

Editor's note: The first of our two excerpts from David Drew's forthcoming Kurt Weill: A Handbook due for publication next spring by Faber & Faber in England, and the University of California Press, is one of the notes from his

catalogue entry of Die Dreigroschenoper; the second is an example of his approach to the recently discovered early works. We are grateful to Mr. Drew and to his publishers for permission to print these items in advance of publication.

How Was Weill's Success Achieved

By David Drew

An excerpt from *Kurt Weill: A Handbook*

The success of [Weill's] music for *Mahagonny* and the other Brecht works is not in question. But how was that success achieved? Brecht sometimes intimated that he himself contributed some or all of the tunes of *The Threepenny Opera*. For years I considered this a boast. Later I came to believe it.

Eric Bentley, "Introduction: Homage to B.B.," in *Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. xxxiv.

Eric Bentley was by no means the first to whom Brecht had imparted some such view of Weill's success. As far as *Mahagonny* was concerned, a comparable view had been circulating since the late 1920's. But *Die Dreigroschenoper* was at that time much bigger game; and the fact that Brecht's claim to co-authorship of the music is not known to have been aired in public during Weill's lifetime may simply indicate our need for further research. The speed with which the claim was beginning to circulate at the time of Brecht's death in 1956 — the very time when Blitzstein's *Threepenny Opera* adaptation and Louis Armstrong's "Mack the Knife" recording were bringing Weill his first posthumous success — already suggested what the letter and the spirit of Bentley's 1961 "Homage" confirmed: the theory that Brecht himself "contributed some or all of the tunes" had been part of the Brechtian folklore "for years," if not for decades, and had now been assimilated by the posthumous cult. In 1961 Bentley already seemed to accept it as an article of faith rather than as something requiring verification, and until the 1980's that faith remained the only basis for acceptance, apart from the doubtful testimony of those who were claiming to have witnessed the collaboration at first hand.

Musicologically and in other respects the picture was transformed in the 1980's by the discovery of some early Brecht settings by Franz Servatius Bruinier, a cabaret musician

who was born in the Rhineland in 1905 and worked closely with Brecht between 1925 until 1927. Among these settings are versions of two songs later used in *Die Dreigroschenoper*: "Seeräuberjenny" and the "Barbara Song." The latter need not detain us here, as its bearing on Weill's setting is insignificant. "Seeräuberjenny" is very much more interesting. The material in the Brecht Archive (BBA 249/53-9) consists of a vocal part and an incomplete set of band parts — trumpet, alto saxophone, banjo, and percussion. The voice part is titled "Seeräuberjenny/Text u. Musik von B. Brecht/Arrangement von F.S. Bruinier," and dated 8 March 1927 — the very month when Weill began working with Brecht on the *Mahagonny* opera.

The basic character contrast between verse and refrain in the Brecht-Bruinier version has been adopted by Weill and immeasurably enhanced by his recomposition of the verse and his transformation of the refrain in terms of what has preceded it and what is yet to come. The fact that he follows the 11-bar outline of Brecht's refrain almost exactly in his own 5-bar version of it was, for many Brecht scholars, a revelation of the truth they and their forebears had taken more or less on trust for so many years. Fritz Hennenberg's pioneering researches into the Bruinier-Brecht collaboration have been continued by Albrecht Dümling, who proves less circumspect than his predecessor when he writes on page 133 of *Lasst euch nicht verführen: Brecht und die Musik*:

The astonishing refrain, which is one of the most celebrated melodic ideas that occurred to Brecht, was in 1928 transferred by Weill to *Die Dreigroschenoper* almost unchanged. It is not out of the question that other melodies in *Die Dreigroschenoper* also derive from Brecht.

Certainly it is not out of the question. But until we have further evidence, Dümling's conjecture belongs to the same departments

of quasi-mystical faith as Bentley's 1961 "Homage." In his excitement at the discovery of Brecht-Bruinier, Dümling seems to have lost his grip on musical and other facts. For what is both "astonishing" and "celebrated" is not Brecht's serviceable but in itself unremarkable idea; it is Weill's composition of it. Bruinier may have been the first musician to board Brecht's "Schiff mit acht Segeln" but it was Weill who took it to sea and steered it to its destination with all its cannon blazing.

