

Juchem employs for Weill-Anderson would have necessitated archival research beyond the scope of a Ph.D. dissertation; anyway, there is no point in criticizing a book for not being what it does not intend to be. But here may be a field for further research, with regard to the historiography of Broadway musical theater in general.

In his preface, Juchem relates that his interest in Weill was awakened in his very first semester as a student at the University of Göttingen, in a course called *Music and Musical Culture in Germany, 1900-1933*. Though largely by coincidence, the title sums up the background for Juchem's attempt very nicely—until quite recently, Germany and 1933 more or less demarcated the boundaries of the relevance musicology in Germany ascribed to Weill on the map of twentieth-century music history. Weill on Broadway was “something else,” not quite music history proper. Hardly anyone would dare to admit to such a view anymore, but it remains to be seen whether other German musicologists will take up Juchem's challenge to reassess Weill—or, not least, to reevaluate their own perspectives.

Guido Heldt
Freie Universität Berlin

Books

Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts

Daniel Albright

Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. 395 pp.
ISBN: 0-226-01253-0

Don't imagine that Modernism is Albright's serpent. Or that his serpent is a keyless wind instrument evolved by the French and Germans a good two centuries before the birth of Boulez and Stockhausen. Instead, think of George Antheil (perhaps a bit more critically than Albright does). But think also and even more of Henry Cowell, who's barely mentioned, though he's quite important, and not only to Americans.

From today's ultra-postmodern perspective, tomorrow is already the day before yesterday. On that very day (at the time of writing) the postmaster from a small town in Scotland was talking to the BBC's national breakfast-show team about his problems with the undeliverable postcard that's just arrived by surface-mail from Auckland, New Zealand. The ground-floor apartment to which the card is addressed has been a dental surgery for many a year, and the addressees are a family whose very name is unknown in the neighborhood. Anyone with information should call the postmaster. But wait, there's another problem. Correctly and legibly postmarked, but lacking any official explanation for the delay, the card was mailed from Auckland in the summer of 1889.

Daniel Albright is Richard L. Turner Professor in the Humanities at the University of Rochester. He has composed an enthralling book *im alten Stil*, a kind of neo-Modernist concerto grosso, ideal for persons whose very existence is doubted by most publishers in the developed world. It should be read “in the Olden Style,” from cover to cover.

“When I was young,” Albright recalls, “I once spent a summer in which I listened to *Erwartung* every day, often two or three times, without paying attention to the text.” One's first instinct may be to com-

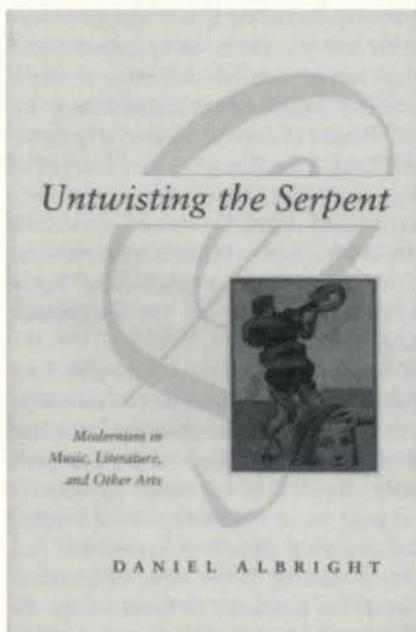
miserate with someone who was still, in James Agee's memorable phrase, “dis-guised to himself” as young. Did he perhaps reflect how different life must have been back in Knoxville that summer evening in 1915? What bearing might Schoenberg's protagonist and her “primal scream” have on the “iron moan” of Agee's streetcar? What indeed had the agony of her solitude to do with “people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of estival body, talking casually”?

It seems axiomatic that anyone who listens to Barber's *Knoxville* “without paying attention to the text” can't be paying much attention to Barber either. Albright's liking for a recorded performance of *Erwartung* (under Hermann Scherchen) that omits the entire solo part seems to entail a judgment about the quality as well as the function of Marie Pappenheim's text and Schoenberg's setting (and thus differs in principle and in kind from the approval that used to be given for performances of *Pierrot Lunaire* that omit the Sprechstimme part). Ultimately, Albright's rejection of Pappenheim and all her works is a tribute to the articulacy of Schoenberg's music:

I wanted to assimilate its wonders, to understand its discontinuities as occult forms of continuity. As with any repeated succession of sounds, *Erwartung* ultimately became fully predictable; and, slowly, the text started to seem an arbitrary melodrama, a silly hoo-ha uncomfortably fastened to the exquisite music.

