

Programme

*BARNOVSKY MUSIC 1927*

*Edited David Drew*

*for wind ensemble with male chorus*

From the early 1900s until his dismissal immediately after the Nazi seizure of power, Victor Barnovsky was one of Germany's leading theatre directors and administrators. In the autumn of 1927 he invited Weill to write a score for his forthcoming production of Strindberg's historical play *Gustav III*. Weill promptly complied—his manuscript bears the date-mark 'Berlin-Charlottenburg, 16-19 Oktober 1927'. The production opened at the Berlin Komödienhaus early in November of that year. (The conductor was Walter Goehr, the father of Alexander Goehr.) The present edition includes almost all the music; but the order of events between the first and last numbers has necessarily been somewhat altered.

Throughout his career, Weill was opposed to the idea of so-called 'incidental music'. In his view, a theatre score, however modest in scale, should not only help to articulate the 'idea' of the play (rather than describe its external features) but should also establish its own criteria. Consequently he gives no musical hint that *Gustav III* is set in the Sweden of 1789—even his 'minuet' seems to head away from the 18th century and towards *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). Like Barnovsky—who did not, however, support him to the extent of presenting *Gustav III* in modern dress—Weill was chiefly concerned with the play's bearing on the post-1918 situation. 'Is something new going to happen in this world of ours?' asks one of Strindberg's characters. 'That is our hope,' replies Count Horn, the erstwhile friend of Gustav, whose military adventures and increasing absolutism represent a betrayal of his early ideals. Thorild, the intellectual, reads Voltaire and Rousseau to his fellow republicans: 'Is it not time that the oppressors are struck down? . . . It is necessary! Humanity can no longer be trampled upon! The fury of mankind is too great!'

Something of mankind's age-old fury—and something, too, of its idealism and its yearning for tranquillity—is echoed in Weill's score. Conversely, the musical imagery also reflects upon the opportunism and the tragic irresponsibility of mankind's rulers. Only in the finale—which originally accompanied the scene of a royal fête at Drottningholm—does Weill directly allude to Strindberg's version of history. As the (off-stage) chorus sing their song of the French Revolution, we are reminded of 1789. But Gustav still had three years to live before the fatal masked ball immortalised by Verdi's opera; and mankind had at least a century-and-a-half of intermittent revolution still to come. Significantly, Weill's finale ends on an unresolved dissonance—derived, like much else in the score, from the four-note motto-theme.

*We wish to express our gratitude to Mrs. Lotte Lenya Weill-Detwiler and the Weill Estate for enabling us to give the first concert performance of the Barnovsky Music.*