

Major Derivative Works and their Adaptors or Arrangers (continued)

Lost in the Stars

Cry, the Beloved Country: David Drew

Marie galante

Chansons des quais Kim Kowalke/John Baxindine

Suite panaméenne David Drew/HK Gruber

“Youkali” (violin and piano): Bruno Garlej

Music from plays

Bastille Music: David Drew (*Gustav III*)

Öl-Musik: David Drew (*Konjunktur*)

Railroads on Parade

Trains Bound for Glory: David Drew

Die sieben Todsünden

Version for low voice: Wilhelm Brückner-Rüggeberg

Arrangement for two pianos and optional percussion:

John Greer

Die sieben Todsünden (continued)

Version for 15 players: HK Gruber/Christian

Muthspiel

Der Silbersee

Silbersee-Gesänge: David Drew

Suite (for Orchestra): Karel Salomon

Songs

Song-Suite for Violin and Orchestra: Paul Bateman

Arrangements and adaptations of individual songs, too numerous to list.

Street Scene

Street Scenes: Kim Kowalke/Lys Symonette

Zaubernacht

Kleine Zaubernachtmusik: John Baxindine

Waltz for violin and piano: Meirion Bowen

Happy End

Kurt Weill Edition, Series I, Volume 6 Edited by Stephen Hinton and Elmar Juchem

New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; European American Music Corp., 2020. 240 pp. (Critical Report 61 pp.)
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This musical play was born under an unlucky star. Despite the high expectations of the creative team and the producer, and a promising title, it failed to repeat the success of its predecessor *Die Dreigroschenoper*, much less exceed it.

One cannot ignore the close relationship between the two works. The crooks-as-protagonists pitted against their counterparts, both armies (beggars in one and the Salvation Army in the other); the epic theater form with songs interrupting the narrative; the settings in great metropolises: nineteenth-century London and twentieth-century Chicago. The shifts of time and place from one piece to the other mark the change from the “old world” of Europe to the new world of America, with its endless Hollywood promises of “happy endings.” *Happy End* self-consciously followed *Die Dreigroschenoper* in many ways: it was billed the same way (“play with music”), and it came from the same team—Kurt Weill, Bertolt Brecht, Elisabeth Hauptmann, Caspar Neher, Erich Engel, Theo Mackeben, and the Lewis Ruth Band. It also chalked up its own theatrical scandal when it premiered on 2 September 1929, as its creators had hoped, but failed to pack the same wallop. Whereas the premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper* marked the onset of an unprecedented global success, *Happy End* saw an outburst of protest against its critique of capitalism. Critics and audience cheered the actors’ performances (especially that of Carola Neher as Lilian Holiday) and Weill’s rousing score, but it did not good; the new play failed to take its triumphant place on German stages.

To this day, Brecht scholars persist in maintaining that it ran only a few performances before closing, but it did not disappear from the bill until 1 October, a month later, for the simplest reason: the paying customers stopped coming. *Happy End* was not performed again in Weill’s or Brecht’s lifetime, although the music enjoyed an afterlife on radio and recordings (again like *Dreigroschenoper*) and even onstage as isolated songs. But the work was silenced until the late 1950s, long after the Nazi ban on Weill and Brecht had ended.

The quick disappearance of *Happy End* had serious consequences for the transmission of the script and musical materials. Brecht used a chaotic rehearsal process in part to rewrite and complete Hauptmann’s unfinished play, whereas Weill, under great time pressure, made changes to the score which were communicated only orally to the musicians. These were only two of the reasons for the disorder that afflicted the performance materials. A more important reason was that the immediate failure of the show kept it from moving to another theater, which would have required a thorough revision of the performance materials—raising the question, which of the countless changes made during rehearsals would have been retained for further productions? Which of the countless corrections, insertions, and elaborations would have become official? How would the authors have solved the problem of the ending, which they argued over and which was hopelessly marred in the first performance?

These questions cannot be answered, because the script and score were never cleaned up and reorganized into a coherent whole, and the gaps in those manuscripts continue to pose problems. The text sources exist in the form of numerous typescripts and carbon copies with handwritten insertions, notes, and corrections, available in the Brecht Archives and Hauptmann Archives in Berlin. Making sense of the sources is no easy matter, because they date from various phases of preparation of the piece; reconstructing each phase of the writing and placing them in the proper order is complicated. All the materials contain markings in Brecht’s and Hauptmann’s hands, and further hands that cannot be identified. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Brecht and Hauptmann used material from *Happy End* for other projects, such as *Der Brotladen* and *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*. The musical sources were no less difficult to sort

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Happy End
Eine Magazingeschichte von Dorothy Lane
Deutsche Bearbeitung: Elisabeth Hauptmann
Songs: Brecht und Weill
Regie: Erich Engel und Brecht
Musikal. Leitung: Theo Mackeben
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Opening night program for *Happy End*.



out. Thanks to the sheer number of changes Weill made during rehearsals, there is no fair copy of the score that reflects what was played at the premiere. Busy with other projects, Weill saw no urgent need to record all the corrections and additions made to the score—that could be put off to a later date, but that later date never arrived. Even if it had, Weill still would have been hobbled by the fact that despite his efforts, he was unable to collect all the musical material after the premiere.

