

# Introduction and Notes

by David Drew

Copyright by the Estate of David Drew.

Whether you care to mention Weill in the same breath as Hindemith or as Holländer, as Copland or as Cole Porter; whether you see him as an outstanding German composer who somehow lost his voice when he settled in America, or as an outstanding Broadway composer who somehow contrived to write a hit-show called "The Threepenny Opera" during his otherwise obscure and probably misspent Berlin youth; whether you disagree with both these views and either find evidence of a strikingly original mind at all stages in his career (but at some more than others), or dismiss him as nothing but a gifted amanuensis of Bertolt Brecht; whether you think of him as a "product of his times" who had his one lucky strike with *Die Dreigroschenoper* and apart from that can safely be forgotten, or whether you believe him to be the creator of a substantial and durable oeuvre spanning twenty (or even thirty) years; whether you consider him incompetent to write anything but theatre music, or whether you number several of his non-theatrical pieces and at least one of his orchestral works among his finest achievements; in short, whether you feel him to be important or negligible, whether you love his music or detest it, admire or despise it – you may rest assured that you are by no means alone, and that you will not need to look far for some eminent authority who shares your view.

What better authority, you may ask, than Bertolt Brecht? Alas, Brecht's only published assessment of Weill is not very helpful. It appears in his essay "On the use of music in the Epic Theatre", and indicates that until Brecht put him on the right track Weill had been composing "relatively complicated music of a mainly psychological sort, but when he agreed to set a series of more or less banal Song texts [i.e. the Mahagonny-Gesänge] he was making a courageous break with a prejudice which the solid bulk of serious composers stubbornly held". Aside from the not unimportant fact that Weill had started simplifying his music some considerable time before he met Brecht, and that even while he was composing "relatively complicated music" he had, for his own and other people's amusement, written some cabaret songs on texts at least "banal" as any of Brecht's for Mahagonny, nothing is more remarkable in his post-1920 music than its withdrawal from those areas which might loosely be described as "psychological" – a bad word in Brecht's vocabulary, here presumably denoting a Straussian or even Schoenbergian ethos. In his theatrical works prior to the collaboration with Brecht, Weill had already dissociated most of the characters (or "figures", to use Georg Kaiser's term) from their individually characteristic emotions, with the one significant exception of a "public figure" (the Tsar in *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren*) who is stripped down to his private, sensual, self; and in his non-theatrical works, Weill had concentrated on the moral, the religious, and the socio-political implications of his chosen texts or pretexts.

The fact that in these pre-Brecht years he concerned himself not only with the work of Georg Kaiser and Yvan Goll – both of whom Brecht admired – but also with Rilke, whose work Brecht detested, and the Bible, is revealing only with reference to specific texts and to Weill's family background. An orthodox Jewish upbringing had been associated with parental influences that were nothing if not culturally and politically liberal. Weill's was a literary as well as a musical family – his mother had wide literary interests, while his father was a Cantor and a composer of liturgical music – and Rilke figured

prominently among the modern poets in a family library where the works of Goethe and Heine, of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Moses Mendelssohn, had pride of place, and where, no doubt, one could have found some of the writings of Eduard Bernstein, if not of (the young?) Marx, and perhaps even a crumpled copy of the Erfurt Programme of 1891.

Unlike Brecht, Weill never needed to repudiate his early background in order to define his artistic functions and objectives. Although it is true that he left the Jewish faith at an early stage in his adult life, there seems to have been no family dissension on that account. Settings of a penitential psalm and of the fifth chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah are perhaps the finest of his early works, and Rilke provided a convenient bridge from the Old Testament to the humanism which was the only faith Weill professed in later years except inadvertently – for instance in the chromatically twisted fragment of the *Dies Irae* which runs through the first movement of the Violin Concerto, in the instrumental chorale of the *Mahagonny Songspiel* (and the baleful light it sheds on the apparent blasphemy of "Gott in Mahagonny"), in the Bachian imagery of parts of the *Berlin Requiem*, and even in the amazingly affectionate irony which distinguishes his settings of real or parodied Salvation Army texts in *Happy End*. But essentially it is in the etymological rather than the theological sense that Weill remained to the end of his life a "religious" artist. The binding obligation of man to his fellow men and to society as a whole is implied by the title and inspiration of his most ambitious stage work, the three-act opera *Die Bürgschaft*; and it is the fundamental theme of all his major works and many of his lesser ones. It is even present in works such as *Happy End* or *One Touch of Venus* which purport to be "mere" entertainments.