There are questions that might profitably be raised about the underlying analytical assumptions and their consequences elsewhere in the discussion of *Erwartung*. Fundamental, however, is an old-fashioned secular faith in the power of music as such, the power that precedes and goes beyond the hermeneutics. Albright well understands that “paying attention to the text” is a discipline whose exactions are multiplied in proportion to the complexity of the interdisciplinary context. And yet: “this book tries to please by holding up to the light the fugitive but powerful creatures born from particular unions of music and the other arts.” It does please; or when it doesn't, it stirs things up, which is just as good.

Albright's chosen fields are those in which “the relations among the arts were either unusually tense and hostile, or



unusually lax and tolerant." The latter, defined as "figures of consonance," are examined in the first section of his enquiry; the "figures of dissonance" are then introduced (though the antithesis isn't always clear); and finally, an all-American C major resolution celebrates a marriage of true and fairly truthful minds in the Paris-paradise of 1928.

As for the serpent of the title, its origins are nautical and divine, its home is the Vatican's famous statue of Laocoön and his sons, and its relevance for Albright begins with Lessing's epoch-making essay of 1766, *Laokoon*. Richard Brilliant's *My Laocoön: Alternative Claims in the Interpretation of Artworks* (University of California Press, 2000) is only the most recent instance—too recent to be cited by Albright—of a debate that has continued and often raged since Raphael and Michelangelo began it almost as soon as the statue was unearthed in 1506.

Lessing's essay is subtitled, "On the Limits of Painting and Poetry." Limits, boundary lines, category distinctions of every sort, these are the serpents Albright is grappling with; and yet music enjoys his special favor. No passage in his expository section on Hieroglyph is better qualified to stand for the book as a whole than the one that contemplates Liszt's circumambulatory masterpiece *Il pensiero* (no. 2 in the Italian volume of *Années de pèlerinage*). Not only from the statue Michelangelo carved for the tomb of Lorenzo de Medici but also from the poem he inscribed on it, Liszt draws a music whose prophetic freedom does honor to both. Paraphrasing Schiller, Busoni (who doesn't appear in Albright's pantheon) famously declared that music is born free, and that its destiny is to free itself again. The music Liszt won from Michelangelo's inscribed poetry and carved stone is informed by that spirit of freedom. Implying a certain belief that all music aspires to other conditions of art and life, the *Années de pèlerinage* in their entirety begin to suggest—it's a "modern" idea—that even the poorest music can dream of playing with the richest.

Is that why Albright tries to banish Nietzsche's Dionysus and elect the Phrygian satyr Marsyas in his place? Marsyas taught himself to play the aulos, which Athena had invented but then thrown away in disgust after finding that it distorted her face when she played it. Marsyas doesn't care about his face. He challenges the lyre-playing Apollo to a contest of skill. According to one often-sculpt-

ed version of the myth, Apollo tied Marsyas to a tree and flayed him alive for his presumption; according to another, the satyr was tried and acquitted by King Midas, whose reward from Apollo was a pair of asses' ears fit for many a music-journalist of our own day. He was given a cap to cover his shame.

As far as ears are concerned, Albright has little to be ashamed of. In value-free alphabetical order his favored composers are Antheil, Poulenc, Satie, Schoenberg, Virgil Thomson, and Weill. Of the two poets to whom he grants honorary status as composers, one turns out to be the North Star in his firmament: Ezra Pound. The other is Brecht.

In *Untwisting the Serpent*, Brecht is introduced as a bit of a twister himself. Concerned about the historical placing of "most of Brecht's best plays," Albright corrects himself: "perhaps I should say most of the best plays published under the brand name 'Brecht.'" The kind of aside that gets an easy laugh at student seminars may no longer earn its keep when a serious point is being overlooked: among the thirteen musical notations forming the appendix to Brecht's *Hauspostille*, by far the most memorable happens to be the only one that speaks a musical dialect remotely akin to that of Pound's "opera" *Le testament*. Albright is rightly preoccupied with the "Mahagonny-Lieder" and their "gestic" implications for Weill. But immediately preceding the "Lieder" is the tune for the "Ballade von den Seeräubern." Whatever the poem may owe to Wedekind, Ringelnatz, & Co. is paid off by the old French *chanson* "L'Étendard de la pitié" (The Banner of Compassion). Later converted into a banner for Mother Courage, the song and its superbly incisive arrangements and formal variations by Paul Dessau achieved international fame after the Berliner Ensemble's triumph at the International Theatre Festival in Paris in 1954. Brecht had another two years to live, and Pound another four to endure in his Washington hospital.

Meanwhile Dien Bien Phu had fallen, and Marx's reading of Laocoön as an image of the human race struggling in the coils of capitalism was finding new adherents. For an old warrior like Hermann Scherchen, there was a logical progression from the individualist "expectation" of The Woman in *Erwartung* to the collective aspirations of Brecht and Dessau in their opera *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* (whose controversial premiere in Communist Berlin in 1951 was

conducted by Scherchen).

