

David Drew

## ***Royal Palace and its Critics***

### ***Notes on the reception, despoliation, and reconstruction of Kurt Weill's and Yvan Goll's opera-ballet, 1927-2001***

The critic cannot hold up the course of things, this world being ruled by the inevitable; but let him point again and again to man, to life in art, to music that is divine because it is in its essence human.

*Adolf Weissmann (1930)<sup>1</sup>*

The prevalence of the package over the product has become one of the key markers of contemporaneity, an emblem of our faded faith in essence and built-in values.

*Ralph Rugoff on Andreas Gursky (1999)<sup>2</sup>*

Until January 2000 and the BBC's 'Weill Weekend' at the Barbican Centre, London, the nature, the outlines and even the approximate location of Kurt Weill's and Yvan Goll's one-act opera-ballet *Royal Palace* were familiar to no more than a handful of specialists in Europe and America.<sup>3</sup> Publicists required at short notice to produce suitable soundbites from a Weill literature that has become voluminous since Kim Kowalke published his pioneering study in 1979 could be forgiven for overlooking—as most of them did—an aspect of the BBC's enterprise that was of purely archeological significance: the fact that some 75 years after its completion, *Royal Palace* was about to be exhibited, for the very first time, in its intended juxtaposition with Weill's first opera, *Der Protagonist*.

<sup>1</sup> Weissmann, tr. Blom, 1930, 148. Apart from a brief envoi, these are Weissmann's closing words.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Rugoff, *World Perfect*, London, 1999, 7-12. Rugoff's essay, adapted from an earlier version published in *frieze*, issue 43, November/December 1998, is an introduction to an exhibition of work by the German artist Andreas Gursky.

<sup>3</sup> Vilain and Chew 1997 is a pioneering study.

Also in one act, *Der Protagonist* is based on the play of the same name by Georg Kaiser. The work had been so well received at its Dresden premiere under Fritz Busch in March 1926 that something of the aura of a successful operatic debut had survived the work's inglorious performance-history in the years immediately following<sup>4</sup> and its fate thereafter. A mere quarter century of total oblivion ended some five years after Weill's death in New York in 1950 with a studio production of *Der Protagonist* in Düsseldorf. It marked the beginning of the work's rehabilitation, and from then on, intermittent stage or radio productions—with or without the work's surrogate companion-piece, the one-act opera buffa *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren*—were welcomed by European audiences and critics, and eventually by American ones too.

Thanks to the widely-reported success of the American premiere of *Der Protagonist* at the 1993 Santa Fe Opera Festival—and perhaps even to some lingering echoes from the British stage-premiere at the (March) 1986 Camden Festival—the well-informed audience attending the Barbican's Weill events in January 2000 may have had reasonable expectations of discovering in Weill's first opera some still-bright flame of youthful inspiration. It was not to be. The orchestral prelude had barely begun before the works' concertante pretensions and theatrical ambitions seemed to jar with the environment, the acoustics, and the audience's mood. It is precisely in the prelude to *Der Protagonist* that the conflict between a post-Straussian impetuosity and a postgraduate awkwardness is most acute. Yet the essence of the piece is also latent in those first pages; and perhaps it was from that that the audience in the hall was already visibly shrinking. Despite an alert performance admirably conducted by Sir Andrew Davis, the distance between the 'work as text' and its live audience seemed unbridgeable. Disengagement gave way to boredom, boredom to restlessness and irritation.

Meanwhile, a much larger and mercifully unknowing radio audience was excluded from the one important aspect of the process of musical communication with which neither musicology nor the higher criticism can concern itself. The mood of the hour, the bearing of an audience from moment to moment, these are not, in the normal course of events, scientifically verifiable factors; yet they are legitimate concerns of the responsible and disinterested reviewer. On this occasion their relevance to what followed was already manifest in the interval-break, when the disappointed 'customers' retired for refreshment, and admirers of the composer's later works, American or European, were over-

<sup>4</sup> The last production in Weill's lifetime was at the Städtische Oper, Berlin, in 1928.

heard complaining than they'd just wasted an hour listening to an apprentice piece.

Such was the inauspicious beginning of an evening that ended with the resounding success of *Royal Palace*. From the first muffled strokes of low bells oscillating between C# and E, the audience's attention was captured and held. A true theatre piece—but one whose ideal stage exists, perhaps, only in the imagination—had effortlessly taken control of an unforgiving concert-space in which the previous defeat of *Der Protagonist* already seemed forgettable (though in truth it was illuminating and even, in this context, an advantage).

Eighteen months later, however, *Royal Palace* was performed by the same artists in the very different context of a BBC Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall, where it formed the second half of a program that began with Schoenberg's Variations for Orchestra and a Rachmaninoff Concerto. Announced as "the surprise discovery of last year's BBC Weill Weekend" and described in the program-book as "a radical 1920s blend of Greek mythology, popular dance rhythms, and ballet and film sequences," *Royal Palace* was now being exposed to a much larger and more broadly representative public than before. Predictably the piece stood the test, and was again an unqualified success. Yet the writer of the program-note had maintained that *Royal Palace* "remains one of [Weill's] least-known and most problematic works."<sup>5</sup>

Reactions to the Barbican performance had already suggested that *Royal Palace* was relatively or wholly unproblematic compared to most of its composer's larger works; and if this was indeed one of his "least-known" works, there was seemingly nothing to prevent its becoming one of his best-known—or nothing, at least, other than the practical and financial obstacles that stand in the way of so many other admirable non-repertory pieces by greater and lesser composers.

Yet the litmus-test of performance can never be an infallible guide to the next performance or public exposure. What befell *Der Protagonist* at the Barbican Centre in January 2000 had no bearing on the enthusiastic reception of a commercial recording of the same work some two years later.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, the votes of confidence carried in the upper and lower houses of the Barbican Centre and the Royal Albert Hall do not guarantee that the next stage-production of *Royal Palace* will be happier than the first.

<sup>5</sup> BBC Promenade Concert, 2 August 2001, program note by Erik Levi.

<sup>6</sup> *Der Protagonist*, with the Deutsches Symphony-Orchester, Berlin, c. John Mauceri, Cologne: Capriccio 60086, 2001.

## — 1 —

Weill began work on the composition of his 45-minute opera-ballet *Royal Palace* in the second week of October 1925, and had completed the full score by the end of January 1926. The peculiar urgency of the whole undertaking sprang from two distinct and successive sources, the first coolly speculative, the second creative and, in effect, overwhelming.

The gamble was with Dresden and the management of its historic Semper-Oper. Fritz Busch as Generalmusikdirektor and Alfred Reucker as Intendant had waited until *Der Protagonist* was already in rehearsal before deciding on practical grounds to postpone the world premiere from October 1925 to March 1926. The decision was reached during Weill's visit to Dresden on 25 September; and had his full approval – not least because he believed that there might be a chance for an all-Weill evening, were he now to provide a companion-piece for *Der Protagonist*.<sup>7</sup>

It was not an idea likely to have commended itself to Reucker or even Busch. Enough was already at stake in their support for the young and operatically untried composer of *Der Protagonist*. But Weill's youthful ambitions were such that an encouraging word from someone in the Dramaturgie might well have sufficed. If his first step on returning to Berlin was to inform Georg Kaiser of the postponement, his second, must have been to explore with him – and not for the first time – the possibility of a new libretto for a 1-act piece, whether a genuinely new one or, like *Der Protagonist*, a swift and simple adaptation of an existing play.<sup>8</sup>

For the time being, Kaiser had nothing of his own to offer. Immediately available, however, was the willing support of his friend and younger contemporary Yvan Goll (1891-1950), the Alsace-born poet and playwright.<sup>9</sup>

Weill's letter of 26 September to his publishers already announces that he will very soon "receive" from an unnamed source a new libretto for an opera-ballet. His careful wording does not suggest that he saw himself as a direct collaborator: "Schließlich vertraue ich Ihnen an, dass ich innerhalb kürzester Zeit ein neues Libretto (halb Oper, halb Ballett) bekommen werde."<sup>10</sup> Three weeks later (15 October) he informs UE

<sup>7</sup> Kurt Weill to Universal Edition, 26 September 1925, Grosch 2002, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Unless Weill had wind of the postponement prior to his Dresden visit, the rapidity of his response was phenomenal.