In 1932 Hauptmann and Brecht assembled a scenario and script, creating a usable record of the work that had not emerged from the rehearsal process. In doing so, they (unintentionally) left out “Das Lied von der harten Nuss,” and they changed the ending, scorned by audiences and critics alike, by removing “Hosiannah Rockefeller.” Not until 1958 did the publishers (Universal Edition and Felix Bloch Erben) prepare a performing version for theaters, although neither Hauptmann nor the widows of Weill and Brecht took part—or if they did there is no record of it, nor is there any record of the sources used, how they were chosen, or the personnel involved. Finally in 1977 the complete script was published for the first time in a posthumous collection of Hauptmann’s writings titled *Julia ohne Romeo*. It appeared with the following note: “Our text follows the performing script issued in 1958 by Felix Bloch Erben.” The published script does contain all the songs, except “Hosiannah Rockefeller,” but the placement is changed in some cases.

Both the composition of the work and its publication history form a long odyssey for both the text of the piece and its performing materials. Now the Kurt Weill Edition presents

a newly edited score and complete text, along with a separate Critical Report. The edition was evidently a difficult undertaking for editors Stephen Hinton and Elmar Juchem from the outset. The publishers were unable to provide complete, definitive material, and no source preserves the entire score with music and lyrics complete. The score now before us, for the first time in the work’s publication history, fits together the music and book as a coherent musical drama, with the script and songs fully integrated in relation to each other. Considering the poor state of the materials that have come down to us, the editors were obliged to pull together a great variety of textual and music sources and examine them critically to determine their reliability and usefulness. The editors made two direct interventions in the musical text: devising a piano part for “Das Lied von der harten Nuss” (the original still has not been found) and preparing two versions of “Surabaya-Johnny,” one presented in the main text, the other, with an alternative orchestration, in an appendix.

The Edition was obliged to take account of other matters as well, notably various arrangements made of songs from *Happy End* (e.g., for voice and piano, or salon orchestra) intended for both professional ensembles and for home use. The editors’ research uncovered recordings made on the Electrola, Ultraphon, and Orchestrola labels from the fall of 1929, both vocal performances (mainly with Lotte Lenya) and instrumental versions. Although we know that the recordings made use of new arrangements, they still relied heavily on Weill’s orchestrations.

In the Introduction to the volume, Stephen Hinton presents and discusses the sources that were lost, recovered, and in some cases lost again, making their mark on the unusual textual history of this work. He provides for the first time a broad-based and clear overview of the complicated saga not only of *Happy End* but of the musical and textual materials that embody it. He begins by contextualizing the piece “in the shadow of *Die Dreigroschenoper*” and goes on to describe the collective work that gave birth to it, the initial development of the basic idea, and the importance of rehearsals in the creation of the final version of the score and script. The Introduction also documents editorial challenges and how they were met, covers reception history, detailing how the work disappeared after the premiere and did not come to light again until after World War II, and closes with a review of the literature and a section on performance practice. The Critical Report provides other essential pieces of the puzzle; the editors describe source material in detail and lay out the underpinning of the edition in detailed notes on their decisions, thereby giving users a basis on which to evaluate their efforts.

The new edition of *Happy End* has vast significance for theaters and theater scholars alike, because it reconstructs the complete work from its sources, presenting the piece as a whole for the first time. As you might say, the editors’ work represents—ninety years after *Happy End* was first presented—a long-overdue happy ending.

Joachim Lucchesi
Schopfheim

Street Scene

Opera North
Matthew Eberhardt, director
James Holmes, conductor

Premiere: 18 January 2020

Few operas evoke a stronger sense of community than *Street Scene*, set in a tenement where social distancing is impossible, so it was both poignant and inevitable that Opera North's much-anticipated run of Weill's American masterpiece should have been cut short by the COVID-19 shutdown. But it did fare better than the majority of opera productions in 2020 and enjoyed enough performances to augment the impressive tally of Opera North's Weill productions (stretching back more than thirty-five years and including an especially notable *One Touch of Venus* in 2004). The common denominator to many of them has been conductor James Holmes, a Weill specialist who has a long record with *Street Scene* going back to English National Opera's production three decades ago; his credentials include studying the work with Lys Symonette, Weill's assistant for the original show. The experience shows; Opera North's orchestra was very much at home in the idiom. Holmes kept the long first act moving, and conjured up the rhythmic buzz and soaring lyricism of the entire score.

Street Scene is Weill's American opera. He labeled it as such, ultimately rejecting the official subtitle, "dramatic musical," and for good reason; it is the one genre evoked throughout the score. That ought to have ruled out amplification, but alas it was used here, blunting the words and generally smoothing things out in a way that contributed to a slight tameness hovering over the evening. The issues raised in this slice of New York life remain enduringly contemporary, so it's surprising how seldom one encounters

non-period or at least non-naturalistic productions of the piece. This staging was no exception, yet its naturalism could have been hotter and dirtier, its costumes a little less neatly pressed.

In almost every other respect, Matthew Eberhardt's staging (a co-production with Theater Magdeburg) hit the mark. *Street Scene* had a strong social message when it first appeared in 1947, and its conscience remains undiminished; it certainly blazed across the footlights here. (What would lyricist Langston Hughes make of today's world?) One departure from most other productions was provided by Francis O'Connor's ingenious set, which turned things inside-out, giving us the hallway and stairwell of the tenement rather than the familiar brownstone facade and street view. Further expressionistic possibilities went unexplored, but the space was cleverly used thanks to Gary Clarke's slick choreography, and any danger of the cast resembling birds perched in an aviary was mostly avoided. Howard Hudson's atmospheric lighting also kept things fluid.

