



A Winter's Fairy Tale

David Drew introduces a revival of
a rarity by Kurt Weill

The *Silver Lake* (*Der Silbersee*) calls itself 'A Winter's Fairy Tale' but it concerns the harsh realities of a socially and economically divided world at a time of widespread unemployment. It was the last of Weill's three collaborations with the eminent playwright Georg Kaiser, and the very last score he completed before fleeing Hitler's Germany in March 1933.

Produced with notable success in Leipzig and in two other German cities during the brief period between Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933 and the Nazi seizure of power five weeks later, *The Silver Lake* was not seen again in Germany until many years after Hitler's defeat. It waited forty years for its first hearing abroad, but today is internationally recognised as one of Weill's finest scores, and the direct forebear of his and Brecht's song-and-dance cantata *The Seven Deadly Sins*.

On the face of it, *The Silver Lake* belongs to the same 'play-with-music' genre as *The Threepenny Opera* – a three-hour evening, of which about one hour is musical. As in *The Threepenny Opera* there are overtures and finales, strophic songs and some celebrated hits (including another 'Morität' in the shape of an overtly



Top left

Kurt Weill (c1934)

Centre
Act 1, Scene 2 from
Der Silbersee, 1933

anti-fascist 'Ballad of Caesar's Death'). On closer inspection, however, the differences are more marked than the resemblances: instead of the *Threepenny* jazz band, a medium-sized orchestra without any jazz instruments; instead of a few brief passages for a beggarly chorus (mostly in unison), an almost Masonic role for a four-part chorus, whose interventions in the great monologue scene of Act 1 would be inconceivable without the example of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

As for the protagonist Severin, he is not only opposed in principle to his *Threepenny* counterpart Macheath, but is confronted by musical and histrionic challenges that any stage Macheath would have nightmares about: as the outraged voice of the dispossessed he has a full-blooded revenge aria that Verdi himself could have been proud of; and then, alone with his spirit-like partner Fennimore, he joins her in a duet whose long lyrical line and chromatically searching harmony would be more than just a heartache for the average Macheath and Polly.

Like Mendelssohn's music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Grieg's for *Peer Gynt*, the *Silver Lake* score has a great deal to gain from concert performance, and perhaps even more than they have. But in Weill's case, to sacrifice the play is also to sacrifice the interplay of musical and dramatic forms. About that, Weill had more to say than even the Beethoven of *Egmont*; and just as Goethe should be a part of any complete performance of the *Egmont* music, so will Georg Kaiser make himself felt as a 'presence' in the Prom premiere of *The Silver Lake*.

Markus Stenz conducts the London Sinfonietta and a distinguished group of soloists in The Silver Lake in Prom 3



Top Juanita Lascarro
sings Fennimore

Above Markus Stenz

Right Design by
Caspar Neher of the
Police station scene
(1933)