<sup>9</sup> Goll was born Isaac Lang, and called himself Yvan or Iwan according to whether he was writing in French or in German.

<sup>10</sup> KW to UE, 26 September 1925, Grosch 2002, 22.

“dass ich an einer neuen Oper arbeite, einem ballettartigen Einakter *Royal Palace*, Text von Iwan Goll (ein herrliches Libretto).”

Though not without occasional misjudgments for which Weill alone is responsible, the quality, the intensity, and the flow of the musical invention in *Royal Palace* owe much to Goll's intuitive understanding of his composer and hence to his own innate musicality. Once Weill had read the libretto, any sense of urgency associated with the Dresden deadline was overtaken by his own creative drive.

Although *Royal Palace* was completed (on schedule) in January 1926, Busch and Reucker had by then decided to couple *Der Protagonist* with Alfredo Casella's Pirandello ballet *La Giara* – already a proven success, and one that happened to be published by Universal Edition, who were doubtless delighted to be relieved of the responsibility of producing performance material for *Royal Palace* at perilously short notice.

The Dresden premiere of *Der Protagonist* on 27 March 1926 was a major success. As a composer for the lyric stage, the 26-year-old Weill had for the time being outstripped Hindemith and Krenek, his two main rivals among the postwar generation of composers active in Germany. Widely reported in Berlin's musical press, the success would certainly have been one of the factors that encouraged Erich Kleiber and his colleagues at the Staatsoper unter den Linden to interest themselves in *Royal Palace* for the 1926/27 season. Early in May 1926 Weill played the score to Kleiber and his *Chefregisseur*. They were impressed;<sup>11</sup> and a month later they confirmed their intention to stage the work during the coming season, when the company would be temporarily housed at the old Kroll-Oper.

As in Dresden, Weill had tried to press the case for his double bill, but in vain. The situation was now reversed: Kleiber and his *Chefregisseur* Franz-Ludwig Hörth, were wholly committed to *Royal Palace* but wary of *Der Protagonist*. According to Weill's account of a “detailed discussion” with Hörth,<sup>12</sup> the Staatsoper management was reluctant to expose itself to comparisons with Dresden.

With due allowances for Kleiber's close ties with Busch and with Dresden, this sounds like a diplomatic excuse for concealing some doubts about *Der Protagonist* itself and thus avoiding an altogether more invidious comparison: not with Dresden's production but with Kleiber's own history-making premiere of *Wozzeck* at the Staatsoper in December 1925. *Royal Palace* plainly belonged to a quite different genre, while

<sup>11</sup> KW to UE, 6 May 1926, Grosch 2002, 33.

<sup>12</sup> KW to UE, 8 June 1926, Grosch 2002, 35.

*The Protagonist* had aspired to a rather too similar one.

The *Royal Palace* premiere was duly scheduled for mid-January 1927, but still without any decision as to the rest of the program. A subsequent postponement to 2 March enabled Weill, as late as 10 February, to make his own highly questionable but gladly accepted contribution: his still unperformed cantata, *Der neue Orpheus*, based on the poem of the same name by Yvan Goll, but now adopted by Weill as a so-called Prologue to *Royal Palace*. The Staatsoper's ballet-master Max Terpis<sup>13</sup> was required to devise a suitable choreography for a work whose concertante form and poetic structure were entirely self-sufficient. Terpis already had his hands full with the extensive dance and mime episodes in *Royal Palace*, and now Weill—with or without Goll's authority<sup>14</sup>—had added to the penultimate and climactic dance scene a spurious link with the so-called 'prologue' by introducing the mythological Orpheus and his worshippers.

The proposed choreography for *Der neue Orpheus* did not materialise. The Staatsoper's evening began with a concert performance of the cantata. (Understandably in the circumstances, the work seems to have made little impression; after the final Berlin performance it was not heard again in Weill's lifetime.) Following *Royal Palace* came the interval; and after that, the local premiere of Falla's *Master Peter's Puppet Show*, a work commissioned by the Princesse de Polignac for performance in her Paris salon.

Hörth's attempt to produce an enlargement of Falla's inspired miniature was doomed from the start, but the success of the evening had already been assured by his flamboyant production of *Royal Palace*, persuasively conducted by Kleiber. For Weill, the premiere was a major personal success. When he took his bow at the close, it was to loud acclaim from a fashionable audience aware that his operatic debut in Berlin happened to have taken place on the evening of his 27th birthday.

Universal Edition's publicists had no difficulty in culling from the press reviews a bouquet of convincing tributes to the young composer. With regard to his librettist, however, they evidently came away empty-handed. Today's research has yet to unearth a single review that reflects the slightest apprehension of those qualities in the libretto that had mani-

<sup>13</sup> The Swiss-born choreographer and opera producer Max Terpis [Pfister] (1889-1958) was best known for his work at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden. He returned to Switzerland shortly before the outbreak of World War 2.

<sup>14</sup> Weill does not mention Goll in this connection—or indeed in any other—during the period between his receipt of the libretto and the premiere in Berlin.

festly excited Weill, nor is there any evidence that Goll's origins, identity, or prior achievements were held to be relevant or at least vaguely interesting. Goll emerges as a nonentity whose foolishness and incompetence had undermined the work of a gifted young composer.

Like every Austro-German or French publisher of new opera in the highly competitive boom years of the 1920s, Universal Edition was aware how avidly prospective clients would study reviews of major premieres, and how swiftly they could and would react. Anything approaching a negative consensus—across the board or within the sector of critical opinion closest to the work under review—was bound to have a drastic effect on the chances of recouping production costs during the coming seasons.

Hans Heinsheimer, the newly appointed head of UE's opera department,<sup>15</sup> was an exact contemporary of Weill's, and in some respects as shrewd as he. But a good head for business and a keen nose for musical and intellectual fashion were not sufficient protection against the critical onslaught on the *Royal Palace* libretto from every quarter.

Without a single dissenting opinion to help define the grounds for defending Goll's libretto, Weill immediately returned to Georg Kaiser, and within days of the *Royal Palace* premiere informed UE that the long-promised resumption of the collaboration was now at hand.<sup>16</sup> Sure enough, he confirms on 23 March 1927 that they had already worked out the scenario for a 45-minute piece. His promise that it would make "eine herrliche Ergänzung zum *Protagonist*" (a wonderful complement to *Der Protagonist*) was certainly not intended to remind himself or anyone else of the "herrliches Libretto" Goll had sent him 18 months before. Yet the same unconscious resonances may still be heard in his important letter to UE of 4 April.

It begins with an oddly defensive introduction to the enclosed libretto for *Na und?*, his first full-evening opera. The author is his former composition-pupil Felix Joachimson, now active as a Dramaturg in Berlin (and soon to achieve success with his play *Fünf von der Jazzband*). The opera has been Weill's main preoccupation for the past twelve months. It is now complete, and ready for immediate promotion to opera houses currently engaged in planning their programs for the 1927/28 season.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Hans Heinsheimer (1900-1993) joined Universal Edition in Vienna as a 23-year-old.

<sup>16</sup> KW to UE, 4 April 1927, Grosch 2002, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Half a year earlier, UE's premature announcement of *Na und?* had awakened Kleiber's interest—potentially at the expense of *Royal Palace*.

Knowing, as he surely did, that there had been no serious inquiry for *Royal Palace* since the premiere, Weill—ostensibly on the advice of ‘friends’—urges his publishers to promote the work as a full-blown ballet (in combination with *Der Neue Orpheus*), and to aim for Olympus itself, in the person of Diaghilev.<sup>18</sup> Two months later he reports that Goll has already spoken with Diaghilev regarding the *Orpheus/Royal Palace* pairing, and had given him copies of both scores.<sup>19</sup>

Nothing came of these initiatives. *Royal Palace* disappeared from the agenda for a year and a half. Overtaken and outbid in the poker-and-whiskey saloons of the *Mahagonny* ‘Songspiel,’ gravely damaged by the success of the Weill/Kaiser one-acter *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* in February 1928, and laid to waste by the triumph of *Die Dreigroschenoper* at the very start of the 1928/29 season, *Royal Palace* had become a lost cause long before Universal Edition received an inquiry for it from the important theatre in Essen.

