

# INTRODUCTION

by Gunther Diehl and Giselher Schubert

## I. Introduction

This volume of the Kurt Weill Edition presents the full score of the one-act opera *Der Protagonist*, whose libretto was derived, with minimal alteration, from Georg Kaiser's one-act play of the same name. The unusual subtitle that Weill included on the title page of his holograph full score, *Ein Akt Oper von Georg Kaiser* (more usual would have been *Oper in einem Akt*), apparently came from Kaiser, who may have wished to identify his text as a libretto rather than a play.<sup>1</sup> Hitherto the full score of this work has been available only as rental material. The extant sources, which are described in detail in the Critical Report, transmit *Der Protagonist* in a variety of forms. The present publication, resulting from a comparison of all those sources, makes the complete verbal and musical text of the work generally accessible for the first time.

Completed in Berlin in March 1925 and given its premiere at the Dresden Staatsoper on 27 March 1926, *Der Protagonist* occupies a special place in Weill's oeuvre. It was his first opera, written at age twenty-five, and belongs to a series of early compositions that systematically explored almost every musical genre: chamber music, choral music, lieder, orchestral works, and ballet. Kim Kowalke summarizes the significance of this opera as "the synthesis of the experimentation of its predecessors, which Weill considered to be studies for operatic composition. It is the climax of his early development—an assimilation of the linear polyphony, non-tonal materials, pervasive chromaticism, and constructive devices that were so carefully but sometimes unsuccessfully explored in earlier works. No other work is so characteristic of Weill's early style."<sup>2</sup>

With the successful premiere of the opera on 27 March 1926 Weill not only achieved a spectacular breakthrough as a composer but also immediately rose to prominence among the young composers identified at the time with the renewal of the crisis-ridden genre of opera. During the opera's genesis Weill also began to theorize about his work. In the essay "Die neue Oper," written two months before the premiere of *Der Protagonist*, he formulated criteria for a "new operatic music" and made public his ideas about "the attitude of the creative artist toward the problems of the musical stage."<sup>3</sup>

The opera marks Weill's first significant collaboration with another artist. Georg Kaiser, twenty-one years Weill's senior, was born in Magdeburg on 25 November 1879. An outstanding representative of expressionist drama, he became one of the most important playwrights of the Weimar Republic. His work was also known outside Germany, above all in the United States. (In a letter dated 23 February 1928 to Universal Edition in Vienna Weill emphasized that "Kaiser is very popular in America.")<sup>4</sup> After completing a business apprenticeship, Kaiser first worked as a clerk in Buenos Aires. Health problems forced him to return to Germany, where he managed to get by without steady employment. He became active as an author in 1911, and 1915 saw the first production of one of his plays. Unable to serve in the First World War for health reasons, he flourished as a playwright during that period. With the 1917 production of *Die Bürger von Calais*, a play he had written in 1914, he came to be known as the foremost representative of expressionist drama in Germany, exercising a formidable influence on contemporary theater. Along with

Gerhart Hauptmann he was the most performed German playwright between the world wars, with some forty premieres of his plays.

His success, however, was overshadowed by serious financial problems that led to his property being confiscated in 1918. Court proceedings followed in 1920 (attended, incidentally, by the young Bertolt Brecht), and Kaiser was sentenced to six months in prison for embezzlement. After his release he settled in Grünheide, on the eastern border of Berlin, and also kept an apartment in Berlin-Charlottenburg that served as a literary meeting place. In 1933, after the Nazis took power, Kaiser was banned from publishing and performing his works; his plays were among the publications burned by the Nazis on 10 May 1933. He managed to escape arrest by fleeing to Holland. In August 1938 he settled in Switzerland; he died, impoverished, in Arosa on 4 June 1945. His works remained largely forgotten after the Second World War. Attempts in the 1980s to revive his fame through performances of, for instance, his *Gas* plays (1918–20) did not lead to any enduring success. He is currently known almost exclusively as Kurt Weill's librettist.

The collaboration with Kaiser brought about—quite unexpectedly—a huge change in Weill's life. It was at Kaiser's home, in the summer of 1924, that Weill got to know Lotte Lenja (née Karoline Wilhelmine Charlotte Blamauer). He and Lenja moved into Kaiser's apartment in Berlin-Charlottenburg in May 1925 and married eight months later, on 28 January 1926. Lenja (as she spelled her name after 1937) later gave the following account of her first meeting with Weill: "Georg Kaiser had a passion for music, and one of his best friends was the conductor Fritz Stiedry. I think it was Stiedry who introduced Weill to Kaiser. Kaiser had a weird assortment of paddleboats, sailboats, rowboats, scullboats, and so on. It was on one of those boats that I first met Kurt Weill. He was coming to discuss *Der Protagonist* with Kaiser."<sup>5</sup> Weill dedicated *Der Protagonist* to Lotte Lenja.

## II. Genesis

In the essay titled "Bekanntnis zur Oper" (Commitment to Opera) that he contributed to the *Blätter der Staatsoper*, distributed in connection with the premiere of *Der Protagonist*, Weill recounted his early musical development and his collaboration with Kaiser that led to the opera:

It was only when I sensed that my music contained the tension of scenic events that I turned to the stage. I wrote the pantomime *Zaubernacht* for a Russian troupe at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm. The intense concentration of Russian theater taught me two things: that the stage has its own musical form whose laws derive organically from the unfolding of the action, and that something significant can be said onstage only by the simplest, most modest means. A nine-piece orchestra, a female singer, two female dancers and a group of children—such were the forces of this danced dream. I felt happy and honored when Georg Kaiser offered to write the scenario for a full-length ballet for me. We set about working together. In ten weeks almost three-quarters of the piece was written. The score of the prelude and the first two acts was complete. Then came a block. We had grown out of the subject matter, the muteness of the characters bothered us, we had to burst the chains of the pantomime: it had to become opera. Georg Kaiser reverted to an earlier piece that he had at one point conceived in his mind in terms of opera, the one-act play *Der*

*Protagonist*. Here we had what we were looking for: an unforced, unintended dovetailing of opera and pantomime.<sup>6</sup>

How Weill and Kaiser were introduced and the details of their first meeting are shrouded in mystery. Three different accounts are in circulation, all equally plausible and mutually complementary.<sup>7</sup> By one account, Kaiser attended a performance of the pantomime *Zaubernacht* (which Weill mentions in the passage quoted above) at the end of 1922, and it is possible that he and Weill first met on that occasion. The conductor and composer Fritz Stiedry (1883–1968) had drawn his friend Kaiser's attention to the work, because he knew that the playwright was considering incorporating dance scenes into his drama. Weill, for his part, knew Stiedry through his teacher, Ferruccio Busoni.

By another account Weill, a young student supporting himself by teaching harmony and counterpoint and playing piano in cafés and bars, was unable to find an apartment with a piano on which to practice. He inquired with Stiedry, who arranged for him to practice in Kaiser's Charlottenburg apartment. It is there that Weill could have met Kaiser for the first time.

A third account relates that the conductor Fritz Busch (1890–1951), who knew Weill from a performance of Busoni's *Arlecchino* at the Dresden Staatsoper, encouraged Weill to write a pantomime for Dresden along the lines of *Zaubernacht*. Kaiser, at Busch's suggestion, was to develop the scenario, and in November 1923 Busch promised Weill to put the two in touch. And in fact Weill and Kaiser did agree that month to work on a ballet-pantomime.

Weill and Kaiser evidently began their collaboration in Kaiser's house in Grünheide in January/February 1924. Progress on the work, whose scenario has not survived and about whose subject matter nothing is known, appears to have been rapid; Weill claimed that "almost three-quarters of the piece," namely "the prelude and first two acts," had been finished in just ten weeks. Weill and Kaiser took a break at the end of February. Kaiser left Berlin briefly, and Weill traveled in Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. On 20 February 1924 he wrote his family about his vacation and the interruption of work with Kaiser: "I'm not making any plans; I'll stay in each place for as long as I enjoy being there. I'll be away for as long as the money lasts. Kaiser and I are in complete accord, and only here, being away, do I notice how such a wonderful break can have a productive effect in the long term."<sup>8</sup>

Quite by chance Weill met Kaiser in Venice. "I ran into Kaiser here at St. Mark's Square," he wrote to his family on 19 March. "The world is a farce [*Affentheater*], but a beautiful one—south of the Alps."<sup>9</sup> In Vienna he signed his first contract with Universal, on 22 April 1924. During this period he also finished his Violin Concerto, op. 12, which received its premiere in Paris on 11 June 1925. Busoni's death on 27 July 1924 was a bitter loss for Weill, which made his work with Kaiser all the more important to him. Their contact developed into a friendship: in a postcard to his sister from June 1924, Weill mentioned visiting the Kaisers, "who have become dear friends and will perhaps become the only people who can replace a part of what I lost with Busoni."<sup>10</sup>

Weill resumed work on the ballet-pantomime after his return to Berlin in the summer of 1924.<sup>11</sup> This further work is found in a thirty-eight-page manuscript of sketches containing 173 measures of music, as well as a sheet with thirty sketched motifs, five of which are also included in the 173 sketched measures. This manuscript may have been conceived as a third act to the envisaged work.<sup>12</sup> But the "block" that Weill spoke of did not merely impede his progress; instead, the project was completely abandoned. The indication "opera" attached to three of the motifs on the sketch sheet suggests that Weill may have considered expanding the ballet-pantomime into an opera. However, if so, he soon rejected the idea, perhaps in his eagerness to turn to the already finished piece that Kaiser now offered him to set to music: the one-act play *Der Protagonist*.

In the essay quoted above, "Bekanntnis zur Oper," Weill emphasized the aspects of the *Protagonist* that appealed to him most:

Here we had what we were looking for: an unforced, unintended dovetailing of opera and pantomime. The melodramatic acting of the Protagonist

could be conveyed only by an operatic character; the high points of the action could be expressed only by music: the dialogue between brother and sister, the clandestinely hasty love scene, the transition to dance, and the sudden shift from comedy into tragedy. The two pantomimes afforded an opportunity for lyrical expansion. In order to lend the proceedings a musical framework I gave the eight musicians something akin to the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy: they open the drama and passively accompany it until finally they intervene, giving the impression that we are guests of the Duke and have witnessed the exceptional performance of the Protagonist.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons Weill identifies can be both confirmed and elaborated. Kaiser had already finished his play *Der Protagonist* by spring of 1920. On 30 May he evidently sent it to Stiedry along with a note in which he wrote: "Dear Maestro, I'm including a little one-act play that requires music. I don't know whether I can mobilize you for such a slight work. But the incentive comes from my abiding wish that we might do something together. One has to start somewhere—the rise of the constellation Stiedry-Kaiser. Then something big will emerge from its own heaven."<sup>14</sup> With his request for music Kaiser must have been thinking above all of the two pantomimes, to be accompanied onstage by musicians whose entrances and exits he conceived expressly as stage action. Stiedry declared his readiness not only to contribute music for the pantomimes but to set the whole play to music. Kaiser wrote to his wife with unconcealed skepticism on 14 September 1920: "Stiedry has begun the composition of 'Protagonist'—he wants to drown the entire one-act play in music. Based on what I heard at his place yesterday, I believe in his considerable abilities. Whether he sticks with it is another question."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Stiedry, who made his name primarily as a conductor, did not stick with it; at some point, impossible now to determine, he not only stopped work on the composition but gave up composing altogether.

Although Kaiser had originally conceived of the piece with a possible musical setting or at least the addition of music (in the pantomimes), his own assessment of the play changed over time. He had first sought its publication in spring 1920 and had his publisher submit it to theaters as a spoken play. Yet in May 1921, without giving any reason for doing so, he prevented its planned premiere in Bochum. He finally allowed the play to premiere almost a year later, on 16 March 1922, in Breslau. Then, after Weill had composed the music, Kaiser appears to have agreed not to permit further performances of the spoken play. In a letter to Universal of 24 October 1926, Weill wrote: "I have just received the enclosed letter. I immediately wrote to Georg Kaiser, who had made a firm commitment that he would, for the time being, withdraw the *Protagonist* as a play. Perhaps it might be possible for you to undertake the necessary steps with Kiepenheuer [the publisher] in order to prevent this performance. Meanwhile, I will see what can be accomplished with Kaiser himself."<sup>16</sup> Besides, Kaiser had clearly described his piece as "Ein Akt Oper," a label Weill adopted as the subtitle of the opera. Nonetheless, performances of the spoken play evidently continued. In a letter dated 9 May 1927, Universal conveyed its view to Weill that such performances "by no means get in the way" of performances of the opera.

In terms of its creative possibilities, the piece must have seemed ideal to Weill at the time: the compact one-act form offered a most inviting premise for his initiation into the genre of opera, and the two pantomimes tied in nicely with his earlier collaboration on the ballet-pantomime. In effect, *Der Protagonist* allowed Weill to continue composition on the abandoned ballet project while naturally expanding it in an operatic direction.

Unlike the aborted ballet-pantomime, whose scenario was apparently worked out even as the music was being composed, the finished play of *Der Protagonist* gave Weill the opportunity to assess the whole work in determining its potential for a musical setting. He then proceeded to set Kaiser's play to music almost unaltered, with only slight changes (to adjust word order, eliminate word repetition, add stage directions, and make minor cuts) in the course of composition. Weill did not need to arrange or adapt Kaiser's play for his musical purposes, and whatever changes he made could be considered routine.<sup>17</sup>

Thematically the piece belongs to the great tradition of the “play within a play,” with which Weill was undoubtedly familiar. This dramaturgical idea comes from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Hamlet provides another example). The effective creation of two dramatic levels and juxtaposition of comic and tragic turns of plot can be traced back to Molière’s one-act prose comedy *L’impromptu de Versailles*. Leoncavallo’s opera *Pagliacci*, in two acts with a prologue, no doubt served as both an inspiration and a challenge to Weill. And as critics of the premiere remarked, contemporaneous operas such as Richard Strauss’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Prokofiev’s *The Love for Three Oranges* also featured two dramatic levels.

