Tango-Habanera

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After Die Dreigroschenoper Weill's music-theatre works divide into two distinct but functionally and thematically interlinked streams – on the one hand, those which are in effect 'through-composed' (eg Mahagonny, Der Jasager, Die Bürgschaft, Lady in the Dark, and Street Scene) and on the other, those which evolve and pioneer an extraordinary variety of mixed forms (eg Der Silbersee, The Eternal Road, Knackerbocker Holiday, Love Life, and Lost in the Stars). Many of the latter have proved, in modern conditions, peculiarly resistant to revival, either because of the forces involved, or because of the dramatic style and content, or both.

Meanwhile the American and European developments in the world of small-scale music-theatre during the past three decades have created a demand for classical repertoire which has principally been served by a mere handful of works: by, for instance, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Milhaud, and, of course, Weill. In Weill's case, that demand harmonized with the perception not only that many important scores which Weill wrote for the theatre between 1928 and 1950 were still quite unknown, but also that almost every one of them contained latent or even unfulfilled concept or concert-like forms. Theoretically these were excerptable without in any way pre-empting the revival of the original works (on the contrary), and therefore (as well as on principle) without attempting to simulate theatrical effects by the incorporation of characters, dialogues, or indeed story-line.

The first attempts at such excerpts were the 'Pantomime' from The Prodigal, the Happy End song-sequence, and War-Play – all tried out in 1975 in the Berlin Festival. More recent is Cry, the Beloved Country (1989), and the latest is the suite Panaméenne, which receives its first public performance in today's programme. As for the songs for Marie Galante, they are a striking exception to the rule: interpolations conceived and composed after the completion of the play, they are more loosely connected than those of any of the related works, and are perhaps best presented in any order appropriate to the immediate context and to theforces available. Precisely for that reason, and probably for the first time since 1934, the little-known but (for Weill's future) important 'Train du Ciel' lament is tonight performed by the vocal forces for which it was conceived. DAVID DREW

Suite Panaméenne

Not until the late 1980s did the present suite of instrumental numbers become practicable as a result of two quite unconnected events: first, the unearthing of the autograph score of the orchestral Tango-Habanera (from which Weill's publishers had derived a popular song published in 1935 under the title 'Youkali'), and second, the discovery of an autograph piano reduction and three instrumental parts (one of them in Weill's hand) for a quite different Tango whose very existence was hitherto unknown. H.K. Gruber's reconstruction of this Tango is strictly and critically based on the autograph manuscripts.

The form of the Suite is determined by the affinities and contrasts between the various numbers. Just as the March of the Panamanian Army is maliciously arranged in the uniform of Austro-Hungarian and scenographic intrique, she is murdered on the eve of her longed-for departure. 'I attend un navire' contains no premonitions of that end (as 'Le Grand Lustucru' certainly does). On the popular chanson level it is clearly intended as a counterpart to the Mahagonny 'Alabama Song' whose refrain is just as firmly anchored to the American harmony. But in this case there is no irony and no cause for it. In a manner diametrically opposed to that of the savage-sounding introduction to the 'Alabama' refrain, the opening 'verse' frankly advertises the refrain's popular appeal. 'I attend un navire' is the earliest of Weill's show tunes to have been conceived as a hit-song, pure and simple, and a hit it deservedly became.

And yet Marie Galante has had no professional production since the original one at the Théâtre de Paris in December 1934. The fact that commercial recordings and sheet music editions kept some of the songs alive in France for more than a decade may help explain some distant echoes of them in the work of such composers as Joseph Kosma. But if at times Weill's characteristic wizardry with a small 'pit' orchestra calls to mind the classic French composition of Marcel Carne, Jean Renoir or Julien Duvivier, this is surely a tribute to Maurice Jaubert, the outstanding film composer of the pre-war era. Jaubert, however, was not in the first place a song writer, and song is the essence of Marie Galante. Paradoxically the authentic Qual des Brumes atmosphere is first conjured up by 'Train du Ciel', which is in fact a chorus of black monks, but one that anticipates not only the Old Testament world of The Eternal Road (1935) but also and especially that of Weill's score for Maxwell Anderson's adaptation (1949) of Cry, the Beloved Country.
THE WEILL EVENT

War Play

A 'song-sequence' devised by David Drew
From the score for Paul Green's play Johnny Johnson.
In September 1935 Weill travelled to America for the first time, in order to oversee the staging of his and
Franz Werfel's biblical drama The Eternal Road, which was due to be performed early in the
following year. Originally it had been decided to postpone that production he decided to remain in New York
for the time being. It was not until the summer of
1937 that he took the first steps towards American
citizenship.