Let us not, at this particular juncture, worry ourselves about a precise evaluation of Weill's importance or lack of it. Too much has already been spoken and written while so much of the music is still waiting to be heard again. But without falling back on the idle excuse that time alone will tell – for time alone does not tell anything other than the appalling lateness of the hour – let us at least remember with respect a human being whose qualities are reflected in his art: a just, loyal, and friendly man, who knew his own worth, and yet dissociated himself from the contemporary cult of genius by preserving – as far as his characteristic irony allowed – a deceptively mild and self-effacing exterior in his everyday encounters; a man for whom democracy was a fundamental and humane truth which should inform every level of activity; a man profoundly aware of the tragedies and follies of his time, but one whose laughter could so convulse him – as he tried to mop away the tears – that it became quite noiseless; a man who was much loved.

London, May 1976

## Opera for Today (Kurt Weill)

*Opera will be one of the essential factors in that universally apparent development which is heralding the coming liquidation of all the bourgeois arts. It should not therefore dissipate itself either in an aesthetic "renaissance" movement or in the presentation of day-to-day events from the outside world which have validity only at the immediate time of writing. It must rather turn to the areas of interest of that wider audience toward which the opera of the immediate future must be directed if*

*it is to have any kind of raison d'être. The thoroughly un-topical representation of our times which would result from such a change of direction must be supported by a strong conviction, whether it uses an earlier epoch to mirror aspects of present-day life or whether it finds a unique, definitive and timeless form for present-day phenomena. The absence of inner and outer complications (in the material and in the means of expression) is in keeping with the more naive disposition of the modern listener and leads to an "epic" structuring of the musical theatre which allows us for the first time to give it an absolute, concert-music form without thereby disregarding the laws of the stage. Hence, in its first manifestations, this development clearly aligns itself with recent endeavours concerned with matching surviving and viable forms of opera and music-drama to a fundamentally changed attitude towards music.*

(October 1927)

(from Kurt Weill, *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Selected Writings), edited by David Drew, ©1975 Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, p. 36.)

(Translation: T.A.J. Souster)

## Mahagonny Songspiel (The little Mahagonny)

The *Mahagonny Songspiel* was first performed at the Deutsche Kammermusikfest, Baden-Baden, on 18 July 1927: conductor, Ernst Mehlich, staging by Brecht and Walter Brüggemann, projections by Caspar Neher; with Lotte Lenya, Irene Eden, Erik Wirl, Georg Ripperger, Karl Giebel, and Gerhard Pechner. The following note appeared in the programme:

*In his more recent works, Weill has been moving in the same direction as other artists from all spheres who foretell the extinction of the bourgeois forms of art. The modest epic piece Mahagonny merely draws conclusions from the irreversible breakdown of the existing social order. Already he is appealing to a naive audience which simply wants a bit of fun in the theatre.*

The manuscript of the score is dated at the end, "Berlin-Charlottenburg May 1927". The texts are five "Mahagonny-Gesänge" which Brecht published in the fourth section of his *Taschenpostille* of 1926 (republished as the *Hauspostille* in 1927). In the *Hauspostille* notes Brecht writes:

*The fourth section is just the thing for times of wealth, the lusts of the flesh and arrogance (which means it will appeal to very few readers).*

The Songspiel is the first of Weill's two *Mahagonny* works (the second, of course, being the 3-act opera, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*). It was the result of a commission from the organizers of the Deutsche Kammermusikfest (a festival of modern German chamber music) – among them, Hindemith – who asked Weill for something which could be performed in a programme of short operas for chamber ensemble. Weill's first idea was to set a scene from *King Lear* or *Antigone*; but as he and Brecht were already planning the *Mahagonny* opera, they decided on the Songspiel as a "style study". The order of the Mahagonny-Gesänge was changed in the interests of continuity, and a short epilogue was added (but no linking dialogue, as some authorities have wrongly suggested). A simple staging was then worked out in collaboration with Caspar Neher, who designed a series of projections. The