Although Kaiser set his play in “Shakespeare’s England,” he presents its historical subject matter in an unmistakably modern expressionist vein. Except for “monkish” elements of organum in the pantomimes, Weill likewise avoids a historicizing style, however tempting it might have been to invoke “early music.” He colors his music in a thoroughly expressionistic way, with expanded and even free tonality, free treatment of dissonances, quartal sonorities, contrapuntal textures, frequent changes of meter, and the occasionally chamberlike reduction of the orchestra that emphasizes wind instruments.<sup>18</sup> Yet with its comic and tragic pantomimes and its play-within-a-play format, Kaiser’s work allows Weill to mark musical expressionism as a style and hence to keep it at a remove.

### III. Compositional Process

Weill appears to have begun work on *Der Protagonist* in August or September 1924, immediately after abandoning the pantomime project. He mentions the new work indirectly in a letter to his family dated 30 August 1924: “Good news to report: 1. The opera house in Münster, which has an excellent reputation, has sent a telegram requesting the premiere of the opera. Although I have made no commitment, the telegram made me very happy. A request for the premiere of an opera that is hardly begun is something that happens only to Strauss.” The inquiry no doubt gave Weill’s work added momentum. On 18 February 1925 he reported to his publisher that he had already finished half of the full score. And on 27 March—exactly a year, as it happened, before the work’s premiere at the Dresden Staatsoper—he announced to his publisher on a postcard: “My opera is finished in full score.”

As seen in the surviving sketches, Weill initially drafted the opera in short score: beginning with the first measure, he notated the music on three or four systems, indicating instrumentation and tempos and including stage directions and underlay more or less throughout. At the bottom of the first pages of the fifty-two-page manuscript are sketches of isolated motifs that recur in the music notated above; the final pages contain no such sketches. They might have been spontaneous ideas that Weill sought to capture or reminders of what he intended to use in the body of the manuscript. Rather than document a compositional process, from the initial provisional ideas and the tentative testing-out of musical structure to the notation of a continuity draft, the sketches simply show Weill writing down, in abbreviated fashion, a more or less complete and for the most part definitive version of the score. As one might expect, the sketches contain deletions, draft versions of specific measures, and measures that ultimately were not used, all of which are inconsequential for the edition. That so little of such superseded material appears at this stage of the compositional process is remarkable.

On the cover page Weill refers to the manuscript as the “complete sketches to *Der Protagonist*,” even though a large part of the second pantomime is missing.<sup>19</sup> Weill may not have sketched those measures; more likely they have been lost (a bifolium of manuscript paper would have neatly accommodated them). Perhaps he borrowed passages from the music of the abandoned ballet-pantomime; because that score has not survived in full, however, this supposition cannot be proven (the surviving portions show no similarity to the second pantomime). Following his sketches Weill wrote out the score of *Der Protagonist* from beginning to end very cleanly and clearly, in part almost calligraphically. There are only a few immediate emendations, where Weill either pasted things over or

crossed them out. The title page of the manuscript includes neither an opus number nor a dedication.

### IV. Performance Materials and Editorial Strategies

Immediately after completing his fair copy of the score, Weill intended to make a piano-vocal score of the opera; at the same time, he exchanged ideas with Universal about the premiere. In a letter to Universal dated 27 March 1925 he wrote: “I will begin immediately arranging the piano-vocal score. But I would like to ask you to take steps now, if possible, to secure the premiere; now is the time for works to be accepted for next season.”<sup>20</sup>

Inquiries for the premiere needed to be coordinated with the production of performance material, since only with the aid of full scores, piano-vocal scores, or copies of the libretto could potentially interested theaters form an impression of the work’s character and casting needs. The driving force behind the resolution of the attendant problems was, surprisingly, always Weill rather than Universal, whom Weill repeatedly accused of failing to provide support. On 9 April 1925 Weill wrote to the publisher: “I am in receipt of your letter of 2 April and can report that the piano-vocal score of my opera is progressing well. I’m glad that, as you write, the opera houses won’t be arranging their schedules for next season until May or June; I definitely hope to let you have the completed piano-vocal score by the beginning of May.”<sup>21</sup> Although Weill was not able to finish work on the piano-vocal score by early May 1925, at the end of the month he was conducting promising negotiations for the premiere of *Der Protagonist* with the Dresden Staatsoper, in particular with Fritz Busch. In June 1925 Eugen Szenkar of the Cologne Opera also expressed interest; in addition, Weill asked Universal to contact Clemens Krauss (Frankfurt Opera) and Bruno Walter (Städtische Oper Berlin-Charlottenburg) and draw their attention to *Der Protagonist*.

Meanwhile, the question of producing the piano-vocal score induced acrimony. In a letter to Universal dated 13 June 1925 Weill summarized present and future plans:

Please find enclosed the letter from Szenkar. Prospects look very favorable for adoption in August, either by Dresden or Cologne, and I find it especially favorable that Szenkar wishes to discuss in person. I would nonetheless be pleased if you could take it upon yourselves to approach Clemens Krauss or Br. Walter. Above all, it seems to me highly desirable that the piano-vocal score come out as soon as possible. I certainly will need it by the middle of August for negotiations with Dresden or Cologne, but at that point it might be possible to delay work on the publication for a short while.<sup>22</sup>

Two days later Fritz Busch, having reviewed the holograph full score in connection with his initial negotiations with Weill, mailed it back to the composer. On receiving it, Weill was able to continue work on the piano-vocal score, which he intended to finish in “eight to ten days.” Yet Busch seems to have strung Weill along a bit about the final agreement for the premiere—reason enough for Weill to complain of the publisher’s lack of support. His letter to Universal on 15 June 1925 also offers a sobering view of the powerless position of young composers:

I have now asked Busch via express letter to Zurich for a clear, less diplomatic communication of his intentions. At any rate, the negotiations, which were all but concluded, have demonstrated again that it is almost impossible for a composer to place an opera without any kind of help, and I’m convinced that immediate intervention on your part can resolve the current situation. The directors adopt whatever is recommended to them most highly—and that’s only possible from a third party. Perhaps the best thing would be for you to start new negotiations on your own. It can’t be hard for you to place an opera with such a brilliant libretto and such simple casting, plus a substantial tenor lead.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, Szenkar energetically restated his interest in having Cologne premiere *Der Protagonist*, and Weill had to make a final decision between Cologne and Dresden. On 28 June 1925 he communicated to Universal his thoughts on the matter; meanwhile, finding a tenor for the

demanding title role introduced casting issues that would end up delaying the premiere:

The enclosed letter from Busch arrived today. So the situation in Dresden is quite favorable. It remains to be seen what temptations are needed to persuade a tenor. An hour after the letter, an urgent telegram came from Szenkar in Cologne: "Dispatch full score and piano-vocal." I'll do so, of course. (The piano-vocal score will be finished in two days.) In my opinion Cologne offers us, after Dresden, the best opportunity in Germany, and artistically speaking there are many reasons that I frankly can't imagine a better location for the premiere. I will write to Szenkar telling him that the final decision rests with you, and then, if he accepts, we can wire Busch asking for a definitive answer. In any event, as far as Dresden is concerned, I am doing the right thing, and a second opera (which I am planning) would no doubt meet with broad cooperation there. On the other hand, I could also ruin any future prospects with Cologne.<sup>24</sup>

Weill sent the completed piano-vocal score (and likely his holograph score as well) to Szenkar and promised to forward it, after its return from Cologne, to Universal's production department. As it turned out, the piano-vocal score did not go to Universal but instead to the Dresden Staatsoper, which had finally decided to stage the premiere of *Der Protagonist*. The production of performance materials thus became pressing. In a letter to Universal dated 22 August 1925 Weill again summarized the issues:

Important news! Busch called yesterday to request my presence in Dresden. He intends to stage *Der Protagonist* as soon as possible (probably on 8 October!!). [Inserted at the end of the letter: "*Der Protagonist* is supposed to be presented on its own."] Taucher, the best tenor for the title role, on whose decision the adoption depended, has already agreed in principle. Busch will be showing him the piano-vocal score on Tuesday; that's when the final decision will be made. But Taucher is traveling to America at the end of October, which could mean I'd have to wait until May for the premiere. Yet doing it now would make it the first event of the winter (also for Berlin). There is no need to fear that the performance would suffer as a result of haste, because Busch is conducting the piece himself.

The most important question now is: how long will it take to produce the performance material and how do you propose to accomplish this? Busch says we could do what was done for *Faust*:<sup>25</sup> make a few copies of the piano-vocal score in Dresden (if possible mechanically) and study it page by page. With some night work it should be possible to produce the orchestral material in 10–14 days. You know about these things better than anyone. I'm sure you'll agree that such a good opportunity won't present itself again in the near future and that we must do everything we can to make it happen.<sup>26</sup>

Universal then promised both Weill and the Dresden Staatsoper to produce the material on time (documents to this effect, however, have not survived). As described in Weill's letter of 22 August 1925, the piano-vocal score was produced in Dresden following the composer's autograph manuscript and was also intended for later use by Universal. Weill requested that the dedication "Für Lenja" be printed on the title page; he brought a new title, *Kulissen* (theater wings), into the mix, withdrawing it several days later; and he demanded that the publisher plan a publicity campaign for the premiere. In addition, he ironed out the problems surrounding the separate publication of the libretto by Universal with Kiepenheuer Verlag, which had published *Der Protagonist* as a stage script. In the middle of September Weill had a meeting to discuss the premiere with its stage director, Josef Gielen. As he wrote in a letter to his family dated 17 September 1925: "On Sunday my Dresden director, Gielen, is coming to see me for a thorough preliminary discussion. So far I have seen neither the set design sketches nor a rehearsal, and you can imagine how excited I am. But you know how grueling the rehearsal of an orchestral work is for the composer. What can it be like with a stage work? Only a healthy portion of brashness and insouciance can help—and I've managed to acquire both over time."<sup>27</sup>

A blue-line copy of the piano-vocal score made in Dresden served as Gielen's rehearsal script. Although this copy, which includes the director's annotations, has survived, it has no significance for the text of the work

presented here.<sup>28</sup> On 25 September 1925 Weill himself traveled to Dresden, only to discover that the premiere planned for 8 October had been postponed until the following March. He gave the reasons in his letter to Universal dated 26 September 1925:

I was in Dresden again yesterday and have come to the conclusion that it is in my best interests to delay the premiere of *Der Protagonist*. More than three quarters of the work was produced, and one could easily have kept to the scheduled date of 8 October, if only Taucher hadn't gotten the jitters in connection with his American trip and lost his head. What's more, Taucher, who really is the ideal person for this role and whom I'd hate to have to lose, is leaving for America on 12 November, which means that the opera could be performed twice, or at the most three times. That would of course be detrimental to its success. Taucher himself, Busch, and director Gielen are firmly convinced that with Taucher in the title role *Der Protagonist* can become a sensational hit. People keep telling me how much they enjoy the work and how reluctant they are to postpone it. Taucher has made a firm promise to return from America on 1 March with the role under his belt; the premiere would take place on 20 March, and the work would remain on the program through the end of April and, above all, would appear as the only work of a young composer in the big opera festival that the Dresden Staatsoper is planning for May.<sup>29</sup>

In the same letter Weill placed part of the blame for the postponement on Universal and its delays in producing the performance materials, especially the piano-vocal score:

Because of this incident I must beseech you as a matter of principle to expedite the publication of my compositions. If the piano-vocal score had already been printed on the day Dresden adopted the work, something for which you had plenty of time over the summer, then Taucher could easily have managed it. Since I have made all of my performances, and even the adoption of the opera, come about on my own, with no help from you, I find it especially irritating when those arrangements that are beyond my control only create further difficulty. . . . As far as the piano-vocal score of the opera is concerned, using the Dresden copy for general publication is out of the question. It is imprecise, hastily prepared, and contains errors. If I could receive a cleanly engraved piano-vocal score soon, there would be a chance of placing *Der Protagonist* for productions in April, both here and in a few provincial cities.<sup>30</sup>

On 15 October Weill informed Universal that he was sending them "the corrected piano-vocal score of *Der Protagonist*," by which he can only have meant a copy that he had edited of the piano-vocal score produced in Dresden. His own piano-vocal score, which must have served as the production master in Dresden, was evidently no longer available; it is never mentioned in future correspondence and is now assumed to be lost. The production of the piano-vocal score, however, was further delayed by Universal. On 9 November 1925 Weill asked Universal to send the corrected piano-vocal score to Dresden for continued study, and on 22 December he had to ask again: "Not a word from you about the piano-vocal score of *Der Protagonist*. I consider it imperative that a clean, precise piano-vocal score be made commercially available two months before the premiere, at the latest; I saw how much that helped with *Wozzeck*.<sup>31</sup> I implore you to issue *Der Protagonist* by January; otherwise it will not be possible to place the work elsewhere."<sup>32</sup>

Yet on 29 January Weill remarked: "The piano-vocal score really has to appear soon," adding "perhaps you can remove the worst errors by pasting over them."<sup>33</sup> This comment implies that Weill no longer expected the piano-vocal score to be engraved but rather simply printed from a corrected version of the score produced in Dresden. Meanwhile, using the blueprint method, the publisher had one of its assistants, Erwin Stein, prepare a piano-vocal score that was ready for the premiere of *Der Protagonist* in Dresden on 27 March 1926. Not until August 1926 did an engraved edition of the piano-vocal score materialize, after Weill had reviewed a manuscript copy of the version overseen by Stein.<sup>34</sup> Weill also read proofs of the engraved edition, which was published as "op. 15" on 27 November 1926.