Rudolf Schulz-Dornburg, the Essen Generalmusikdirektor and one of Weill’s earliest proponents, had been interested in *Royal Palace* long before the Berlin premiere, and was now proposing to include it in Essen’s summer festival of modern opera. According to Heinsheimer in his letter to Weill of 21 December 1928<sup>20</sup> he had told Schulz-Dornburg that *Royal Palace* was not available as it was scheduled for revision. As if improvising on the spur of the moment, he went on to explain to his docile composer that it would be “pointless” (unzweckmässig) to produce the work without a thorough revision of the libretto.

Schulz-Dornburg remained adamant, and could afford to, for in recent years he had been one of UE’s most loyal clients. On 7 February 1929, Heinsheimer warned Weill<sup>21</sup> that the conductor was on his way to Berlin, and would probably contact him in order to press his case for *Royal Palace*. It was therefore essential, if embarrassing, to tell Weill what he has already told Schulz-Dornburg: that composer and publisher were of one accord in this matter, and that Weill shared the view that a performance of *Royal Palace* would be undesirable and indeed damaging in the aftermath of *Mahagonny* and *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Tactfully, or so he must have imagined, Heinsheimer defined the problem in terms of Goll’s old fashioned text and the brave new world of Brecht.

<sup>18</sup> KW to UE, 4 April 1927, Grosch 2002, 57: ‘Auf den Rat meiner Freunde.’ Who but Goll might have suggested Diaghilev? Maurice Abravanel, perhaps.

<sup>19</sup> KW to UE, 22 June 1927, Grosch 2002, 67.

<sup>20</sup> UE to KW, Grosch 2002, 151.

<sup>21</sup> Grosch 2002, 159.

How far Weill actually went along with Heinsheimer is not clear. In any event, Schulz-Dornburg got his way, and *Royal Palace* was duly staged at the Essen opera festival in June 1929. Like Kleiber, Schulz-Dornburg was obliged to conduct from Weill's holograph full score, for there was no other copy: Universal Edition had from the start economised on production costs—much to the composer's annoyance<sup>22</sup>—and it is obvious that no further expenditure had been authorized in the aftermath of the Berlin premiere. The original hand-copied set of orchestral parts was supplied to Essen and was, like the full score, unique.

These are not trivial details. What became of the score and parts after the Essen performances remains to this day a mystery. As there was no demand for the work during the remaining 20 years of Weill's lifetime and for some while after, the loss went unnoticed. Whereas Heinsheimer had failed to reach his short-term goal of rendering *Royal Palace* inaccessible—that is, technically inoperable pending repairs—it had been achieved in the longer term by a lethal combination of contingency and carelessness. Not until the Holland Festival of 1971 was *Royal Palace* heard again in its entirety, re-orchestrated on the basis of the unusually informative piano-vocal score published in 1926.<sup>23</sup>

*Na und?* was less fortunate. Put on their guard by the reception of the *Royal Palace* libretto, Heinsheimer and his Director, Emil Hertzka, reacted without enthusiasm to the Joachimson text Weill had sent them early in April 1927. At their invitation, however, Weill travelled to Vienna and, on the 13th, played the score to them.<sup>24</sup> It was of no avail. *Na und?* was formally declined.

<sup>22</sup> KW to UE, 10 November 1926, Grosch 2002, 40.

<sup>23</sup> See Bibliography for title-page details. In 1960 the present writer was asked by Harry Buchwitz, then the Intendant of the Frankfurt Opera, to suggest a companion-piece for the planned German premiere of *Die sieben Todsünden*, with Lotte Lenya as vocal soloist. The first recommendation was *Royal Palace*, in a version re-orchestrated from the vocal score; but this idea was abandoned for practical and logistical reasons. The next significant step was a discussion with Gunther Schuller in Tanglewood, which led to his brilliant orchestration of an abbreviated version of the score based on the dance and mime elements. This was successfully staged in October 1968 by the San Francisco Opera conducted by Schuller. Eighteen months later the present writer was engaged by the Holland Festival as Consultant for a Weill retrospective in 1971. Owing to prior commitments, Schuller was unable to undertake the suggested completion of the *Royal Palace* orchestration (much as he would have liked to). This was duly provided at short notice by Noam Sheriff. The version of *Royal Palace* currently available is still two-thirds Schuller and one-third Sheriff—though this was not made clear by the promoters of the British performances in 2000 and 2001.

<sup>24</sup> KW to UE, Grosch 2002, 58-59.

A fatal link between the rejection of Goll's libretto by the critics in March 1927 and the rejection of *Na und?* by UE a month later is exposed by the very different responses to Weill's and Kaiser's *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*. On 19 April,<sup>25</sup> Weill informed UE that he had just received from Kaiser the final manuscript pages of the libretto and would be forwarding a typewritten copy shortly. At no point in the subsequent production process did Heinsheimer or his colleagues express any reservations about the libretto. Their confidence in the work's future—already advertised by their investment in a processed and printed full score—was shown to be well founded. The premiere at the Leipzig opera house on 18 February 1928 was successful and widely enjoyed. The musical press accepted the libretto as part of an entertaining package, and had little else to say about it.

Viewed from today's perspective as vehicles, furniture, or housing, the librettos for Weill's three one-acters of 1924-27 retain their utility value, regardless of changing taste, intrinsic worth, or the infinite possibilities of directorial re-packaging and refurbishment. *Der Protagonist* is a ready-made—finely engineered for the private theatre of its previous owner. *Der Zar* is a vintage car—a once fashionable drop-head coupé custom-made for its composer and guaranteed to carry him from A to B, though not without several breakdowns. It could have done with a ruthless check before composition. Afterwards is too late.

And *Royal Palace*? A trans-cultural edifice designed with love and understanding, it was entered with joy, inhabited for one unrepeatable autumn and winter. Long enough for Weill's needs, and as much as he could afford.

To attempt a substantial revision of a libretto such as Goll's—any of Tippett's for instance—or even to tinker with it, would be senseless. Apart from the film and dance scenarios, which are freely adaptable and obviously intended to be, the text is what it is because Goll means every word of it. After the triumph of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in September 1928, Heinsheimer did his best to persuade Weill to desert the site of *Royal Palace*. Ostensibly, he now saw the work as an obstacle to the progress of the Weill-Brecht partnership. Probably unaware of the young Brecht's admiration for Goll's surrealist theatre of the early 1920s, Heinsheimer had good reason to assume that Brecht would consider the *Royal Palace* libretto worse than 'ridiculous.'<sup>26</sup> Business is business,

<sup>25</sup> Grosch 2002, 59.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Brecht's 'Kurze Bericht über 400 (vierhundert) junge Lyriker', first published in Berlin in *Die Literarische Welt*, 4 February 1927 (Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol 18 Frankfurt, 1967), 54-56.

and *Die Dreigroschenoper* was now big business. So too was Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*. In this case, Brecht's famous dismissal of it was overruled by the message from the box office. For Heinsheimer and the editors of *Anbruch*, the irresistible rise of *Jonny* was a heaven-sent answer to the decline in the fortunes of Franz Schreker, a figure whose influence on *Royal Palace* was nowhere mentioned at the time.<sup>27</sup>

Fifty years later, in the book that marked the birth of a new generation of Weill scholarship, Kim H. Kowalke made important points about the music of *Royal Palace*. Without reservations, however, he endorsed the original condemnation of Goll's libretto.<sup>28</sup> The consequences were far-reaching. An old 'problem' reborn is no longer the old problem.

To be fair to Goll's original critics, the Staatsoper and its Dramaturgie had unhelpfully published a program-book that offered them no guidance as to the poet's literary background or current standing, but relied instead on his own deliberately self-effacing essay. The Staatsoper not only concealed the functional relationship between *Royal Palace* and *Der Protagonist*, but failed to devise an effective—let alone illuminating—alternative to what had been a carefully-structured double-bill. Thus Goll becomes the scapegoat for the forgetfulness of an ambitious young composer and the confused intentions of the Staatsoper management.

