

SPEAK

SIDE ONE:

SPEAK LOW (from "One Touch of Venus")

MY SHIP (from "Lady in the Dark")

SING ME NOT A BALLAD (from "The Firebrand of Florence")

LOW THE GREAT MUSIC OF KURT WEILL MAURICE LEVINE

AND HIS ORCHESTRA

ARRANGED BY
DAVID TERRY

FOOLISH HEART (from "One Touch of Venus")

HERE I'LL STAY (from "Love Life")

GREEN-UP TIME (from "Love Life")

SIDE TWO:

JOHNNY'S SONG ("To Love You and to Lose You" from "Johnny Johnson")

SEPTEMBER SONG (from "Knickerbocker Holiday")

MORITAT ("Mack the Knife" from "The Threepenny Opera")

MOON-FACED, STARRY-EYED (from "Street Scene")

WESTWIND (from "One Touch of Venus")

JENNY (from "Lady in the Dark")

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HIGH FIDELITY**A NOTE BY LOTTE LENYA**

(Lotte Lenya, Mr. Weill's widow and foremost interpreter of his vocal music, has written this introduction to "Speak Low.")

"I don't give a hoot for posterity," was the answer Kurt gave in 1927 during the festivals in Baden-Baden, Germany (the equivalent of America's Tanglewood today), where his "Little Mahogany" was premiered. One of his fellow-composer contemporaries rushed up to him and said to Kurt, who was then known as an atonal composer, "Do you know what you are doing, you are writing in G minor again! Think of posterity!"

Kurt's reply has been quoted many times since, and I have been asked every so often if he really meant it. In our 24 years of married life, there were many indications that he did, as any creative artist would, care a great deal what *die Nachwelt* would think of his work, in case it should survive. But he knew too well that this question was not in his hands, and he could only do what he thought was best at the time he was working. Many times I heard him struggling for days over a few bars, and when I once said to him, "Darling, why are those few bars so important? I am sure nobody will ever hear the difference," he smiled and answered, "but I hear them!"

He would have enjoyed hearing David Terry's arrangements which Maurice Levine, who conducted Kurt's last show, "Lost in the Stars," conducts so ably in this album. Kurt loved orchestrating and considered it an integral part of composing. He could never quite understand other composers who would turn over a new composition to a professional orchestrator. He was almost eager to get through with the actual composing of a score so that he could get started on the orchestration. This is what he called his desert, and it was unthinkable for him to let somebody else do the job.

Still, he was fascinated when he heard for the first time a jazz version of his *September Song*. I had bought the record and put it on without showing him the label. After a moment, he said, "That sounds familiar. What is it?" Of course a few seconds later he recognized it, and he quoted a line from "The Threepenny Opera," when Jenny sings "*Es geht auch anders—doch so geht es auch*" (It's possible this way—but it's possible the other way, too.).

I am sure this is what he would have felt about this present recording of his songs, and he would have loved it.

LOTTE LENYA
New York—May 19, 1959

THE MUSIC IN THE ALBUM

(David Drew, who prepared the following notes, is a critic for "The New Statesman" and is currently in England writing a book on the life and works of Kurt Weill.)

"I am essentially a theater composer"—these were almost the first words of the first press interview Kurt Weill gave on arriving in this country in 1936. Apart from some film music and a handful of songs written for various private purposes, every note that he composed in the fourteen years that remained to him before his tragic death in 1950 was intended to be heard in the theatre.

Even though we may choose to listen to the songs in this album with half an ear (the only way of listening to many things these days), there isn't much point in describing what anyone can hear anyway. But the one thing that no one can hear is the precise dramatic idea which inspired each of the songs. Describe that, and the music may once again find its other dimension.

ONE TOUCH OF VENUS

Three of the songs in this album, including the title song, come from "One Touch of Venus," the S. J. Perelman-Ogden Nash musical play which had its enormously successful premiere in New York in October, 1943. Of these songs, perhaps the least known is *Westwind*, which is sung by Whitelaw Savory, the millionaire art-fancier, after his first meeting with reincarnation of the Goddess Venus.

Foolish Heart comes later in the action. Venus has fallen in love with an obscure little barber named Rodney Hatch, and she comes back to Savory to tell him her troubles. Savory is by no means disposed to act the kindly uncle, but he listens to her wistful waltz-song, as she blames her poor foolish heart for her difficulties.

The hit song from the show, of course, is *Speak Low*. By now, foolish heart or no, Venus is in the somewhat inexperienced arms of Rodney Hatch. She has discovered him rather the worse for wear and comforts him by stroking his face and singing the love song, *Speak Low*. The magic of the occasion conquers Rodney as surely as the song itself has enthralled innumerable listeners.