The four principal roles were finely drawn. As Anna Murrant, Giselle Allen gave a moving performance that captured all the heartache and emptiness of this heroine's existence. Mrs. Murrant is the most "operatic" of all the roles, and Allen brought power and poignant depth to the jaded Puccinian lines of "Somehow I Never Could Believe." Robert Hayward, who took time off from Weill to sing a potent Alberich in the London Philharmonic's *Siegfried*, delivered a well-calculated Frank Murrant, balanced between brutish inflexibility and helpless inarticulateness; not even Mr. Murrant is a villain, just another victim of the tenement building's dehumanizing trap. Gillene Butterfield and Alex Banfield were plucked from the chorus and had lighter voices; she brought a touch of fragility to Rose's "What Good Would the Moon Be?" and he had the shy intensity for Sam, rendering a very moving "Lonely House," worthy of the young poet that he is.

Opera North's reputation for teamwork was upheld by the rest of the large cast and excellent chorus. Dean Robinson made a hot-headed Mr. Kaplan, and Claire Pascoe a vicious Mrs. Jones in leading the trio of gossiping housewives. Christopher Turner was an ebullient Lippo Fiorentino, and Amy Freston suitably *frum* as Shirley Kaplan, Sam's sister, who decries intermarriage. As the janitor Henry Davis, Byron Jackson sang a wonderfully bluesy "I Got a Marble and a Star"; Quirijn de Lang was suitably silver-tongued as Rose's sleazy boss. Laura Kelly-McInroy portayed a girlish Jennie Hildebrand yet held the stage in "Wrapped in a Ribbon and Tied in a Bow." Michelle Andrews and Rodney Vubya came on strong as the jitterbugging duo Mae and Dick, and Lorna James and Hazel Croft stood out as the Nursemaids. Has their lullaby ever sounded more sardonic or cynical?

One of the great strengths of *Street Scene*—a piece of fierce social criticism, to be sure, but much more than that—is that Weill sought to uplift as well as provoke, and this production struck a fine balance in capturing the work's humanity, with a melancholy tone that one felt even more acutely when the show's full run fell victim to the pandemic.

John Allison
Opera Magazine

PHOTO: CLIVE BARDA



Members of the supporting cast assemble on the "inside-out" set.

Die sieben Todsünden and other works

Staatsoper Hamburg
Frank Castorf, director
Kent Nagano, conductor

Premiere: 5 September 2020

A sharp change of direction at the Staatsoper led to an unforeseen premiere in this pandemic era that has decimated the performing arts. Nothing like this ever happened before, and it certainly was not in the cards on 12 March, when lockdown went into effect on the Elbe. The company was forced to dream up an entirely new season—inexpensive but not lightweight, intimate, unconventional. And no intermissions allowed.

Enter Frank Castorf. Once a frequent guest director at the Hamburg Schauspielhaus, the former lion of the Berliner Volksbühne, well known there for his distinctive style and temperament, expected to start the season with Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. But it was not to be after COVID-19 changed everything. Though Castorf grumbled about Chancellor Merkel and called for popular resistance to government measures to slow the spread of the virus, he changed his program like a good little boy. He came up with the title "Molto agitato," two hours of thrown-together music that Castorf presented with little apparent excitement or pleasure on Hamburg's huge, mostly bare stage. "Più lento" would have been a more appropriate tempo indication for this crude assemblage of pieces that had little to do with each other but came from composers with ties to Hamburg: Handel, Ligeti, Brahms—and, for some reason, Weill.

Castorf's favored designer, Aleksandar Đenić, created a neon American flag that moved around on a cart, forming a visual exclamation point. Another flag waved around realistically, and a third burned at the end. There was also a banner bearing the spray-painted motto "Sex and Lies," which he borrowed from his controversial but bracing production of the *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth in 2013. So much for Castorf's usual symbols, duly filmed live by two onstage cameramen. Not particularly angry or agitato. His sample case of implements, which he has spent decades sharpening, have nonetheless become dull. The latest trotting out of his toolkit offers few revelations, lacks a real narrative, and is not even particularly strong in its imagery. Part of the package are once again the glamor-slut costumes by Adriana Braga Peretzki for the three acting/singing/speaking ladies.

Kent Nagano led an orchestra reduced by distancing in Handel's "Entrance of the Queen of Sheba," which sounded muted and very dry. Castorf obviously likes the work, because he framed it with the hilarious clip of James Bond (Daniel Craig) parachuting into the stadium with the Queen at the 2012 Olympics. He also likes Quentin Tarantino's film *Reservoir Dogs*, so we were treated to a projection of an ugly torture scene from it later on, before the beginning of *Die sieben Todsünden*. It all made him look like an overgrown kid playing with his theater toys.



Valery Tscheplanowa
with soda bottle and
a neon American flag
behind her.

