

Kurt Weill

**Oil Music**

Arranged by David Drew

1. Nocturne
2. Work-rhythm I
3. Workers' Song I
4. Work-rhythm II
5. Workers' Song II
6. Song Mussel from Margate

Sarah Leonard *Soprano*

Peter Hall *Tenor*

Nancy Long *Mezzo soprano*

Brian Etheridge *Baritone*

In March 1928 Weill interrupted work on his opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* to write two theatre scores. One of them was for *Konjunktur* (Business Cycle), a 'comedy of economics' produced by Erwin Piscator at the Lessig Theater the following month. The author of the original play was Leo Lania, a writer and journalist who had distinguished himself with his reports of the Hitler trial in 1924, and was now a member of Piscator's 'collective' of writers. The stage version of *Konjunktur* was the joint work of Lania, Piscator, and his Dramaturg Felix Gasbarra. In his programme note, Lania remarked that the 'hero' of the play was petrol and that the 'plot' concerned the economic and political implications of the struggle for oil. The play opens in a primitive Balkan country where oil is accidentally discovered by three small-time hoodlums. They are soon followed by increasingly weighty representatives of American, Anglo-Dutch and Soviet oil interests, and there ensues, as a contemporary critic wrote, 'the struggle of the strong and the exploitation of the weak, manslaughter and murder, grandiose fraud and primitive trickery, all for the sake of oil'.

Only a few fragments of Weill's score have survived. They include a nocturne which he used again in *Street Scene*, nearly 20 years later, and various ostinato patterns or 'work rhythms' intended for documentary film sequences. Although the mechanistic effect of their ad lib repetitions suggests that he may have been acquainted with Satie's score for Rene Clair's *Entr'acte*, it is also, of course, a critical comment to which the superimposed melody lends a Russian (not to say Soviet) character. The melody is entitled 'Arbeiterlied' in the manuscript, but the words are missing.

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**Mussel from Margate**

In Margate on the Promenade there's a relic of another time;  
A little shop with its sea-souvenirs and a great big mussel on a sign.  
There stands an elderly man  
Who shouts as loud as he can:  
My souvenirs I'd like to sell  
Shell! Shell! Shell!

Mussel from Margate made out of gold,  
Mussel with magical powers.  
Mussel from Margate, every time you look  
You'll remember back to unforgettable golden hours.

In Margate on the Promenade there came up quite a smell;  
For there where once was a mussel shop stands a great petroleum well.  
The son of the elderly man  
Had another kind of business plan,  
An international oil cartel  
Shell! Shell! Shell!

Mussel from Margate made out of gold  
Mussel with magical powers.  
Mussel from Margate, every time he'll look  
He'll remember back to the oil well's unforgettable towers.

And as they started pumping oil in Margate on the Promenade  
A dozen wells all over the world sprang up, from Alaska to Kuwait,  
In Caracas and Aberdeen  
From blood they made gasoline  
Ten thousand voices join to yell  
Shell! Shell! Shell!

Mussel from Margate made out of gold  
Mussel with magical powers.  
Mussel from Margate, every time they look  
They'll remember back to black gold's unforgettable showers.

And as the sun set in the west, in Margate on the Promenade,  
The oil began to catch on fire, from Nigeria to Malay.  
Burning oil will set the world on fire,  
For petroleum is our desire;  
And here on earth we'll call our hell  
Shell! Shell! Shell!

Mussel from Margate, gold made from it  
Oil mixed with water makes power.  
Mussel from Margate, every time we look  
We must pay the price at the unforgettable

Felix Gasbarra  
English version by Eric Salzman

Kurt Weill

**Klopslied**

Neil Jenkins *Tenor*

The text is traditional, and familiar to all Berliners. The only known copy of Weill's setting is in a New York library. It was made for an album presented to Emil Hertzka by composers associated with Universal Edition, Vienna — among them, Schoenberg, Bartók and Milhaud. As far as we know, the first and only performance until recently took place on 14 December 1927 at the wedding reception of Thea and H H Stuckenschmidt.