— 2 —

*Royal Palace* has a cast of seven, plus solo dancers or mimes, a corps de ballet, and an off-stage women's choir. The protagonist and the only named character is Dejanira (soprano). Her off-stage double is identified simply as 'Solo Soprano'. The five remaining solo parts—all men—divide into a trio of three principals and a pair of important subsidiaries:

- The Husband (bass)
- Yesterday's Lover (baritone)
- Tomorrow's Innamorato (tenor)
- Young Fisherman (tenor)
- Old Fisherman (bass)

The 'Royal Palace' is a luxury hotel overlooking an Italian lake. The hotel's terrace is festooned with camelias and shaded by palm-trees

<sup>27</sup> Like Weill, Schreker was published by Universal Edition. For an illuminating and well documented account of Schreker's increasingly troubled relations with UE – not least with regard to the editorial policy of *Anbruch* – see Christopher Hailey, *Franz Schreker 1878-1934. A cultural biography*, (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> Kowalke 1979, 284.

and cypresses. On the opposite side of the lake is a mountainous landscape dotted with villages.

## 1 Prologue

- 1.1 *Moderato*. As if from the rose-pink campaniles dominating each of the mountain villages there begins a symphony of bells and chimes. Behind the backdrop's painted lake a 3-part women's chorus (later subdivided) vocalises its recurrent Refrain. The idyll is interrupted by the three-note signal of a motor-horn, and a notated *accelerando*.
- 1.2 Foxtrot. Four figures in travelling-cloaks appear on the terrace: Dejanira, The Husband, Yesterday's Lover, and Tomorrow's Innamorato.<sup>29</sup> They are greeted by dancing page-boys in red uniforms.
- 1.2.1 Blues-trio. Dejanira and her two lovers recall their worldwide travels, and the yearnings of shepherds and laborers who catch sight of them as they pass.
- 1.3 *Allegro molto*. The women's chorus resume their vocalised refrain, which becomes the accompaniment for the Solo Soprano's song of sensual awareness. The Husband enters the hotel to order orange juice.

## 2 Yesterday's Lover

- 2.1 *Andante con moto*. Yesterday's Lover asks why Dejanira has not sung since their night together, and is angered by her world-weary reply. She has been listening to the *dolce espressivo* song from the Lake, and hearing in it "an echo from childhood".
- 2.2 *Molto vivace* (dance scene – tarantella). Led by the hotel manager, the waiters and page-boys bring trays of exquisite delicacies and set them before Dejanira and Yesterday's Lover. "The lady only eats roast stars, rubies in milk, and rose-ice" jokes The Husband, now returned. Tomorrow's Innamorato abruptly halts the tarantella.

## 3 The Three Suitors

- 3.1 *Allegretto*. Tomorrow's Innamorato is hungry – but only for Dejanira. He lists her charms and codes them by color, as if they might alchemically become edible—blue, red, and green, pink, violet and orange, black and white.
- 3.1.1 The Husband fancies buying the entire lake. His rivals accuse him of crass materialism; he considers himself more poetically-minded than they. "Who loves you most?", he asks Dejanira, "is it I, or that one, or that? Money, Brains, or Imagination?"

<sup>29</sup> Goll distinguishes between the 'Geliebte' of yesterday and the 'Verliebte' yet to come.

3.2 *Tranquillo*. Yesterday's Lover apostrophises Dejanira. She is his last sailing ship, a three-masted barque that will take him to the island where Love lies silent, still, and turned to stone.

3.3 *Moderato assai*. In tango rhythm. Tomorrow's Innamorato permutes the four syllables of Dejanira's name. Spellbound, his two rivals join in.

#### 4 Dejanira and the Fishermen

4.1 *Un poco agitato*. Dejanira tells her three suitors that they comprehend nothing: women are as inexhaustible as the lake, and not to be bribed or bought with expensive jewelry. How long will it be, she asks, before men intuitively understand why a mother feels suffocated by her unborn child, why love no longer rages, but grieves, silent as a mountain. Fearing for her sanity, The Husband is otherwise unmoved.

4.2 *Allegro molto*. Lake Chorus and Solo Song (Refrain 3). Fishermen appear with their nets and baskets. The Young Fisherman tells Dejanira that their nets are for catching women's desires.

4.2.1 *Sostenuto*. The Old Fisherman reads the four-fold message of the skies, the winds, the seasons, and the elements, and prophesies that one of The Husband's quartet will die.

4.3 *Tranquillo*. Dejanira gives The Old Fisherman her emerald ring.

#### 5 Finaletto (quartet)

5.1 *Allegro appassionato*. The three suitors renew their pleas and bear tokens of the gifts they will now offer her, one by one.

#### 6 The Three Gifts

6.1 The Husband offers 'The Rich Continent.' *Vivace assai* (Foxtrot). Film: Côte d'Azur; Wagons Lits to Constantinople; a ball; Ballets Russes; a plane to the North Pole.

7 **Yesterday's Lover offers 'The Heaven of our Nights.'** *Allegro martellato*. Ballet: The Signs of the Zodiac, lit by the sun from one side and the moon from the other. Shadows doubling the four figures on the terrace join the Dance of the Stars; the shadows of Dejanira and Yesterday's Lover become passionately involved, as the off-stage Solo Soprano and off-stage Young Fisherman begin to sing a new 2-part refrain in close contrapuntal imitation. The climax of their duet is interrupted by the dancers (*Allegro giusto*). Frenzied orgy of shadows and stars.

- 7.1 Suddenly, all is still. *Tranquillo semplice*: shadows and stars disappear.
- 8 Tomorrow's Innamorato offers 'Eternal Nature.'**
- 8.1 *Molto moderato*. The entire stage becomes a sea-surface, the wave patterns are slow, rhythmic, revolving. Later, the scene transforms into a broad landscape.
- 8.2 *Poco animato*. Orpheus appears; behind him a procession, representative of all living creatures. Their dance ends in homage and obeisances to Orpheus.
- 8.3 *Tempo 1*. The dancers retire into the distance. A saddened Dejanira approaches the three men.
- 9 Dejanira's aria.** 'Arme Werber!': Poor suitors! None has understood her, none has recognised her except through the urgency of their own needs and desires. Yet the folly of their egotism now allows her to regain her lost freedom. The protagonist will "sing no more." Nameless at last, she becomes another bride of the lake.
- 10 Tanz der Wasserfrau.** *Royal Palace* closes with a large-scale tango-finale sung by the entire on-stage and off-stage cast apart from the now silent Dejanira. As in the tango-premonitions of 3.3, the text is confined to the four syllables of her 'magic name,' presented in the original form and three interversions: Janirade, Rajedina, Nirajade.

Casting off her brocade cape, the transformed Dejanira begins her water-dance. As the voices of Tomorrow's Innamorato and the Lake's Solo Soprano emerge from the ensemble and begin a lyrical duet, the newborn 'Wasserfrau' loosens her long blond hair; three times her own length, the tresses stream out behind her like a great fishing net. Golden fish are caught in it, and golden stars hang from it. Slowly she sinks beneath the surface. Tomorrow's Innamorato is heard no more; it is now The Young Fisherman who partners the Solo Soprano. Distant bells start to contradict the rhythm of the tango, and then persistently ignore its cadential harmony.

The Husband, his back to the audience, watches aghast. "Help!" he cries hoarsely as the curtain slowly falls, "someone is drowning." A solo horn replies with two *pianissimo* reminders of the motif originally announced by the church bells and then degraded by the motor-horn. At the close, the only remaining sound is that of low bells pitched in a foreign key.

As a companion piece to Georg Kaiser's *Der Protagonist*, Goll's *Royal Palace* is not supplementary but strictly complementary. It defers to the composer, but does so from a position of strength. Knowing that

Kaiser had no composer in mind when he created his *Protagonist*, Goll concentrates on what he imagines his composer might 'hear' rather than see, and excludes the narrative developments, the dramatic confrontations, and the occasional flashes of psychological realism which give *Der Protagonist* its peculiar urgency. His critics in 1927—not only in Berlin but also, it seems, in the offices of Universal Edition—were indifferent or insensitive to the musically motivating qualities of the text. In Vienna if not in Berlin, some appreciation of the affinities between Goll and Béla Balász, as well as between *Royal Palace* and *Bluebeard's Castle*, might have been expected. But it was not forthcoming. Its absence is revealing: in none of the Berlin notices was there evidence of any understanding of Goll's origins and present position. Nor are there even the beginnings of a critique of the libretto—only disparaging epithets, or at best two or three derisive sentences or a scornful comparison with Ernst Krenek, the latest in the tradition of composer-librettists.