PHOTO: MONIKA RITERSHAUS

After all that music there was some loud, vulgar drivel about Madonna's "Like a Virgin" delivered by baritone Georg Nigl in nasty Viennese and tenor Matthias Klink in a strained Swabian accent. This by way of an introduction to Ligeti's insanely difficult exercise in nonsense, *Nouvelles aventures*, performed by seven musicians onstage and flawlessly vocalized by Nigl, Katharina Konradi, and Jana Kurucová. Then we got a snippet from Handel's pastorale "Aci, Galatea e Polifemo" along with an animated nudie film made in the Soviet Union that made me long for the centaurs in Disney's rendering of *Sacre du printemps* in *Fantasia*.

Such an assortment of thematic flashcards displayed in this gargantuan space, thinly populated due to hygiene regulations, does not make theatrical sense; Castorf's little still lifes don't look like much on a big opera house stage, either. Finally he achieved some focus in the finale we were all waiting for: Weill and Brecht's iconic-satiric ballet *Die sieben Todsünden*, in which Castorf's love-hate relationship with America and its myths generated by pop music and movies meets a critique of capitalism. The work comes across less as opera than as intense music theater.

The fabulous Valery Tscheplanowa—a magnificently broken-down yet strong and hard-as-nails *disease*—portrayed both the singer Anna I and the dancer Anna II in a crackling red patent leather dress, sipping from a soda bottle on a stage that looked like an empty runway. She has presence to burn, and a now harsh, now defiantly drawn out *Sprechsingsang*. And the Family singing "Müßiggang ist aller Laster Anfang"—more of that, please! The male quartet, already having performed Brahms's *Vier Gesänge*, stay way in the back, pattering around their Louisiana living room with lots of pictures on the walls. Hardly revolutionary, but it goes down smoothly enough as an anticapitalist classic. The fifteen-member ensemble performing Gruber and Muthspiel's orchestration had to work to be heard in the vast hall.

The verdict: Uninspired junk. Maybe Castorf ought to let Angela Merkel take over.

Manuel Brug
Die Welt

Note: HK Gruber and Christian Muthspiel's orchestration of *Die sieben Todsünden* for fifteen players is intended for circumstances in which the original orchestrations cannot be performed. It was premiered 21 September 2019 in Bonn (see review in the Fall 2019 *Newsletter*) and has been performed several times since.

Die sieben Todsünden, Das Berliner Requiem, Violin Concerto

Los Angeles Philharmonic
Esa-Pekka Salonen, Conductor

7-9, 13-15 February 2020

As an insidious and deadly virus was beginning to infiltrate America, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, known for its cutting-edge programming, was taking a deep dive into music from the Weimar Republic led by conductor laureate Esa-Pekka Salonen (he led the orchestra from 1992 to 2009). The festival featured a panoply of events, including film screenings, an off-site cabaret, and a performance of Kurt Schwitters's epic sound poem, *Ursonate*. It opened with a program of works by Paul Hindemith, Arnold Schoenberg, and Kurt Weill, whose Violin Concerto was performed by soloist Carolin Widmann.

Written in 1924, the seldom heard work is unusual in its orchestration: seven woodwinds, three brasses, four double basses, and a trio of percussionists. The ensemble might seem small, yet the concerto is nevertheless dramatic, bursting with unexpected resolve. As Weill wrote to his publisher, "The work is inspired by the idea—one never carried out before—of juxtaposing a single violin with a chorus of winds." That idea became profound in the hands of Munich-born Widmann, whose playing was both meticulous and searching, moving from lyrical and playful to dynamic and textured. Abetted by Salonen's crisp direction and the sure-handed band, the impressive three-movement work bore hints of Weill's theatricality to come. Beginning with a somber, dirge-like first movement, the concerto features a second movement consisting of three connected character pieces offering vigorous timbral interplay. Here the solo violin took on the xylophone and trumpet at different times, not to mention whooping it up with oboe and flute, with a crisp and colorful range of sounds all very much alive in the pristine acoustics of Disney Hall. And while the music appeared to grow spikier as it progressed, the finale is a whirlwind of dancery but dissonant effects that galloped towards a satisfying conclusion. Widmann's impressive debut with the L.A. Philharmonic coincided with another debut: the orchestra performed this work for the first time in its hundred-year history.

Framing the evening were two pieces by Hindemith: His blink-and-you'll-miss-it "Rag Time (on a theme of J. S. Bach)," which riffs on Bach's C-Minor Fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, is rambunctious, brassy, and highly entertaining, while the *Mathis der Maler* Symphony, from 1934, is of an entirely different ilk. Aided by surtitles, the work wove its way from quiet chordal structures to the momentous grandeur of thunderous percussion. Schoenberg also went back to Bach in orchestrating two chorale preludes, "Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele" and "Komm, Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist." His beefed-up Bach—first performed by the L.A. Philharmonic in 1935 with the composer conducting—became a glittery contrapuntal extravaganza in Salonen's deft handling.



Gabriella Schmidt (Anna II)
and Nora Fischer (Anna I) in
Die sieben Todsünden

PHOTO: FARAH SOSA

For the second week of the festival, "Weimar Nightfall," the conductor plunged into the revolutionary aspects of Weimar musical theater and recruited the esteemed brothers McBurney, music consultant/dramaturge Gerard and director Simon, and commissioned production and video designs from Anna Fleischle and Will Duke, respectively.

