



# KURT WEILL IN BERLIN

## PETER SANDLOFF AND HIS ORCHESTRA

American-born Peter Sandloff grew up in Germany, where he is well known as a conductor-orchestrator for theatre, films, radio, and television. His witty, atmospheric arrangements of these songs from Kurt Weill's stage works were recorded in Berlin under the personal supervision of Lotte Lenya.

### SIDE 1

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagony (The Rise and Fall of the City Mahagony): Wie man sich bettet so liegt man (As you make your bed, so will you lie)

Berliner Requiem: Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen

Dreigroschen-Oper (The Threepenny Opera): Tango-Ballad

Konjunktur: Die Muschel von Margate

Happy End: Der kleine Leutnant des lieben Gottes

Dreigroschen-Oper: Barbara-Song

Happy End: Surabaja-Jonny

Happy End: Bilbao-Song

### SIDE 2

Dreigroschen-Oper: Moritat (Ballad of Mack the Knife)

Dreigroschen-Oper: Kanonen-Song (Army Song)

Mahagony: Zithermelodie und Song von Mandelay

Happy End: Matrosen-Tango (Sailors' Tango)

Die Petroleum Inseln: Das Lied von den braunen Inseln

Dreigroschen-Oper: Mond über Soho (Love Song)

Mahagony: Wie man sich bettet so liegt man



Photo of Kurt Weill taken in 1950 in New York (Karsh of Ottawa).  
Drawing from the original program of the film *Dreigroschen-Oper*.

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IN THE CONSTANTLY CHANGING HISTORY of composers' reputations, there is no stranger case than that of Kurt Weill. Born in 1900, he studied with Humperdinck and Busoni, and by his twenty-seventh year was generally recognized as one of the three leaders of the *avant-garde* in Germany. His music was then as "specialized" as that of his colleagues Hindemith and Krenek. But within two years he had evolved a highly personal style which combined traditional "classical" harmony with the accents of a new type of popular song. Although he was condemned as a deserter by some of his more superficially progressive colleagues, his work between 1928 and 1933 was as original as anything written at that time.

Together with Bert Brecht, the leading German writer of his generation, Weill formulated a new type of opera, and the many works he wrote for the stage (including three full-length operas and four shorter ones) established him as the most prominent German theatre composer since Richard Strauss. But within a few days of Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, all of Weill's works were banned, and he was forced to flee for his life. He eventually settled in America, where he died in 1950.

In America, Weill found a completely new career for himself as a notable composer for Broadway. Believing that the works which had brought him such fame in his native land were no longer relevant to his new environment, he did little to encourage their performance, and continued his own musical development on quite different lines: *Knickerbocker Holiday*, *Lady in the Dark*, *One Touch of Venus*, *Street Scene*, and *Lost in the Stars*. By 1950 the world had almost forgotten his one-time reputation as an important German composer — a reputation that had been acknowledged by such figures as Furtwängler and Bruno Walter.

But now the wheel of fortune has turned again. Under the guidance of Weill's widow, the distinguished actress and *disease* Lotte Lenya, a wide audience in America has joyfully discovered the German works of Weill. A parallel upsurge of interest has taken place in Central Europe. All Weill's operas and theatre works (apart from a few pieces destroyed by the Nazis) have been revived — most notably *The Threepenny Opera* (*Dreigroschen-Oper*), and his influence on the younger generation of musicians is already evident.

The reasons for this are worth considering. Although not in any way a man of the past, Weill found a unique and impeccably precise form for expressing the attitudes of Romanticism. His music implies a predominantly tragic view of the world, though the tears may be hidden behind a mask of irony. In this, Weill is much closer to Gustav Mahler (whose music he much admired) and to the *Lieder* writers than he is to the black-and-white world of the modern popular song. It is quite wrong to suppose that he used foxtrot, tango, or other modern rhythms in his music as an imitation of, or parody of, American dance music. The purpose is much more serious. The mysterious tensions of his harmony would tell us that even were it not for the very searching quality of the verse which he set.

The fourteen songs by Weill arranged by Peter Sandloff for this recording were all composed between 1928 and 1930. All but two were settings of texts by Brecht. It is important to remember that these are nothing more nor less than solo or duet songs in simple strophic form. They represent only one side of Brecht and Weill's work, and cannot suggest anything of the operatic style which the two men evolved. We should also remember that we are listening to instrumental arrangements which, in the

nature of things, can have little in common with the type of voice-and-accompaniment texture which Weill handled so brilliantly. The majority of these arrangements keep quite close to the spirit, if not the form, of the originals. The exceptions are the "Barbara-Song," "Surabaja-Jonny," the "Moritat," the "Kanonen-Song," and "Das Lied von den braunen Inseln," all of which are very free variations on Weill's original compositions.

The pieces included in Sandloff's selection are remarkable testimony to the variety of feeling and inflection which Weill achieved within the narrow confines of his song-forms. For the way these musical images reflect the contrasts and contradictions of human life shows the hand of a real master and the vision of a real artist.

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