It was surely towards that tradition that Goll, as amateur musician and word-composer, was leaning. Wagner he surely knew; Schreker quite probably; and Schoenberg (or Marie Pappenheim) perhaps. Reading the *Royal Palace* text aloud and listening to it with today's ears, we may also be reminded here and there of Michael Tippett, but more often and more extensively, of Olivier Messiaen. Only Goll could have written a French version of *Royal Palace*; and had he done so, we might hear more clearly how much the libretto owes to the sources from which Messiaen drew the language and imagery of (for instance) *Cinq Rechants* and the *Harawi* cycle.

It seems not to have occurred to anyone but Weill himself that Goll's libretto was the work of a musician, a gifted amateur perhaps, but a musician nonetheless. Without overt reference to the baroque, Goll has constructed the basis for a vast *da capo* aria in which the B section is usurped by Dance, and the *da capo* proceeds, as it were, *dal segno*.

Perhaps because of an unwillingness to state the obvious, but more probably to emphasise a musical rather than literary bias, Goll's introductory essay alerted the Staatsoper public to the 'magic' of Dejanira's name without referring to its legendary background. Four months later a select and sophisticated audience of critics, publishers, composers, and modern-music enthusiasts was to enter the Kursaal in the fashionable resort of Baden-Baden and hear a 'Songspiel' mysteriously entitled *Mahagonny*. Just before the final D-minor chord, they learned that the untoward vocable was "only a made-up word".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> 'Mahagonny ist nur ein erfundenes Wort'

Among the audience on that occasion were many influential persons from Berlin, most of whom would have heard and seen *Royal Palace* in March. If the incantatory magic of Dejanira's name had not escaped them, its resonances of classical antiquity might still have been audible behind the chiming tetrasyllables of Ma-ha-gon-ny and Lot-te-Len-ja.

Perhaps you've heard of *Deianira's* name  
 For all the country spoke her beauty's fame.  
 Long was the nymph by num'rous suitors woo'd  
 Each with address his envy'd hopes pursu'd.<sup>31</sup>

— 3 —

In January 1912, only ten months after its world premiere in Paris, Saint-Saëns's 4-act opera *Déjanire* was seen for the first time in Germany in a production by the Court Opera in Weill's home town of Dessau. Weill was then nearing his 12th birthday. Like his two brothers and his younger sister, he had from an early age been encouraged by his parents to join them on some of their many outings to the Court Theatre. Whether he was taken to the Saint-Saëns is open to question. That he would at least have been made aware of the work's existence—not to mention that of the venerable *Maître*—seems probable, and in due course Busoni might well have called it to mind again.<sup>32</sup>

Saint-Saëns had adapted his libretto from the play by Louis Gallet for which he had composed incidental music in 1892. The play was loosely based on Sophocles's *Trachiniae*—sometimes known as *The Women of Trachis*, or in Gilbert Murray's translation, *The Wife of Heracles*. The same Sophocles play, as Saint-Saëns knew better than any prominent French musician of his day, had provided the basis for Thomas Broughton's libretto for Handel's *Hercules*.

The first and only Sophocles play Weill could have seen in Dessau was *Antigone*. In the version by Adolf von Wilbrandt (1837-1911) it was staged during the season of 1913-14, and revived the following season—a critical period in Weill's early adolescence. Ten years later, the

<sup>31</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses IX*, 'The Story of Acheloüs and Hercules' tr. John Gay (1685-1715).

<sup>32</sup> Busoni admired Saint-Saëns's music, and he and Saint-Saëns remained on close terms to the end. Saint-Saëns's death in December 1921 occurred during Weill's first year in Busoni's masterclass. In the following year, Busoni began to study Saint Saëns's Fourth Piano Concerto in C minor – apparently the last new concerto with which he was actively engaged before his own death.

idea of a one-act transposition or reversion of *Antigone* could well have commended itself as a possible companion-piece for *Der Protagonist*—not only to Weill but also to Kaiser. In March 1927, just before he and Kaiser began *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, Weill was invited by Hindemith and his colleagues to write a short theatre-piece for the forthcoming festival of chamber music in Baden-Baden. Reluctant to write another one-act opera, he was at that stage proposing to take a scene from a classic play—and one of the two he mentioned was *Antigone*.<sup>33</sup>

Eventually supplanted by his choice of the Mahagonny Songs from Brecht's *Hauspostille* (1926-27), Weill's idea of a *scena* from *Antigone* sounds like a throw-back to his discussions with Goll and Kaiser eighteen months earlier. Goll would have been sure to reject it at that time, not because it was a poor idea but because it was an excellent one, on which Jean Cocteau had successfully stamped his name in 1922.

Goll's aversion to almost everything Cocteau represented was profound, and went much deeper than any residual envy of a success he clearly regarded as ephemeral and would neither aspire to nor remotely approach. That it was a principled rather than temperamental aversion is apparent from much of his writing in the early 1920s — most obviously (though no names are mentioned) in the Surrealist Manifesto he published in 1924. Always more interested in helping fellow artists than in managing his own life—and consequently much better at it—he would have been the first to acknowledge the tactical mastery with which Cocteau proceeds directly from his absurdist play *Les Mariées de la Tour Eiffel* (1921) to the telescoped *Antigone*, and then publishes them as a pair.

The sets and costumes for the production of *Antigone* at the Théâtre de l'Atelier in December 1922 were by Picasso, the music by Honegger. A key moment in French theatre-history, this "attempt to photograph Greece from an aeroplane" (as Cocteau described it) began the chain of events that led to *Oedipus Rex*, the collaboration initiated by Stravinsky in his letter to Cocteau of October 1925.<sup>34</sup> At around the same time, Honegger was planning his through-composed opera based on Cocteau's *Antigone*.

— 4 —

It is one of the ironies of 20th century operatic history that Weill was arranging for his (still uncopied!) holograph full score of *Der neue*

<sup>33</sup> KW to UE, 23 March 1927, Grosch 2002, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Stravinsky's letter asking Cocteau to provide him with a telescoped version of Sophocles' first Oedipus play is dated 11 October 1925—just four days before Weill told his publishers that he had now received Goll's "wonderful" *Royal Palace* libretto and had begun the composition.

*Orpheus* to be delivered to the Staatsoper on the very day (10 February) when the Leipzig Opera was staging the world premiere of Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*.<sup>35</sup> Next day, Krenek's triumph was headline news in Berlin. With only three weeks left before their own premiere, Kleiber and Hörth may have imagined that Goll's disillusioned *Orpheus* would reaffirm their independence from *Jonny spielt auf*. If so, they changed their minds within the coming week.

On 18 February the Berlin *Morgenpost* published a preview of the *Royal Palace* production headlined 'Opera rehearsal on the Tempelhof runways (with film and aeroplane).'<sup>36</sup> The illustration showed a plane on the tarmac and Dejanira and The Husband preparing to enter it. Aravantinos and his romantic settings are not mentioned. "Skyscrapers, pleasure-grounds, and railway stations"—these, according to the *Morgenpost*, provided the distinctive background for this new "opera" by the "hypermodern composer Kurt Weill".

During the second half of February, another bout of *Jonny* fever resulted in a new generic label. No longer was *Royal Palace* to appear under its dull grey banner, "Oper in einem Akt," still less would it be advertised as the opera-ballet it actually was. No, the final announcements declared it to be "eine tragische Revue."<sup>37</sup>

The production was revised accordingly: out with the Zodiac signs and the dance of stars and shadows, in with the electrics and the giant turbines, the demented dials and levers of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and a fully mechanised corps de ballet.<sup>38</sup> These innovations are substantiated by press notices and photographs. Presumably, some changes would have been made, where practicable, in the final edit of the film-scene.

How far the hasty modernisation-program was allowed to encroach upon the neo-romantic dream-world depicted by Aravantinos in his original maquettes is impossible to judge from the surviving reports and pictures. A stiffly-posed photograph shows the hotel staff dancing towards The Husband's table with trays of delicacies for him and his party as they "gawp" romantically at the lakeside scenery.<sup>39</sup> But that was

<sup>35</sup> KW to UE, 10 February 1927, Grosch 2002, 50-51.

<sup>36</sup> Unpaginated newspaper cutting, currently in the author's archive.

<sup>37</sup> Although the press rightly made fun of it, the label stuck, and was still misleading Herbert Fleischer in his 'Kurt Weill – Versuch einer einheitlichen Stilbetrachtung' [*Musikblätter der*] *Anbruch* 14, 1932, 135 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Weill's first and abandoned project for Max Terpis and the Staatsoper unter den Linden was a ballet entitled *Maschinen*. See KW to UE, 15 October 1925, Grosch 2002, 23.