Opening with Hindemith's *Murderer, Hope of Women*, performed against stark projections that more than anything resembled concrete wreckage, this one-act 1919 opera, based on a scandalous text by Oskar Kokoschka, announced itself with horns and trombones and was peppered throughout with sex of all stripes, ranging from blatantly brutal to distressed to bacchanalian. The 25-minute drama features a warrior (Man), ably sung by baritone Christopher Purves, who conquers Woman, the mesmerizing soprano Madeleine Bradbury Rance, with Salonen making exceptional use of his sizeable orchestra. While the staging was minimal, the upshot was maximal in its disturbing dissonance, offering an uncommon blend of musical and emotional force which served as a prelude to the even darker *Berliner Requiem*. Weill's choral cantata features settings of some of Bertolt Brecht's gloomiest texts for male voices (Purves and tenor Peter Hoare) accompanied by wind band plus organ. Composed in 1928 for radio—an emerging technology, with which Weill was fully engaged and aware of both technical and social issues—the opus was a response to the tenth anniversary of the end of World War I.

A memorial to many people named and unnamed, including an unknown soldier from that war, a young woman who committed suicide, and the murdered socialist Rosa Luxemburg, the music makes stunning use of saxophones, as well as guitar and banjo. Far from jazzy, however, the work projected an austere feeling. The drama was enhanced by grainy black and white video imagery—Berlin street life in the 20s, a hurtling train, and goose-stepping Nazis for the "Legend of the Unknown Soldier Beneath the Triumphal Arch." Hoare and Purves gave achingly beautiful renderings, with Salonen again proving razor-sharp as the polyphony of Weill's lines shifted from moody and lyrical to bracingly resonant in this performance, another first for the L.A. Philharmonic.

Without intermission, the concert closed with *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Just after both Weill and Brecht went into exile during a time of immense political upheaval in Europe, they created this *ballet chanté* (sung ballet), their final full-length collaboration. A scathing critique of industrial capitalism, and of an America Weill and Brecht had never visited, the work was commissioned by a wealthy Englishman, Edward James, who proposed a main character (Anna) split into singing and dancing halves. Here, Anna I, a shrewd, caustic, ultra-modern woman, was sung by the splendid soprano Nora Fischer, whose silvery voice soared; Anna II, a hustling cabaret hooper/Hollywood wannabe—“the girl degraded into a commodity” as Weill biographer Jürgen Schebera had it—was provocatively danced by Gabriella Schmidt.

The work reinterprets the canonical deadly sins—Sloth, Pride, Wrath, Gluttony, Lust, Greed, and Envy—for a capitalist universe. We first encounter the sisters at home in Louisiana, where the family—father, mother, and two brothers performed by a quartet of male singers (Jarrett Ott and Simon Bode along with Purves and Hoare)—warns them against Sloth. Our heroines then begin a seven-year journey to seek their fortune in order to make enough money to build a small house back home. Pride is set to a waltz in which Anna II ends up dancing topless at a cabaret. (Movement director/choreographer Leah Hausman fashioned dances that, at times, contained allusions to Fosse, as well as period-type gestures from flapperesque to shimmying.) But since “pride is for rich people,” the Annas are deployed to Los Angeles to work at a movie studio only to get fired after Anna II can’t repress her Wrath. The scene makes use of a fine foxtrot; Weill’s orchestration sets up a dazzling contrast between woodwinds and strings. The male quartet, a sly nod to barbershop style, returns in Gluttony, when Anna, who has inked a film contract,

is warned against overeating. Then Lust rears its head, as Anna II becomes a kept woman, forced to stay with wealthy paramour; the propulsive score includes wisps of Broadway-like fare. Greed features an aria for the father while the stage teems with iPhone selfies (anachronistic but still cool), spangles (costumes by Fleischle), and clownish makeup. It’s no surprise, then, that an exhausted Anna II is consumed with Envy for those who need not work before the Annas return to Louisiana and the new home they’ve paid for.

It was impossible to hear this music during those two weekends in February without thinking of our world today, where fascism, and more recently the coronavirus, have been on the rise, taking lives all over the world. While the performances had few blatant references to life in 2020, the concerts felt wholly relevant, replete with a nagging dread that the world has truly changed. Indeed, when our jobs now are to stay safe, healthy, and six feet apart—and going to the concert hall seems like a luxury from the past—there is solace in hearing our favorite orchestras, composers, and musicians from afar, whether streamed, downloaded, or powered by various media platforms. And knowing that Weill, who made use of radio, the new technology of *his* time, would not only have embraced this era, but would also have taken full advantage of musical distancing tools, gives these performances in retrospect an added jolt of chilly reality.

Victoria Looseleaf
Los Angeles

Zeitgenossenschaft!

Ernst Krenek und Kurt Weill im Netzwerk der Moderne

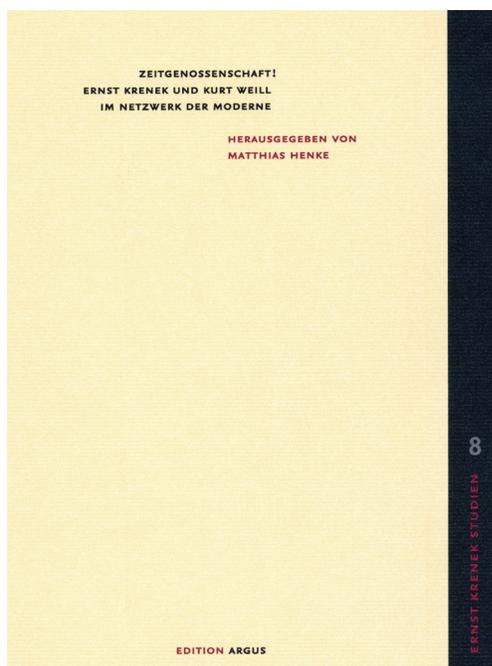
Matthias Henke, ed.
(Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2019)