While trying to earn his keep in New York after the
postponement of The Eternal Road, Weill
consolidated his links with the Group Theater. In the
spring of 1936 he was invited to collaborate with the
Group Theater on a musical play whose subject he
himself was to choose. He recommended an
American version of Hasan's Siegf. With this in view
the Group Theater introduced him to the
distinguished playwright Paul Green, a life-long
experimenter in new forms (and a pioneer of open-air
theatre in North Carolina). The result of this
collaboration was Johnny Johnson, which was written
and composed in the summer of 1936 and staged for
the first time that December, in New York.

Although the production was hardly more to the taste
of the Broadway public than The Threepenny Opera
had been three years earlier, the Play was highly
favourable. Among the theatrical intelligentsia in
New York Weill's already high reputation was
consolidated. In recent years Johnny Johnson has
found increasing acceptance as one of the 'classics'
of American musical theatre.

The fact that Weill's score, like the play, is far
removed from the Broadway style of the day is as
apparent as is the relationship with Weill's two
'Berlin' musicals for the Theater am Schiff-
hauserdamm. Weill himself acknowledges this
relationship by means of several brief and functional
quotations - one from The Threepenny Opera, and
the remainder from Happy End.

Though still composing as a conscious European,
Weill affectionately recalls the American hits of
World War I, and evokes the times when America
was singing George M. Cohen's 'Over There' and
sundry patriotic ditties with such titles as 'Good Luck
to the LSA', 'The Ragtime Volunteers are off to War'
and 'Au Revoir but not goodbye'. Weill's own 'Farewell Song' is characteristically double-edged - on the one hand a brilliant parodising of
such songs (and incidentally the first 'hit' he wrote
on American soil) and on the other, the work of a
composer who understood, as well as any the
manifold ironies of Cos i san tutte.

War Play was devised in consultation with Paul
Green as one of the elements in a so-called 'Kurt
Weill Portrait' mounted by the Berlin Festival in 1975.
As the title suggests it was confined to those
numbers in the original show which relate directly to
the war theme; and it was specifically intended for
the second of two 'War and Peace' programmes
performed at the Berlin Academy of Arts by a group of
soloists and the London Sinfonietta conducted
by David Atherton.

War Play was designed to complement Johnny Johnson,
not in any way to compete with it. Although its
structure is independent of any 'dramatis personae'
other than the historical ones, and any narrative
elements other than history itself, it follows the play's
broad outline, since it is determined by the musical
and poetic content of the musical numbers, including
those relevant and important numbers, such as the
Farewell Song', which were dropped by the Group
Theater, or which, like Epitaph', remained in a
voice-and-piano score. (The present scoring of
'Epitaph' is by Christopher Stone.)

If there is any respect in which War Play must be
identical, in effect, with Johnny Johnson, it is with
regard to Weill's and Green's fundamental
philosophy (which has been widely misrepresented in reference
books and indeed in productions). Like most of us,
Weill and Green are of course 'against' war. But
each, in his different way, is no less against peace-
mongering than against war-mongering - because
each, from his different background, was already
aware that war against fascism might be inevitable
and would certainly be justifiable.

Lost in the Stars and Cry, the Beloved Country

The quest for a concert sequence.

