

Convention attaches price tags and descriptive labels to all but the very greatest composers and thus provides a too-convenient substitute for independent judgement. The tag puts an approximate value on the composer, the label describes, in the simplest terms, the kind of artist he is or is thought to be. When a composer's name is better known than all but a few of his works, the conventional idea of him is almost certainly faulty, and the works that do not accord with it are unlikely to be given a fair hearing. Take the case of Schoenberg. Here, reads the present-day label, is a difficult man, the maker of revolutions, the pioneer of atonality, the creator of the twelve-note method. While the early and comparatively conservative works are heard, and respected, in the light of their successors, late ones like the **Theme and Variations** Op 43 or the **Suite in G** – yes, in G – of 1934 are not given their due. They don't sound all that 'difficult', they certainly aren't 'atonal' or serial. Uncharacteristic by-works? In fact, they're nothing of the kind. But the label covers them and they are seldom performed.

Perhaps the extreme case is that of Weill. No other contemporary composer of comparable 'fame' is so obscured by the labels that have been found for him. Some years ago – it must have been in the early 1950s – I had need of information about Weill, of whose work I knew nothing apart from **The Threepenny Opera**, which was said to be by far his best piece. Glancing down the list of his works in a reliable musical dictionary, I saw to my amazement the rubric, 'Sym'. Was it really true, was it even conceivable, that the composer of **The Threepenny Opera** had written a symphony? I recalled no mention of it in the obituary notices published after his death in April 1950. My further enquiries were fruitless. It seemed incredible that there should be no trace of a symphony, however bad, by a successful composer whom certain authorities – for reasons at that time far from clear to me – considered important. On the other hand, dictionaries are not infallible. And so, on grounds of probability, I decided that this, to my mind, highly improbable work did not exist. But had I known even **The Threepenny Opera** better than I did, I would have realized that within the primitive strophic forms of that work there is an extreme harmonic tension which, remote though it is from anything symphonic, is potentially adaptable to larger and more sophisticated forms. Indeed, the work, properly heard, sounds less like the chef d'oeuvre of a lightweight composer than the inspired holiday-task of at least a medium-heavyweight. And that's exactly what it is.

One of Weill's several affinities with Stravinsky – needless to say, a greater composer – lay in his tendency to set himself new problems in each work. The critical confusions that resulted may be better understood if we imagine what might have been the consequences had Stravinsky's **The Soldier's Tale** been as 'sensational' a success as **The Threepenny Opera** and thus been regarded, like that work, as the yardstick of its composer's genius. (In fact, it was not **The Soldier's Tale** but the early Diaghilev ballets that for many years prejudiced the acceptance of Stravinsky's finest achievements.)

On the basis of **The Soldier's Tale**, it might be argued that Stravinsky excelled in the grotesque, the parodistic and the demonic, and was thus unlikely to fulfil himself in the 'humane' modes of comedy or tragedy; that he was addicted to popular rhythms, including those of 'jazz', and was thus a typical product of the post-war era; and

above all that his characteristic formal processes were so remote from anything symphonic that he was doomed to failure should he be so rash as to address himself to concert audiences.

Similar thoughts seem to have been uppermost in the minds of the critics who gathered for the first two performances – both under Bruno Walter – of Weill's second symphony (wrongly advertised as his first). On both occasions the work was dismissed by the press – despite the public's enthusiastic response to it – as a disastrous blunder on the part of a 'theatre-composer' who should forthwith return to his true metier, and remain faithful to the talent he had displayed in **The Threepenny Opera**. Though offended by what they took to be the work's naivety and bad taste, the critics finally damned it on the grounds that it lacked whatever originality they attributed to Weill.

In truth it is highly original and there is not a paragraph, not even a sentence, whose authorship cannot be identified by any listener familiar with the preceding works, particularly the opera **Die Bürgschaft** and the musical play **Der Silbersee**. Significantly enough, the work was received with more comprehension when Walter, in 1937, introduced it to Vienna, where Weill was known to be more than just the composer of **The Threepenny Opera**. But a few respectful notices were not enough to repair the damage. In most countries, as well as in the Germany from which he had fled in 1933, Weill was by then without an audience. His confidence undermined by a series of professional reverses and the almost unremitting hostility of the musical world, he followed the advice of the symphony's critics, and never again ventured outside the realm of the theatre.