ISBN: 978-3-931264-37-6

In 1928 Karl Mannheim posited a theory of generational consciousness in a ground-breaking essay, “The Problem of Generations.” Might this be the unspoken premise of the present volume? Two composers born in 1900, coming of age in postwar Berlin at the dawn of the Weimar Republic, nourished and propagated by a burgeoning new music festival culture, finding fame and notoriety toward the end of the decade with two wildly successful operas, and, just a few years later, being forced into exile, ultimately landing in the United States. What do the lives and works of Ernst Krenek and Kurt Weill tell us about what Matthias Henke calls the “shared destiny of contemporaries”

(*Schicksalsgemeinschaft von Zeitgenossen*)? This collection of essays, which grew out of a conference at the Kurt Weill Fest Dessau 2016, attempts to tease out both the arresting parallels and the still more striking dissimilarities between two of the era’s most representative figures and their place within the “network of modernity.”

Krenak and Weill may have shared networks, but they inhabited very different esthetic spheres with few direct intersections. This comes through clearly in Joachim Lucchesi’s chapter on Bertolt Brecht, Reinke Schwinning’s discussion of Ernst Bloch, and Ulrich Wilker’s examination of Alexander Zemlinsky, whose links to Weill were considerably stronger than to Krenak. On the other hand, Paul Bekker, as we read in Andreas Eichhorn’s essay, was an early champion of Krenak’s work and had a close working relationship with the composer in Kassel and Wiesbaden. Bekker’s skepticism toward Weill began to change only in 1932 when he staged *Die Bürgschaft*—his last



production in Wiesbaden. These essays, however lopsided, provide valuable surveys of the literature and raise interesting, if unasked, questions. To what extent, for instance, did Weill and Krenek find common ground in their mutual aversion to Brecht's critique of opera? Or how might one apply Bloch's principle of hope to a work such as *Jonny spielt auf*? A pity there is no article on Hans Heinsheimer, head of Universal Edition's opera division. In matters both artistic and practical he was the principal interlocutor of each composer during the years of their greatest success.

Correspondence with Universal Edition is a central source for essays by Claudia Maurer Zenck on the Krolloper and Jürgen Schebera on the Städtische Oper Leipzig that illuminate the role of individual conductors and stage directors (Otto Klemperer and Ernst Legal in Berlin, Gustav Brecher and Walther Brüggemann in Leipzig) in establishing the renown of each house as a center for contemporary opera. The Krolloper may be better known today, but Leipzig—with three Weill and two Krenek premieres, including *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* and *Jonny spielt auf*—proved more influential.

Four essays are devoted to comparisons of individual works. Marco Hoffmann examines the varying strategies by which Krenek's *Der Diktator* and Weill's *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* mirror and comment upon their times. Stefan Weiss's perceptive discussion of the two violin concertos reveals, among other things, how Universal's aggressive campaign for Krenek's work (as opposed to a more perfunctory effort for the relative newcomer Weill) helps account for the disparity in performances between the two. Matthias Henke's treatment of Weill and Krenek's Rilke settings is sensitive and enlightening, although he misses an interesting opportunity. In 1920, Weill—then at the height of his Rilke enthusiasm—appeared as an accompanist in the only known contemporary performance of Franz Schreker's Rilke setting, "Und wie mag die Liebe." Although the experience left few traces on Weill's *Stundenbuch*, one can readily see interesting points of comparison—particularly in text

setting and vocal writing—between this Schreker song (as well as his Whitman settings of 1923) and Krenek's "Ô Lacrimosa." That Schreker is virtually absent from these essays no doubt owes something to a generally uncritical reliance upon Krenek's often venomous autobiography, *In Atem der Zeit*. Leanne García Alós's discussion of the two first published string quartets traces Busoni's influence on Weill but downplays the technical mastery that Schreker instilled in his students. Curiously, Weill absorbed with good grace Busoni's stiff critique of his quartet, whereas Krenek, who had initially withheld the work from his teacher, professed outrage at Schreker's praise.

Three chapters address broader sociological issues. Kristina Schierbaum contrasts Krenek, a precocious only child, with Weill, a gifted son in an extended family bound up in a tight-knit religious and cultural community, although she draws no conclusions about how this may have made for differences in their esthetic philosophies. A fascinating chapter by Nils Grosch explores the American "exile" of both composers within the context of mobility studies. Weill embraced the challenge of his new environment, whereas Krenek eventually yearned to connect with Europe's postwar avant-garde. Finally, Andreas Zeising's discerning analysis of portrait photographs around the time of *Jonny* and the *Dreigroschenoper* ends with a coda discussing images from the years of Weill's Broadway celebrity, with no corresponding comment on Krenek. Was Krenek so underexposed in the U.S.?