Weill's holograph full score lacks any opus number, an anomaly that deserves comment here. Opus numbers became a problem for Weill in the

1920s for a variety of reasons, both philosophical and practical. He assigned them to his compositions at the beginning of the decade, seemingly as a matter of course. By the end of the decade, however, he had abandoned the practice and along with it the pretensions of presenting his oeuvre in this way. Yet the abandonment was neither abrupt nor consistent. His next work, the cantata *Der neue Orpheus*, has two opus numbers: on the title page of the holograph, Weill assigned it the opus number 16, presumably reserving op. 15 for *Der Protagonist*. On the first page of the score itself, however, he entered the number 15. The discrepancy evidently created considerable confusion in Universal's production department; for this and perhaps for other reasons that are hard to reconstruct, including the fact that *Der neue Orpheus* appeared in print eight months before *Der Protagonist*, the piano-vocal score of the cantata was also published as op. 15 (and correspondingly emended in Universal's production records from 16 to 15). So Weill had two published works bearing the same opus number, even though the cantata was at first advertised in Universal's house publications *Anbruch* and *Pult und Taktstock* as op. 16 and the engraver's model for the piano-vocal score had, at some point, been changed from 15 to 16. Later advertisements for Weill's works, typically found on the back covers of his published piano-vocal scores and sheet music of individual numbers from his compositions, managed to avoid the confusion of the double opus number by listing all the stage works without their opus numbers (as was fairly common at the time) and *Der neue Orpheus* with its actual published number (i.e., op. 15). The piano-vocal scores of the other two one-act operas, *Royal Palace* and *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, were both published with opus numbers (17 and 21 respectively), even though the advertisements listed them without. *Die Dreigroschenoper* marks a decisive turning point in Weill's oeuvre. Although the composer himself initially assigned it the opus number 25, which he entered on an early manuscript version of the piano-vocal score, along with the title "Musik zu 'The Beggar's Opera,'" all of the published materials appeared without that number. Nor, indeed, did Weill include it on the holograph of his full score, which he completed in September 1928. In retaining the opus number for *Der Protagonist*, the Kurt Weill Edition has elected to follow the precedent set by the publishing history of Weill's works, a history that reflects the evolution of a composer who began his professional career using opus numbers but who in the course of the first decade gradually and inconsistently eschewed them.

The production of orchestral parts for the premiere finds as little mention in Weill's correspondence with Universal as does the production of a full score of the work and the separate printing of the libretto. At any rate, Weill did not participate in the production of parts or the libretto by, for example, reading proofs.<sup>35</sup> Fritz Busch conducted the work during rehearsal and the premiere using Weill's autograph full score. On this occasion—and even more likely in connection with the two subsequent stagings in Erfurt and Nuremberg—numerous markings were made by various hands: "conducting aids" such as the indication of entries, time signatures, beats, instrument names, tempi, and dynamic markings. There are passages in which unclearly notated pitches are identified by letters, while still other annotations refer to the action on stage. Above all, there are cuts and instrumental retouchings added by Busch during rehearsal, evidently with Weill's consent.

Even after the very successful premiere, Universal appears not to have considered producing a full score of the work, and Weill felt compelled to voice the following concern on 10 November 1926: "I sincerely hope that, for Erfurt at least, you will have produced a new *Protagonist* full score, because I would like to make sure that certain cuts and reductions in the orchestration from Dresden are not universally applied."<sup>36</sup> But on 11 January 1927 Weill still had every reason to complain to Universal about the unavailability of performance materials: "Now that the work has been adopted three times, you cannot deny that it amounts to a substantial impairment of my interests when there is only one set of performance materials for *Der Protagonist*. I should also take this opportunity to point out once again that sending my original full score to theaters without first making a copy of it is hardly appropriate."<sup>37</sup>

Only at the end of 1927 did the publisher finally decide to create not

one but two full-score manuscript copies of *Der Protagonist*. Whereas the first of these copies was evidently used for performances in Italy in the 1960s (see comments below and Critical Report, pp. 10–12), it was the second manuscript copy that served as a master for multiple photomechanical reproductions that were made available as rental material.<sup>38</sup> Corrections and emendations were regularly entered into the latter score, from which all other performances of the work have been conducted. In preparation for Universal's copyists, Weill reviewed his score thoroughly on 8 December 1927 and made final determinations about the various changes that had been entered into the holograph: "I have confirmed any retouchings of *Der Protagonist* directly in the score. All cuts, retouchings, and other markings in blue pencil are mine and definitive. I believe that the score, as I have marked it up, can now be handed over to the copyist."<sup>39</sup> Weill was not involved in Universal's production of the rental score inasmuch as he did not correct any proofs.

In October 1928 Universal produced engraved string parts that replaced manuscript materials; the other orchestral parts remained in manuscript format (or photomechanical reproductions thereof). All surviving prewar orchestral parts postdate the Dresden production and derive from the manuscript copies of the full score. The original instrumental parts used at the Dresden premiere have not survived.

Few of the editorial issues and dilemmas characteristic of the bulk of Weill's dramatic oeuvre, in which conflicting sources compete for authority without benefit of Weill's post-production intervention, pertain to *Der Protagonist*. The annotated holograph full score, as Weill told his publisher, transmits the opera in what he termed "definitive" form. Therefore the editors have privileged that score for all parameters of music and text and consulted other sources only in cases where Weill's notation is incomplete, ambiguous, or otherwise defective.

## V. Premiere and Reception in the Press

The premiere of *Der Protagonist* was initially scheduled to take place on 25 March 1926, and although Weill wrote to Universal on 11 March 1926 that "the rehearsals in Dresden are making good progress," opening night was delayed on short notice by two days. As planned from the start, there would be no companion piece. A week before the premiere Weill traveled to Dresden to attend final rehearsals. On 20 March 1926 a local newspaper provided a surprisingly well-informed announcement of Weill's arrival in Dresden, including a short biography that conveyed, if only indirectly, a sense of his growing importance as a composer:

Kurt Weill, the composer of the one-act opera *Der Protagonist* that is to receive its premiere at the Staatsoper on Saturday, 27 March, was born twenty-five years ago in Dessau. At the age of eighteen he went to the Berlin Conservatory of Music to study with Humperdinck; after one year he abandoned his studies in favor of an appointment as répétiteur in Dessau and then Westphalia. In autumn 1920 Busoni admitted him as a pupil; out of this apprenticeship a friendship soon evolved. The young Weill became the master's *famulus*. In Berlin the first performance of a larger work, the pantomime *Zaubernacht*, took place in 1922. Thereafter he made a name for himself above all with the following works: "Fantasie, Passacaglia und Hymnus" for Orchestra; String Quartet (Frankfurt Music Festival 1923); choral works[,] "Frauentanz" (Salzburg Music Festival 1924), "Rilke-Lieder" with orchestral accompaniment; Concerto for Violin and Winds. Weill completed his first opera, *Der Protagonist*, in the spring of 1925. Since then he has written a second one-act opera, *Royal Palace* (text by Yvan Goll). At the moment he is writing a comic midsummer night's play based on the English original by Clifford Bax.<sup>40</sup> Kurt Weill has arrived in Dresden and is participating in the final stage rehearsals of the opera.<sup>41</sup>

The dress rehearsal took place on 25 March at 10:30 A.M. There are no surviving reports of the rehearsals; nor have assessments or anecdotes from participants been transmitted.

The premiere was presented as a "nonsubscription" event, with open ticket sales. The program lists the following cast members: Curt Taucher (Protagonist), Elisa Stünzner (Schwester), Paul Schöffler (Der junge Herr), Ludwig Eybisch (Der Hausmeister des Herzogs), Adolph Schoepf-

lin (Der Wirt), Robert Büssel (Erster Schauspieler), Rudolf Schmalnauer (Zweiter Schauspieler), Elfriede Haberkorn (Dritter Schauspieler).<sup>42</sup> Others listed are Fritz Busch (conductor), Josef Gielen (stage director), Adolf Mahnke (set design), Max Hasait (technical director), and Leonhard Fanto (costume design); librettos were available for purchase.<sup>43</sup> The issue of the *Blätter der Staatsoper* distributed in connection with the premiere (1925–26 season, no. 13, April 1926) included Weill's previously quoted essay "Bekenntnis zur Oper."

A critic identified only as "P. B." reported on the nature of the production in the *Dresdner Volkszeitung* of 29 March 1926:

Josef Gielen has staged the work. He usually directs plays. As with many who pursue this calling, the passion and devotion he exhibits for the operatic stage seem profound. The mise-en-scène is a country inn in Olde England fitted out in the Tairoff manner with scaffolding and a system of rods on which, during the all-too-brief course of the piece, puppet-theater property is hung to accommodate the rehearsal scenes. Adolf Mahnke and director Hasait have also contributed to the creation of the set. With a painterly eye, Professor Fanto has designed effective costumes.<sup>44</sup>

Press reports of the audience response during and after the premiere contain inconsistencies; it almost seems that the critics were projecting their own opinions of the piece onto the audience. On 30 March 1926 a critic (signed "G") for the *Zwickauer Zeitung* wrote:

The audience initially displayed their approval of this "music of the future" but intermittently became restive, such that by the end the struggle between the numerous, well-distributed supporters of this most modern music and its opponents swung violently back and forth. Kurt Taucher, in the lead role, was showered with applause for his truly great performance; yet when the composer appeared, there was hissing and whistling. Such a battle of opposing parties is something the Dresden Opera has seldom witnessed.<sup>45</sup>

Karl Johann Perl of the *Fränkischer Kurier*, on the other hand, reported on 13 April 1926:

Reflecting a radically progressive attitude, this work was performed in the wake of a hugely successful premiere. The "Ein Akt Oper," as Georg Kaiser calls it and for which the twenty-five-year-old composer Kurt Weill has written the music, plays for fifty-five minutes; and as the curtain came down, there ensued applause that carried on for a full twenty minutes. It was not uncontested, and in part intentionally reinterpreted so as to underline the success of the lead, Kurt Taucher; yet it was so general and emphatic that the young composer had to appear with the conductor Fritz Busch and the singers countless times.<sup>46</sup>

And "E. R." in the *Meißner Tageblatt* (3 April 1926) drew attention to the contingent of professionals in the audience:

At the premiere of *Der Protagonist* at the Dresden Staatsoper, a battle that assumed heated proportions was waged between the supporters of atonal and tonal music. Jeering, hissing, and whistling were drowned out by the incredible storm of applause. There were repeated curtain calls for Kurt Weill, music director Fritz Busch, and the cast principals. Numerous visiting journalists, theater managers and directors, publishers, and conductors attended the performance. For a whole year, amazing things have been reported about the first work by the famulus and pupil from Busoni's master class.<sup>47</sup>

The opera achieved a spectacular success of unexpected proportions, one that was repeated at the next performance on 31 March 1926, which Weill also attended. The premiere produced "forty curtain calls," as Weill wrote to Universal on 6 April 1926: "The Dresden Staatsoper assured me that such a success is quite unique for a first work. The second performance was brilliant and produced twenty curtain calls. I will be present at the third performance (14 April)."<sup>48</sup> No less spectacular was the reception in the press, whose approval matched that of the audience. Even critical voices acknowledged Weill's singular talent as a composer for the stage. On 1 April 1926 Weill wrote to his parents: "It is quite exciting to become world-famous overnight. Even a couple of bad reviews are welcome,

because with a uniformly favorable press the demands placed on me would become excessive. My telephone has been ringing off the hook. And always the same sincere enthusiasm. Who would have thought!"<sup>49</sup>

Weill expressed his gratitude to the Dresden Staatsoper in a letter he sent to Fritz Busch after the premiere, which was published in a number of Dresden newspapers:

Having returned from Dresden, I am compelled immediately to thank you again: above all, you yourself for the courage and conviction with which you championed my work, as well as for the careful preparation that alone could make possible such an incomparable performance. I would also like to ask you to convey my enormous gratitude to everyone who contributed to the overall success: the splendid Kurt Taucher for his overwhelming achievement; Elisa Stünzner for the touching tenderness of her portrayal; Josef Gielen and his helpers Mahnke, Fanto, and Hasait for the ravishing staging; all the singers, whom I can't name individually; and also, above all, the wonderful Staatskapelle, especially the eight musicians of the wind octet, for their devoted work. I am aware that the great success my work has achieved is due to your energetic initiative and the unsurpassable ability of your institution.<sup>50</sup>

No overall tendency can be discerned from the judgments expressed in the available reviews of the premiere, besides their acknowledgment of Weill's talent and the interpretive achievement of the Dresden Staatsoper. As one might expect, assessments of the work were controversial. Overall, however, they document the vitality of a musical culture that can both generate and support works such as *Der Protagonist*—something borne out, above all, by the reviews in the regional newspapers written by little-known critics.

Assessments of the relationship between libretto and musical setting ranged from criticizing the libretto while praising the music and vice versa—extolling the libretto while rejecting the music—to asserting the inner unity of libretto and music. Those critics who rejected Weill's music as too modern tended to do so in terms of its embodying a stylistic tendency that they associated with composers such as Strauss, Stravinsky, Schreker, Schoenberg, or Berg, even if they cast little or no doubt on Weill's gifts as an opera composer. These negative assessments soon lapsed into language that unmistakably anticipates the jargon of the Nazi period. All the more impressive, then, are the generally positive assessments of the work, such as the following by the archconservative critic of the *Sächsische Staatszeitung*, who commended Kaiser's libretto but not the music (4 April 1926):

An excellent script, strong in worthy, poetic values, just made for opera. It is the old story of jealousy, a variation on the theme of *Pagliacci*, albeit with the cold steel fatally wounding the sister. Here, too, there's a troupe of itinerant actors, the performance of a comedy that turns to bloody tragedy. . . . Missing [in Weill's music] is the divine, arresting spark, the blazing fire that causes everything to glow. Having to listen to such sounds with different ears is something one has become used to. I've heard far worse in recent music. But the composer has been unable to prevent us from becoming bored, despite the brevity of the opera and the provocative, sometimes amusing plot. This is solely the composer's fault. Only toward the end does Weill discover the power of expression. And with the Protagonist's last words, he cannot avoid melody, despite his resistance to it.<sup>51</sup>

The critic O. Schmidt of the *Chemnitzer Zeitung* (3 April 1926) disparaged the libretto while emphasizing Weill's talent, yet without appreciating the music:

Georg Kaiser's play is the product of cool reasoning—made but not created. At its core is a tragedy of jealousy. The brother, the hero of the play, the celebrated mime artist, loves the sister and kills her when she confesses that she loves another. This situation is dialectically somewhat veiled only by the assumption that she embodies for him truth and purity. The whole business is "theater" with somewhat worn-out props such as, among other things, theater within theater: the brilliant actor who goes crazy during the performance. In addition there is the allusion to Ariadne with the shift from a comic to a tragic play as commanded by the Duke who, in England at the time of Shakespeare, wishes to present his guests



with a grotesque pantomime. The whole thing is a stage play written from a completely literary standpoint, without taking account of the fact that music is not an art form of the mind. That Kurt Weill, coming from the Busoni school, chose this product of a frankly perverse mindset demonstrates that he, too, is more a musician of the mind than of the heart. Here he had to content himself with a supporting role, namely underscoring the intentionally grotesque stage action. And there's no question that, in this respect at least, he acquits himself honorably by capturing in sound the work's harsh colors. The penetratingly shrill sonorities of a stage orchestra, which represents, as it were, the concertino part of the music, enhance the effect of cacophonies based on an unfettered harmonic language well suited to the dramatic action. I won't deny that this kind of music requires absolute skill.<sup>52</sup>

A critic in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* identified as “-re.” (30 March 1926) emphasized the unity of libretto and music:

This strongly dramatic book, one that is also imbued with lyricism in a number of brief episodes, cries out for fulfillment in music. The score by the young Kurt Weill provides that fulfillment. From an economically deployed orchestra, with the strings and winds possessing an unusual timbral quality, there emerges a melody that presents the soloists with rich possibilities for cantabile expansion. The short duets contain tenderly floating, lyrical expression; the pantomime music is vivid and humorous with its highly original quartet. And how convincingly and beautifully the improvisation transforms itself, in the music as well, into drama; how profoundly and movingly the music interprets the essence of the emotionally tormented mime-artist who by murdering his sister also destroys himself! This score, rendered organic through strong inner reflection, reveals Kurt Weill to be a man filled with music, one who brings together the laws of theatrically tangible and musically absolute construction in a new and unique way.<sup>53</sup>

The critic Steinsdorff of the *Zittauer Morgen* (30 March 1926) identified the music with a stylistic trend of which he himself disapproved:

Now to Weill's music. In literature and the plastic arts so-called expressionism is over. In music we're still in the middle of it. Such a comparison is justified insofar as atonality in music corresponds to abstraction in painting and to the absence of verbal logic in poetry. Amorphous music, for lack of a better term, certainly has potential, not for further development but rather for adventurous expeditions into peripheral zones. The most decisive boldness alone is capable of elevating it above the embarrassment of being mere noise. This ultimate boldness, which Alban Berg always had, is missing in Weill. The result on Saturday was, for the most part, unnerving boredom. Atonal music must take us by surprise, or else—putting it bluntly—we see the con and think that if someone were up there singing “Alle Vögel sind schon da” [a German children's song], it would fit just as well and no one would notice. As mentioned, however, we're still in the middle of this. Five or ten years ago it wouldn't have been possible to say something similar about August Stramm or Kandinsky without courting ridicule as a sinister reactionary.<sup>54</sup>

The well-disposed reviews outnumbered the conservative and reactionary and, in part, simply uninformed ones. (These last openly prided themselves on knowing even “worse” music, with which they compared Weill's music unfavorably.) The three following reviews are examples of the many positive ones from the regional press. Alfred Dreßler offered praise in the *Breslauer Zeitung* (1 April 1926):

Kurt Weill's composition has several interesting characteristics. The two contrary style types—here drastic comedy, there dark tragedy—occasion Weill's use of two orchestras, the regular one in front of the stage, a second one onstage. This latter group, a wind octet, accompanies the more external events of the actors' rehearsal in the form of two pantomimes. The main orchestra serves to support the singing. For the most part, the two play separately. The frequent use of recitative is noticeable, demanded by Kaiser's modern notional dialogue. Among recent composers Weill is a talent to be reckoned with. The way in which he expands and lays bare the psychological bond between Protagonist and Sister, something merely outlined in rudimentary fashion by Kaiser, demonstrates his born musical temperament. The disposition of the climaxes and transitions of the jostling array of moods in this hard-to-compose work betrays a remarkably secure dramatic instinct. The climax with the Protagonist's murder of

the Sister is a splendid achievement. The orchestra is gripping in the captivating immediacy of its expression, ineluctably proceeding toward the catastrophe. The long fermata after the deed is especially impressive. In terms of vocal technique, Weill makes exceptional demands on the lead roles of Protagonist and Sister. Sonic streams positively flow here, evincing Weill's powers of melodic invention. Kurt Weill is a great hope; only twenty-six years old, he has justifiably created a sensation with his first opera. . . . The Staatsoper did the right thing by allowing the newest German music to have its say (or rather, sound) through one of its best representatives.<sup>55</sup>

“P. A.” wrote in the *Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung* on 2 April 1926:

The dovetailing of opera and pantomime, the histrionics of the Protagonist, the lyrical exchange between brother and sister, the short love scene—all lend the action fine moments geared for the stage, while affording the music an opportunity to unfold dramatically, to reach a high point, to break off; in short, to run the entire gamut from comedy to tragedy. Dramatic tension from the first to the last note. Eight musicians assume, as it were, the role of the ancient chorus: they open the piece, as though a performance were indeed being given for the Duke; they intervene as accompaniment for the pantomime onstage; and they send us off at the end with fanfares. Contrasting with this wind octet, the forces in the orchestra pit include strings, percussion, two oboes and bass clarinets, three horns, and three trombones. Weill was a pupil of Busoni's and is undoubtedly one of the strongest and most extraordinary talents of the present day. *Der Protagonist* is, for him, a coup. His musical language is so concise, his melodic lines so expansive, his orchestration so original, that thoughts about models of any kind simply don't arise. Above all, this music has pacing, an uncanny pacing that erupts in response to the plot, the pacing demanded by the stage. The success of the work exceeded all expectations. It swept along not only the numerous musical guests, the press, and the theater specialists but also an operagoing public skeptical of all things new; the young composer was called to the stage with the cast some forty times.<sup>56</sup>

Karl Johann Perl, quoted earlier, wrote in the *Fränkischer Kurier* (13 April 1926):

Kurt Weill brings a pronounced stylistic ability to the musical treatment of this book, which is less conflicted than it is Janus-headed. The score has unmistakable number-opera traits, yet its form grows organically from the stage action, which has little to do with division into musical numbers; the synthesis nonetheless is perfect. The pantomime quality predominates; nevertheless, the three characters, Protagonist, Sister, and Lover, sing sweeping cantilenas accompanied by a wonderfully transparent orchestra, part of which plays separately onstage, yielding completely new timbral effects. Two more characters, the Innkeeper and the Duke's Housekeeper, remain memorable in the scheme of things alongside the others. Echoes of the style of the times (Stravinsky and Berg, to name but two) make themselves felt, of course, without in the least calling into question the pronounced individuality of Kurt Weill. The freely unfolding, unforced polyphony of his compositional technique allows a melodic invention of curiously austere inwardness to blossom; this music possesses, moreover, a strong dramatic power and a sure formal sense, something that helped especially to promote the effect of the conclusion. The performance under Fritz Busch, with Josef Gielen from the Dresden Schauspielhaus as director, left nothing to be desired in terms of music or singing yet failed utterly as far as dance was concerned. One could envision instead a Russian troupe whose members would also have to be ideal singers.<sup>57</sup>

The national press, such as the Frankfurt and Berlin newspapers, also reflected the work's enormous success, establishing and spreading Weill's reputation as one of the leading opera composers of his generation. These overwhelmingly favorable reviews, some remarkably substantial and knowledgeable, can be documented with four examples.

In the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the Weimar Republic's most prestigious newspapers, Erich Haenel wrote on 7 April 1926:

This one-act opera, whose successful premiere in the Sächsische Staatstheater has already been mentioned, is the work of a twenty-five-year-old, as such an undoubted test of talent and thus a promise for the future—insofar, that is, as there can be any further development for music such as

this, which completely eschews the system of traditional harmony. Busoni's *Faust*, which Weill, being the master's preferred student, knows and reveres, is the immediate predecessor of this new opera. Unlike that opera, however, whose element of fantasy is all too frequently overshadowed by the rationalism of the theater critic, Weill's opera has the advantage of a powerful dramatic compression and climax. Georg Kaiser has shown with his "Act" that he is intimately familiar with the necessities of the stage and that, for all their well-known formulas, his creations do justice to their inherent theater in gushes, exclamation, and horror unlike almost any other children of the contemporary stage. . . . What Kaiser reconceives is as bold as it is inspired: the victim is not the lover but the sister, bound to the brother by waves of the most sublime eroticism. And above all, this: when the point of the pantomimic farce, namely to cure jealousy, is turned into tragedy at the request of the noble patron, it backfires on the hero with appalling ferocity. Blood-red fog begins to swirl around him; all the Furies of his hellish heart begin to howl; in truth, the fragile edifice of his artistic being begins to fall apart. The scene shows two corpses: more tragic than the lifeless body of the young woman is the god-forsaken artist, who conquers the world for himself and through himself.

It is thus the tragedy of genius. Has the composer managed to fulfill musically this brilliantly articulated idea? Weill's music is at its strongest and most arresting where the scene takes a tragic turn. The double orchestra reveals the hand of a master tone painter, with double winds—flutes, bassoons, clarinets, and trumpets—onstage (they are the musicians of the Duke, for whom the pantomime is being performed). Equally gripping is a rhythmically incisive presto for woodwind in the burlesque, as is the general ability, evident everywhere, to convey characterizations through purely sensuous sonic effects. Substantially less personal is the lyrical element, and even the dramatic climaxes possess less power than they do brutality. Nor should one expect any melodic invention. The utmost is required of the singers; only their total involvement in the inner dramatic and musical architecture of the role can produce success.<sup>58</sup>

The notoriously conservative Max Marschall, writing in the *Vossische Zeitung* (n.d.), was the only renowned critic from Berlin to voice misgivings about the piece and reserve judgment on Weill's talent as a composer:

Just as the acting of the Protagonist is "over the top," so too is the verbal and musical poetry in this problematic work. It strives all too consciously to produce something totally different, something that surprises us. Whether Weill possesses a specific musical talent, whether his invention is powerful and unique, is hard to tell for certain based on this little opera. Inventive he certainly is—at least in coming up with discords and musical noise with which he accompanies the bizarre happenings on stage. He's uncommonly fond of effects, and here and there he manages to calculate the dramatic effect so confidently, so ingeniously, that we are inclined to assume that he will yet write a successful opera, provided his fate lands him with a good book, a truly operatically good book. After the catastrophe there is a long pause of utter silence. That is highly effective: the effect is achieved not through the positive but through the negative means of composition. Then Weill starts spinning the musical thread again; how he does this and then spins it further and gives the last word to the Protagonist and concludes his operatic experiment—one may take this perhaps to be a sign of talent and a glimmer of hope for further work and activity on the terrain of opera, which is still hot, after all. If Weill is a composer capable of writing music that is more than noise and scenery, then he will enjoy another triumph. Meanwhile opera is not yet the precious vessel ready to capture the streams of his inner song. I am availing myself of his words; he likes to express himself poetically.<sup>59</sup> Or perhaps his imagination merely fabricates for him streams of his inner song. The listener, fobbed off with rhythmic and harmonic experiments, with shrill declamation, and with orchestral effects, cannot be satisfied with goodwill. He misses, to put it trivially, melody, for only therein lies spiritual revelation.<sup>60</sup>

Rudolf Kastner, writing in the *Berliner Morgenpost* (29 March 1926), took the opposite position:

With admirable vigor, Weill's music immerses song and pantomime, which alternately inform the action, into a world of sound and rhythm—a world that, leaving aside its quite logical origin in the style of Busoni's *Harlechino* [*sic*], manages via Stravinsky to achieve a tone all its own. The burlesque play of the first pantomime, under- and overlaid by a special stage orchestra of eight players, gives free rein to Weill's scurrilous humor.

Yet only when, together with the author, he enters the zone of tragedy does his inspiration attain the strongest dramatic force by means of piercing harmonies and an orchestration that reaches, beyond Schoenberg or Berg's *Wozzeck*, ultimate clarity and a stylistically constitutive veracity of expression.<sup>61</sup>

Oskar Bie, in his review published in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (29 March 1926), showed himself to be nothing short of overwhelmed by Weill's talent and attempted to convey his experience of the work even in his writing style:

Weill, whose approach is not naturalistic but stylizing, treats the voice as a vocal instrument, not in a declamatory or instrumental way but simply as a voice per se. Hence he loves a new melody more than he respects the words. It is an important path toward modern vocality, the future of opera. In decisive places, words are eschewed entirely: where solemn, tragic, or mocking emotions are interjected, which reside in sound; where there is lyrical intensification that finds voice in coloratura, in this new coloratura that utters the words—secrets, lies, love—these suggestively playful words, and allows them to dissolve in the absolute musical language of the duet, like a late snow on the warm ground. How often have I recommended this approach to opera. Now I have experienced it. Weill's musical style is somewhere between the psychological intellectuality of Busoni and the quasi-graphic quality of Stravinsky's writing for winds. Yet it is thoroughly his own, independent, relying on no one. He loves the timbre of wind instruments, which are heard everywhere today in reaction to the string tones of romanticism. All romanticism, all ecstasy is finished, shadows of the landscape and the soul spread themselves thinly; the expression of feeling is somehow bound into the musical language itself, which forms the music's great and strong nuances, its hushed lowlands. It is music of the antiromantic sort—basically absolute and responsible only to itself, in spite of the attributes of its various types—that is sweeping the world these days. Its language possesses the latest modern freedom, without grimace or malice, and matures progressively over the course of the piece. The formal organization is terrific. The first breakthrough occurs when the actor senses the incipient madness—a huge intensification leading to the muted love scene of the Sister; a duet that dissolves into pure music. The dumb, arrogant chords of the major-domo, who orders the *buffo* pantomime; the terpsichorean transition; the delicious parodistic octet of the upper winds to illustrate the comedy; the droll vocalizations of the wordless players, vocal quartet, and wind accompaniment. The first outpouring of the Sister's confession. The tragic pantomime, dark colors, and building continuo of the timpani with wooden sticks, in elementary amplification, B–C sharp, the giant pendulum of the tragedy; erupting screams of the dissonant instruments, pure D major of the upper trumpets as judge, remaining G minor of the lower trombones as lingering sound. . . . Was it a purely intellectual pleasure? Was it the rational discovery of new operatic worlds? Perhaps it was partly this, but only in the consciousness of the critic who holds the threads of this insurmountable genre's development in his hand, casting his critical eye. For the non-philosophical theatergoer it was more about immediate impact, theatrical experience in a new form, and the fact of a musical talent who, with his knowledge, not only looks into the future but also, with his ability, will conquer it for himself, by means of the compelling force of invention and imagination. That is the step the pupil takes beyond the master, Busoni.<sup>62</sup>