number of singers was determined by the resources available for the Baden-Baden programme, and the apportioning of the texts between the singers reflected purely musical considerations. Although each of the singing roles was given a name, the texts did not allow for any individual characterisation; and neither by costume (formal evening dress) nor by other means was there any anticipation of the dramatic elements in the later opera. Thus, the Baden-Baden *Mahagonny Songspiel* recorded here is essentially different from the recent "theatre version" presented and recorded by the Berliner Ensemble under the title *Das kleine Mahagonny*. The latter is, in fact, a shortened and burlesqued version of the opera libretto cleverly arranged as a Brechtian musical farce for actors; the music, which becomes purely incidental, consists of fragments of the opera and the *Songspiel*, freely arranged, re-harmonized, and re-orchestrated for the Berliner Ensemble band. Formally speaking, it bears no relation to Weill's score, whose technical demands are indeed far beyond the reach of even the most versatile company of actors.

The circumstances of the Baden-Baden commission are confirmed by the evidence of the score; Weill was writing for experienced opera singers even when – or especially when – he was making them do things of which they had little experience. The fact that he and Brecht, at a comparatively late stage, had the brilliant idea of persuading Lotte Lenya to sing Jessie (opposite Irene Eden's Bessie) does not alter the situation. Another year was to pass before Weill started to write specifically for actors – and even then, for actors of a very special kind.

### From *On the Gestural Character of Music* (Kurt Weill)

Because of the need to illustrate a gesture, Brecht had earlier sketched music for his lyrics. Here, a basic gesture is fixed rhythmically in the most primitive form, while melodically, the utterly personal and inimitable manner of singing in which Brecht performs his songs is registered. In this version the *Alabama Song* runs:

We can see that this is no more than a notation\* of the speech-rhythm and completely useless as music. In my setting of the same text I shape the same basic gesture, but here it is really "composed", with the far freer means available to the musician. In my version, the song is laid out on quite a broad scale in bold melodic sweeps, and the accompaniment figure gives it a quite different foundation – but the gestural character is preserved, even though it appears in a quite different form:

(March 1929)  
(from *Ausgewählte Schriften*, pp. 43-44.)  
(translation: T.A.J. Souster)

\* Brecht's "notation" is one of the five "Mahagonny-Lieder" in the "Gesangsnoten" section of his *Hauspostille*. Weill made no use of Brecht's melodies for "Auf nach Mahagonny", "Wer in Mahagonny blieb", and "Benares Song" (in which Brecht amalgamates "There is a Tavern in the Town" with "One Fine Day" from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*); but in the case of "Gott in Mahagonny", he applied methods of transformation similar to those he used in his setting of the "Alabama Song". (David Drew)

### Pantomime I (from "The Protagonist")

The 1-act opera *Der Protagonist*, based on Georg Kaiser's Expressionist tragedy of the same name, contains two Pantomimes. In the opera, the Protagonist is the leader of a company of strolling players in Shakespearean England. He and his players are commanded to give a performance for the entertainment of the Duke and his guests from Spain and Italy, who understand no English; it must therefore be a dumb play. The first Pantomime is the dress rehearsal of a licentious comedy in the style of Chaucer or Boccaccio, which later (Pantomime II) has to be changed into a tragedy in order not to offend the Bishop who had unexpectedly arrived at the Duke's castle.

Pantomime I is accompanied solely by the opera's stage-band of 8 wind and brass instruments, and is directed to be played "ganz tänzerisch, unrealistisch, mit übertriebenen Gesten" (in a dance-like manner, unrealistically, with exaggerated gestures). Now and again the actors break into song, but their texts – as in Blacher's and Egk's *Abstrakte Oper Nr. 1* – are purely syllabic. *Der Protagonist* established Weill as the most promising theatre-composer of his generation in Germany. Like the *Violin Concerto*, it is largely divorced from traditional tonality; but the influence of Richard Strauss (*Elektra*) and even Wagner are discernible in the operatic style and serve to make the music more approachable. The style of Pantomime I is deliberately distinct from that of the opera, being predominantly grotesque and distorted,

like an Expressionist parody of the *buffo* music of the opera (while Pantomime II starts by parodying the ominous music). The mock-chorale which introduces the monk seems also to make fun of Hindemith; the monk's subsequent "love song" (trumpet solo) alludes to Strauss's *Don Juan*.