<sup>39</sup> See Farneth 2000, 57, for a photograph showing part of the original backdrop by Panos Aravantinos.

only the first scene—a glimpse of *Le bourgeois Gentilhomme* in the mid 1920s. From then on, modernity was the watchword, and the stylised neo-romanticism of Panos Aravantinos's designs was seemingly of no further interest to critic or photographer.

— 5 —

On the morning after the Berlin premiere, the *New York Times* published an Associated Press report under the headline 'BERLIN OPERA MINGLES AUTO HORN, FILM, JAZZ'. According to the report "innovations brought wild applause and a few scattering [sic] hisses."<sup>40</sup> A refreshing assumption that the modernity of a new opera will be as interesting to American readers as it was stimulating for the Berlin audience pervades the entire report. At the close, Weill himself is quoted at length on the subject of jazz. His media-friendly remarks are identical in tone with many attributed to him in interviews with the American press of the 1930s and 1940s.

On a different plane and without a mention of jazz, the AP report of the Staatsoper's success is confirmed by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in an impressively serious review published two days after the premiere. Its author, Karl Holl, was a critic worthy of Germany's most widely respected newspaper. He refers to the "success" only in order to consider the reasons for it, suggesting that the musical score will remain the evening's strongest asset, but that the actual success was assured in the first place by the quality of the musical performance.<sup>41</sup> About the stage direction he is more critical, and convincingly so, though he acknowledges its positive contribution. In common with all his colleagues, however, he judges Goll's deliberately undramatic text by the irrelevant standards of Krenek's action-packed libretto for *Jonny spielt auf*, and finds it wanting.

Not until the approach of the Weill centenary did the Holl review and the *New York Times* report find their deserved places in the Weill literature, thanks to David Farneth's magnificent compilation *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents*. During the four decades that had elapsed between the composer's death and the opening of the Weill-Lenya Research Centre in New York, the only readily accessible documents concerning the reception of *Royal Palace* were reviews published in specialist or scholarly periodicals and preserved in the collections of leading libraries in Europe and the USA. One such periodical is *Anbruch*,

<sup>40</sup> Farneth 2000, 56.

<sup>41</sup> Farneth 2000, 56, reduced facsimile of original review.

nominally the house magazine of Universal Editions, actually an essential source for the historian of contemporary music in the inter-war period—more consistently so than *Melos*, founded by Herman Scherchen in 1920 and taken over by Schott seven years later. Another important and widely available periodical is *Die Musik*, Germany's foremost musical monthly since its first publication in 1901. Two others, generally unrepresented in European libraries but exceptional in their coverage, are *Musical Courier*, a fortnightly published in New York 1884-1961, and *Modern Music* (New York, 1924-46), published by the League of Composers, and America's counterpart to *Anbruch* and *Melos*.

Perhaps because the editors of *Anbruch* had no license to publish unfavorable reviews of new works by UE composers, the subtly affirmative *Royal Palace* review contributed by the founder-editor Paul Stefan (1879-1943) has had less than its due.<sup>42</sup> Stefan and his colleagues—among them, the young Wiesengrund-Adorno—understood the constraints and knew how to correct the bias with implied question-marks, significant omission, and, on the positive side, careful understatement. Stefan's review is finely balanced. At the close, his brief reflection on the response of the Staatsoper audience indicates—as no other review does—that the evening was among other things a personal success for Weill. He had found a new Berlin public; and it had warmly welcomed him.

Alone among the critics, Stefan is clear and emphatic about the creative strides Weill has made in the past year. Comparing *Royal Palace* to *Der Protagonist* (and boldly disregarding UE's publicity requirements for the latter) he finds it the stronger piece—specifically with regard to melodic invention, harmonic precision, and an orchestral texture that reconciles audacity with functional relevance. In sum, the musical language strikes him as “new, more assured, and richer.. However—and the reservation is crucial—it has yet to reach a point where the “expression” (*der Ausdruck*) is “wholly convincing.”

Still missing, in Stefan's view, is a compelling reason for musical utterance—an irresistible “inducement” (*Anlass*) rather than an acceptable excuse. Any question as to what exactly he means by “Anlass” is forestalled in the best Delphic manner:

[Weill] is so very genuine, he can only be convincing [*überzeugend*] when a convincer [*ein Überzeugender*] has loosened his tongue and he speaks because he must, not because he is able to—an ability (*ein Können*) surely no longer seriously doubted by anyone.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> 'Berlin: Weill, Royal Palace,' *Musikblätter des Anbruch*, Vienna, 1927, 9/1, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Er ist so sehr echt, dass er nur dann überzeugen kann, wenn ein Überzeugender

Who or what is this "Überzeugender"? If the *Royal Palace* score achieves the kind of advances Stefan has specified, Weill's tongue has indeed been "loosened" and the unmentioned librettist is in some measure vindicated.

Without kow-towing to Universal Edition or sniping at his fellow critics, Stefan has in fact come to Goll's rescue while leaving space for the sceptics.<sup>44</sup> Almost certainly he had talked with Weill before or after the performance; quite possibly—for theirs was more than a business relationship—Weill had mentioned for the first time, and with "conviction," the name of Bertolt Brecht. In any event, the return-journey to Vienna and the *Anbruch* office was not so long that Stefan would have forgotten how Goll in his introduction to *Royal Palace* had maintained that for an opera-composer the "primal element" (*das Urelement*) is "the word" (*das Wort*). The word that Goll had singled out was "Dejanira". Everything Weill achieves with it in the early stages of *Royal Palace* suggests that it was already 'ein Überzeugender'—precisely in Stefan's sense. In the closing pages it emerges as absolute victor.

Stefan's preference for the relative simplicity of a 'can/must' antithesis has led him astray in both directions. Taking the conventional wisdom for granted, he exaggerates the extent of Weill's technical ability (Können), and underestimates his new-found sense of purpose. On the opposite side is the same misapprehension about 'ein Überzeugender' that allowed the Brecht-Weill cult to emerge within eighteen months of the *Royal Palace* premiere, and then to hold sway in Europe and in academic America for half a century.

For that, of course, Stefan bears no responsibility. Intelligent, sensitive, and well-intentioned as it is, his review deserves its place beside Holl's. Together, they represent a bulwark against the prejudices and incompetence displayed in several contemporary critiques of *Royal Palace* that are much better known than theirs, but rarely if ever challenged.

— 6 —

The post-premiere reviews of *Royal Palace* that reached America via the *Musical Courier* and *Modern Music* were based on, or freely adapted from, those that originally appeared in German newspapers or periodicals. For a new generation of American writers and scholars concerned with Weill in the 1980s, the physical accessibility of the American versions had a cultural dimension that lent them a semblance of authentic-

---

seine Zünge löst, wenn er spricht, weil er sprechen musste, nicht weil er sprechen konnte – ein Können, das wohl niemand mehr ernstlich anzweifelt.

<sup>44</sup> How easily Stefan can be adduced in support of a conventionally negative view of *Royal Palace* is clear from Taylor 1991, 94-95.

ity as documents in the vernacular—documents, moreover, that had been addressed to a largely professional readership. Once the authors' credentials had been taken for granted, the oracular judgments handed down by an earlier age could be accepted at face value, without due investigation of backgrounds or possible prejudices.

It was in the *Modern Music* version of an equally unfavorable but less acerbic review in *Die Musik*<sup>45</sup> that Goll's libretto was first described as "ludicrous." The author was Stefan's slightly older contemporary and former comrade, Adolf Weissmann (1873-1929). In the aftermath of World War 1, Weissmann had become a convert to New Music. Like Stefan, he had played his part in propagating the international and local activities of the ISCM after its formation in 1922; and it is in that context that his friendly reviews of Weill's *Frauentanz* and op.8 String Quartet are best read.

By the mid-1920s Weissmann had become a favorite butt of conservative critics and musicologists who saw themselves as Pfitzner's true disciples, and were already tending towards the far right. By the autumn of 1927 Weissmann's situation had changed radically. In the first place, his increasing and well-known disillusionment with Modernism had culminated in the publication in 1926 of his influential book, *Die Entgötterung der Musik*.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, and much to the glee of his antisemitic opponents, he had then emigrated to Palestine—where he died two years later.