## VI. Subsequent Prewar Productions and Reception

After the great success of the premiere and the broad, positive, largely enthusiastic reception in the press, Weill could justifiably hope for a series of new productions of his work in the coming season, 1926–27. Yet he remained somewhat skeptical because of resistance toward his music on the part of those who were either envious or engaged in intrigue. He wrote about this situation in a letter to his parents dated 8 April 1926:

Reviews are arriving from the provincial papers on a daily basis. The *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which is particularly important, was excellent; also Breslau, Mannheim, Vienna, etc. So far I have more than twenty wholly favorable reviews, including about ten sensational ones. In point of fact it was *the* big opera success of the season. I don't know anything yet about the ramifications. . . . Sooner or later there'll be a ruckus with Hertzka, since he'll have to change my contract.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile he stolidly refuses to acknowledge, to me at least, that I've become overnight one of the most



successful opera composers. These are awfully unpleasant stories.—We were delighted at how you were feted. There wasn't so much of that going on for me, since my circle of acquaintances is composed mainly of "colleagues," whose enthusiasm understandably does not manifest itself so vociferously. All possible means are being devised to prevent a local engagement, and since my success has isolated me even more, the Berlin production is unlikely to happen.<sup>64</sup> Not that I could give a damn now.<sup>65</sup>

Weill's skepticism was largely justified. In the 1926–27 season, *Der Protagonist* was staged only in Erfurt (premiering on 3 December 1926) and Nuremberg (premiering on 5 May 1927). In 1928, in a double bill with *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, it premiered in Altenburg/Gera on 8 and 22 April, Frankfurt am Main on 19 June, Berlin (Städtische Oper) on 14 October, and Stuttgart on 15 December. In 1929 it was produced both with *Der Zar* in Hanover (premiering on 26 February) and without *Der Zar* in Leipzig (premiering on 27 February).<sup>66</sup> The performance history prior to the Second World War ends with a single performance on 18 February 1932 in Essen. The paucity of productions, relative to the success of the premiere and the work's reception in the press, can be explained by a number of distinct but interrelated factors: the need for a companion piece (*Der Protagonist*, lasting only about sixty-five minutes, did not provide a full evening's theater); curiosity about Weill's new stage works, which drew attention away from *Der Protagonist*; Universal's failure to promote effectively Weill's work; and, last, the dissolution of expressionism as the predominant musical style, paralleled by Weill's own development as reflected in works such as the Songspiel *Mahagonny* (1927) and, above all, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928).

In a letter to Weill from 15 March 1927, the publisher directly mentions the first problem: "[We] would welcome it if the difficulty of finding a work for *Der Protagonist* could be resolved."<sup>67</sup> Weill was well aware of this "difficulty." Already on 6 January 1926—even before the premiere, that is—he announced the imminent completion of a new opera (the one-act opera *Royal Palace*), "oriented more toward poetry, dance and feeling," that would form "a real antipode to the theatricality" of *Der Protagonist*.<sup>68</sup> Yet all attempts to combine *Der Protagonist* and *Royal Palace* into a single evening of opera came to naught, above all because *Royal Palace* was more meaningfully combined with the cantata *Der neue Orpheus*, serving "as it were as a prologue" (as Weill wrote to Universal on 23 February 1927); the texts of both works were by Yvan Goll. *Der Protagonist* was then performed with pieces such as the pantomime *Der Schneemann* by Erich Wolfgang Korngold (in Nuremberg), *Djamileh* by Georges Bizet (in Leipzig), or *Angélique* by Jacques Ibert (in Essen). The one-act opera *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, also with a libretto by Georg Kaiser, was announced by Weill as a "wonderful complement" to *Der Protagonist* (letter to Universal, 23 March 1927). Weill even hoped with this new one-act opera, completed in August 1927, to find "new adoptions" of *Der Protagonist*. His hopes were only partly fulfilled. Although there were a number of performances combining the two pieces, the performance of *Der Protagonist* was always "taken into account" (a phrase used by Weill in a letter to Universal, 9 June 1928) or even rejected on the grounds that the work was "not currently suitable for Berlin," as the director of the Berlin theaters, Heinz Tietjen, put it according to a letter that Weill wrote to Universal on 20 September 1927. Universal then pleaded with Weill, in a letter dated 16 November 1927, "not to allow potential contracts for *Der Zar* to break down" just because "*Der Protagonist* has to accompany it." The new one-act opera *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* did not so much give *Der Protagonist* added momentum as it eclipsed it.

*Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* illustrates a dilemma for Weill that resulted from his rapid composition of new stage works following *Der Protagonist*, namely *Royal Palace* (completed in January 1926) and *Na und?* (completed in March 1927). After the big success of his first opera, theaters were more interested in premiering a new Weill work than they were in repeating one that was already known and had received widespread acclaim. Weill's growing reputation is reflected in the fact that he had to plot his next move carefully: he sought to draw *Der Protagonist* to the attention of the theaters that wanted to present his works but had to do so in such a way that they did not feel he had passed them over in the

assignment of premieres. A letter to Universal dated 6 May 1926 reflects the difficult situation in which Weill found himself. Reporting on the interest expressed by Erich Kleiber, music director of the Berlin Staatsoper, in the premiere of *Royal Palace*, he wrote:

I then made my case for a simultaneous adoption of *Der Protagonist*. Kleiber is by no means averse; he wants to look at the work more closely and, if there is another performance, definitely travel to Dresden. As was to be expected, however, he's still somewhat reluctant to produce a work that has already enjoyed success in Dresden. And above all, he heard about my new work from an unfortunate newspaper item and is now seriously thinking about a combination of *Royal Palace* and *Na und?* (the latter lasts about two hours). I tried using all means to talk him out of this plan. He's wavering between the two possibilities, and the situation is certainly auspicious enough to enable you, in all likelihood, to get *Protagonist* and *Royal Palace* accepted.<sup>69</sup>

Of course, Kleiber then produced *Royal Palace* without *Der Protagonist*.

Weill felt let down by Universal in his efforts to have *Der Protagonist* accepted by the theaters. On 29 April 1926, just a month after the premiere, he gave vent to his irritation:

A well-known German music director has just written to me: "When will Universal start up the usual publicity? The silence seems somewhat odd to me." It's a shame that musicians on the outside are noticing your silence with respect to *Der Protagonist*. I must admit that I'm deeply disturbed by it. The theater managers tell themselves: if the publisher is so silent, then the success can't be that great. If the prospectus isn't finished, you could at least have come out with some kind of announcement. The success of *Der Protagonist* in no way fell short of that enjoyed by *Wozzeck*; the press is just as sensational, and the two works are mentioned together wherever modern opera is talked about. Anyone who was there can tell you that no first opera by a twenty-five-year-old has ever achieved such success. Your conduct makes it seem as though it had merely been the usual *succès d'estime*. You're even continuing your tactic of leaving further adoptions up to me. If you are interested in having our Staatsoper [in Berlin] adopt the work, then I must urgently request that you immediately and energetically take the matter into your own hands.<sup>70</sup>

Weill was hardly exaggerating with his objections; Universal did not support Weill's early works as "energetically" as he could have wished—something evident not only in the sluggish production of the performance materials for *Der Protagonist* but also in the fate of *Royal Palace* and *Na und?* The score and orchestral material for *Royal Palace* have been irretrievably lost, apparently because Universal Edition failed to make even a single copy of Weill's full score, which, along with the sole set of orchestra parts, was never retrieved after its production in Essen in 1929 (fortunately at least the piano-vocal score survives). The publisher rejected *Na und?* entirely; nothing but preliminary sketches for this work survive.

One reason for the small number of productions of *Der Protagonist* may be the "collapse of expressionism, which occurred suddenly, like an overnight bankruptcy, with the end of inflation in 1924."<sup>71</sup> There is no question that the style of *Der Protagonist*, because of the subject matter and libretto, can still be described as essentially expressionist, even if Weill inflects the music of the pantomimes in a way that suggests a critique of musical expressionism. At any rate, the reviews of the premiere drew a close connection between the work and expressionism. Weill himself, in a letter to his parents dated 7 December 1925, emphasized the "blunt impression" that *Der Protagonist* makes. Weill was not the only composer who freed himself from this "blunt" expressionism in subsequent works for the stage. Two other examples are Ernst Krenek with *Jonny spielt auf*, a "jazz opera," as contemporaries called it, that enjoyed great success starting in 1927; and Paul Hindemith with his opera *Cardillac*, premiered in Dresden on 9 November 1926, an early example of *neue Sachlichkeit* in the musical theater (a "Musizieroper," to use another untranslatable label of the time), whose dress rehearsal and premiere Weill attended. Above all, it was Weill himself, with the Songspiel *Mahagonny* (composed in May 1927) and particularly *Die Dreigroschenoper* (composed May through August 1928), who caused his initial successes to fade while completely leaving behind the expressionism of his earlier works. In the wake of this

historical development, in which Weill's music played such a decisive part, the assessment of his earlier works by music critics changed. After the premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper* his correspondence with Universal contained scarcely any mention of performances of *Der Protagonist* or of performance problems related to that work. Not until 3 January 1931 did Weill pose the surprising and unprompted question in a letter to Universal: "What's up with *Der Protagonist*?"—without receiving an answer. The last thing he heard from Universal apropos *Der Protagonist* appears in a letter dated 4 February 1932: "Today the contract with Essen for *Protagonist* was finalized."<sup>72</sup>

Weill attended the first two follow-up productions of *Der Protagonist*, in Erfurt (3 December 1926) and Nuremberg (5 May 1927), both of which corroborated the success of the premiere. Concerning the Erfurt production he wrote to Universal on 6 December 1926: "I attended the Erfurt premiere of *Der Protagonist* at the invitation of the Stadttheater. It was a quite decent performance, and the response of the audience very similar to that in Dresden, except that an unschooled provincial audience must be even more at a loss for words. At any rate, the performance clearly demonstrated that *Der Protagonist* can be both viable and successful for smaller theaters as well."<sup>73</sup>

In Nuremberg he participated in a rehearsal, as he reported to Lotte Lenya early in May 1927: "The opera has been rehearsed brilliantly, and the performance often comes close to the Dresden one. The Protagonist is good, the Sister bad. Wetzelsberger [the conductor] is excellent and a charming fellow. He's from Salzburg, and thus has all the good and none of the bad characteristics of the Viennese.—Once again the opera has an extraordinary impact. But they're expecting a scandal. Well, so be it."<sup>74</sup> Yet the "scandal" did not occur; Weill wrote to Universal on 6 May 1927: "Just back from Nuremberg, I can report with delight a very big success of my *Protagonist*. It was sold out; the audience followed enthusiastically; the first pantomime was, in particular, a notable success, and there were numerous curtain calls at the end. The performance, too, exceeded all my expectations: it was uncommonly precise, transparent, and impressive. The overall impact was, in places, even stronger than in Dresden. Conductor: Wetzelsberger; title role: Fritz Perron."<sup>75</sup>

The first performance of *Der Protagonist* with *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, which Weill attended, took place on 8 April 1928 in Altenburg. It was also the first Weill performance conducted by Maurice (de) Abravanel, who was no stranger to the work when he agreed to conduct it in Altenburg and Gera, two small Thuringian cities that shared an opera company. In July 1926 he had reviewed the Dresden premiere for *La revue musicale*, discussing with particular insight the music's dramatic function:

The music does not illustrate the action; it *is* the action. The text presents the external, visible drama. On a more profound level, the music expresses the psychological action that cannot be conveyed in language. Just like his collaborator, Weill carefully avoids everything that could diminish the drama's clarity or lower its stature. He doesn't cry over the Sister's death, and nowhere does he encourage us to partake in the hero's despair. He is content to show them, but with such precision that the listener is overcome.

This is what gives the work its unique value. As far as I know, *The Protagonist* is the first successful venture in opera that moves the listener while leaving his feelings of sympathy completely to the side. After one hearing, it would be impossible to claim to know the music as such, because its craftsmanship is too personal, too novel; but it conveys, even on a first hearing, everything it wishes to express with elemental power.<sup>76</sup>

Abravanel would become one of the composer's most loyal advocates and interpreters; he would later conduct nearly all of Weill's Broadway productions.

On 14 October, the performance of the two one-act operas at Berlin's Städtische Oper attracted great interest; the press response to this production, coming as it did after the premiere of the *Mahagonny-Songspiel* and *Die Dreigroschenoper*, reflected the shift in critical attitudes. Weill was now one of "the most talented and promising" of the "younger generation," his *Protagonist* having been "surpassed," in terms of compositional

technique and style, by his recent works. Only a few years after its genesis, Weill's one-act opera had already acquired a "historical" flavor, so that neither praise nor criticism of the piece could alter his significance as a composer, as evinced by reviews by two of the most influential Berlin critics, Adolf Weißmann and Alfred Einstein. In the *B. Z. am Mittag* (15 October 1928) Weißmann wrote:

Kurt Weill has completely reconciled himself with me through his *Dreigroschenoper* music. The dramatic arranger Bert Brecht had him on a leash: Kurt Weill had to avoid through-composition. Instead, as music arranger, he created the cleverest, most appealing theater music of all. If we turn back from the *Dreigroschenoper* man to the Georg Kaiser ally—for we heard *Der Protagonist* some two years ago in Dresden—then Kurt Weill still appears to be in the midst of the crisis. Yet today's man sheds light on yesterday's. And because he's being performed better now, his crisis-ridden work has a more powerful impact than it did back then.<sup>77</sup>

Einstein, who had the broadest and most profound knowledge of music history among critics of his day, wrote in the *Berliner Tageblatt* (15 October 1928):

There's a problem with Weill's two one-act operas, but it is very easily solved. It has to do with the question of why both these works have so little music in them. There are those who claim that the lack of music is the path to a new form of opera (Gluck once held a similar opinion). Kurt Weill himself refuted this claim when he followed *Der Protagonist* of 1925 and *Der Zar, der sich photographieren lässt* [sic] of 1927 with *Die Dreigroschenoper* in 1928. You can take pleasure in a hundred ways of melodic expression, but you have to be a melodist in some form. The barrel-organ ditty of the *Dreigroschenoper*, the ejaculatory prayer of Mr. Macheath facing execution—both have infinitely more music in them than these two operas combined.