Ultimately the discovery of the Brecht-Bruinier song can do nothing but good. The stir it created in 1984 is already shown to be as naive as the consternation Diaghilev allegedly expressed on being shown that the well-loved tunes in Stravinsky's *Firebird* were exactly what any 14-year-old could have guessed they were: Russian folk tunes. On a humbler level the same is true of "Seeräuberjenny": whether the pirate ship is sailing under Brecht's flag or Weill's, the contour, ictus, and intervallic structure of the refrain proclaim a Slavonic origin (and it is one that Weill in no way disguises). Innumerable parallels could doubtless be found in Russian folk song up to and including the time of the October Revolution. One example that was in its day considerably more "celebrated" than Brecht's melody is the tune used by the Soviet composer Lev Knipper for his "Cavalry of the Steppes." Its contour relationship with the "Seeräuber" refrain would hardly have escaped Weill's amused attention when he made his orchestral arrangement of Knipper's tune in 1943 for inclusion in *We Will Never Die*.

Since most of the melodically distinctive passages in Brecht's tunes are borrowed from popular sources, it is by no means "out of the question" that the "Seeräuber" refrain is another borrowing, and will sooner or later be identified as such. In that event a song already rich in associations will have acquired a further layer of them, and the credit due to Brecht for the inspiration of combining these particular words with this particular melodic line will be increased accordingly.

Whatever has yet to be revealed, the decisive inspiration in the song is Weill's and Weill's alone. The very fact that at a structurally crucial point the melodic line is a borrowing confirms the evidence of our ears: as so often in Weill, the structural priorities are harmonic and tonal, not linear. The refrain, as Dümpling remarks, is "astonishing"; but only because of the tonal events that have preceded it and the harmonic ones that then explode its own cadential structure.

Nevertheless Brecht-Bruinier compels one to ask what mysterious force drew Weill to the refrain and prompted so powerful a reaction to its East European melos. For a while it seemed as if another cryptic clause had been added to the song's anarchic-revolutionary program — without loss to its messianic associations, but also without enriching them. But quite soon after the discovery of the Brecht-Bruinier song a complementary discovery on the Weill side solved the riddle — at no expense to the song's fascination — by adding to the broadly Russian resonances of the refrain a specifically Jewish one. In 1985 the definitive version of Weill's *Ofrah's Lieder* of 1916 was acquired by the Library of Congress [see the accompanying catalogue entry from *Kurt Weill: A Handbook*]. Among the songs that were not in the draft versions previously available in the Weill-Lenya Research Center was a setting of Jehuda Halevy's "Denkst du des kühnen Flugs der Nacht," a passionate nocturnal invocation to the beloved. At the very start a precipitously chromatic progression from somewhere in the region of G minor affords a longer glimpse of the mature Weill than any other passage in this adolescent cycle. With the arrival at F-sharp major, the Late Romantic vistas in which the heavenly bridegroom and the earthly became indistinguishable seem once more to be opening out. At this point, and at the words "Sie schmückten nur mein Angesicht" (starting on an unaccompanied F-sharp upbeat) the piano inserts a B minor root-position triad, and voice and piano together outline a 7-note motif identical with the head-motif of the "Seeräuberjenny" refrain; not however in Brecht-Bruinier's version and key, but in Weill's slightly altered version and in the same key.

At the unconscious level where his mature imagination is always most deeply stirred, Weill has returned to his origins, his home, and his earliest creative experience. This is the world of which Ernst Bloch had so profound an intuition when he wrote his classic essay on "Seeräuberjenny" (reprinted in *Bertolt Brecht's Dreigroschenbuch*, Frankfurt, 1960) and dedicated it to Weill and Lenya. It was not a world that Weill needed or would have wished to share with Brecht, but the values that were part of it were also a part of everything he contributed to *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The marriage Weill has arranged between Halevy's expectant bride and Brecht's vengeful Seeräuberjenny leaves