Pantomime I is in the form of a theme, variations, and finale. The scenario (see p. 32) is by Georg Kaiser himself; a few musical indications have been inserted to aid the listener.

### The Protagonist (Kurt Weill)

Only when I noticed that my music contains the tension of scenic action did I turn to the stage. For a Russian troupe in the Theater am Kurfürstendamm I wrote the pantomime *Zaubernacht* (Magic Night). I learnt two things from the concentrated intensity of Russian theatre: that the stage has its own musical form which grows out of the course of the action and that, on the stage, meaningful things can only be said with the simplest, most inconspicuous means. A nine-piece orchestra, a singer, two dancers and a number of children – that was the set-up for this danced dream. It was a great joy to me, and so I was delighted when Georg Kaiser offered to write a full-scale ballet plot for me. We went to work in collaboration. In ten weeks, almost three-quarters of the work were completed – the score of the prelude and the first two acts. Then we got stuck. We had grown out of the material. The silence of these figures was tormenting us and we had to break the bonds of this pantomime; it had to become an opera. Georg Kaiser went back to an older play – the one-act *The Protagonist* – which in his mind he had already conceived for the opera stage. Here we had what we were looking for: a free-and-easy, unpremeditated intermingling of opera and pantomime. (February 27th, 1926)  
(from *Ausgewählte Schriften*, pp. 52-53.)  
(translation: T.A.J. Souster)

### Vom Tod im Wald (Death in the Forest)

The original version of Brecht's marvellous poem dates from 1918 and was later included in his play *Baal* (1922). Weill's setting uses the slightly revised version published in the *Hauspostille* (1927). Although it was written shortly after the *Mahagonny Songspiel*, it has almost nothing in common with that score, and is much closer to the style of the *Violin Concerto* and *Der Protagonist*. *Vom Tod im Wald* was first performed by Heinrich Hermanns (bass) at a Berlin Philharmonic concert, conducted by Eugen Lang, on 23 November 1927, and it greatly shocked the conservative critics (one of whom described it as a "monstrosity"). Was it simply the free tonal dissonance that caused the shock? Or was it the intensity and cold ferocity of the whole musical setting, with that single warming shaft of light just before the unfathomable darkness of the close?

### Happy End

The songs and choruses for the comedy *Happy End* were composed in Berlin, Munich, and the South of France during the summer of 1929, before Brecht and

Elisabeth Hauptmann had finished the play. Some of the song texts (including "Surabaya Johnny", which had already been set to music by F. Bruinier) pre-date the play, and none is closely integrated with its dramatic context.

Weill's main inducement was an opportunity to develop the "song style" which he had evolved in *Mahagonny* and *Die Dreigroschenoper* but which he realized was not a suitable basis for continuous musical structures. *Happy End* is thus in marked contrast to the cantatas *Das Berliner Requiem* and *Der Lindberghflug*, which preceded it, and the school-opera *Der Jasager*, which followed it.

The premiere of *Happy End* ended in a uproar. Provoked by the sudden intrusion of Agitprop methods in the final scene of an (apparently) commercial gangster comedy, the opposition was intensified by the musical finale, "Hosianna Rockefeller". The press was uniformly hostile to the play, and the production closed within a fortnight. With only two notable exceptions – T.W. Adorno and Max Marschalk – the critics who had admired the *Dreigroschenoper* music were apparently quite unable to discern the strikingly fresh inspiration and more versatile techniques of the *Happy End* score.

Four years after the failure of the first production – at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm on 2 September 1929 (with Carola Neher as Lilian, Helene Weigel as Die Dame in Grau, Peter Lorre as Dr. Nakamura, Oskar Homolka as Bill, and Kurt Gerron as Sam) – Weill considered rescuing the score from oblivion by preparing a "Songspiel" version with Brecht. But he was distracted by another commitment and then by the problems of emigration. The "Song sequence" recorded here was devised by the present writer for concert performance, and has no dramatic connotations. It includes all but one of the numbers (apart from a prologue which has not been traced since the time of the original production). The order of numbers is determined by two co-ordinates: the musical need for balance and contrast (voices, tonality, character, etc.) and the absolute obligation to relate all juxtapositions to the content and function of the texts. The missing number, the "Bilbao-Song", is the only one which is a simple character-piece without moralistic significance, and it also happens to be the one which resists musically satisfactory incorporation in a suite-like structure. On the other hand, it seems eminently suitable as an encore for a concert performance, not only because it is the most celebrated of all *Happy End* numbers (having been circulated in a "hit song" version) but also because it is itself an ironic comment on the very idea of encores. But in recording terms, the only equivalent of an encore is another record, "by popular demand"...