Georg Kaiser . . . is quite a dangerous libretto author. Kaiser, the—how should one put it?—creator of dramatic thought games [*Denkspieler*] is the most unmusical poet there is; at best he is surpassed in his lack of musicality by Carl Sternheim. What nonetheless recommends him as a librettist and belies this lack is the concision of his language and scenic invention and his sense of symmetrical form. As little as the inflated eponymous hero in *Der Protagonist*, who stabs his sister in thespian paroxysms, seems suitable as an operatic hero, all the more inspired is the operatic dramaturgy of the inserted scene, initially burlesque, then turned tragic. These two pantomimes justifiably stimulated Weill, even if he didn't musically exploit the contrast between them. As an opera, *Der Protagonist* is a kind of wonder of the ocean: the fish tail of "tension" hangs on it—achieving "breathtaking tension" is the cheapest thing there is—the other part of the monster is formalistic opera; the situation is composed, not the word: excitement, deliberation, tenderness, all in an unconventional but also artificial [*uneigentlich*] musical language.<sup>78</sup>

Theodor W. Adorno published in *Die Musik* a review of the one-act opera's production in Frankfurt; it shows that already in 1928 he no longer either could or would take cognizance of music beyond the confines of schools, ideologies, or putatively "objective" historical tendencies:

The two Georg Kaiser one-act operas by Kurt Weill appeared only a few weeks after *Cardillac*. One should be very grateful for the familiarity: both pieces reveal a formal mindset that rigorously addresses contemporary problems, be they compositional ones or in the choice of the literary subject matter, and which hardly has anything more to do with neoclassicist ideology than with the romantic music drama of yesteryear. At the same time, the composer can be credited with sufficient musical strength and ability to realize his aims. It is hard to say what those aims are in the abstract when they don't yet reveal themselves in an immediate way. Invoking the ideal of playfulness that Weill inherited from the Busoni school goes only so far—even though the constructions of the text in particular might suggest this, with the antithesis of reality and appearance—scarcely any further, in fact, than the strict rejection of romantic psychologizing. Weill's music approaches its theatrical subject matter with a peculiar motoricism, inspired less by the psychic contours of the piece as a whole than by the visible gesture of the theatrical moment, not relying on preexisting musical forms so much as owing its momentum directly to the stage. There is a direct path from Weill to Stravinsky; since, however, the composers stimulated by Stravinsky have much to choose from, it is worth noting, as a sign of a very good and genuine instinct, which

Stravinsky Weill follows: the earthiness of *Le Sacre* and the current “dix-huitième” are avoided, only *L’histoire du soldat* is recalled, not only on the musical surface of *Der Protagonist* but also in spirit. That frees the way to the deeper aims of Weillian drama. They have nothing to do with mirroring the play, and everything to do with its dissociation into particles; Weillian opera is composed from the fragments of the dramatic plot. If today he demands a theater of representation, not action, and looks for his texts accordingly, he is merely drawing the literary consequences from his approach to musical composition. The unity of the dramatic figure, hitherto invariably the focus of dramatic music, is dismantled; the pantomime action is more a means to destroy that unity than a transposition into that supposedly purer realm of a secondary reality with which little glory may be gained in music anymore. All that comes particularly well to the fore in *Der Zar*, which for all the merits of its stagecraft did not really appeal to the audience. . . . If, especially in *Der Protagonist*, everything doesn’t quite come off, one is inclined from the start to place the blame on the school: for all of Busoni’s inspirational power, his mistrust of musical construction and his resistance to any kind of vivid profile has spread confusion among a generation that is no longer satisfied with the aestheticizing rehearsal of a lost *serenitas*. There is the danger, above all, that the Busonian doctrine of resolute technical introspection stands in the way, just as Busoni’s compositional technique has never quite consolidated itself. Hence a number of solutions in *Der Protagonist* are technically not the most sophisticated; there is an occasional lack of contrasting characters construed in opposition to one another, and for all the clarity and precision of the voice-leading, Weill’s instrumental imagination seems a little insecure when it comes to writing for orchestra.<sup>79</sup>

As to the quality of the Frankfurt production, Adorno noted: “The performance under the lively conducting of Nettstraeter, with the imaginative directing of Mutzenbecher, very respectable; however, some of the singers, such as the dramatically skilled Protagonist, ought to have sung more forcefully.”<sup>80</sup>

Weill, too, attended the performance in Frankfurt; his report in a letter dated 21 June 1928 to Universal places Adorno’s critical judgment and competence in a questionable light:

Back from Frankfurt, I’d like to give you a full report. Not to mince words, it was the worst performance of one of my own works that I have ever experienced. Musically imprecise and inadequately prepared, with thoroughly ungifted directing that completely missed the point with all the usual theatrical nonsense. I spent five days eradicating the most egregious errors, but nothing more can be done in the face of a fundamentally wrong approach and a lack of ability. That I can nonetheless confirm a respectable success with the public (ten curtain calls after *Protagonist*, fifteen after *Der Zar*) is reassuring proof that both works can withstand even the hostilities of an utterly distorting performance. It’s only a shame that the Frankfurt press had a completely false impression imposed on it; yet the gentlemen at the opera house are convinced that the success with the public should lead to a decent number of performances.<sup>81</sup>

No critic engaged *Der Protagonist* more frequently or perceptively than did Heinrich Strobel, who reviewed performances in Erfurt and Berlin, even presenting a pre-performance lecture in Gera on 22 April 1928.<sup>82</sup> His rapturous review of the Erfurt production evinces his enthusiasm for both the opera and its composer:

This time it was confirmed that this “act of opera” is one of the most convincing creations of modern musical theater. The twenty-four-year-old recognizes with the instinctive feeling of a genius the musical potential of this fabulously effective, Pirandello-like one-acter by Georg Kaiser. One senses that he [Weill] comes from Stravinsky—in spite of his studies with Busoni. But the way in which he intensifies the tremendous tension through music, the way in which he leads the expressive arc of the dramatic *Melos* innovatively, daringly, and often breathtakingly, the way in which he introduces lyrical passages in the gushing duet between Lover and Sister, the way in which he juxtaposes the clearly defined scenic blocks without the use of cheap, thrilling sound effects, building up the piece in a powerful dynamic curve, where the eight onstage wind players—who accompany the pantomimes—and the main orchestra interact wonderfully: all this is thoroughly original, new, not relying on catchword formulas, this reveals an elemental dramatic talent. This music never ceases to be immediate, vigorous, bubbling over with youthful energy, and it shows an astonishing degree of technical accomplishment. And above all,

there is a dramatic pace hardly to be found in another contemporary work.”<sup>83</sup>

## VII. Postwar Productions and Reception

There were no new productions of *Der Protagonist* after the Second World War until 27 April 1958. That first production, at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in its Duisburg house, had little public impact. A matinee presented as if a studio performance and cast with the company’s second-tier performers, it suffered from a number of deficiencies in both performance and staging. The opportunity to reacquire the public with the work after the Nazi period was not only not seized; it was ignominiously squandered. The second production of the work took place in Frankfurt am Main two years later, in April 1960, together with *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* and *Die sieben Todsünden*. The performance of *Die sieben Todsünden*, which marked the German premiere of the work and Lotte Lenya’s first appearance in Frankfurt since the war, attracted all the publicity; *Der Protagonist* was scarcely noticed.

On 12 May 1960, an Italian-language premiere of *Der Protagonist* took place at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples under the direction of Gábor Ötvös.<sup>84</sup> Also in 1960, Italian Radio (RAI) produced a recorded version of the work (once again in Italian), under the direction of Bruno Maderana, which was first broadcast on 18 December 1960.<sup>85</sup> Subsequently, numerous radio stations broadcast the recording between 1962 and 1965, mostly in the United States and later in the Federal Republic of Germany. An English radio production by the BBC followed in 1978. The London Sinfonietta had already recorded the first pantomime for Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft in 1975, thereby acquainting a broad international audience with at least an excerpt of the work.<sup>86</sup> The staged premiere of *Der Protagonist* took place in England on 12 March 1986 during the Camden Festival; the American premiere did not occur until 31 July 1993, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The most recent, widely acclaimed performance of *Der Protagonist*, and also the Austrian premiere of the work, occurred as part of the Bregenz Festival on 21 July 2004. In addition, the work was first released on compact disc in 2001.<sup>87</sup>

The press response to performances of *Der Protagonist* after the Second World War shows that understanding of Weill’s first opera and its stylistic position before and beyond “song style” and *Dreigroschenoper* grew slowly over time. Even so, these postwar reviews did not attain the level of understanding reflected in many reviews from the prewar period. This noticeable drop in quality, above all in the reaction of German critics to the first new production of *Der Protagonist* after the Second World War in Duisburg, can be traced to a number of conditions that had negative repercussions not only on Weill reception but on all music criticism during the 1950s in Germany, namely:

- the Nazis’ systematic elimination of Jewish music critics and their replacement of music criticism by “music contemplation” [*Musikbetrachtung*], which had promoted critical mediocrity along with opportunism
- the complete suppression during the twelve-year Nazi period of all music from the Weimar years that had been labeled “degenerate,” including all music by Jewish composers—a suppression that affected Weill’s music in particular, reducing it to little more than “hearsay”
- the limited availability during the immediate postwar years of the Weill works that had been published by Universal<sup>88</sup>
- the mostly tacit but nonetheless palpable doubts about the development of Weill’s composition in the United States, with his new works largely unknown yet scorned, at least implicitly, as light music<sup>89</sup>
- the extraordinarily polarizing “avant-gardist” development of music in the postwar period, which pushed even composers such as Alban Berg and Paul Hindemith to the periphery—composers whose operas, unlike those by Weill, were being performed again by the late 1940s and remained in the repertoires of numerous opera houses.

All these factors repeatedly come into play, with varying emphasis, in the reviews of the first production of *Der Protagonist* after the Second World War, notably in attempts, however inadequately informed, to situate the work historically or to determine its aesthetic significance apart

from any tendencies of compositional style. Discussions of *Der Protagonist* proved to be fatally tied to the fact that as a composer Weill was mostly associated with the “song style.” Left unconsidered, however, was the notion that works of art that had been deprived of public reception by brutal state measures could make a morally irrefutable claim to be protected and performed again. Weill’s works were not, as some reviews asserted in a sanitizing manner, “blocked” after 1933, nor did they simply “disappear” or happen to be “forgotten”; their “disappearance” was intentional and sanctioned, the result of an act of state repression.

Herbert Schultz, writing in *Der Mittag* (29 April 1958), traced the problem of Weill reception exclusively in terms of aesthetic history, thus ignoring the historico-political dimensions of this reception: Can Weill’s music be engaging in its own right, or does it attract only “historical” interest as embodying a particular stylistic “tendency”? Schultz wrote:

Every work of art blocked after 1933 must, when revived, withstand a test proving that its artistic substance and truth content are sufficient to overcome a period of having completely disappeared and been forgotten. Quite often it is the case that works that seemed astounding and essential between the First World War and 1933 will have lost all their relevance when they later resurface. A further question is significant in this connection. In painting and literature the process of presenting to the current intermediate generation all the works they were forced to forgo, and allowing those works to be integrated into their intellectual sphere, has been relatively rapid. Musical theater, however, needs much more time to cover the backlog of an audience that knows formerly famous works only from hearsay and must now experience them for the first time in completely changed circumstances.

In Duisburg, at the matinee premiere of Kurt Weill’s one-act opera *Der Protagonist* (to a text by Georg Kaiser), that audience was only sparsely represented; there was a clear sense, however, not only in the applause, that this performance of the Deutsche Oper am Rhein struck a chord. That is because this work is timeless in its subject matter, uncovering deep regions of human thought and emotion, and because the music is so powerful and filled with its own vitality that, after more than thirty years, it still appears both true and secure. This revival was both necessary and rewarding; it filled a gap in our knowledge while conveying, quite differently from *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Die Straße*,<sup>90</sup> an image of the composer for whom “the song” [*der Song*] was just one of many possible means and whose mastery was also confirmed in other ways.<sup>91</sup>

The critics of the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine* (Günter Engler, 29 April 1958) and *Die Welt* (Heinrich Lindlar, 30 April 1958), on the other hand, were not musically convinced that the work’s revival was “necessary.” Whereas Engler missed any “vivid” [*plastisch*] invention in the music, Lindlar considered it, strangely enough, “suspiciously accomplished.” Engler wrote:

The little opera that received its premiere in Dresden in 1926 has acquired a bit of dust since its youthful days of German expressionism. Perhaps it could still be captivating, if an outstanding performer were cast in the title role. Under “normal” circumstances it will offer no more than historical interest. Georg Kaiser’s text evinces literary ambitions. His eponymous hero is a brilliant actor for whom fiction and reality easily become blurred. In such a situation he becomes his sister’s murderer. That is a typically Kaiserian construct: precious, startling, and, at the same time, theatrically effective. Weill’s music manages to capture some of that. It contains an element of the large gesture, of the pathos of aesthetic beauty, and is appealing where it can employ irony. Yet even for a work lasting one hour the musical ideas are not vivid enough.<sup>92</sup>

Lindlar, in contrast, wrote of the music:

The catchiest portions were the ironically illustrative musical gestures of the young Weill. For the pantomime involving two jealous couples he simply bubbles over with comic or frivolous musical licks and figures. He employs, somewhat insouciantly, substantial instrumental forces that intermittently and abruptly dissolve into thin, transparent patterns of sound. Fantastic to listen to, almost suspiciously accomplished, yet overall still somewhat lacking in control or stylization.<sup>93</sup>

