

## PREFACE

The symphony was commissioned by the Princesse Edmond de Polignac, and begun in Berlin in January 1933. Progress was interrupted by the composer's emigration in March of that year and then by the composition of *Die sieben Todsünden* (also a commissioned work). The sketch of the symphony was completed in December 1933, by which time the composer had found a new home at Louveciennes, near Paris. The full score was ready two months later.

The world premiere was given by the Concertgebouw Orchestra under Bruno Walter in Amsterdam on October 11, 1934. The work was very warmly received by the public; but the critics, who knew Weill only by the very different *Die Dreigroschenoper*, were disconcerted by his apparent change of front and by the unusual character of the work. Walter conducted subsequent performances in New York, but it was not until he brought it to Vienna in 1937 that it received generally favourable notices. Performance in Hitler's Germany was of course impossible; and as a result of political events in Europe the work vanished from the musical scene after 1937.

In the period following the First World War Weill had composed several orchestral works, including the remarkable *Symphony in One Movement* (1920—21). His subsequent development had led him away from the concert hall, but from 1929 onwards he began to consider a return. The symphony of 1933 is thus the result of several year's cogitation. Although the musical idiom owes much to the

two preceding stage works, *Die Bürgschaft* and *Der Silbersee*, the symphony 'was conceived as a purely musical form' (to quote Weill's own words). One may, if one wishes, find some reflection of the dark events of 1932-33 in the general mood of the work, and so interpret the last movement as bravely reaching out towards a happier future. Nevertheless, Weill firmly disclaimed any specific programme; and when pressed by Bruno Walter to supply a romantically descriptive title, he consented only to the non-committal and quite inapposite 'Symphonische Fantasie' (c.f. Schumann's 4th Symphony!).

Formally, the symphony consists of a sonata allegro whose slow introduction contains the seeds of the whole work, a funeral march with some sonata characteristics, and a rondo finale. The line of the first movement is continued by the second and opposed by the third. Thematic and motivic cross-references are of great importance. Thus for example the tarantella coda to the finale is based on a joyful transformation of the main motive of the funeral march.

In the clarity and brilliance of the textures, Weill reveals — not for the first time — his profound love for the music of Mozart, while the romantic and 'popular' aspects of the work show what he has learned from Schubert and Mahler. The resulting synthesis of classical and romantic elements is very much his own. Like its otherwise dissimilar companion-piece, *Die sieben Todsünden*, the symphony is an expression of Weill's creative imagination at its purest and most characteristic. Certainly none of his works is more deeply felt.

#### *Editorial notes:*

The following sources have been consulted:

- A. Autograph (black ink on 24-stave ms. paper, pages numbered 1-79), owned by the heirs of the Princesse Edmond de Polignac.
- B. Score and string parts in copyist's hand, incorporating the composer's autograph revisions. Property of Heugel et Cie.

In A, the original version, there is no percussion apart from timpani. In B, the revised version, Weill has added to the second and third movements an extra percussion part (for triangle, cymbals, gong, snare drum, tenor drum, and bass drum). The addition was made at the request of Bruno Walter, but much against the composer's own inclination. The result, predictably enough, is unsatisfactory; and according to a contemporary press report Walter returned to the original version at the first performance (which Weill attended). The extra percussion part has therefore been omitted from the present text.

In all other respects, this text incorporates Weill's revisions — a large number of added expression marks, added bowing indications, and a few minor changes in the string writing.

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