### **Das Berliner Requiem (The Berlin Requiem)**

This cantata was composed in Berlin in November-December 1928, and dedicated to the Frankfurt Radio, which commissioned it. The first performance – Hans Grahl (tenor), Johannes Willy (baritone), and Jean Stern (bass), with members of the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, conducted by Ludwig Rottenburg – took place in Frankfurt on 22 May 1929, after several postponements resulting from objections (whether political or religious) raised by one of the programme committees responsible for censorship of all broadcast material. Although the objec-

tions were overcome without sacrificing a line, the work was broadcast only once, and was not relayed by any other German station.

The text of the cantata is a selection of poems from the *Hauspostille* and elsewhere. The selection seems to have been partly determined by the tenth anniversaries of two related events: the end of the First World War and the murder of the Spartakist leader and militant pacifist, Rosa Luxemburg, by officers of a paramilitary right-wing organisation. However, the Grabschrift (Epitaph) for Rosa Luxemburg was, musically speaking, an afterthought, and almost certainly was never offered to the radio: Weill first set the nonpolitical "Marterl" and then adapted the vocal line to the slightly different prosody of the Grabschrift, which exists as an alternative. The choice is crucial to the traumatic elegy of the "Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen" (Ballad of the Drowned Girl), since Weill expressly intended that the following Grabschrift/Marterl should be understood as commemorating the "Mädchen"; Rosa Luxemburg's partly decomposed body had been recovered (after a considerable lapse of time) from Berlin's Landwehr Canal where it had been flung by her murderers.

Weill had been deeply interested in the development of radio from its inception, and since 1924 had been publishing regular critiques of Berlin radio programmes in the weekly journal *Der deutsche Rundfunk*. His first radio commission – and the first such commission offered to a notable composer in Germany and perhaps anywhere else – was a major score for Grabbe's *Herzog von Gothland*, produced by Funk-Stunde Berlin in September 1926. The composer said of the Requiem: "The radio presents serious musicians of our own day for the first time with the problem of composing works which can be assimilated by as large a number of listeners as possible. The content and form of these compositions for radio therefore have to arouse the interest of a large number of people of all sorts. The title, "Berlin Requiem", is not meant to be ironic; we wanted to make a statement about death in the way city-dwellers feel about it. The work is a series of dirges, memorials, and epitaphs and (therefore) a kind of secular requiem."

The conception of the work may have been influenced by that of Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*, while the instrumentation and the stark textures certainly owe something to Weill's practical experience of the musical possibilities and limitations of radio technology at that early stage. It is also relevant to note that his friend Max Butting, the composer and teacher, was in charge of a class in radio composition at the Musik-Hochschule in Berlin during this period.

### **Kleine Dreigroschenmusik für Bläserchester (Suite for Wind Orchestra from "The Threepenny Opera")**

Most suites from stage works are simply expedient collections of available pieces. But a few are compositions in their own right; and the Suite from *The Threepenny Opera* is one of them. The music for Brecht's adaptation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* was written in the summer of 1928, and the work was first performed, with extraordinary success, in August of that year. The Suite followed some four months later. It was heard for the first time at the Berlin Opera Ball in February 1929, conducted by Otto Klemperer.