More reticent in the political sphere than in many others, Albright would seem to incline to a Rorty-like quietism. After an early and ominous reference to "the political operas of Brecht and Weill," he leaves well alone until *Der Jasager* brings him, for just a moment, perilously close to a land mine.

His escape is providential. The account he gives of Weill's collaboration with Brecht, and vice versa, may or may not change the course of Weill scholarship; it will certainly enrich its findings. Again Pound is the guiding star. But the new angle reveals Yeats close by; and it is the involvement of Pound and Yeats with Noh theatre that allows Albright to discuss Britten's *Curlew River* (1964) long before Weill's *Der Jasager* (1930), and at a conveniently safe distance from it.

His routing is flawless. Perhaps unwittingly, but if so, with a rare intuition, he approaches *Der Jasager* from a position indicated forty or more years ago in a radio broadcast by the Austrian-born composer and scholar Egon Wellesz. A former student and biographer of Schoenberg, and a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford since 1938, Wellesz was best known for his work in the field of Byzantine music and notation, but had recently published an edition of Troubadour songs. As composer of the once admired but long neglected stage works *Alkestis* and *Die Bacchantinnen*, and also of the recent Congreve opera *Incognita* (1951), Wellesz was broadcasting a talk on the history of dramatic composition. In the course of it, he spoke of Weill, and compared his achievement in the field of operatic reform with that of Gluck. There were no apologies for airing a view that might have made sense a quarter of a century earlier in the musical Germany of Alfred Einstein and Paul Bekker, but was likely to perplex or enrage the majority of his British listeners (Edward Dent excepted!) in the 1950s.

Albright is equally unapologetic. As if in tribute to Wellesz, he brilliantly adduces Schoenberg's tonal masterpiece of 1929, the unaccompanied male chorus "Verbundenheit" op.35, no.6, before proceeding to examine *Der Jasager* in terms of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. In general, and beyond the boundaries of Weill's opera, his account is so illuminating that the shadow of doubt cast by his only comparative music example can safely be ignored. Like other such examples in the book, it is less convincing than the general point it is intended to

illustrate. More important is what *Der Jasager* comes to represent in the double context of Laocoön's struggle with the serpents, and classical humanism's engagement with pre-Christian antiquity. Whereas pilgrims and scholars of a former generation would flee from the "bourgeois leftism" of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Mahagonny* and wend their way up the dusty mountain track to the narrow ledge from which *Der Jasager*—half read but quite unheard—could be lightly tossed as they headed for the clouded summits of *Die Massnahme*, Albright stays at home, listening, reading, and paying attention to the text. For him *Der Jasager* becomes the quintessential Weill, a goal, a terminus.

Weill's relationship to Gluck—to *Don Juan* as well as to *Orfeo*—is incontestably a part of his inheritance from Busoni, Liszt, and Mozart. The critical importance of his cantata *Der neue Orpheus* has been so widely recognized since the publication in 1986 of Kim H. Kowalke's important essay, "Looking Back: Towards a New Orpheus," that Albright can perhaps afford to take it for granted. A more surprising absence, apart from two brief allusions, is that of Cocteau's *Orphée* (1926).

Suppose that Weill had read the play at the time of his talks with Cocteau in 1933–35, and had then in 1949 seen the "new" and renewed film version with its Gluck-blessed score by his former admirer Georges Auric? What might the omnipotent, indivisible, and Protean Weill of current theology have made of all that?

Albright's Weill doesn't tell us; he seems to have closed up shop after *Die sieben Todsünden*. And yet Albright corrects himself just in time, with one of the most telling *aperçus* in the entire book:

behind any of Weill's stage pieces there lies a nest of other stage pieces, opening out onto everything from *The Play of Daniel* to Rodgers's *Carousel*. To learn what is the common property of all music theatre, listen to Weill.

To learn of certain properties Weill's music theatre did *not* have in common with, say, Virgil Thomson's, listen to Albright on *Four Saints in Three Acts* (whose composition was precisely coterminous with that of *Die Dreigroschenoper*). But if you want to learn why Weill's happily named film musical *Where Do We Go From Here?* (1944) has little in common with the film scores his good friend Antheil was writing a year or two later, Albright

won't help you much. You'll have to watch the movies, and while you're about it, listen to the recent recordings of Antheil's symphonies. You may or may not be disappointed.

One of the many virtues of Albright's book is that readers will wish to seek out or rediscover music that has barely been touched upon (or not at all), even as they are persuaded, whether by stealth or sheer enthusiasm, to explore the mixed-art collaborations it so dazzlingly elucidates.

David Drew
London

© Copyright 2001 by David Drew

This review is an excerpt from a wider-ranging essay which will be published in due course and included, in a revised form, in the author's projected collection of reviews and essays covering music, arts, and politics in the period 1917–2001.