the artlessness of Brecht-Bruinier and the artiness of *Ofrah's Lieder* far behind. But since the motif that united them is still the merest cliché, the validity of the contract might well be in question had the bans been announced only once. How, then, does Weill treat the "Barbara-Song," and the rather less permanent domestic arrangements it records? About them, Brecht and Bruinier have nothing of any musical account to say. Weill on the other hand discovers a refrain no less "celebrated" than that of "Seeräuberjenny. Melodically its head-motif is also a cliché; and it too has very strong East European associa-

tions. Its first appearance in Weill — or at least the first we know of — is in his setting of Eichendorff's "Sehnsucht" which dates from 1916. The motif reappears that same year at the very start of the second of *Ofrah's Lieder* — "Nichts ist die Welt mir."

"The world is nothing to me." The means whereby Weill repeatedly expresses that sentiment in his *Dreigroschenoper* music, but only and always in order to refute it, are characteristic of his own peculiar dialectic. In them will be found the true secrets of his success.

Und ein Schiff mit acht Se- geln und mit fünf-
Und das Schiff mit acht Se- geln und mit fünf-
-zig Ka- no- nen wird lie- gen am Kai.
-zig Ka- no- nen wird be- schie- ßen die

"Die Seeräuber-Jenny", mm. 29-39. Music by Brecht/Bruinier. Text by Bertolt Brecht. Copyright Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1984.

p **Breit**
Und ein Schiff mit acht Se- geln und mit fünf- zig Ka- no- nen wird lie- gen am Kai.
Und das Schiff mit acht Se- geln und mit fünf- zig Ka- no- nen wird beschie- ßen die Stadt.

"Nr. 6 Seeräuberjenny" from *Die Dreigroschenoper*, mm. 23-27. Music by Kurt Weill. Text by Bertolt Brecht. Vocal score by Norbert Gingold. Copyright 1928 by Universal Edition. Copyright renewed. All rights reserved. Used by permission of European American Music Corporation.

Sie schmückten nur mein Angesicht, nur selber - den ich so warm, so dicht,
hac 2. t.

"Denkst du, des kühnen Flugs der Nacht," from *Ofrah's Lieder*, mm. 5-7. Music by Kurt Weill. Text by Jehuda Halevy. Weill copyright assigned to European American Music Corporation. All rights reserved. Used by permission of European American Music Corporation.

OFRAH'S LIEDER

Cycle for voice and piano on modern German translations of Hebrew poems by Jehuda Halevi. (c. 1080-c. 1145).

NOTE 1

A physician by training, Judah ben Samuel ha-Levi was the foremost Hebrew poet of medieval times, and also an important neo-platonic Arabic philosopher. He spent his early years in his native Spain, and then emigrated to Palestine, where he died. The poems chosen by Weill are moralities and fables drawing for their imagery on nature and the animal kingdom. "How astonishing forsooth, and wonderful," begins "Wie staunenswert," "the gentle dove catches the eagle."

DRAFTS A and B

(Partly missing?)

- | A | B |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. "In meinem Garten steh'n zwei Rosen" | 1. ditto |
| 2. "Ich bin dir mehr als Son- nenglanz" | 2. "Nur dir, fürwahr" |
| 3. "Nur dir, fürwahr, mein stolzer Aar" | 3. "Wie staunenswert" |

Autograph (Rita Weill Collection)

[N.B. The following description and the corresponding one in the section below is based upon examination of photocopies only.]

Draft A is on seven sides of a 12-line paper (oblong format without maker's name). Each song begins on a new page and has a heading in the same style: *Ofrah's Lieder 1*, etc. If the eighth side of the original manuscript, rather than the first, is the one that is blank, this would confirm the impression left by the character of 3 and its tonal relationship to the preceding songs — namely that Weill was originally planning a three-part cycle. In version B "Nur dir, fürwahr" is shifted to second place, with the result that its E-flat major tonality is made to sound as if it were a subdominant consequence of the first song's B-flat major. In this context the C major of "Wie staunenswert" could not have been intended as conclusive; nor indeed could its vapid Wagnerisms. If Weill was now planning a set of five, the fourth song could have been "Ich bin dir mehr als Sonnenglanz," from Draft A. Not only would the Schubertian F minor of its opening have made an effective contrast, but the tentative cadence in A-flat major, beneath which Weill has written "oder auch gleich nach Es" (or alternatively straight to E-flat), would have allowed for several different tonal conclusions to the cycle. The first page of a slightly revised version of the E-flat major "Nur dir, fürwahr" is headed by the roman numeral V, and might seem to indicate a further stage in the evolution of Draft B towards the definitive version of the cycle; but since it is identical with the final version of that song, it is more likely to be a second copy for singer or accompanist.