The reason he and Anderson began work on their
adaptation of Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country, Weill
may well have guessed that he did not have long to
live. But despite the manifestly valedictory character
of the score's closing pages, it would be wrong to
accord Lost in the Stars the status of a consciously
pre-meditated 'last work'. Its true significance is no
less remarkable, but of quite another sort. Almost as
if the entire succession of Broadway scores from
Lady in the Dark (1940) to Love Life (1947)
constituted a single vast parenthesis occupied by the
special circumstances of World War II and its
immediate aftermath, the 'musical tragedy', based
on Paton, is unmistakably the direct consequence of,
and the counterpart to, Knackerbocker Holiday, the
'musical comedy' Anderson and Weill had based on
Washington Irving a decade earlier. In both,
Anderson's and Weill's American preoccupations vie
with a powerful residue from Weill's European ones;
and in both, the clash of ideas or ideologies
underlines or overrides the individual drama.

The successor to Knackerbocker Holiday was to have
been Ulysses Acanthos, an adaptation of Harry
Sewall Edwards' epistolary novel about the
wanderings of a faithful slave who is separated from
his owners during the American Civil War. Originally
offered to Paul Robeson but declined by him, the
project was abandoned in the late summer of 1939,
by which time Weill had written a considerable
quantity of music. The idea of an all-black, or
predominantly black musical, if possible with
Robeson in a star role, certainly interested Weill,
and in 1945 he and Anderson returned to the
Ulysses material, and especially to two songs which
they had published three years earlier - Lost in the
Stars and a blues that was later to be entitled
'Trouble Man'. By now they had decided to make
Lost in the Stars the title song; but once again the
project foundered. Precisely at what point Anderson
and Weill decided to insert no less than five of the
Ulysses numbers into their adaptation of Paton's
novel is not known, but the reasons for doing so, and
for adding others in the same style, are clear
enough. On the one hand their Andersonian philosophy provided a convenient means for the
explicitly and complexly Christian commitments of
Paton's novel; on the other, their frankly popular style
was, for Broadway purposes, an indispensable and
indeed life-saving ingredient in a show where every
number that is directly or indirectly related to the
social, political and economic themes of Paton's
novel is relatively austere in character and
predominantly dark in tone. It was while planning a
variety of events for a Weill 'retrospective' at the
1975 Berlin Festival that I first examined the
possibilities of extracting from Lost in the Stars a
sequence of numbers whose structure and
continuity would be convincing enough to justify
concert performance without dialogue excerpts or
narratives - hence, a sequence that would
concentrate on the 'local' drama rather than on the
individuals involved in it. Once the numbers directly
or indirectly related to Ulysses Acanthos had been
set aside - to be returned to later, or perhaps to be
kept for some other occasion - the extent to which
Weill had composed the remainder almost as if he were subconsciously preparing for some kind of theatrically-enhanced concert performance. Cognizant of the difficulty of finding solutions for certain formal problems without encroaching upon, or adding to, what Weill himself had written forced me eventually to abandon the project. What I decided to do in those years some thirteen years later the selfsame problems seemed as intractable as ever, and little progress was made with them. But in March 1988 I suddenly felt impelled to return to Paton's novel, which I had last read in 1960. To re-read it in any context is to discover that the significance of Paton's manifold achievement has only been illuminated by the passage of time and by the tragic course of events; but to re-read it with Weill in mind, and to do so at a single sitting, also revealed to me the obvious but hitherto elusive fact that Weill's first reading-to judge from other known examples-would have thrown up a series of quite specific musical images or concepts that predated the active collaboration with Anderson and must in some respects have influenced if not determined its nature. This implies that irrespective of the dramaturgy of the play, any musical number for which there is a clear pretext in Paton invites rigorous scrutiny in terms of the concert requirement. One such number is the unpublishable boogie-woogie chorus, 'Gold'. Having previously and without much thought discounted it on musical and stylistic grounds, I now felt impelled to reconsider it in a more critical spirit that immediately drew the one describing the trial of the three blacks and the sentencing of Absalom Kumalo. I opened thus: 'There is little attention being paid to the trial of those accused, the trial of Arthur Jarvis of Parkwold. For gold has been discovered.' There follows a bitterly ironic account of the subsequent behaviour of the Johannesburg stock market and those who live by it. The main thrust of 'Gold' is precisely that of Paton's chapter: its processes are remorseless and purely mechanical until the very close, when Weill delivers—in the most extreme dynamic he had achieved in his Expressionist period—an indictment that is precisely congruent with Paton's. Weill's first reading-to judge from other known examples—would have thrown up a series of quite specific musical images or concepts that predated the active collaboration with Anderson and must in some respects have influenced if not determined its nature. This implies that irrespective of the dramaturgy of the play, any musical number for which there is a clear pretext in Paton invites rigorous scrutiny in terms of the concert requirement. One such number is the unpublishable boogie-woogie chorus, 'Gold'. Having previously and without much thought discounted it on musical and stylistic grounds, I now felt impelled to reconsider it in a more critical spirit that immediately drew the one describing the trial of the three blacks and the sentencing of Absalom Kumalo. I opened thus: 'There is little attention being paid to the trial of those accused, the trial of Arthur Jarvis of Parkwold. For gold has been discovered.' There follows a bitterly ironic account of the subsequent behaviour of the Johannesburg stock market and those who live by it. The main thrust of 'Gold' is precisely that of Paton's chapter: its processes are remorseless and purely mechanical until the very close, when Weill delivers—in the most extreme dynamic he had achieved in his Expressionist period—an indictment that is precisely congruent with Paton's. 