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I sit and eat two balls of meat.  
A sudden knock.  
I listen with surprise  
When suddenly the door's ajar  
Well, well, I think; think I, well, well.  
The door was shut; it's open now.  
I go outside to see; guess who is there?  
It's me, it's me, it's me!



Kurt Weill

## Pantomime I (from *The Protagonist*)

The Wife: Brian Etheridge *Baritone*

The Husband: Peter Hall *Tenor*

The Girl: Sarah Leonard *Soprano*

The Monk: Terry Edwards *Bass*

The 1-act opera *The Protagonist* (based on Georg Kaiser's Expressionist tragedy of the same name and first performed under Fritz Busch, in Dresden in 1926), 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.

*The 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.

The style of Pantomime I is distinct from that of the opera, being predominantly grotesque and distorted, like an Expressionist parody of the opera's *buffo* music (while Pantomime II starts by parodying the ominous music). The chorale which mockingly introduces the monk seems also to be teasing Hindemith: but the monk's subsequent "love song" (trumpet solo) alludes to Strauss's *Don Juan* with a more kindly humour.

Formally, Pantomime I consists of a theme, nine variations, and finale.

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Scenario by Georg Kaiser

### Theme and Variation 1

*Andante non troppo*

The Wife (at the bedroom window on the left) turns back and entices the Husband with languorous gestures. The Husband suffers her caresses reluctantly telling her that he has to go out. The Wife grows desperate but eventually calms down. The Husband disappears from the window and emerges from the front door, locking it. The Wife hangs out of the window and implores him (*trumpet, lamentoso*) to stay. The Husband points to the lane through which he must leave. The Wife throws kisses after him. Husband exits. The Wife, overcome with grief, rests her head on the window sill.

### Variation 2

*Allegro molto*

After a while the Husband returns, and begins a "serenade". The Girl's attention is caught and she looks down bashfully. The Wife (left) listens — looks up — sees her Husband — and ...

### Variation 3

*Molto furioso*

starts raving. The Girl sits rigid once more. The Husband runs under the window (left) and tries to pacify the Wife. The Wife threatens terribly at the opposite window. The Husband sits down sadly beside the door — listens (*clarinet cadenza*) — and ...

### Variation 4

*Allegro molto moderato*

leaps into the lane from which he pulls the Monk. He makes violent gestures at him, points to the Wife and hands him the key of the door, excitedly frisking backwards and forwards. The Monk finally enters, chuckling.

### Variation 5

*Sostenuto. Chorale*

The Wife turns round, changes her posture and waits humbly. The Monk appears at her side (*Intermezzo, trumpet solo, Tranquillo e dolce*); after some pious advances, he grows importunate. The Wife still resists. The Husband returns under the Girl's window and throws his mandolin up to her. The Girl fastens the latch-key to the ribbon and lets it down. The Husband unlocks the door, enters and appears beside the Girl.

Kurt Weill

## Vom Tod im Wald

Sung in German

Terry Edwards Bass

### Variation 6

*Allegretto scherzando* -

Ensemble: Girl, Husband, Wife and Monk

From here, the love-play of both couples becomes more and more intensive

### Variation 7

*Poco meno mosso* -

love duet: Girl/Husband

### Variation 8

*Allegro molto* -

ensemble continues, "tü, tü, tü"

On both sides, the love-play reaches its climax. The Monk lies on top of the Wife, who is leaning out of the window and thus catches sight of the Husband, who is in a similar position with the Girl. (Wife: "traitor!"). The Monk and the Girl continue the love-play. Reverse position: Wife on top of Monk, Girl on top of Husband, who catches sight of the Wife. (Husband: "Unfaithful one!")