In his 1991 study of Weill and his music, Ronald Taylor quotes the key passage from Weissmann's *Modern Music* review, and asserts that its author "spoke for many."<sup>47</sup> "The impression made by this libretto", writes Weissmann,

is of a comic melancholy which borders on the ludicrous. Nothing interesting has been contributed by the composer. His use of jazz is competent but he also attempts to be lyrical in the spirit of the age and it is these lyrical moments that are the dullest.

<sup>45</sup> 'Das Musikleben der Gegenwart. Oper.' *Die Musik* 19/2, Berlin: April 1927, 518. This was preceded by Weissmann's review in the Berlin daily, *BZ am Mittag*, which contained—or so Weill suggested to his publishers in a letter of 4 April 1927—a passage on his music that was suitable for publicity purposes (there is no such passage in his subsequent reviews).

<sup>46</sup> Weissmann 1926. Jazz and popular music are seen as harmful influences on 'serious' composers, and most notably on Stravinsky. In the revised edition, published posthumously in 1930, Weissmann sees new hope and identifies it with Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*.

<sup>47</sup> Taylor 1991, 94.

Weissmann's original review in *Die Musik* is equally assertive and equally lacking in substance or authority. It does however acquire some slight documentary interest towards the end, where the author turns to Falla's "enchanted" puppet opera (as he calls it). Having already reviewed the piece for *Die Musik* after its performance at the ISCM festival in Zurich in 1926, he now regretfully reports that in the Staatsoper it lost its "resonance," thanks to an over-inflated production (something he had apparently not noticed in *Royal Palace*). The reader is left with the impression that the first half of the evening had not ended so lamely as the second—and wondering why Weissmann has neglected to say so.

If the unique qualities, including the subtlety, of Paul Stefan's review for *Anbruch* have been underrated because of a suspected bias in favor of the work and its composer, the evidence of a pronounced bias in the opposite direction has been consistently overlooked by writers and scholars who have been referring to Hugo Leichtentritt's review in *The Musical Courier* ever since Kim Kowalke quoted an extensive excerpt in *Kurt Weill in Europe*, the seminal work he published in 1980. Perhaps because it is the *only* review quoted by Kowalke, hasty or incautious readers seem to have been misled by the key phrase in his prefatory remarks "Leichtentritt's review is representative."<sup>48</sup> From the context it is clear that Kowalke is referring to Leichtentritt's failure to distinguish between Weill's and Krenek's use of popular dance idioms, and is claiming, correctly, that this was representative. Like most of his colleagues, Weissmann was equally confused.

As for the libretto, Weissmann's "ludicrous" is nicely matched by Leichtentritt's "ridiculous." Having complimented Krenek on "an insolent but amusing and effective libretto," Leichtentritt continues: "Goll's libretto for *Royal Palace* confounds effect with affectation, and stands a good chance of being the dullest opera book in existence." In 1980, Kowalke was again characterising the libretto as "ridiculous," which is, after all, a historically familiar condition among libretti. However, in his separate and usefully analytical discussion of the music Kowalke goes one step further. While his view of the music remains strictly non-judgmental—though not yet identifiably postmodern—the libretto has become, in some undefined but perhaps commercial sense, "disastrous."<sup>49</sup>

Value judgments handed down by musicians in literary contexts

<sup>48</sup> Kowalke 1979, 46. Earlier on the same page, Kowalke's quotation from the Leichtentritt review dismisses *Der neue Orpheus* in three sentences, the last of which ends by describing it as "a toilsome and not very amusing affair, which passed by without noticeable effect."

<sup>49</sup> Kowalke 1979, 284.

but avoided in musical ones tend to be especially unreliable where musical theatre is concerned. As an 'artistic' entity, even as a chunk of real estate, *Royal Palace* was always a special case. Whether Leichtentritt was a suitably objective agent seems questionable.

A year younger than Weissmann, Leichtentritt was born in Posen (Poznań) in 1874.<sup>50</sup> He studied music and musicology at the University of Berlin, and in the early 1920s became chief music critic of one of Berlin's leading newspapers, the *Vossischer Zeitung* (where the original version of his *Royal Palace* review may have appeared). Although his large catalogue of compositions in the symphonic, vocal, and instrumental fields was never to win the recognition he hoped for, his scholarly work as music-historian, editor, and theorist was already highly regarded on both sides of the Atlantic. As correspondent of the *Musical Courier* his qualifications were high, and his interests suitably broad: they ranged from what we now call "Early Music" (the Netherlands School especially) to Bartók and Schoenberg. The biography of Busoni which he published in 1916—during Busoni's wartime absence from Germany—was the key to their extensive correspondence, and the relationship that was renewed when Busoni returned to his Berlin home in 1920.

The subject of Leichtentritt's 1901 dissertation for the University of Berlin had been one of the pioneers of German opera, the Hamburg composer Reinhard Keiser (1674-1739). From Keiser to Handel was a natural step, but it was not until 1920 and the first Händel festival in Göttingen that Leichtentritt's studies were rewarded. Significantly, the role he was now to play in Germany's Handel renaissance leaves no mark on Busoni's correspondence with him in the early 1920s.

Had Busoni lived a little longer and in better health, Leichtentritt might well have brought him to Handel or Handel to him. With regard to Schoenberg (in whose work Leichtentritt continued to interest himself) no such service was conceivable. Busoni's enthusiastic recognition of Schoenberg in the years before World War I was the result of a particular combination of unique circumstances.<sup>51</sup> Isolation in wartime Switzerland proved fatal to a relationship already overtaken by his Faust project. From then on, the drift of his thinking changes, and with it, the tone of his correspondence.

<sup>50</sup> Leichtentritt left Germany for the United States in 1933, and died in Cambridge, Mass., in 1951, after a long and distinguished career.

<sup>51</sup> The Busoni-Schoenberg relationship is discussed in some detail in the author's forthcoming contribution to a Festschrift in honor of Alexander Goehr. See footnote no.58.

It was in Zurich towards the end of 1915 that Busoni met the Catalan-born and French-trained composer Philipp Jarnach (1892-1982). Jarnach—whose wife was German—followed him to Berlin in 1921, and soon occupied a place of his own in the intricacies and intrigues of the Busoni circle. Within a year he had also secured positions of influence in the New Music worlds of Berlin, Donaueschingen, and the ISCM. The international success of his op.16 String Quartet proved timely, as did his (apparently reluctant) agreement to complete Busoni's *Doktor Faust* after the composer's death that same year.

Like Busoni, Jarnach had several publishers for his music. Although Universal Edition was not among them, Paul Stefan exercised his editorial freedom in such matters, and commissioned or accepted from Leichtentritt an article on Jarnach which was published in *Anbruch* in 1923.<sup>52</sup> There would have been no objections to that from UE—at this time especially, it was useful to be in Jarnach's good books.

The relationship between Jarnach and Weill had begun on the solid basis of counterpoint lessons. Weill manifestly found them helpful, even inspiring, and duly acknowledged the debt in the orchestral work he dedicated to Jarnach.<sup>53</sup> As Busoni's favorite and openly favored pupil, Weill had been the object of some jealousy from his colleagues in the Masterclass. If there were similar disturbances in his relations with Jarnach, there is no sign of them at that stage. Indeed, it was Jarnach who introduced him to ISCM circles, and helped launch his career during Busoni's lifetime. After the death of Busoni in 1924, there would have been a natural tendency for the two men to drift apart. In Weill's case, the drift became almost inevitable once he had established his quasi-familial relationship with the Georg Kaisers in Grünheide; and it was surely confirmed, during the winter of 1924/25, by his passionate involvement with Lenja. Yet there is no evidence of any estrangement until the early summer of 1926—shortly after the successful premiere of *Der Protagonist* in the opera house where *Doktor Faust* had been coolly received a year before. An undated letter to Lenja confirms a letter to his parents dated 22 July 1926 in which he reports that Jarnach had "let loose a storm of intrigues" against him.<sup>54</sup> Abruptly and decisively, he ended the relationship.

<sup>52</sup> Hugo Leichtentritt, 'Philipp Jarnach,' *Musikblätter der Anbruch*, Wien: 1923, 258-62. The article is conventionally encomiastic in the manner of the time, and shares the general opinion that Jarnach's highest achievement is the String Quintet, op.10. As for the future, great store is set by Jarnach's 'aristocratic disposition' (*der Adel der Gesinnung*).