This is a handsomely produced volume—its spotty index aside—that provides a wealth of solid research but is largely limited to cautious comparative analysis. It lacks an interpretive framework. To understand the underlying dynamics of *Zeitgenossenschaft* one might well go back to Karl Mannheim, who argued that generational perspectives are shaped by concrete events experienced in childhood and adolescence. For Ernst Krenek and Kurt Weill, the collapse of a stable world order in war, revolution, and hyper-inflation, followed by a decade of precipitous change and disruption in technology (transportation, communications, recording, radio, sound film), social relations, economic structures, and political systems, forged a singular generational consciousness. Perhaps another book will tell *that* story.

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Lotte Lenya Remembers:

In 1932, when I did *Mahagonny* in Vienna for a limited engagement, after the opening the publisher gave a little party. Weill couldn't come because he was working on his new opera in Berlin, so I sat next to Ernst Krenek, but he didn't say anything. I said, "Well, evidently you didn't like it." he said, "No, I hated it. I'm sorry, Lenya. I loved you, but I hate the work. I think it's raw and vicious." Then in 1937, when we saw him in New York, he said, "Lenya, do you remember that night in Vienna after the opening?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Now I understand. Having lived in this country for two years, now I understand *Mahagonny* much better than I did then."

Ein Hauch von Venus

Staatsoperette Dresden cast recording
Peter Christian Feigel, conductor

Hitsquad Records 668416

One Touch of Venus has had particular difficulty finding its place in the German canon of classic Broadway musicals. When Weill's agent Leah Salisbury notified him in January 1950 of a request to arrange a production of *One Touch of Venus* in occupied Germany and Austria, Weill replied that based on his knowledge of the "present status of the German theatres my impression is that they are in no way equipped to do justice to a piece like *Venus*, and a bad production would do a lot of harm to me." His misgivings were indeed justified. *One Touch of Venus* saw its German premiere over fifty years after the Broadway opening: not in a leading opera house but in a small theater in Meiningen (1994). Later German productions were conceived on a similar scale, such as the ones in Freiburg (1998), Wuppertal (2000), Berlin (2001, Zelttheater am Schlosspark), and Döbeln (2003).

Venus presents several challenges. One is common to any Broadway show in Germany: Singing actors for many years had no way to receive the necessary training. That situation changed somewhat with the introduction of dedicated degrees in musical theater at acting schools and conservatories and the founding of several specialized musical production companies in the 1980s and 1990s. Most commercial production companies, however, have ignored classic Broadway musicals in favor of "megamusicals" à la Lloyd Webber. One of the few exceptions is the Staatsoperette Dresden, which premiered in June 2019 the first truly satisfying production in Germany of *One Touch of Venus*, directed by Matthias Davids (see review in the Fall 2019 *Newsletter*).

The resulting 2-CD cast recording is a valuable and worthy addition, incorporating nearly the entire score: songs, ballet music (sadly without "Venus in Ozone Heights"), and most of the dialogue. The recording is excellent, displaying the singers and orchestra with natural, transparent, and balanced sound quality. The Staatsoperette Orchestra, which plays Weill's original orchestrations under the direction of Peter Christian Feigel, delivers punch and enchantment, sounding as fresh and competent as any Broadway orchestra in the 1940s. Johanna Spantzel, as Venus, uses her agile soprano lightly and delightfully in "Ich fühl mich fremd in dieser Welt" (I'm a Stranger Here Myself), the waltz "Dummes Herz" (Foolish Heart), the hit song "Sprich leis'" (Speak Low), and the torch song "Bei ihm" (That's Him). Jan-nik Harneit embodies a convincing Rodney with a vibrant tenor voice. He delivers the twin songs "So sehr hab' ich dich lieb" (How Much I Love You) and "So sehr hab' ich Liebe satt" (That's How I Am Sick of Love), and the naively heartwarming "Rosenhochzeit" (Wooden Wedding), with much wit and irony, never falling into the trap of overacting. Christian Grygas, as Whitelaw Savory, and Winnie Böwe, as Molly Grant, sing their solo numbers tastefully, entertainingly, and with panache. Grygas's control of a spectrum of moods—sardonically funny, fearsome, and touchingly serious in "Kunst muss sein" ("New Art Is True Art"), "Doktor Crippen," and "Westwind" respectively—is particularly impressive.

Presenting the songs in German highlights another challenge that *Venus* presents. S.J. Perelman's witty, screwball-comedy dialogue and the plot more generally evoke New York during the Second World War and make frequent references familiar only to American audiences of their own day. But more than that, Ogden Nash's clever, unconventional song lyrics are bound to make even more difficulties for the translator than most golden-age Broadway musicals. (Translated lyrics—often awkward and jarring against the smooth, syncopated melodies—have scuttled not only productions of Weill's shows in Germany, but those of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, Bernstein, and Sondheim.)

Roman Hinze's translation adapts all the culturally specific allusions in the script idiomatically into German, and the song lyrics come across as natural and sprightly. For example, the release in "Wooden Wedding":

"Payday will be a magic casement,

Am Zahltag da haben wir gute Laune,

Opening on something peachy,

Dann hört die Welt auf mein Kommando.