For the critic Paul Müller of the *Rheinische Post* (28 April 1958) *Der Protagonist* likewise had no “contemporary” significance, although in his

opinion parallels could be drawn with the (later) operas of Carl Orff or Boris Blacher and Werner Egk:

A single, unusually successful work can make its author so famous that he remains almost an unknown in terms of his oeuvre as a whole. That’s what happened with the composer of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Yet Weill continued to compose (the Berliner Festwochen 1957 reminded us of his grand opera *Die Bürgschaft*; the Düsseldorf-Duisburg performance of *Street Scene* reminded us of the American-musical Weill). Now the performance of *Der Protagonist* at the Oper am Rhein (the work received its premiere in Dresden under Fritz Busch in 1926) reminds us of the fact that, even before *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Weill (after studying with Humperdinck and Busoni) was a recognized, idiosyncratic composer in the volcanic turbulence of the expressionist 1920s. This first performance in the Duisburg house was presented as a studio matinee. Georg Kaiser wrote the text to this one-hour, rather cerebral variant of *Pagliacci*, no less feverish than it was ice-cold. . . . Weill’s music is a colorful prism, fermenting, full of (back then) new signs. Much of what we hear in this parlando piece and its richly illustrated orchestral accompaniments is akin to Hindemith. Attractive, idiosyncratic wind parts accompany the “pantomime” before it lapses back into singing and talking. We hear Orff-like vocalese (anticipating the “abstract opera” of Blacher-Egk) and in general a kaleidoscope of what was then the newly discovered “musikantisch” style.—A worthwhile rediscovery, then, much of it still unexpectedly fresh; yet as a whole, as packaging for a Georg Kaiser text, like so much from these sparkingly lively years, it has acquired quite a bit of dust.<sup>94</sup>

The anonymous critic of the *Rhein-Ruhr Kompass* (17–30 May 1958) referred expressly to the postwar reception of Weill that had failed to materialize:

Weill is for most people just the musical author of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The early works such as *Der Protagonist* have been long forgotten. Even though works from the same period, such as Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck* and Paul Hindemith’s *Cardillac*, were picked up right after the war, there was no interest in Weill’s first foray into opera, a genre that he himself later developed in a quite different direction. Yet the revival now, after some thirty years, is significant insofar as it shows us in exemplary fashion where, back then, the younger generation took its cue for a new musical theater. Few works from the interwar period demonstrate as clearly as Weill’s first opera that the return back beyond romanticism to the baroque was the starting point, not the overcoming of romanticism through the dissolution of chromaticism into atonality, which would later take center stage.<sup>95</sup>

The review in the *Kölnische Rundschau* (1 May 1958) by Herbert Eimert, one of the more influential proponents of serial and electronic music, is particularly informative with respect to Weill’s standing in avant-garde music circles at the time. Eimert found it easier to write approvingly because he did not believe *Der Protagonist* would enter the general repertory:

No less a figure than Georg Kaiser, Germany’s most frequently performed contemporary playwright three decades ago, wrote the libretto to Kurt Weill’s opera *Der Protagonist*. Just as significant was the fact that Fritz Busch presented the operatic debut of Kurt Weill with this hour-long one-act opera at the Dresden Staatsoper in 1926. Up until then Busoni’s student Weill had been known only to a small progressive circle as the composer of chamber works, choral pieces, and a violin concerto.

*Der Protagonist* was the first of three operas with which the young composer, then twenty-six, drew attention to himself. . . . Two years later, with *Die Dreigroschenoper*, he found his own unmistakable style, admittedly unthinkable without Bert Brecht’s texts.

Weill’s sentimental and savage songs have frequently been imitated but never matched—even by him. The works that followed, the three-act version of *Mahagonny* and *Die Bürgschaft*, failed to achieve the coherence and punch of *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

With the composer’s emigration began the American, commercial, phase of his production for the theater, for which the folk opera *Die Straße*,<sup>96</sup> recently revived in Duisburg, serves as a not entirely happy example, despite attempts to improve its dramaturgy. Taken as a whole, Weill’s New York boulevard-theater, with its hard-bitten mixture of Puccini, vulgar melodies, and jazz, has proved to be an opera import of a low order. Weill’s American works, in spite of a number of attempts, have not been able to establish themselves here.

Following that late work, the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Duisburg took on, in a studio matinee, the early *Protagonist*, which has not been performed for thirty years. In spite of this rewarding and informative revival, it remains unlikely that this work will find its way into the repertory. Curiously enough, this has less to do with the fresh, vitally inspired music than with the text. . . .

Weill's agile musical language possesses a surprising contrapuntal solidity that is, moreover, thoroughly effective for the stage. The act of insanity committed by the mime artist is not illustrated psychologically but rather artfully counterpointed in a neobaroque style that is not that far from Hindemith's *Cardillac* and even anticipates it. Only for a few moments, in the declamation of the major-domo, do we hear the psalm-like tones of the beggar king Peachum.<sup>97</sup>

Alfons Neukirchen in the *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten* (29 April 1958) saw the work as having outgrown its "historical" interest and called for an appropriate performance:

The fruits of this excavation can be harvested only by a theater that stages *Der Protagonist* with its finest forces, in the most theatrically effective way possible, and includes the work in its repertory along with another one-act opera.

It became strikingly clear that *Der Protagonist*, after thirty years, is no longer an object for a studio, for experimental theater. Its form and content have their historical place. Yet its realization requires the utmost artistic power and sophistication. The challenge for the eponymous hero, the leader and star of a theatrical troupe in Shakespearean times, can be met only by a singer who is also a gifted comedian. Has there ever been such a fortuitous combination apart from Caruso? . . .

How on earth is a tenor supposed to meet this huge challenge, when not once in the decisive scene can he rely on the splendor and seductive power of his voice? This probably explains why *Der Protagonist* was no longer performed.<sup>98</sup>

Nor did the performance given in Frankfurt in April 1960 meet the challenge issued by Neukirchen; on the contrary, *Der Protagonist* paled in comparison with *Die sieben Todsünden* and the art of Lotte Lenya. Andreas Razumovsky, an Adorno pupil, wrote uncomprehendingly in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (8 April 1960):

Busoni's "new aesthetic," we are told, was the single biggest influence on *Der Protagonist*—the "comic" pantomime, exaggerated with German thoroughness and little humor; the much invoked classicality; the *commedia dell'arte*. The rest is all "theater of fate," Leoncavallo without the same level of melodic inspiration: the solid music of a no doubt very talented répétiteur. In the pantomime: a very faint presentiment of the later Weill . . . Basically, as mentioned, it was not until the last piece that the evening turned serious and was to be taken seriously. *Die sieben Todsünden* . . . Seeing Lotte Lenya live onstage and hearing her voice, which one knows so well from her records, is thrilling.<sup>99</sup>

Wolfgang Steinecke, the organizer of the Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music, offered quite a different judgment of the impact of *Der Protagonist* in this Frankfurt performance:

*Der Protagonist* (which the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf revisited for the first time two years ago) is the stroke of genius of the twenty-five-year-old Weill, who with this first work convincingly documented his calling as a theater composer. It is fascinating even today to see how Weill combines two musical spheres in the play-within-a-play by juxtaposing the regular orchestra and a stage orchestra, thereby separating the world of the opera proper from the performed pantomime and, at the end (when the Protagonist can no longer distinguish between these worlds), collapsing them. A masterpiece of musical dramaturgy that remains effective, provided one decides to shorten the concertistic longueurs of the pantomime wind music.<sup>100</sup>

The first performances of *Der Protagonist* in England (1986) and the United States (1993) reflected the growing curiosity about the early works of Kurt Weill. This need was also reflected in the reviews, which, rather than exploring the work and related problems of interpretation, tended to provide fairly general information about *Der Protagonist*. In connection with the London premiere that took place on 12 March 1986 as part of the Camden Festival, Winton Dean wrote in the *Musical Times*:

Kurt Weill's posthumous reputation has been so insecure that any encounter with his unfamiliar operas in the theatre is welcome. Abbey Opera's production of *Der Protagonist* and *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren* (Bloomsbury Theatre, 12 March) was strong enough to allow a fair assessment. Both were composed in the mid-1920s on librettos by Georg Kaiser, and were receiving their British premières in excellent translations by John Eaton and Lionel Salter. Each illustrates Weill's feeling for the theatre and mastery of the orchestra, especially the wind. The vocal writing on the other hand is often faceless; Weill's gifts were more for situation than character, for ironical commentary rather than emotional commitment. *The Protagonist*, a piece of expressionist *verismo* with a faint whiff of *Pagliacci*, is less successful in projecting the hero's obsession with his sister than in the two wind-accompanied pantomime scenes, one comic and one tragic, that bring the drama to its grim climax. Though rather too long, it is a work of incisive if erratic promise.<sup>101</sup>

Rodney Milnes, in his review in the *Financial Times*, was also concerned above all with providing information about a piece whose only complete performance known in England was a radio broadcast production:

Our experience of Weill in this country is restricted virtually—and shamefully so—to the works he wrote in collaboration with Brecht, which form a small and hardly representative fraction of his output. For this reason, if for no other—and there were others—a warm welcome to Abbey Opera's double bill on Wednesday of *The Czar Has His Photograph Taken* and *The Protagonist*, two pre-*Threepenny-Opera* one-acters being given their British stage premières as the opening operatic salvo in this year's Camden Festival. . . .

Even aged only 26, Weill was plainly a born musical dramatist. The Hindemithian atonal scurrying (authentically alienatory) and occasional leprous lyricism (Korngold cleaned up by about 75 per cent) are riveting to listen to on their own terms and also consistently serve the drama; the short piece grips—and disturbs—from start to finish, on this occasion despite an over-fussy, almost panic-stricken production by John Eaton—who also provided the good translation).

Updating the piece from Elizabethan England to white-faced expression-era was no help at all: action and setting failed to gel.<sup>102</sup>

Nicholas Kenyon, in his review in the *The Observer*, pursued a similar aim to that of Milnes, yet arrived at a different conclusion about the production:

*The Protagonist* (1926) was the crucial work in Kurt Weill's early career; a first opera whose success opened all doors to him. . . . It was remarkable enough for Weill to have had the collaboration of Georg Kaiser, the foremost expressionist German playwright; even more remarkable was the vigour, strength and surefootedness of his score for this weird and disturbing libretto.

In spite of a BBC recording which proved the musical merits of *The Protagonist* some eight years ago, it has taken until now for the plucky little Abbey Opera to mount the British stage première, in tandem with Weill's other one-act Kaiser setting, *The Czar has his photograph taken*, under the adventurous umbrella of the Camden Festival. Perhaps *The Protagonist*, with its extensive pantomime and dumb-show elements, needs to be seen in order to convince us of its originality: if so, John Eaton's production, which whisked the piece out of its original English Elizabethan setting (an exotic location for 1920s Germans, but fraught with problematical connotations for us) and turned it into a grimfaced contemporary parable, was just what the opera needed.

Eaton thrust this parable of an actor who cannot distinguish between life and reality (echoes of Sartre's *Kean*) at us by drawing his actors right into the auditorium and relegating the orchestra to the back of the stage. . . . The pantomime sections produce Weill's most starkly characterised music, full of the eerie wind scoring that later appears in the *Berlin Requiem* and elsewhere; the rest of the drama is filled with strongly-profiled, hard-edged music of a slightly anonymous idiom like lighter Busoni—Weill's teacher, whose *Arlecchino* provides some parallels with this piece.

That the mixture works, and provides such a precise mirror of the sickly expressionism of the libretto, makes one eager to see some more of Weill's non-Brecht German works in London—particularly the enigmatic *Die Bürgschaft*, written with Caspar Neher, and his final Kaiser collaboration *Der Silbersee*, which was staged with great success (albeit in an updated version) in New York a few years ago.<sup>103</sup>



The press reception of the first performance of *Der Protagonist* in Santa Fe in 1993, again a production by Jonathan Eaton, was similar to that of the London premiere of 1986; an example is the review written by Allan Kozinn for the *New York Times*:

The Kurt Weill revival of the last 15 years has done much to illuminate the musical journey this adaptable composer took from his early years as a Busoni disciple through his jazz-tinged works of the 1920's and 1930's to his final years as a Broadway composer. Yet a glance at his catalogue shows that many of his works, including some pivotal ones, remain virtually unknown. Weill's first opera, *The Protagonist*, was a critical and popular success at its premiere in Dresden, Germany, in 1926, yet the current Santa Fe Opera production is its first American staging. . . . *The Protagonist* is a sober, chilling score in Weill's serious, Busoni-influenced symphonic style, an insistent acidic language that intensifies the situations it describes.<sup>104</sup>

None of the productions from the period after the Second World War was able to focus sustained, enduring attention on *Der Protagonist*. A number of them were festival or studio performances, which did not really reach the general operagoing public. The greatest impact came from the spectacular production at the Bregenzer Festspiele in July 2004. The reasons for its success lay mainly in its fulfillment of the interpretive standards already posited by the *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten* critic Alfons Neukirchen in April 1958—namely, engagement of “the finest forces” to perform with “the utmost artistic power and sophistication.” Nicholas Brieger directed the Bregenz production; Gerhard Siegel sang the part of

the Protagonist; Catherine Naglestad portrayed the Sister; and the Wiener Symphoniker played under the direction of Yakov Kreizberg. Reviewing the production in *Der Tagesspiegel* (23 July 2004), Bernhard Doppler wrote:

Kurt Weill's *Der Protagonist* from 1926 makes the theater its theme: on the wide stage to open the Bregenzer Festspiele are four rows of upholstered cinema seats wedged together (stage design: Raimund Bauer). The Protagonist is a theatrical principal studying dramas of jealousy with his troupe: banality and seriousness, nonsense and pathos abruptly shift; reality and fiction likewise. Traveling with the troupe is a woman whom the Protagonist calls—incorrectly?—his sister. When he discovers her with her lover, however, he histrionically murders her. Weill's first opera is both gripping verismo à la Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* and expressionism à la Berg's *Wozzeck* that asks, as it were: What is it in us actors that commits murder? The protagonists in Bregenz are first and foremost the musicians: the Wiener Symphoniker under Yakov Kreizberg, especially the beguiling ensemble of eight wind players who, clothed as lemurs, mingle with the troupe of actors. This Bregenz discovery, in particular the effective pantomimes, makes it easy to appreciate the sensational success of the piece, which immediately put the twenty-six-year-old Weill on a par with the composer of *Le sacre du printemps*, Stravinsky. Reducing Georg Kaiser's text to amorous babblings, the partly atonal pantomimes nonetheless strike an appealingly elegiac tone. As far as witty amusement and its contemplation are concerned—integrating the popular and the cerebral—musical theater has not come much farther than this, ninety years later.<sup>105</sup>