### Variation 9

*Molto agitato*

The Wife pushes the Monk away and threatens the Husband. The Husband replies, pointing to the Monk. The Wife starts beating the Monk. The Monk disappears: the Wife follows him. The Monk comes out of the door, the Wife behind him, and flees down the lane. The Wife knocks at the door (right). The Husband and Girl, embracing, lean out and jeer at the Wife. The Wife grows tame and implores the Husband to come down. The Husband points at the Girl, whom he will bring home with him. The Wife agrees. Husband and Girl disappear from the window and come out of the door. The Husband kisses alternately Wife and Girl. He gives the Wife a long embrace (Girl is jealous). Then he embraces the Girl (Wife waits patiently).

### Finale

*Tempo di Cancan*

The Monk appears from the lane in order to claim his rights from the Wife; he is chased, caught, beaten and put to flight by the Wife and Husband. (*Presto*) The Husband sends Wife and Girl back to their respective windows. Then he runs from one house to the other blowing kisses.

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?

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*Und ein Mann starb im Hathourywald  
Wo der Mississippi brauste.  
Starb wie ein Tier in Wurzeln eingekrallt  
Schaute hoch in die Wipfel, wo über  
den Wald  
Sturm seit Tagen ohne Authörn sauste.*

And a man died in the Hathoury Woods  
To the Mississippi's growling —  
Died like an animal clawing at roots  
Stared up through the trees, as the  
wind skimmed the woods  
And the tempest was endlessly howling

*Und es standen einige um ihn  
Und sie sagten, dass er stiller werde:  
Komm, wir tragen Dich jetzt heim,  
Gefährte!  
Aber er stiess sie mit seinen Knien  
Spuckte aus und sagte: Und wohnin?  
Denn er hatte weder Heim noch Erde.*

Several of them stood to watch him go  
And they strove to make his passage  
smoother  
Telling him: We'll take you home now,  
brother.  
But he thrust them off him with a blow  
Spat, and cried: And where's my home,  
d'you know?  
That was home, and he had got no  
other.

*Wieviel Zähne hast Du noch im Maul?  
Und wie ist das sonst mit Dir, lass sehn!  
Stirb ein wenig ruhiger und nicht so faul!  
Gestern abend assen wir schon Deinen  
Gaul.  
Warum willst Du nicht zur Hölle gehn?*

Is your toothless mouth choking  
with pus?  
How's the rest of you: can you still tell?  
Must you die so slowly and with  
so much fuss?  
We've just had your horse served up  
as steak to us.  
Hurry up! They're waiting down in hell

*Denn der Wald war laut um ihn und sie.  
Und sie sahn: ihn sich am Baume  
halten.  
Und sie hörten: wie er ihnen schrie.  
Rauchend standen sie im Wald  
von Hathoury  
Und mit Arger sahn sie ihn erkalten.  
Denn er war ein Mann wie sie.*

*Du benimmst Dich schäbig wie ein  
Tier!  
Sei ein Gentleman, kein Elendshaulen!  
Ja, was ist denn das mir dir?  
Und er sah sie an, kaputt vor Gier:  
Leben will ich! Essen! Faul sein!  
Schnaufen!  
Und im Wind fortreiten so wie ihr!*

*Das war etwas, was kien Freund  
verstand:  
Dreimal riefen sie mit Gentleman  
ihn an.  
Dreimal lachte da, der vierte Mann.  
Ihm hielt Erde seine nackte Hand.  
Als er krebsig lag im schwarzen Tann.*

*Als ihn der Wald von Hathoury  
frass.  
Gruben sie den sehr vom Tau  
durchnassten  
Noch am Morgen durch das dunkle  
Grass  
Voll von Ekel noch und kalt von Hass  
In des Baumes unterstes Geäste.*

*Und Sie ritten stumm aus dem Dickicht.  
Und sie sahn noch nach dem Baume  
hin.  
Unter den sie eingegraben ihn.  
Dem das Sterben allzu bitter schien:  
Und der Baum war oben voll Licht.  
Und sie bekreuzten ihr junges Gesicht  
Und sie ritten schnell in die Prärien.*

Then the forest roared above their head  
And they saw which tree trunk he was  
seizing  
And they heard his screams and what  
he said  
Could not go to him, but stood and  
smoked instead  
And, exasperated, watched him  
freezing:  
So like them, and yet so nearly dead.