<sup>53</sup> Drew 1987, 133-35.

<sup>54</sup> Weill to his parents, Symonette/Juchem 2000, 326; Weill to Lenja, Symonette/Kowalke 1996, 49.

If Leichtentritt knew of the quarrel—which he surely did—he would have heard Jarnach's side first, and sympathised. The binding loyalty to Busoni, the affinities of outlook, the sense of new threats to Europe's cultural hegemony—these were more than sufficient to unite two musicians whose minds were outwardly so very different. Although there is still a need for scholarly research into the Weill-Jarnach-Leichtentritt nexus, Leichtentritt already provides the two basic documents: his *Anbruch* essay of 1923 and his *Royal Palace* review four years later.

Reviewing *Royal Palace* almost as if he were Jarnach's alter ego, he identifies Weill as "a pupil of Busoni" only for the purposes of his critique. He finds it "strange" that someone who until now has been "so serious-minded" has accepted such a farrago. His summary of Goll's exiguous story-line misses the point by a wide margin, but provides another angle: it is impossible, he declares, "to write worthwhile music to the ridiculous dialogue of this action."<sup>55</sup> Modestly, he admits that "the variety show on the stage is so dazzling that one almost forgets the music," but nevertheless concedes that Weill "has taken all possible pains to make his score interesting." How? "Mahler, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and the French school are entirely familiar to him, and he makes liberal use of their attainments."<sup>56</sup> There is no evidence that the Weill of the mid-1920s had heard much Stravinsky apart from *The Soldier's Tale* and the Octet, or that he was at all interested in 'The French School,' whatever that might be.

The inclusion of Schoenberg's name is especially revealing. Leichtentritt knew his Schoenberg well enough to hear that there is nothing remotely Schoenbergian in the *Royal Palace* score (the Expressionism latent in the libretto is another matter). But why no mention of the recently victorious Berg?<sup>57</sup> Perhaps because the prejudices Busoni shared with a generation of German musicologists whose hour had yet to strike were best represented by the collocation of Mahler and Schoenberg. After some nugatory tributes to Weill's "facility," to the "brilliance and vivacity of his dance music," and to moments of "real expressiveness" ("too short and too few") he concludes that the score is a "cold, glittering, technically interesting but nearly expressionless combination of sounds—the product of a clever intellect."

<sup>55</sup> Kowalke 1979, 46. Presumably, either 'dialogue' or 'action', or even both, are the *Music Courier's* mistranslations.

<sup>56</sup> In relation to *Royal Palace*, these pro forma assertions are indefensible from any standpoint other than the purely journalistic.

<sup>57</sup> On 14 December 1925, Weill and Georg Kaiser had attended the world premiere of *Wozzeck* at the Staatsoper, Kleiber conducting. By then, the *Royal Palace* draft was already complete.

Where else do we read of these frigidly clever minds to whom true originality had been denied ever since they forsook their tribal homelands and insinuated themselves into the body of Western society? Only partly filtered by Busoni, some of Bayreuth's more poisonous distillations are already back in the medicine-cupboard of German music criticism.<sup>58</sup>

—7—

In his closing chapter on 'The Critic's Duty,' Adolf Weissmann complained about the overweening power of advertising in the newspaper world, just as he had previously complained that "sport is becoming almighty, that the sporting section in the newspapers grows larger and larger."<sup>59</sup> Having consoled himself with the thought that those critics who "surrender body and soul" to journalistic expediency "had in any case not much to lose,"<sup>60</sup> he nevertheless accepts that the call "for interesting news may drive a critic who wishes to be useful to his editor into activities which may be highly detrimental to his cause."<sup>61</sup>

Weissmann had already emigrated to Palestine when Blom was describing him as "one of the few German critics who admit that the art of music is not their own country's exclusive concern."<sup>62</sup> In the Berlin of 1927, there were in fact a considerable number of such critics; equalled if not surpassed in the regional press.<sup>63</sup> And yet: had there been one commanding voice to speak up for *Royal Palace* in its totality, the future of the work and perhaps even of the composer might have been different.

Which of its reviewers had read and digested the musical and literary texts before or after attending the performance? Or explored more of the background than was revealed by publicity handouts and the interviews associated with them? Which had insisted on attending the dress rehearsal as well as the premiere? Or tried to discriminate between text and event, performance and production—just in case (as was indeed the case) some or all the elements were in futile conflict? Which contributor to an influential periodical returned to a later performance to

<sup>58</sup> The interrelated questions of Busoni's antisemitism and philosemitism are examined in the author's essay 'Canonic Studies and Time-Pieces on the Motif FB-AG' in *Sing, Ariel. Essays and Thoughts for Alexander Goehr's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (ed. Alison Latham) Ashgate, Abingdon, 2003

<sup>59</sup> Weissmann 1930, 12

<sup>60</sup> Weissmann 1930, 144

<sup>61</sup> Weissmann 1930, 145

<sup>62</sup> Blom, Introduction to Weissmann 1930, v

<sup>63</sup> KW in his letter to UE of 23 March 1927, Grosch 2002, 53-54, gives the names of 17 metropolitan and provincial critics whose reviews of *Royal Palace* strike him as noteworthy.

confirm or change a doubtful impression rather than risk misleading his present and future readers? And last but not least—German musical journalism being still, in those reputedly enlightened days, a male preserve – which of these highly educated menfolk bothered to remark that the protagonist of *Royal Palace* was a woman?

Among performers and interpreters, much comfort is drawn from the notion that press notices, like butterflies or bluebottles, have a short life. It was always an illusion. Even before the realities of Information Technology, the only ‘dead’ press notice was one that had escaped all forms of reprography and vanished from the face of the earth. Reviews long buried in the vaults of newspaper-libraries were only slumbering. For them there was at least a chance of a happy awakening at the flash of a camera or the touch of a scholarly hand.

In the history of 20th-century opera as it stood prior to the Weill centenary, *Royal Palace* was a small light that blinked once and was extinguished. For Weill and his music, the consequences were measurable. In the broader perspective, the aborted success had certain definable implications for the future of musical reporting in the German press before, during, and after Hitler’s Reich.

However, it is precisely from our own standpoint—75 years later!—that the recent and popular discovery of *Royal Palace* is so encouraging. It reminds us how pointless it is to hanker for the inconceivable return of some long-vanished age. The most effective response to the more meretricious devices and exploits of today’s arts journalism is the one resoundingly delivered by a liberal and lively musical public. The continued existence of such a public may still depend, more than we now imagine, upon a few trusted yet apparently solitary voices, conveying and enriching the essence of current scholarship while transmitting to a more-or-less unimaginable posterity something of the authentic experience of the hour, the day, the week.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Drew, David, *Kurt Weill: A Handbook* (London, 1987)

Farneth, David, ed. (with Elmar Juchem and Dave Stein), *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents* (London, 2000)

Grosch, Nils, ed., *Kurt Weill: Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition* (Stuttgart/Weimar, 2002)

Kowalke, Kim H., *Kurt Weill in Europe* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979)

*Musikblätter der Anbruch: Monatschrift für Moderne Musik* (Wien, 1919-37) (*Anbruch*, from 1929)

Symonette, Lys and Kim H. Kowalke, eds./trs, *Speak low (when you speak love): the letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1996)

Symonette, Lys and Elmar Juchem, eds., *Kurt Weill: Briefe an die Familie (1914-1950)* (Stuttgart/Weimar, 2000)

Taylor, Ronald, *Kurt Weill: Composer in a Divided World* (Boston, 1991)

Vilain, Robert and Geoffrey Chew, 'Iwan Goll und Kurt Weill: *Der Neue Orpheus* and *Royal Palace*', in Robertson, Eric and Robert Vilain, eds. *Iwan Goll-Claire Goll: Texts and Contexts* (Amsterdam/Atlanta, 1997)

Weill, Kurt, *Royal Palace*, Oper in einem Akt [Georg Kaiser gewidmet]/Text von Iwan Goll/ op.17/Klavierauszug mit Text von Arthur Willner (Wien, 1926)

Weissmann, Adolf, *Die Entgötterung der Music* (Berlin, 1926)

Weissmann, Adolf, *Music Come to Earth*, tr. Eric Blom [from the revised 1930 edition of *Die Entgötterung der Musik*] (London/Toronto, 1930)