The practice of basing serenade-like suites for wind orchestra on the scores of successful operas and singspiels was common in Mozart's day, and Mozart himself indulged in it – if only (he suggests) to stop some thief forestalling him. Although that kind of problem should not exist for composers who enjoy copyright protection, one might imagine that Weill's main purpose in making the Suite was just as commercial as that of his 18th-century predecessors. But the score tells quite another story. In the first place, the instrumentation (12 wind instruments (including two saxophones), timpani, piano, percussion, plus banjo, guitar, and bandoneon) already made the Suite quite unsuitable for normal concert conditions at that time; secondly, even if the instrumentation had not been so predictable an obstacle, the character and above all the structure of the Suite were manifestly contrary to the interests of easy marketability, in either the "serious" or "light" fields, as they then were. In fact, the Suite was seldom heard in Weill's lifetime, and did not begin to be widely performed until quite recently – that is, until patterns of concert-giving inherited from earlier and very different ages began to break up, either of their own accord or under deliberate pressure. Although it might be argued that a criticism of those patterns is already implicit in the form of the Suite, musical considerations are paramount, and one must beware of hindsight (with due allowance for Weill's foresight). If, for instance, Weill's manner of introducing the world-famous Moritat (Ballad of Mack the Knife) by means of the motivically-related Lied von der Unzulänglichkeit (Song about Inadequacy) strikes us as peculiarly comic, it is worth recalling that the peculiarity, if not the comedy, is one of history's pleasant accidents; for in Weill's day the tune had attracted little attention. The "hits" that would have been recognized by the guests of the Opera Ball were the Tango-Ballade and the Kanonen-Song. And how brilliantly Weill integrates them in the Suite! He has so placed them that their different kinds of darkness – sensual in the Tango, social in the Kanonen-Song – are dramatized by the musical form, while any spurious "hit" quality attached to them by the processes of popularization is stripped away. The ensuing Finale is the crowning masterstroke: Weill ignores everything in the theatre-score's finale apart from the closing chorale, which he prefaces with the darkest music in the entire score. Thus the implications of the Overture are fulfilled even more clearly than they are in the stage-work, and the eight "separate" numbers of the Suite are seen to form two balancing and contrasting spans which meet in the almost Schubertian lyricism of No. 5, "Pollys Lied". Schubertian lyricism? Surely, you object, Brecht's poem is a parody and Polly a petty-bourgeois sentimentalist? Perhaps. But when Brecht is parodying, Weill often is not. But if the music is "serious" about its Schubertian (or Brahmsian?) parentage, you continue, how is it to be sung in the theatre? After all, *The Threepenny Opera* is not even an operetta; it's a "play with music", written and composed for actors. And if the acting is bad, a cast of Carusos couldn't save it. The music is almost certain to take second place.

True, alas; and perhaps that is the main reason why Weill interrupted urgent work on his 3-act opera *Mahagonny* in order to prepare a means of hearing some of his *Threepenny Opera* music under conditions which could not be approached in the theatre.

## Konzert für Violine und Blesorchester, op. 12 (Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra, op. 12)

The *Concerto* was composed in Berlin in April/May 1924. Although written for Joseph Szigeti, it was first performed by Marcel Darrieux (with the Orchestre des Concerts Walter Straram, under Straram himself) at an ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music) Concert in Paris on 11 June 1925. During the 1920s it became the most widely performed of Weill's instrumental works. It was also the first of them to be revived a quarter of a century later, when interest in his European achievements was re-awakened.

Contrary to what this history might suggest, the *Concerto* is not the most approachable nor the most characteristic of Weill's concert works – rather the contrary; no previous work that is known to us – not even the very earliest – is so far removed from anything we can immediately recognize as “Weill”; the next work – *Der Protagonist* – is already closer again.

Not that the *Concerto* sounds like anyone else – though at first hearing one may be deceived by fleeting echoes of Stravinsky (*Octet* and *Soldier's Tale*) and of Hindemith (*Kleine Kammermusik für fünf Bläser*, op. 24, no. 2), and some chance affinities with the Berg of the *Chamber Concerto* (1924–25). T.W. Adorno wrote of the *Violin Concerto*:

*In this piece, the lines of Weill's development intersect; the Busoni-esque lucidity is still there, playfully avoiding both dense polyphony and indeed the melodic plasticity which Weill was later to round out so strikingly. There is a strong trace of Stravinsky to be found in the classical, masterly clarity of the sound and in much of the wind writing. The later Weill can be heard in the dramatic pungency which often enough contradicts the classical balance, but most remarkable of all is a Mahlerian quality, at once garishly expressive and painfully laughing, which calls everything playful and secure into question. Weill thus relinquishes objective realism in favour of the dangerous, surrealistic realm he inhabits today. The piece stands isolated and alien: that is, in the right place. One would imagine that after composing his most recent works, Weill will return to his more expansive style with all its abundance and harmonic daring in order to define them with complete precision.*

