The symphony was composed in Berlin in April-June 1921. Although Weill never released it for public performance, he did not underrate its importance; as late as 1932 he included it among the representative works of his early years. The score was lost in 1933, but came to light twenty-five years later. The first performance was given in 1957 by the NVDR Symphony Orchestra (Hamburg), under Wilhelm Schückter. A study score was published in 1968 by B. Schott's Söhne (Mainz).

The autograph score's title page—destroyed by well-wishers who hid the autograph during the Second World War—bores a pacifist-socialist epigraph taken from Johannes R Becher's *Festspiel, Workers, Peasants and Soldiers—A People's Awakening to God* (1921). Written in an extreme expressionist idiom derived from Strindberg's religious dramas, the *Festspiel* gives a stylized picture of a world war and its revolutionary aftermath. While the symphony is in no sense a formal counterpart to the *Festspiel*, it clearly relates to Becher's preoccupations at that time. (Three years later Becher completely re-wrote the play: the religious message was excluded, and the social one re-interpreted in orthodox communist terms, rather than the romantically left-wing socialist ones of the original version."

Although Weill was a member of Busoni's masterclass at the time of composing the symphony, neither he nor the other members of the class were 'pupils' in the normal sense. Busoni did not give formal composition lessons—which were never the intended object of the class—but imparted his views in the course of discussions of the classics (notably Bach and Mozart) and of the works submitted to him. While he allowed his pupils, or disciples as he preferred to call them, complete freedom as to their manner of composition, he did not disguise his own preferences and dislikes. The latter must certainly have influenced his unfavourable verdict on Weill's symphony, whose Mahlerian and Straussian rhetoric, with the hyperboles and purple patches that go with it, represented almost everything against which Busoni had set his face. Weill had been nurtured on Wagner and the late romantics, and by 1920, if not earlier, had discovered, and been thrilled by, the music of Schoenberg—from which, by this time, Busoni was thoroughly estranged. It is significant that the only ideas in Weill's symphony that met with his master's approval were the (neo-classical) fugal and chorale ones—which today may strike us as the least felicitous in the work.

Like Schoenberg's Op 9 *Kammersymphonie*, to which it is plainly indebted (just as the earlier Rilke tone-poem was apparently indebted to Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*), the symphony is in one movement, and is based, melodically and harmonically, on the interval of the fourth. Like the 1916 *Kammersymphonie* (also in one movement) by Franz Schreker—with whom Weill had once considered studying—it owes much of its rich sonority to the extremely elaborate *divisi* string writing. Although there are passages of chamber-orchestral, even chamber-musical character, it is not by any means a chamber symphony. It requires a large body of strings, together with a moderate complement of wind, brass and percussion.

The thirty-bar introduction juxtaposes four distinct statements. The first of them is one of the work's two cyclic themes, and begins thus:

Ex 3

(The idea owes something to the one that initiates the second-subject stage in Schoenberg's Op 9 *Kammersymphonie*, and in turn prefigures one in Hindemith's Op 38 No 3, and another in Weill's own *Mahagonny*). After a varied repeat of the opening statement, the introduction closes with a lyrical codetta whose melody inverts motive A. That relationship by inversion, together with the marked contrast of musical character, suggests the 'war-and-peace' antithesis that underlies the main structure of the symphony. The structure divides into three main spans, each with many subsections.

Span 1 begins with an *allegro vivace* marked 'wild, heftig' (wild, violent). If its march-motif suggests the mechanized armies of modern times, the galloping rhythms and shrill whinnings that go with it seem to anticipate the apocalyptic horsemen evoked in the finale of Weill's *Die Bürgschaft*. Greatly speeded-up versions of both the cyclic motives contribute to the tumult.

An outwardly quieter though inwardly no more peaceful mood is suggested by a new idea (Ex 4)—initially for solo clarinet and viola—which, in the context of the foregoing material, has something of the character traditionally associated with the initiation of the second-subject stage in a sonata movement:

Ex 4
It is all the more poignant for being, in fact, a transformation (by augmentation) of one of the vicious-sounding motives from the allegro vivace. But this 'soft and tender' (ruhig und zart) answer to the battle-music is cut short by the return of the Ex 1 and 2 music in reverse order. The juggernaut-chords of Ex 1 provoke a massive gesture of protest which, after five bars, subsides in resignation. Then follows a sustained lyrical episode which seems to express a state of complete spiritual withdrawal.

This episode, which marks the centre of Span 1 and replaces a conventional development section, is in two parts. In the first, a string ‘concertino’ gropes towards the tonal light while seemingly disembodied horn phrases (4/4 against the basic 3/4) echo the previous protest and dimly foreshadow the affirmative chorale theme that still lies far ahead. The second part of the episode, in 6/8 time and marked ‘ammutig’ (graceful), is, we may suppose, a vision of a better world. Although the sunny E flat major of the opening is the relative major of the work’s home-key, it sounds very remote from that embattled home. Equally remote are the gently-walking bass-lines and the melodic hints of an almost idyllic Ländler. One is reminded of a moment in Becher’s play where, amid the clamour of war, a lone woman speaks, or rather whispers, of the day when the ‘May trees of peace and longing’ will be planted in place of the torn-down field-altars.

All this is still a dream. The return to reality is heralded by the violins’ suddenly-painful reminder (Ex 6) of motive A:

The ensuing attempt to re-affirm the ‘ideal’ vision is swiftly crushed by a tutti that leads back into the battlefield of the allegro vivace. After a reinforced version of the ‘protest’ music and a second retreat into the penumbra of the string ‘concertino’, Span 2 ends with a brief reminiscence of the 6/8 ‘vision’, which is to be developed in the central section of Span 2.

Span 2 is in triple time throughout, and is marked andante religioso. The main theme (introduced by the cellos) is accompanied by a solo clarinet melody which distinctly anticipates the mood of Marie’s lullaby in Wozzeck (1923). The mood is not specifically religious, and the lullaby is subject to interruptions from the outside world (motive A, in diminution, then motive B, climactically). The voice that is heard here seems to be that of pleading man, or woman, rather than that of God. The actual discovery of God is reserved for the next and last span.

Span 3 begins, on the lower strings, with a neo-classical theme that is related to nothing that has gone before apart from the groping string-music in the allegro vivace’s ‘concertino’ section. The theme, which might be said to represent ‘man without God’,

...
Weill's second symphony, his last orchestral work, was the result of a commission from that renowned patroness of modern music, the Princess Edmond de Polignac – to whose generosity we owe such works as Stravinsky's *Renard*, Falla's *Master Peter's Puppet Show* and Satie's *Socrate*. The first sketches were made in Berlin in January and February 1933. Progress was interrupted first by the composer's enforced emigration from Germany in March, and then by the need to fulfil, at short notice, a new commission – for the ballet *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Composition of the symphony was resumed in the late summer of 1933, and completed, in the village of Louveciennes near Paris, in February 1934. The first performance was given by the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra under Bruno Walter in October of the same year. Partly owing to the unfavourable press reactions, and partly owing to the worsening conditions in the Europe of the late 1930s, the work remained in manuscript and was soon forgotten. The first edition – a study score – was published in 1966 jointly by B. Schott's Söhne, Mainz and Heugel et Cie, Paris.

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