You're behaving meaner than a bear!  
Be a gentleman, that's suicidal!  
What has got into you there?  
Weak with greed, he fixed them  
with his stare:  
Let me live! And eat! Breathe deep!  
Lie idle!  
Ride off in the wind without a care!

That's what none of them  
could understand.  
Thrice they shouted "gentleman"  
and "please!"  
Thrice the fourth man laughed at words  
like these  
Earth was clinging to his naked hand  
As he lay cancered among the black  
trees.

As, swallowed by the woods, he then  
decayed  
Sodden with dew, they buried him  
for ever  
Before noonday in the grassy shade  
Numb from shock once more and cold  
from hate  
With the tree's bottommost  
branches over.

And they rode in silence from that place  
Turning round to see the tree again  
Under which their comrade once  
had lain  
Who felt dying was too sharp a pain:  
The tree stood in the light ablaze.  
Then each made the mark of the cross  
on his face  
And they rode off swiftly over the plain.

Bertolt Brecht

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Kurt Weill

## Kraniche-Duett (Cranes' Duet)

Nicole Tibbels *Soprano*

Neil Jenkins *Tenor*

Some weeks after he had finished the full score of his *Mahagonny* opera in March 1929 Weill was urgently requested by his publisher to collaborate with Brecht on an expurgated version of the brothel scene. At first he and Brecht demurred, but when it became apparent that the brothel scene was a major obstacle to the work's performance, they submitted the *Cranes' Duet* as a diametrically opposed alternative. The text is an early poem of Brecht's, originally entitled 'Die Liebenden'; it has been described by Hannah Arendt as one of the greatest lyric poems in the German language since Goethe. Weill's setting of it was published as a concert excerpt, and as such it certainly deserves to be heard, especially as it is often omitted from stage productions, and even if its G minor close is (deliberately) inconclusive.

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- Jim Dearest Jenny, I'm leaving now.  
The days that I spent with you all were pleasant ones.  
And the end, when that came, was pleasant too.
- Jenny Dearest Jimmy, I also enjoyed the little time I spent with you,  
And I don't know where I may end up now.
- Jim Take my word,  
There's lots of guys as good as me.
- Jenny That isn't true.  
I know I won't see a time like this again.  
See those two cranes in their great circles wheeling.
- Jim The clouds seem part of them, so high they travel!
- Jenny Have done since from their nest they first went stealing.
- Jim Where new lives start and older lives unravel.
- Jenny At equal heights and with an equal daring.
- Both Though they seem to lie still as specks of gravel,
- Jenny They fly, the crane and the cloud together sharing  
The lovely sky, through which their flight is fleeting.
- Jim Neither dares lag behind and end their pairing.
- Jenny And neither feels a thing except the beating  
The wind gives both, each sees its partner quaking,  
As they fly side by side, their flight a meeting.
- Jim Letting the cruel wind steer them with its shaking,  
Only so they can touch and see each other.
- Jenny Though they well know their bond will soon be breaking.
- Jim Though they well know men hunt them one place to another  
Where thunder warns of rain, or guns of danger!
- Jenny So under sunlight and moon, each orb much like its brother  
They fly along, each owning and owned by th'other.
- Jim To go where?
- Jenny Anywhere!
- Jim To all the world...
- Jenny A stranger.
- Both Thus are they free to love, free to love, free to love.
- Jim You ask how long these two will be together?
- Jenny Quite briefly!
- Jim And how they will feel at parting?
- Jenny Cold!
- Both So Love means for lovers: one moment to hold.

Bertolt Brecht

*Translation by Michael Feingold*

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