Alan Paton was born in Pietermaritzburg on 11 January 1913, and died at his home near Durban on 12 April 1988. He wrote Cry, the Beloved Country while touring Europe and North America in his capacity as Principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory in Johannesburg. It was his first novel, and its publication early in 1948 brought him international fame. Since then it has sold more than 15 million copies in 30 languages, and has influenced the lives and thinking of countless individuals—for instance, Mary Benson, the white South African biographer of Nelson Mandela, who has said that it transformed her attitude to her black compatriots and determined her future political career.

Kurt Weill was born in 1900 in Dessau, where his father was chief Cantor in the synagogue. His family's German origins go back as far as the 13th century, and although he was brought up in the Jewish faith, racial barriers of any kind had been foreign to the immediate circle of his native town since the time of Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn. After completing his studies in Dessau in 1918, Weill went to Berlin where he studied with Humperdinck and others prior to his admission to Busoni's Masterclass in Composition. Already in 1922, while still a member of the Masterclass, he made his successful debut in Berlin with his score for Die Braut, then seen in New York three years later. In January 1926 Weill married the actress and dancer Lotte Lenya. Two months later the highly successful premiere of his opera The Prodigal Son won him a significant reputation outside the contemporary-music circles where he was already firmly established. A year later he began his collaboration with Brecht on the opera Der kuriose Fall der水电磁性电报, but interrupted it in 1928 to compose the score for Die Dreigroschenoper which was to make him a household name in German-speaking countries and relatively far beyond, elsewhere. With Die Dreigroschenoper Weill made a decisive and immensely influential break with the central Modernist tradition, while remaining very much aware of the fruitful tensions between his own work and that of the Second Viennese School on the one hand and the Hindemith School on the other. Despite and because of politically inspired opposition (which affected, without preventing, the success of the Mahagonny opera, but seriously inhibited the progress of its successor, Die Bürgschaft) Weill consolidated his reputation in Germany during the early 1930s, and won a new reputation in France, thanks in the first place to the French version of Pabst's Threepenny Opera film. It was to Paris that Weill fled in March 1933, after the Nazi seizure of power, and there (with interludes in London) that he completed his Second Symphony and composed the ballet-with-song The Seven Deadly Sins (his last completed collaboration with Brecht), the anti-fascist operetta Der Kuhhandel, and the original German-language version of The Eternal Road. Weill's professional and exploratory visit to New York in 1935 was unexpectedly prolonged and led eventually to his decision to remain in the USA and apply for citizenship. On the basis of his initial work with the Group Theater and the Federal Theater he established a foothold on Broadway, where Lady in the Dark was to bring him in, 1940, a success commensurate if not exactly comparable with that of The Threepenny Opera in Berlin twelve years earlier. Although the score itself was widely misconstrued, the nature of the success was such that it lost Weill most of his remaining support among the musical intelligentsia and, as he came to recognize, the experimenting in a series of shows that is unique in the history of Broadway.