If, as Adorno remarked, the Weill *Concerto* “stands isolated and alien: that is, in the right place”, it is because of conflicts peculiar to Weill and his historical situation. The first clue to the nature of these conflicts is the marvellous *tranquillo* episode shortly before the end of the first movement. Here Weill speaks for the first time in affectionate and intimate tones; and as he recalls, almost in Pierrot's sense, the fragrance of “far-off days”, the movement's scarred and desolate landscape fades from view, and the convulsions are momentarily forgotten. The coda is a brief and gentle reminder of the earlier disquiet.

The three interlinked nocturnes (cf. Mahler's 7th Symphony) which form the central movement effect a transition towards a warmer Southern climate. But even in the tarantella-finale there is a sense of hunter and hunted, of an escape that is sought but not found – except inwardly, towards the end, in a passage of rapt meditation analogous to the first movement's *tranquillo* episode. This time, however, it is not the past and its

fragrance that seems to be recalled, so much as the North and its forest murmurs; and this time, the toccata-like coda is extensive and anything but gentle. Relentlessly, it marshals the troops whose distant *reveilles* were heard in the central cadenza movement. Curious how the orchestra's threatening interjection near the end (before fig. 35) anticipates the *Happy End* chorus “geht hinein in die Schlacht” (“March ahead to the fight”). . .

### A Note on Musical and Literary Texts

All the songs recorded here are given to the male or female voices which the composer had in mind, and are performed in the original keys with the original instrumentation. While such an assurance would be superfluous in the case of any other significant 20th century composer, it is important to recognize that Weill is a special case in two respects: first, because in his theatre work he was well used to transposing and adjusting songs for actors who were having difficulties; and secondly, because certain of his songs have achieved such widespread popularity and are to be heard in so many arrangements that even “serious” musicians are sometimes under the impression that his own scores cannot be of any interest – if indeed he was capable of making them! In fact, these scores are of commanding importance, not simply for academic reasons (which Weill would have laughed to scorn) but because of what they alone can offer the listener. For Weill was a master of his craft, and his sense of key colour and instrumental timbre was such that every change by another hand is in some sense a change for the worse – which of course was why he always defended the integrity of his scores so fiercely.

The composer's own manuscripts have been consulted throughout the making of this record, except in the case of the *Berlin Requiem*, where only a first copy is extant. The versions of Brecht's poems used by Weill differ in many details from the ones in Brecht's Collected Writings, owing to Brecht's subsequent revisions.



