

About the program:

Compositions by ALBERT WEILL

By all accounts Weill's father was a man of wide culture and great modesty. During his 18 years as Cantor of the Dessau synagogue his contributions to musical life within and beyond the Jewish community were considerable, and his home became a favorite meeting place for singers and players from the Court Opera, including in later years some notable guest artists. How far Albert Weill's activities as a composer extended beyond the immediate requirements of the synagogue is not known, but one thing is certain: it was through them that his son was first able to form, at the deepest human level, an image of what a composer might be.

KIDDUSH

Kiddush is the last of the four compositions Weill is known to have dedicated to his father. It was written in March 1946 — when Weill was in the midst of composing *Street Scene* — and was one of the notable series of sacred works commissioned by Cantor David J. Putterman for the 75th anniversary of the Park Avenue Synagogue, New York.

TWO FOLKSONGS OF THE NEW PALESTINE

Folksongs of the New Palestine was a collection edited by Hans Nathan and published in 1938 by the Nigun Press. Among the distinguished composers who contributed arrangements to the series were Copland, Honegger, Milhaud, and Wolpe.

In a March 30, 1938 letter to Dr. Nathan, Weill describes his arrangements:

Immediately after my return from Hollywood, I began the arrangement of the two folk songs. I have just finished them and sent them to Masada. I believe the two arrangements have turned out well. *Havu L'venim* has been provided with a brief introduction and the whole song as been based on a restrained march rhythm which seems to me quite effective. The entire song can be repeated, the "prima volta" directly leading into the introduction. For *Baa M'nucha* I have chosen a sort of through-composed form, without destroying the verse structure. The initial twelve measures in the three stanzas have been treated in diverse ways corresponding to the diverse character of the texts. The refrain remains the same in the three stanzas; only in the last stanza it has been treated freely in favor of the "night atmosphere." --English translation by Hans Nathan.

Baa M'nucha was composed by Daniel Sambursky and gained great popularity from its featured use in the film *The Promised Land* of 1933.

OFRAH'S LIEDER

Until recently our knowledge of Weill's early compositions was confined to a handful of isolated songs and a solitary chorus, all dating from the period 1914-16. It was not until the discovery of a draft of *Ofrab's Lieder* in 1983, and of an apparently definitive score two years later, that Weill's nascent command of larger forms could be assessed. Weill was 16 ½ when he completed *Ofrab's Lieder*. Although he was to make notable advances within the next twelve months, he was still prepared to offer *Ofrab's Lieder* for public performance as late as November 1917. By then he would certainly have known and understood enough about such early prodigies as Schubert and Mendelssohn to recognize the limits of his own achievement thus far. Yet the embryonic presence of a real composer is already unmistakable in *Ofrab's Lieder*, and here and there the listener is afforded brief (and in one case startlingly clear) intimations of what is to come. It is above all in the context of his music for *The Eternal Road* that Weill's first encounter with Hebrew poetry takes on a prophetic note.

Juda ben Samuel ha-Levi (c. 1080-c.1145) was the foremost Hebrew poet of medieval times. He spent his early years in his native Spain, and then emigrated to Palestine, where he died. The German translations set by Weill are modern.

THE ETERNAL ROAD

The Eternal Road, or rather *Der Weg der Verheissung* (The Road of Promise), to give its original German title, is an exceptionally large work that was written and composed in an exceptionally short time. Commissioned by the indefatigable Meyer W. Weisgal for production by Max Reinhardt, with the aim of raising money for the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, it was begun in the summer of 1934 and theoretically ready to go into rehearsal a year later. Owing to a series of mishaps it was not seen until January 1937, when a somewhat truncated and garbled version was presented at the Manhattan Opera House, which had to be partially rebuilt in order to accommodate the massive sets designed by Norman Bel Geddes. Despite considerable public support

and desperate economy measures, the running costs proved so great that the production eventually sank in a sea of debts. Some excerpts from the score were later used in several Jewish pageants on which Weill collaborated with Ben Hecht, but the work itself has yet to be salvaged.

Today's excerpts are in no sense intended as a "summary" of a score equivalent in length to a full scale opera or oratorio. But rather they are an indication of qualities and objectives that are wholly characteristic, yet quite distinct from those that are popularly associated with Weill. Although the composer of these particular excerpts may seem to be far removed from the composer of *Recordare*, the fourth and last act of *The Eternal Road* — that is, the "Jeremiah" act that was omitted from the 1937 production — clearly demonstrates that the one presupposes the other.

The complete score of *The Eternal Road* remains unpublished. A small album of vocal excerpts published at the time of the premiere bears a dedication to Weill's father.

RECORDARE, Opus 11

Composed (in September 1923) a bare half year after the final version of the Op. 8 string quartet, the *Recordare* has a technical assurance and a maturity of utterance that would be by comparison altogether astonishing were the quartet as truly representative as Busoni's recommendation of it suggests. Yet the *Recordare* remained unpublished and unperformed during Weill's lifetime, and indeed was lost without a trace until 1971, when a copy made soon after completion was discovered by the musicologist O.W. Neighbour in a Paris music store.

The reasons why Busoni evidently preferred the quartet to the *Recordare* and indeed to other equally notable achievements of the same period cannot have been unconnected with the fact that the inspiration of the *Recordare* and its companion pieces is overtly religious, whereas that of the quartet is not. Busoni, like other notable composers of his generation, was a staunch non-believer.

In choosing his text from the fifth chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, in the Latin Vulgate version, and setting it in the form of an elaborate polyphonic motet, Weill consciously aligned himself with a tradition that extends back to Josquin and Palestrina. With the motets of Bach as his principal background model and those of Reger as immediate formal precursors, Weill develops a large single-movement form in seven sections, the last of which is an anguished rather than affirmative chorale.

Neither in the theological nor in the tonal sense does the *Recordare* affirm the certainties of Bach's day. Consistently chromatic and dissonant in a manner that poses formidable problems for the singers but nevertheless has an audible logic of its own, the music never actually abandons tonality, yet seems to pose that threat as if it were a metaphor for the threat of a permanently estranged Deity. Fundamental to the entire structure is the tonally vagrant theme announced at the very beginning. With that same theme, the children's choir makes its first entry half way through the work, providing a cantus firmus for the turbulent polyphony of "deficit gaudium cordis nostri." This powerful climax precipitates the only moment of harmonic repose in the entire work; yet it is precisely here that two solo children proclaim (*molto tranquillo*) that the sins of the fathers are now being visited on the next generation. As in *Der Jasager*, there are no equations between childhood and innocence; but when at the close of the work the adult choir intones the last reminder of the chromatic cantus firmus, the children are allowed a pellucid cadence of their own, on the word "Domine."