almost exclusively in its *déshabillé* form with piano accompaniment.



Mrs. Mister (Audrey Babcock) and Reverend Salvation (Justin Hopkins)

PHOTO: GARY DAVID GOLD

The production staged by Opera Saratoga uncovered a very entertaining stage piece filled with brilliant theatrical ideas and musical solutions. The performance was enjoyable, and the young cast responded to Blitzstein's rich and imaginative orchestration with excitement, though not all of them were vocally mature. The orchestra under Mauceri's direction revealed that the piano version had flattened Blitzstein's musical subtleties and at times rendered the characters quite bland; their individual stories gain a deeper and more convincing voice from the original orchestration, and a "sparring partner" that had been lost in the piano accompaniment. Thanks to Mauceri's enthusiasm, which he imparted to the Opera Saratoga Orchestra, the audience grasped the ways Blitzstein filtered dramatic situations of *Cradle*, sometimes seriously and sometimes jokingly, through the most appropriate American musical match for his characters. He treated the members of Mr. Mister's family and his subalterns on the Liberty Committee as vaudeville characters, portraying them with ironic and funny, almost corny, musical numbers: a waltz, a torch song, a foxtrot, even satirical quotations of Bach and Beethoven. For instance, bass-baritone Justin Hopkins in the role of Reverend Salvation let Blitzstein's orchestration guide him in emphasizing the solemnity of a Bach chorale accompanied by accordion, double bass, and trombone, while he brought out the irony of a sellout minister with the help of brilliant and at times parodic timbre of woodwinds and saxophones behind the wonderful warm tones of his voice.

Many other numbers acquired new life in the orchestral version.

For example, martial tempo and repetitive rhythmic patterns of the piano accompaniment combined with syllabic text-setting have often turned "Joe Worker," the song in which Ella Hammer seeks justice for the death of her brother, into a rather monotonous piece. There is no doubt that Nina Spinner's dramatically powerful interpretation of the song in this production attained such emotional depth thanks to the strings doubling her melody and the addition of clarinets in the *crescendo* passages to intensify the power of the lyrics.

*Cradle* came to embody the aspirations of a generation of leftist artists and intellectuals who believed in the social relevance of art; its sporadic revivals have until now paid homage to the show more as part of American history than as a viable theatrical piece. Luckily, Opera Saratoga will release a commercial recording of this production. That will help *Cradle* gain its rightful place as a theater work, so that its legacy can finally be shorn of the myths surrounding its premiere.

**Maria Cristina Fava**  
Western Michigan University

# Das Berliner Requiem and Other Works

**Orchestra and Chorus of Staatsoperette  
Dresden**  
**Ernst Theis, conductor**

CPO 777 839-2

Kurt Weill's *Berliner Requiem* (1928–29) appears on the two-CD set *Plays & Operas for the Radio*, the third volume in the series *Edition RadioMusiken*, a project of the Staatsoperette Dresden, Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, Deutschlandradio Kultur, and the Akademie der Künste. This admirable series presents music composed for the radio in Weimar Germany, some known only to specialists from old clippings and unpublished scores.

The selection of works on this album is one of its great strengths. Certain similarities stand out, especially in terms of instrumentation, well-defined rhythms (whether jazz-derived or not), and the predominance of mens' voices. But just as striking is the diversity of musical styles and dramatic forms. The *Berliner Requiem* stands out dramatically, in that all the other works have a well-defined plot (with the exception of the Haas overture, two versions of which bookend the set), from Hindemith's fleshing out of a folk ballad in *Sabinchen* to the tight, suspenseful narrative of Gronostay's crime thriller *Mord*. The *Requiem* is the earliest work on this recording, which helps us hear how the elements of Weill's song style influenced his contemporaries, especially in Wilhelm Grosz's *Bänkel und Balladen*, where Weill's style is pushed to an even jazzier extreme.

This CD set represents an important contribution to the discography of the *Berliner Requiem*. When the work is included in collections of Weill's music, we may hear it as a transitional work in the development of Weill's song style. Other recordings have struggled to contextualize the *Requiem* among the work of other composers (see, for example, Amy Wlodarski's review of the CD *Kaddish* in the Fall 2008 *Newsletter*). The present recording allows us to hear the *Berliner Requiem* in a new, largely unfamiliar, and eminently appropriate context: alongside contemporary works written specifically for broadcast.

The *Requiem* presents a particular problem in that we do not know exactly what form the work took when first broadcast in May 1929. Between 1928 and 1931, Weill repeatedly reordered, added, or cut numbers; no complete score of the work in any of these forms has been preserved. The version given here is David Drew's 1967 "practical performing edition." Yet the discussion of the *Requiem* in the CD booklet mostly summarizes Nils Grosch's research, in which he argues that Drew's version is well suited for concert performance but jettisons the original radio-specific character of the work. Grosch targets especially the *da capo* repetition of the chorale, "Lobet die Nacht." Listeners might also question the exclusion of "Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen," since this number was very likely part of the original broadcast. A recording of Drew's performing edition (perhaps omitting the repetition of the chorale), together with the various pieces that Weill also considered for inclusion, would be useful.