# Kurt Weill: Chronology

by David Drew

2 March 1900 1915-18	born Dessau studies theory and composition in Dessau with Albert Bing	23 November 1927	first performance of <i>Vom Tod im Wald</i> (Death in the Forest), Berlin	March 1938	begins collaboration with Maxwell Anderson on <i>Knickerbocker Holiday</i> , a political satire
April 1918	attends classes at Hochschule für Musik, Berlin and at the University of Berlin (studies with Max Dessoir, Ernst Cassirer)	31 August 1928	premiere of <i>Die Dreigroschenoper</i> (The Threepenny Opera), Ein Stück mit Musik (after John Gay's "The Beggar's Opera") by Bertolt Brecht, Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin	3 September 1939	Britain and France declare war on Germany
September 1918	full-time student at Berlin Hochschule für Musik (studies with Humperdinck, F.E. Koch, Krasselt)	8 February 1929	first public performance of <i>Kleine Dreigroschenmusik</i> (Suite from The Threepenny Opera), Kroll Opera Concert, Klemperer conducting	23 January 1941	Broadway premiere of <i>Lady in the Dark</i> , musical play by Moss Hart, lyrics by Ira Gershwin America enters the war
1919-20	Repetiteur at the Dessau Hofoper (under Knappertsbusch), then Kapellmeister in Lüdenscheid	22 May 1929	first performance of <i>Das Berliner Requiem</i> (The Berlin Requiem), Frankfurt	7 December 1941 January 1942- May 1943	Weill mainly engaged in helping to arrange and produce lunch-time shows for factory workers
September 1920 December 1920	settles in Berlin is accepted on the strength of a portfolio of compositions by Ferruccio Busoni as one of the six members of his Masterclass in Composition at the Akademie der Künste (Prussian Academy of Arts). Meetings with Ludwig Meidner, Johannes R. Becher, and others.	2 September 1929	premiere of <i>Happy End</i> , Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin	7 October 1943	Broadway premiere of <i>The Firebrand of Florence</i> , operetta in two acts, book and lyrics by E.J. Mayer and Ira Gershwin
April-May 1921 December 1922	composes First Symphony	29 October 1929 January-May 1930	Wall Street crash <i>Der Jasager</i> , school opera in two acts, text by Brecht	June-July 1947	visits Palestine, via England, France, and Switzerland
Season 1922-23	premiere (Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin) of <i>Zaubernacht</i> (Kinderpantomime, scenario by Wladimir Boritsch)	Aug. 1930-Oct. 1931	<i>Die Bürgschaft</i> , opera in three acts, text by Caspar Neher	7 October 1948	Broadway premiere of <i>Love Life</i> , "A Vaudeville", text by Alan Jay Lerner
September 1923	completes <i>Recordare (Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetarum)</i>	July 1932	begins <i>Der Silbersee</i> , "Ein Wintermärchen" (a winter's tale) in three acts, text by Georg Kaiser; 5,392,248 registered unemployed in Germany	31 October 1949	Broadway premiere of <i>Lost in the Stars</i> , a "Musical Tragedy" adapted by Maxwell Anderson from Alan Paton's novel "Cry the Beloved Country"
December 1923	concludes his 3-year period at Akademie der Künste	January 1933 21 February 1933	begins 2. <i>Symphonie</i> in Berlin Nazi hooligans provoke a riot at the second performance of <i>Der Silbersee</i> in Magdeburg	December 1949	begins collaboration with Maxwell Anderson on a musical play based on Mark Twain's novel "Huckleberry Finn"
January 1924	first discussions with Georg Kaiser; sketches for a 3-act Pantomime	27 February 1933 4 March 1933	Reichstag fire Reichstag elections: Nazis win bare majority; cancellation of Leipzig performance of <i>Der Silbersee</i> booked by the Arbeiterbildungsinstitut. No further public performance of any work by Weill in Germany until 1945.	3 April 1950	after a fortnight's illness, dies in the Flower Hospital, New York
April-May 1924	composes <i>Konzert für Violine und Blasorchester</i> (Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra)	21 March 1933	"Day of Potsdam": Hitler and Hindenburg publicly seal their compact at the ceremony marking the opening of the Reichstag; Weill leaves Berlin by car, heading for France		
April 1925	completes <i>Der Protagonist</i> (The Protagonist), opera in one act after Kaiser's play of the same name	23 March 1933 April-May 1933	Weill arrives in Paris composes <i>Die sieben Todsünden</i> , text by Brecht		
11 June 1925	first performance of <i>Konzert für Violine</i> in Paris; soloist Marcel Darrieux, conductor Walter Straram	August 1934- December 1935	composes <i>Der Weg der Verheissung</i> , biblical drama in four parts, text by Franz Werfel		
28 January 1926	marries the actress Lotte Lenja (Lenya)	September 1935	sails for New York and plans to stay until the premiere of <i>Der Weg der Verheissung</i> , due to take place early in 1936. Subsequent postponement of the production forces him to find work in America.		
27 March 1926	highly successful premiere of <i>Der Protagonist</i> in Dresden; conductor Fritz Busch, director Josef Gielen	Summer 1936	lectures and composes at Group Theatre summer camp		
September 1926	first radio commission, a score for Grabbe's <i>Herzog von Gothland</i> , produced by Funk-Stunde Berlin	19 November 1936	premiere of <i>Johnny Johnson</i> , a musical play by Paul Green, produced by the Group Theatre, New York		
March 1927	first discussions with Bertolt Brecht; outline for <i>Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny</i> (Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny), opera in three acts	27 August 1937	takes first step towards American citizenship: re-enters U.S.A. from Canada for immigration purposes		
May 1927	completes <i>Mahagonny Songspiel</i> , after Brecht's "Mahagonny-Gesänge"				
18 July 1927	first performance of <i>Mahagonny Songspiel</i> , Deutsche Kammermusikfest, Baden-Baden				