LOVE LIFE

Here I'll Stay is taken from "Love Life," a show which in some ways was the most remarkable of Weill's American theatre collaborations. The book by Alan Jay Lerner chronicles the history of family life and love in the New World. The story begins in the Connecticut of 1791. Mr. and Mrs. Sam Cooper arrive to set up house, and after they have been welcomed by the local inhabitants, they declare their intention to remain at each other's side in the song, *Here I'll Stay*.

The next scene in "Love Life" shows the Cooper family in the America of thirty years later. It is spring, and a celebration party is held at the Cooper house. Mrs. Cooper sings the gay, folksong-like ballad, *Green-Up Time*, and the guests are inspired by the tune to join in a happy dance.

KNICKERBOCKER HOLIDAY

Another musical play which reaches back into America's past is "Knickerbocker Holiday," which gave us *September Song*. It was the outstanding hit of Weill's first pure Broadway musical, which he wrote in 1938 with Maxwell Anderson. The cast was led by Walter Huston, who played the "dictator," Peter Stuyvesant. Stuyvesant has his soft side, and, toward the end of Act One, he proposes marriage to the young and beautiful Ina Tienhoven. He claims that it is to be a marriage of political convenience, but his gently pained *September Song*, which he sings when Tina seems to reject him, suggests that the affair is closer to his heart than he would like us to believe.

JOHNNY JOHNSON

Johnny's Song ("To Love You and to Lose You") is the title that was given to the popular-song adaptation of the theme song of Weill's first American stage work, "Johnny Johnson." Johnny is a simple stone-mason who lives in a small town in the South. His one passion is the cause of Peace. But when the Great War breaks out, he is persuaded to enlist, only to find that the conduct of the war scarcely fits in with his ideals. After various misfortunes, he ends up selling toys in the streets. But he never quite loses his optimism. His theme tune, which occurs instrumentally throughout the play, and vocally at its conclusion, clearly expresses his simple faith.

THE FIREBRAND OF FLORENCE

Another unusual Weill collaboration for the stage was "The Firebrand of Florence," written in 1945 with Edwin Justin Mayer and Ira Gershwin. "The Firebrand" was closer than most Broadway shows to the traditional operetta style, and its plot dealt with episodes in the life of Benvenuto Cellini. *Sing Me Not a Ballad* is addressed to Cellini by a skittish Duchess who is anxious to begin a flirtation without wasting time on "grim preliminaries."

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

The most recent popular success from the Weill repertoire is the famous *Moritat*, or *Mack the Knife*. Of the millions who know and love the tune, only a fraction can have heard it in the theatre, sung in the nasal tones of the Street-Singer, who uses it to introduce "The Threepenny Opera." Thirty years have passed since its sly lilt first seduced an audience into sympathizing with the outrageous Mack the Knife, who sidles away from every crime, protesting his innocence as blandly as the tune itself.

LADY IN THE DARK

In "The Threepenny Opera," there is another famous song, in which a scullery-maid dreams of the day when a ship will enter the harbour and its pirate crew will ravage the town at her bidding. A little over ten years after "The Threepenny Opera," Weill returned to this idea in "Lady in the Dark," the musical play he wrote with Moss Hart and Ira Gershwin. But this time the "ship" song was sung by the heroine, Liza Elliott, the editress of a fashion magazine. During the course of consultations with her psychiatrist, she remembers the phrase of a song which she had learned as a child. At the end of the play, when she has discovered her true destiny, she remembers *My Ship*.

In great contrast is the other song from "Lady in the Dark," the famous ballad of *Jenny*, in which Gertrude Lawrence first sang of the girl whose virtues were varied and many, except that she was inclined always to make up her mind.

STREET SCENE

Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed is another kind of blues, less satirical and more sensual in feeling. It comes from Weill's most ambitious American work, "Street Scene," a dramatic musical (or Broadway opera) with book by Elmer Rice and lyrics by Langston Hughes. Its story deals with the drama, love, and loneliness of the inhabitants of a poor district of New York during 24 hours of a hot summer. *Moon-Faced* is first heard as a tune from a radio during the opening scene. Later it is sung by a young boy as a kind of jazz serenade to his girl friend. The music then underscores dialogue as the boy gives the girl a few shots from his gin bottle. Thus fortified, they begin a dance which would certainly enliven any street scene.

DAVID DREW
London—May 12, 1959

For your further musical pleasure, may we suggest:
September Song by Lotte Lenya Columbia KL 5229

The Threepenny Opera (New York Cast) MGM 3121

Lost in the Stars (Original Cast) Decca 8028

At the recording session: (left to right) Conductor Maurice Levine, producer George Avakian, Miss Lenya, arranger David Terry.