Maybe a trip to Gimbel's basement,

Komm mit zu Woolworth und dann staune:

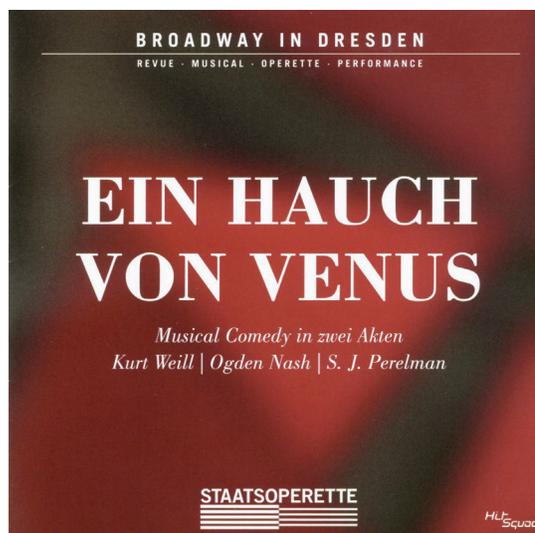
Or a double feature with Don Ameche?"

Ich spendier' dir Kino mit Marlon Brando."

Hinze replaces the defunct department store Gimbel's with Woolworth, the German equivalent, while the better-known Brando supplants Don Ameche. His clever adaptations are reinforced by the performers' creative interpretations. In "Massen, massen, massen Geld" (Very, very, very), Hinze's allusion to a wealthy Swiss—a cliché *par excellence*—is emphasized by Böwe, who sings the passage with a strong Swiss German accent.

This CD is a compelling record of arguably the first successful and entirely delightful production of *Ein Hauch von Venus* in Germany, finally putting to rest Weill's reservations about producing his most popular Broadway musical there. The "American Weill" continues to gain ground in his native country.

Michael Baumgartner
Cleveland State University



New Year's Eve Concert 2019

Berlin Philharmonic
Diana Damrau, soprano
Kirill Petrenko, conductor

EuroArts DVD 2067998

We know how Angela Merkel spent the evening of 31 December 2019. She was attending a concert at the Philharmonie Berlin, caught on camera during the filming of the event. The concert, clearly geared for popular appeal, celebrated the American musical theater of the twentieth century, perhaps an odd choice for this most German of orchestras. It showed how much twentieth-century American music owes to Broadway and its composers.

The program featured soprano Diana Damrau, German-born but fluent in English. She sang some of the classics—"Send in the Clowns," "I Could Have Danced All Night," and a fascinating solo version of "If I Loved You," among others—in, yes, operatic style. Clearly the orchestra's new conductor Kirill Petrenko has a fondness for the classic Broadway musical, and it showed. As he led sumptuous renditions of Gershwin, Bernstein, Rodgers, Sondheim, Arlen, Loewe, and Weill, he was also paying homage to the great orchestrators who worked alongside the great composers.

As the American musical began to emerge as an art form in the twentieth century, a new convention emerged with it as composers began relying on orchestrators to create the actual scores, assigning the basic melodies and harmonies to the instruments in the pit. I doubt this happened because the composers couldn't do it themselves; I think it was a combination of time pressure and the composers' ample respect for their musical collaborators. These orchestrators—most notably Robert Russell Bennett—were first-rate musicians, but not first-rate composers. Few of Bennett's surviving compositions hold any interest now. But his contribution to the American musical is nothing short of miraculous.

Whether he realized it or not, Petrenko's New Year's Eve concert was a salute to Bennett. And most astonishingly to his 1949 Symphonic Nocturne from *Lady in the Dark*.

Regular readers will know that Weill, almost uniquely among the great Broadway composers, made his own orchestrations, and *Lady in the Dark* was no exception. Bennett's assignment was to take Weill's score and create from it a tone poem for symphony orchestra. I must confess that I was not aware of the Symphonic Nocturne, so this was the first performance I ever heard. The fact that this remarkable band—Germans (and a very few Asians) plus a Russian conductor—"got" this music is remarkable. But get it they did, and the thrilling performance preserves and puts across the theatrical spirit of the music.

Bennett begins with fidelity to the plot: "My Ship," the song that haunts both the drama and the leading lady, hops around the orchestra to establish a musical foundation. Then he ushers in tune after tune, musically laying out the main character's



psychological journey. In *Lady in the Dark*, only the dream sequences are scored, so Bennett takes us on a dreamy journey that explores various styles; even if we don't know the show, the journey is musically fascinating. A great orchestrator, he knows when to unleash the full symphonic forces, when to allow a single section to revel in a romantic melody (as with the strings in "This Is New"), or when to let a theme build, as he does with music from the *Circus Dream*, starting with the piccolos. He also has the smarts to work in solos, often with the haunting refrain of "My Ship." It is very difficult to find effective ways to use solos in symphonic writing, but he does it with great effect. There are a few bars in "The Saga of Jenny" when his attempt to make the band swing doesn't really take off, but he saves the day by handing things over to a solo trumpet. And then he returns to "My Ship" for an emotional satisfying ending.

The Symphonic Nocturne should absolutely be a staple of orchestral programming, right up there with "The Carousel Waltz," the overture to *Candide*, and Bennett's own overtures to *My Fair Lady* and *South Pacific*, all of which are frequently performed.

Who would have guessed that a young Russian conductor, recently appointed chief musical director of the Berlin Philharmonic, would have such an idiomatic sense of the American musical theater? He provided seductive, playful, passionate, and altogether brilliant readings of this music, and he has charisma to burn. Clearly he's having a good time, and let's hope his obvious affection for the genre persists for many years to come.

Ted Chapin
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