

Kurt Weill

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WEILL'S Concerto for violin and an ensemble of ten wind instruments, percussion, and double basses was composed in April-May 1924, for Szigeti. Its near contemporaries are the Berg Double Concerto (1923-5), with its accompaniment of thirteen wind instruments, and the first of the Hindemith chamber concertos, for piano and twelve instruments (1924). To that extent, the Weill Concerto belongs to, and neither follows nor leads, the 'modern' music of its time. Weill had already renounced the more traditional and perhaps more assured style of his first adult pieces, where his models had been Mahler, Strauss, and the early Schoenberg.

As T. W. Adorno once remarked, the Concerto 'stands isolated and alien, which is to say, in the right place.' This is so despite the echoes of Stravinsky (*The Soldier's Tale*), Hindemith (Op. 24 No. 2), and Berg (in general), which may obtrude at first hearing. A sense of hostile isolation was and remained characteristic of Weill. It is one inner bond between the Concerto and the outwardly dissimilar works for which Weill is best known today—*Mahagonny* and the rest. The other bond, an inherent romanticism, provides the tension.

The romanticism of the Concerto becomes explicit at two points: in the almost Mendelssohnian (if disillusioned) tranquillo episode before the first movement's coda, and again in the related episode towards the end of the finale. But it is implicit in the entire 'programme' of the work. Weill wrote the Concerto on his return to a bleak Germany after his first and overwhelming visit to Italy.

The first movement is wholly 'alien': desolated counterpoints mingle with an uprooted *Dies Irae*, become convulsive, and rise to a shriek of despair. The first part of the tri-partite central movement, a nocturnal *Potentanz*, leads to a transformation scene ('Cadenza') and thence to a 'Serenata' which at last reaches the Mediterranean sun, but shivers nonetheless. The final tarantella looks back at Italy, but only finds a sort of peace amid the forest murmurs of the north.

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