Modern recording of historical radio works presents challenges in evaluating the performances, as we discern in these renditions. The technology of the time was limited to a smaller dynamic range, and rhythms and text had to be articulated more clearly. Similarly, the nasal timbre audible in many recordings served to help the voice be heard against the instruments. The incomplete recording of the original broadcast of Hindemith's *Sabinchen* included here helps to orient the listener to some of these differences. The modern recordings on the album tend to steer a path between historically informed performance practice that applies the limitations of past technology to modern performance and one that takes advantage of modern technology at the expense of the distinctive sound of Weimar-era recordings. This recording of the *Requiem* has less emotional impact than others, with little dynamic contrast and a "square" approach to rhythm and delivery. Dispensing with the male chorus, however, lends the work a revealing clarity. In the other works, one notices that most of the singers involved are trained in modern musical theater and operetta, but this is less obvious in the *Requiem*.

Almost certainly for reasons of space, the CD booklet does not include the texts of any of the works, an unfortunate omission. Most of them are not well known or readily available. Placing the lyrics and libretti on a supplementary website, for example, along with translations, would make these seldom-heard pieces more accessible. But the booklet (in German and English) is generally excellent, with a mix of strong explanatory texts and well-chosen excerpts from historical documents. This recording is recommended, not necessarily for the performance of *Das Berliner Requiem*, but for shining a new light on it—and offering a new perspective on music of the Weimar era more generally—thanks to the other works in the set.

**John Gabriel**  
University of Hong Kong



# Wanted: Songs of Kurt Weill

Dagmar Pecková, mezzo-soprano, et al.

Supraphon SU 4226-2

# Thousands of Miles

Kate Lindsey, mezzo-soprano and  
Baptiste Trotignon, piano

Alpha Classics 272

There's a tradition of opera singers tackling music that lies outside their standard repertoire; Richard Tauber is possibly the best-known example, but Peter Anders took on Lehár and Strauss, while Gitta Alpar delivers Paul Abraham with the same ease she brings to Leoncavallo. Teresa Stratas's groundbreaking recording of previously unknown Weill songs was followed by a second exploration of more familiar material; Anne Sofie von Otter and, most notably, Dawn Upshaw have also offered their own takes on well-known Weill songs.

The two recent CDs under consideration here are, alas, not in that class. Dagmar Pecková's selection of fifteen Weill songs includes numbers from his German, French, and American years. I know one shouldn't judge a CD by its cover, but my heart sank at the sight of the image adorning the accompanying booklet: a transgender photo, complete with bowler hat, mustache, dangling cigarette—looking suspiciously like a famous shot of Raul Julia as Macheath.

When the music started my fears were all too quickly confirmed. The first track, "Surabaya-Johnny," must be one of the most pedestrian renditions ever recorded. Weill's original marking, "Sehr ruhig: Blues," does not make it easy to set a tempo, but "ruhig" does not mean "slow"—it's an indication of how to deliver the song. The walking (or marching) bass that he deploys in the piano part indicates movement, not stasis. In Pecková's hands, the number begins as a funeral procession—and, given how elderly she makes the protagonist sound, I couldn't help conjuring images of her on a walker, telling her lengthy tale of misery and screeching at poor old Johnny, who, one suspects, would have taken his pipe out of his mouth and headed over the horizon without waiting for verses two and three. Weill makes his intentions for the section preceding the refrain ("Du sagtest viel, Johnny ...") perfectly clear: the dynamic marking is *mf* (until the last verse), and the line "nimm doch die Pfeife aus dem Maul, du Hund" is to be spoken on a *diminuendo*. Pecková disregards the

composer's instructions, apparently confusing *Sprechgesang* with *Schreigesang*.

Unfortunately, the persistent choice of tempi that plod where they should skip or stroll continues throughout—exceptions being a lively version of the "Kanonen-Song" featuring vocalists Jiří Hajek and Jan Kučera; an engaging take on the "Alabama-Song" with a male chorus in the background; and the "Moritat," which lets loose both a jazz band and chamber orchestra to overwhelm Weill's brilliant orchestration.

Kate Lindsey has augmented her recording of Weill songs with more traditional examples of the *Lied* from Zemlinsky, Korngold, and Alma Mahler. It's hard to follow the justification for this juxtaposition. Her interpretations of these *Lieder* certainly offer something to the listener, but it would have made for a more coherent CD to bring in composers like Paul Abraham, Mischa Spoliansky, and Friedrich Hollaender, who have suffered neglect comparable to if not greater than that of their classical counterparts.

Lindsey and her pianist have indicated that they are looking to close the distance between classical music and Broadway, between the old world and the new. A commendable aim, but if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then the dishes offered here are at times rather too rich. The delivery of the text is almost invariably (to continue with the culinary analogy) over-egged: emotions are poured out over the listener at various inappropriate stages, veering (as in the third stanza of "Nannas Lied") between contempt and overemphasis before—predictably—milking "Wo sind die Tränen" for every last drop of emotion. But such melodrama deployed against Weill's and Brecht's restrained (and all the more powerful for it) depiction of brutalization has to take second place to a mashup of "Seeräuberjenny" and "Barbara-Song." Introduced by an extended piano riff, Lindsey launches a violent attack on the audience on behalf of young Jenny. And she continues spitting out the text (*Spuckgesang*?) with the verse of the "Barbara-Song," taking it at a funereal tempo, as Weill's deft piano accompaniment undergoes significant revision and expansion. Pianist Baptiste Trotignon explains why he has undertaken this "improvement" on the

original: apparently because Weill's piano parts are "a little bit boring," and were made by copyists. Certainly not the case in the "Barbara-Song," composed for piano and voice for three verses, with winds and banjo added only for the final refrain. But thanks to Trotignon, I get it now. Weill didn't really know how to write for the piano ...

Michael Morley  
Flinders University

