

Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra, Op. 12

This concerto was composed in Berlin in April/May 1924. Although written for Joseph Szigeti, it was first performed by Marcel Darrieux in Paris on June 11, 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. 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 marvelous *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 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; the orchestra's threatening interjection near the end strikingly anticipates the *Happy End* chorus "Geht hinein in die Schlacht."

Vom Tod im Wald

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 November 23, 1927, which greatly shocked the conservative critics (one of whom described it as a "monstrosity"). Was it simply the atonal dissonance that caused the shock? Or was the 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?

Song of Mandelay from *Happy End*

Happy End premiered in 1929 at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm almost exactly one year after the premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. With a book by Elisabeth Hauptmann and songs by Brecht and Weill, the play with music was intended by the producer to duplicate the popular and commercial success of *Dreigroschenoper*. Such was not to be, however. At the climax of Act III, the play's light-hearted nature took a sharp twist to the left, ending in a scene which combined scurrilous political satire with what seemed very like frank blasphemy. There was a minor riot, and the police were called in to restore order. The work, all but forgotten except for a few songs, remained in obscurity until 1956 when Lenya recorded the entire score for Columbia Records. Many critics feel that it boasts Weill's best theater songs.

Kleine Dreigroschenmusik

Suite from *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, and was first performed by the orchestra of the Krolloper in Berlin, at a concert of modern music conducted by Otto Klemperer in February 1929.

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 one might imagine that Weill's main purpose in making the suite was just as commercial as that of his eighteenth-century predecessors. But the score tells quite another story. The instrumentation (twelve 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; and it did not begin to be widely performed until quite recently — that is, until patterns of concert-giving inherited from earlier and very different ages begin 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 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 audience at the Kroll concert were the Tango-Ballade and the Kanonen-Song.

And how brilliantly Weill integrated 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 Pollys Lied.