DEFINITIVE VERSION

1. "In meinem Garten steh'n zwei Rosen"
2. "Nichts ist die Welt mir"
3. "Er sah mir liebend in die Augen"
4. "Denkst du des kühnen Flugs der Nacit"
5. "Nur dir, fürwahr, mein stolzer Aar"

Autograph (Library of Congress)

Written in blue ink on twelve sides (non-autograph pagination) of W.O.H.i.H. No 402a L.C.G. [paper], the manuscript was in the possession of the soprano Elisabeth Feuge and her heirs until its purchase in 1985 by the Music Division of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Except in 2, the underlaid texts are in modern arabic script. On the title page is an oblong octagonal label, with the autograph date "September 1916" (in the left-hand corner) and autograph titling as follows: "Ofrah's Lieder/Ein Liederzyklus nach Gedichten von/Jehuda Halevi/von/Kurt Julian Weill."

NOTE 2

"Nichts ist die Welt mir" is so much more accomplished than any of the four songs in the two preceding drafts that it suggests a lapse of weeks or even months before Weill put the cycle into its final form; yet there has been no technically significant revision of the two songs Weill has preserved. The weakest of the new songs is "Er sah mir liebend in die Augen." Clearly intended to replace "Wie staunenswert," it likewise attempts to establish a quasi-operatic contrast to the cycle's predominantly lyrical manner. But although it is compositionally more sharply focused than "Wie staunenswert," it is quite as naive in its histrionic attitudes, and sounds all the more so after the relatively sophisticated "Nichts ist die Welt mir." If, at a second look, one is disconcertingly reminded of the attitudes Weill was to poke fun at fourteen years later, in Lucy's "Eifersuchtsarie" — the only *Dreigroschenoper* number that lives up to that work's reputation as a parody — that is a tribute to the revelation afforded by the next song in the cycle. In the ambivalence of the very first harmony, as in the semitonal processes by which it is dissolved prior to the exorbitant F-sharp major resolution, one hears the *ferne Klang* of the Weill to come; and then, as if to prove that this uncanny prefiguration is real rather than fanciful, the piano, in bar 6, suddenly glimpses Seeräuberjenny's eight-sailed ship as it emerges from the chromatic mists with Wagner's Flying Dutchman still aboard. The telescopic effect is so pronounced that one has to remind oneself that the musical substance is hardly such as to overwhelm listeners unfamiliar with what lay ahead. Only a teacher as sympathetic and discerning as Albert Bing might have recognized the promise latent in that first page of 4, and forgiven the romantic effusions that follow.

Between the first two versions of *Ofrah's Lieder* and the definitive one runs the line that divides adolescent works that were of interest chiefly within the family circle from those that began to reach out for a wider audience. Judged on its own intrinsic merits, without the distortions of sentiment or hindsight, the definitive version is simply a step in the right direction: at the age of 16½ Weill still had much to learn about harmony and composition, but was learning fast. The fact that he was prepared to offer *Ofrah's Lieder* for public performance a whole year later may raise questions about his powers of self-criticism; yet he had good reason to regard *Ofrah's Lieder* as his true starting point. Small wonder that he unconsciously returned to its polyglot Jewish-Romantic modes in *Der Weg der Verheissung* and *The Eternal Road*. For all their gleanings from Schubert and Schumann, from Loewe and Mendelssohn and Wagner, *Ofrah's Lieder* contain the first glimpses of the mature Weill, and the only ones before he had discovered Mahler and modern music.