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THIRD PROGRAMME: FRIDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER 1960: 10.30 - 11.00 p.m.

PROGRAMME PRE-RECORDED: MONDAY 29TH AUGUST 1960: TLO 25438

REHEARSAL: 2.00 p.m.

RECORDING: 3.30 - 4.30 p.m.

STUDIO: L 1

KURT WEILL'S THEATRE SONGS
SUNG BY LOTTE LENYA

Introduced by David Drew

OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT: (Live from Continuity)

This is the BBC Third Programme. Kurt Weill: this evening David Drew introduces some gramophone records of Weill's theatre songs sung by his widow, Lotte Lenya:

DAVID DREW (TLO 25438)

Although Weill wrote approximately fifty pieces in the short song form, they are far from being representative of his total achievement during the seven enormously productive years of his maturity in Germany. However, they tell us much about Weill's powers of characterization, and indicate at least a corner of the unique world he created.

Weill first experimented with simple strophic songs in popular dance or march rhythms early in 1926: at that stage he used them as contrasting elements in otherwise relatively complex, through-composed stage works, much as Berg had used popular elements in "Wozzeck". Weill's meeting with Brecht in 1927 gave this development a new direction, and in that year he wrote his first song designed not for a trained singer, but for an actress. The actress was his wife, Lotte Lenya. The songs in which we shall hear her in this programme were all written for a singing actress, and are to be clearly distinguished from the music that Weill wrote for singers (in the traditional sense).

They will be heard in the order of their composition. First, the famous song of Pirate Jenny from "The Threepenny Opera". Its four verses tell of the servant girl in a cheap hotel who dreams of the arrival of a pirate ship. The town will be razed to the ground except for the hotel: the raiders will swarm in the streets, truss up the citizens and bring them to Jenny, asking her who is to die. And she will reply "All of them", and with her cry, "Hoppla", their heads will roll. Behind the naïve pathos of this day-dream, the song evokes a darker vision of a day when the down-trodden will triumph and the mighty will fall.

1) RECORD: SEERAUBER-JENNY

app. 4'02"

Weill wrote the next song, the Havanna Lied, for the 1931 Berlin production of the opera "Mahagonny", to take the place of the original neo-baroque arioso printed in the score. It compresses within a single strong line of melody and harmony the anguish of a situation in which human dignity can be bought and sold. "Think it over, Herr Jacob Schmidt", says the singer, "Think it over, what you can get for thirty dollars".

2) RECORD: HAVANNA LIED

1'55"

The so-called popular songs in "Mahagonny" are a kind of choric interpolation, usually sung in front of the footlights, and almost always given to the one member of the cast who should be an actress rather than a singer of the traditional kind. Apart from these interpolations, the work follows the convention of the classical number opera. For obvious stylistic reasons, the popular songs tend to be introduced by brief passages of spoken dialogue, and this is the only material in the work which is not set to music.

^{Here is}
~~We will now hear~~ a song from "Mahagonny" which develops the implications of the Havana Lied by giving them a different context. If man is only worth the low price for which he can be bought, then in an inflated market he may end by being worth nothing. At this stage in the opera, the leading figure has found that he is unable to pay his debts, but no one will help him, and the girl with whom he had sworn eternal love coldly watches his arrest and sings, "Wie Man sich bettet" - "For as you make your bed, so you will lie". It is worth hearing the preceding dialogue in order to see how cunningly the first sung phrases follow the natural spoken cadence of the words - an achievement for which ^{nowadays} Janacek is celebrated. The form is a simple da capo verse and refrain, in which the quasi-Wagnerian

harmonic development of the verse is cancelled by the negative kindergarten harmony of the refrain; and the negative message of the refrain, "Each man for himself" is in turn shown up by the falsely positive character of the tune. Musico-dramatically, this is an exact translation of Brecht's famous alienation effect.

3) RECORD: WIE MAN SICH BETTET
from MAHAGONNY

Not all of the Weill songs have a direct or even oblique ideological significance. For the play "Happy End", Weill wrote with Brecht a number of songs which are purely picturesque or romantic. Here is one such song, "Sorabaya Johnny", in which a woman first recalls her youth and innocence, and then observes the lines of age and curses her lover for his cruelty. At the time when this record was made, only the first verse and refrain of this song's instrumental accompaniment was available. This has been used in the subsequent verses, and has been somewhat simplified. Nonetheless, from the dramatic point of view, the performance is a tour de force.

4) RECORD: SORABAYA JOHNNY
from the play HAPPY END

The next song, the Ballad concerning a Drowned Maiden, was originally written for three men's voices and guitar as part of a radio cantata called "Berliner Requiem" that ^{Weill} ~~was~~ based on **s**eparate poems by Brecht. The Ballad might almost be an apostrophe to the dead Ophelia: the body of a drowned girl floats down a river, weeds and algae clinging to her dress, day turns to night, and slowly, very slowly, God forgets her and she becomes carrion with other carrion.

In a way that almost anticipates the methods of Messiaen, the piece accumulates a violent harmonic tension ^{that resolves} ~~which leads~~ *in the annihilating lunge of the final melisma.* ~~up to the broad melisma on the penultimate word. "Then in the river, she was carried with other carrier".....~~

5) RECORD: VOM ERTRUNKENEN MADCHEN
from the BERLINER REQUIEM

Weill's last work in Germany was "Der Silbersee", a work in which the music played as important a part as it did in Bizet's and Daudet's "L'Arlesienne". It calls for singing actors, conventional ^{singers} ~~soloists~~, chorus and full orchestra. Weill's collaborator on this occasion was the leading expressionist play-wright, Georg Kaiser, with whom he had written two one-act operas in the 1920's. "Der Silbersee" is described as a "Winter legend", and although it avoids any topical references, it clearly reflects the two crisis-torn winters preceding Hitler's accession to power. The ballad of Caesar's Death describes the rise and fall of a tyrant in terms which will be familiar to those who recall the musical ambience of the anti-fascist movements between the wars.

6) RECORD: CASARS TOD
from DER SILBERSEE

Finally, another song from "Der Silbersee", whose gentle and affectionately ironic lyricism is typical of a seldom-appreciated side of Weill. It's the song of the poor relation who longs for a life in which she is cared for simply as a human-being, and not merely as a poor relation. The gentle berceuse rhythm of the song attempts to console but fails: the extraordinary high-pitched sounds of the ten-bar orchestral coda speak of a desolation that is barely sufferable. Once more Weill reveals one of his most distinguishing characteristics - a refined and illuminating sense of pity.

7) RECORD: ICH BIN EINE ARME VERWANDTE

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CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT (Live from Continuity)

Those gramophone records of Lotte Lenya singing some of Kurt Weill's theatre songs were introduced by David Drew, whose voice was recorded.