The so-called 'Weill renaissance' of the 1950s began with the re-discovery of **The Threepenny Opera** and the remarkable gifts of Weill's widow Lotte Lenya. It was assisted, or rather diverted from a genuinely musical course, by the rocketing reputation of his most distinguished literary collaborator, Bertolt Brecht. The musical world, rightly preoccupied with the greater problems of the Schoenbergian and post-Schoenbergian revolutions, tended to regard the renaissance as a minor cultural or literary phenomenon, and was not disposed to question the theory – encouraged by Brecht and promoted by his disciples – that Weill was not a self-sufficient composer, but rather one who owed much of his inspiration to that of his collaborators, notably, of course, Brecht. The theory seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the only works of his that made any headway in the Europe of the 1950s were those with texts by Brecht. Consequently his reputation, such as it was, rested on a handful of works, only one of which was written after 1930, and none before 1927.

The Berlin of that period has, for various and somewhat disheartening reasons, found a place in the popular mythologies, or nostalgias, of the post-war world. That, no less than the name of Brecht, was duly associated with Weill's music. Weill, it was generally felt, was the Offenbach of Berlin's raffish, indulgent and dangerous heyday, just as Georg Grosz was its Hogarth. But today we are beginning to see that if he was that at all, he was considerably more than that. Of the recently discovered and appreciated works that have nothing whatsoever to do with the popular image of (Isherwood's?) Berlin, the most important are the two symphonies.

The first symphony is, as far as we know, Weill's earliest surviving

orchestral work (preceding by four years the first such work by his senior contemporary and chief rival, Hindemith). It seems that in this work – begun immediately after his 21st birthday – Weill came of age. That kind of starting-point is one we need to discover before assessing the stature of any creative artist.

For the first time – again, as far as we know – Weill was concerning himself, creatively, with 20th-century man. The symphony is 'about' war (in the modern sense) and peace (in the ideal sense), above all, about the search for faith. Its successor, according to Weill, had no extra-musical programme. It certainly does not require one. Yet its imagery is demonstrably related to that of the mature works in which Weill explores the social and philosophical territory surveyed in the first symphony. One could, so to speak, 'de-code' the second symphony by reference to parallel passages in Weill's other stage works; one could say of this passage that it represents the invading tyrant, of that, his opponents, of a third, his victory, of a fourth, renewed resistance. If so, one would be found to attach a special significance to the fact that the symphony was begun after the collapse of German democracy and a few weeks before the Nazi seizure of power. But does all that contribute to our purely musical understanding of the work? Of course not. What it may do is warn us not to be misled by the music's urbanity. The expressionistic violence of the first symphony, with its overtones of Mahler, Strauss and the early Schoenberg, is nowhere evident in the second. Yet within the simple-seeming forms and tunes and triadic harmonies of this work there is a turbulence, a mortal struggle, that is all the more intense because it is hidden and compressed. From Mozart, whose music he discovered through his teacher Busoni, and from Haydn, who was a later discovery, Weill has learnt how to re-invest his 19th-century legacy (the *Volkstümlichkeit* of Schubert, the tragic irony of Mahler). The result is a symphony unlike any other in the modern repertoire. With what cunning and boldness it is composed, with what subtlety of feeling it is informed, may not be fully sensed at first hearing. It will never be sensed unless we are prepared to listen with open ears and minds – which is to say, without preconceptions of what 'modern music' should or should not be. There is no such thing in art as an 'outmoded' technique, because no technique is in itself of any artistic value. 'I can't say it often enough!' wrote Schoenberg in 1932, 'my works are twelve-note compositions, not twelve-note compositions.' By the same token Weill's second symphony is a tonal composition (like Schoenberg's 1934 **Suite**), not a tonal composition that is therefore to be heard as a counter-revolutionary manifesto.

Busoni's concept of the 'oneness of music' was not lost on his pupil. Weill believed that the far-from-easy path he had taken was a necessary alternative to the one taken by Schoenberg, whose example, nonetheless, he continued to admire. From the work of Weill, who was born in the first year of our century and died at its mid-point, there emerges for the first time and in its most radical form a lesson that has yet to be learnt by those theorists (and not only the un-musical ones) who would deny that a Britten or a Shostakovich has contributed to the 'historically significant' music of today.

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A leaflet containing analytical notes and documentation is enclosed with this record.