(Translated from the German by Stephen Hinton)

## Notes

1. In the holograph fair copy of the play from 1920, however, Kaiser used the designation “Einakter” (“one-acter”); see the facsimile of the title page in Gunther Diehl, *Der junge Kurt Weill und seine Oper “Der Protagonist”: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zur Deutung des frühen kompositorischen Werkes*, Kieler Schriften zur Musikwissenschaft 41 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994), 2: 154.
2. Kim H. Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe*, Studies in Musicology 14 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 263.
3. Kurt Weill, “Die neue Oper,” in Kurt Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater: Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera (Mainz: Schott, 2000), 42–45.
4. “[...] dass Kaiser in Amerika sehr beliebt ist.” Kurt Weill, *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, ed. Nils Grosch (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 111.
5. “Georg Kaiser war ein leidenschaftlicher Musikliebhaber, und einer seiner besten Freunde war der Dirigent Fritz Stiedry. Ich glaube, es war Stiedry, der Weill mit Kaiser bekannt machte. Der Kaiser hatte eine merkwürdige Sammlung von Paddelbooten, Segelbooten, Ruderbooten, Skullbooten und so weiter. In einem dieser Boote habe ich Kurt Weill kennengelernt. Er kam nach Grünheide, um mit Kaiser über *Der Protagonist* zu diskutieren.” Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, ed. and trans., *Sprich leise wenn du Liebe sagst: Der Briefwechsel Kurt Weill – Lotte Lenya* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1998), 45. The English translation is from Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, ed. and trans., *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 35.
6. “Erst als ich spürte, daß meine Musik die Gespanntheit szenischer Vorgänge enthält, wandte ich mich der Bühne zu. Ich schrieb für eine russische Truppe im Theater am Kurfürstendamm die Pantomime *Zaubernacht*. An der geballten Konzentriertheit russischer Theaterkunst lernte ich zweierlei: daß die Bühne ihre eigene musikalische Form hat, deren Gesetzmäßigkeit organisch aus dem Ablauf der Handlung erwächst, und daß Bedeutsames szenisch nur mit den einfachsten, unauffälligsten Mitteln gesagt werden kann. Ein Orchester von neun Mann, eine Sängerin, zwei Tänzerinnen und eine Anzahl von Kindern – das war der Apparat dieses getanzten Traumes. Es hatte mir Freude gemacht, und ich war beglückt, als Georg Kaiser sich erbot, mir eine große, abendfüllende Balletthandlung zu schreiben. Wir gingen gemeinsam an die Arbeit. In zehn Wochen entstanden fast drei Viertel des Werkes. Die Partitur des Vorspiels und der beiden ersten Akte war vollendet. Da stockte es. Wir waren über den Stoff hinausgewachsen, die Schweigsamkeit dieser Figuren quälte uns, wir mußten die Fesseln dieser Pantomime sprengen: es mußte Oper werden. Georg Kaiser griff auf ein älteres Stück zurück, das früher schon in Gedanken an die Oper konzipiert war, den Einakter *Der Protagonist*. Hier hatten wir das, was wir suchten: ein zwangloses unabsichtliches Ineinandergreifen von Oper und Pantomime.” *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 46–47.
7. See Diehl, *Der junge Kurt Weill*, 1: 154–59.
8. “Pläne mache ich nicht, solange es mir an einem Ort gefällt, bleibe ich. Zeit nehme ich mir, solange das Geld reicht, da ich mit Kaiser ganz einig bin u. da ich hier erst merke, wie eine solche wunderschöne Unterbrechung auf lange Zeit hinaus fruchtbar wirken kann.” Kurt Weill, *Briefe an die Familie (1914–1950)*, ed. Lys Symonette and Elmar Juchem (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 285; letter to Albert and Emma Weill.
9. “Ich habe hier auf dem Markusplatz Kaiser getroffen! Die Welt ist ein Affentheater, aber ein schönes – südlich der Alpen.” *Briefe an die Familie*, 290–91; postcard to Albert and Emma Weill.
10. “Vorige Woche war ich [...] bei Kaisers, die mir liebe Freunde geworden sind u. vielleicht die einzigen sein werden, die mir einen Teil von dem ersetzen können, was ich an Busoni verliere.” *Briefe an die Familie*, 295; postcard to Ruth and Leo Sohn (no precise date).
11. On 29 May 1924 Weill commented to his family: “Kaiser still has not delivered the conclusion of the book [a reference, apparently, to the scenario of the envisioned *Pantomime*]. But I don't mind, as I have plenty of other plans.” (“Kaiser liefert noch immer nicht den Schluss des Buches. Aber ich mache mir nichts draus, weil ich unendlich viel Pläne habe.”) *Briefe an die Familie*, 292; letter to Albert and Emma, Nathan and Helene Weill.
12. Regarding the *Pantomime* project, see David Drew, *Kurt Weill: A Handbook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 154–56.
13. “Hier hatten wir das, was wir suchten: ein zwangloses unabsichtliches Ineinandergreifen von Oper und Pantomime. Das übersteigerte Schauspielertum des Protagonisten konnte nur in einer Opernfigur gestaltet, die großen Momente der Handlung nur durch Musik ausgedrückt werden: die Aussprache zwischen Bruder und Schwester, die heimlich-hastige Liebeszene, der Übergang ins Tänzerische und der plötzliche Umschwung vom Heiteren ins Tragische. Die beiden Pantomimen gaben Gelegenheit zu lyrischer Entfaltung. Um dem ganzen Geschehen noch einen musikalischen Rahmen zu geben, erteilte ich den acht Musikanten gewissermaßen die Rolle des Chores in der antiken Tragödie: sie sollen das Drama eröffnen, sollen es in passiver Haltung begleiten, bis sie selbst eingreifen, und sollen am Schluß die Vorstellung erwecken, als seien wir nun Gäste des Herzogs und erlebten das einzigartige Spiel des Protagonisten.” *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 47.
14. “Lieber Maestro, einliegend ein kleiner Einakter, der Musik erforderlich macht. Ich weiss nicht ob ich Sie für so geringes Werk mobilisieren darf. Aber den Ansporn



- giebt [*sic*] der immer lebendige Wunsch irgendetwas mit Ihnen gemeinsam zu machen. Irgendwie muss einmal ein Anfang sein – Aufgang des Gestirns Siedry-Kaiser. Dann kommt das Grosse aus seinem eigenen Himmel von selbst.” *Georg Kaiser: Briefe*, ed. Gesa M. Valk (Frankfurt/Main: Propyläen Verlag, 1980), 189.
15. “Siedry hat die Komposition des ‚Protagonisten‘ angefangen – er will den ganzen Einakter unter Musik setzen. Nach dem, was ich gestern davon bei ihm gehört habe, glaube ich an seine grossen Fähigkeiten. Ob er durchhält, ist eine andere Frage.” *Georg Kaiser in Sachen Georg Kaiser: Briefe 1916–1933*, ed. Gesa M. Valk (Leipzig and Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1989), 163.
  16. “Soeben bekomme ich den beiliegenden Brief. Ich habe mich sofort an Georg Kaiser gewandt, der mir seinerzeit fest zugesagt hatte, dass er den *Protagonist* als Schauspiel vorläufig zurückziehen würde. Vielleicht ist es Ihnen möglich, bei Kiepenheuer sofort Schritte zu unternehmen, um diese Aufführung zu verhindern. Ich werde unterdessen versuchen, was durch Kaiser selbst zu erreichen ist.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 39.
  17. A reproduction of the play appears in Diehl, *Der junge Kurt Weill*, 2: 142–50. Diehl’s annotations show that there are only a few differences between the text of the play and the text of the libretto.
  18. Regarding compositional technique, see Diehl, *Der junge Kurt Weill*, 1: 348–55.
  19. See the discussion of source **Dh** in the Source Valuation section of the Critical Report, p. 14.
  20. “Ich werde mich gleich an die Ausarbeitung des Klavierauszuges begeben, bitte Sie aber, wenn möglich, schon jetzt Schritte in der Frage der Uraufführung zu unternehmen, da jetzt wohl der geeignete Moment der Annahme für die nächste Saison ist.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 12.
  21. “Im Besitz Ihres Schreiben vom 2. April teile ich Ihnen mit, dass der Klavierauszug meiner Oper gute Fortschritte macht. Ich bin sehr froh, dass – wie Sie schreiben – die Opernhäuser ihre Dispositionen für die nächste Saison erst in den Monaten Mai-Juni treffen; denn bis Anfang Mai hoffe ich Ihnen bestimmt den fertigen Klavierauszug vorlegen zu können.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 12.
  22. “Anbei sende ich Ihnen das Schreiben Szenkars. Es bestehen also für August recht günstige Aussichten auf Annahme in Dresden oder Köln, u. ich halte es für besonders günstig, dass Szenkar eine persönliche Aussprache wünscht. Trotzdem wäre es mir angenehm, wenn Sie von sich aus jetzt auch an Clemens Krauss oder Br. Walter heranträten, u. vor allen Dingen erscheint es mir sehr wünschenswert, dass der Klavierauszug so bald wie möglich herauskommt. Allerdings brauche ich ihn von Mitte August ab für die Dresdener, bzw. Kölner Verhandlungen, aber dann könnte man wohl evtl. die Druckarbeit kurze Zeit unterbrechen.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 14.
  23. “Jetzt habe ich Busch per Eilbrief nach Zürich um eine klare, weniger diplomatische Mitteilung seiner Absichten gebeten. Jedenfalls haben die Verhandlungen, die tatsächlich so gut wie abgeschlossen waren, von neuem gezeigt, dass es für einen Komponisten fast unmöglich ist, allein, ohne irgend eine Hilfe eine Oper anzubringen, u. ich bin überzeugt, dass ein sofortiges geschicktes Eingreifen Ihrerseits noch jetzt die Situation klären kann. Die Direktoren nehmen das an, was ihnen am meisten angepriesen wird – u. das kann doch nur ein Dritter tun. Vielleicht ist es dann am günstigen, wenn eventuell neue Verhandlungen von Ihnen selbst angeknüpft werden. Für Sie kann es nicht schwierig sein, eine Oper mit so glänzendem Textbuch u. so einfacher Besetzung, dazu mit einer tragenden Tenorpartie, unterzubringen.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 14–15.
  24. “Beiliegender Brief von Busch erreichte mich heute. Die Situation in Dresden ist also doch recht günstig. Fragt sich, durch welche Verlockungen man einen Tenor überreden kann.  
Eine Stunde nach dem Brief kam ein dringendes Telegramm aus Köln von Szenkar. ‚Eilsendet Partitur u. Klavierauszug.‘ Das werde ich natürlich tun. (Der Klavierauszug ist in 2 Tagen beendet.) Köln ist m.E. nach Dresden die grösste Chance in Deutschland u., offen gestanden, in künstlerischer Beziehung könnte ich mir aus vielen Gründen keinen besseren Uraufführungsplatz wünschen. Ich werde also Szenkar schreiben, dass die letzte Entscheidung Ihnen vorbehalten bleibt, dann können wir im Fall seiner Annahme noch telegrafisch Busch um einen endgültigen Beschluss bitten. Dresden gegenüber bin ich in jedem Fall im Recht u. dort würde ich dann bei einer zweiten Oper (die ich plane) auf weitestes Entgegenkommen stossen. Dagegen könnte ich mir in Köln alle Aussichten zerstören.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 16.
  25. The reference is to the premiere of *Doktor Faust* by Ferruccio Busoni on 21 May 1925.
  26. “Wichtige Neuigkeiten! Busch hatte mich für gestern telephonisch nach Dresden gebeten. Er hat die Absicht, so schnell wie möglich (wahrscheinlich am 8. Oktober!!) den *Protagonisten* herauszubringen. [Einfügung am Ende des Briefes: ‚Der *Protagonist* soll allein gegeben werden!‘] Taucher, der beste Tenor für die Titelrolle, von dessen Entscheidung die Annahme abhing, hat im Prinzip bereits zugesagt. Dienstag zeigt ihm Busch den Klavierauszug; dann fällt die letzte Entscheidung. Aber Taucher fährt schon Ende Oktober nach Amerika, dann müsste ich mit der Uraufführung bis Mai warten. So aber wäre es (auch für Berlin) das erste Ereignis des Winters. Dass die Aufführung unter der Eile leiden wird, ist nicht zu befürchten, da ja Busch selbst dirigiert.  
Die wichtigste Frage ist nun: in welcher Zeit könnte das Material angefertigt werden u. welchen Weg schlagen Sie vor, um das zu schaffen? Busch sagt, man könnte es wie beim *Faust* machen: den Klavierauszug in Dresden in einigen Exemplaren vervielfältigen (möglichst auf mechanischem Wege) u. Seite für Seite studieren. Das Orchestermaterial ist mit einiger Nacharbeit in 10–14 Tagen herzustellen. Über all das wissen Sie ja am besten Bescheid. Jedenfalls werden Sie meine Meinung teilen, dass sich eine so günstige Gelegenheit so bald nicht wieder bietet, u. dass wir alles dranwenden müssen, um es zustande zu bringen.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 18.
  27. “Sonntag bekomme ich den Besuch meines Dresdner Regisseurs Gielen zum Zweck einer gründlichen Vorbesprechung. Bisher habe ich weder die Dekorationsentwürfe noch eine Probe gesehen, u. Ihr könnt Euch denken, wie gespannt ich bin. Aber Ihr wisst, wie zermürbend schon die Probe eines Orchesterwerks für den Komponisten ist. Wie soll das erst bei einem Bühnenwerk sein. Da hilft nur eine tüchtige Portion Frechheit u. Wurschtigkeit – u. beides hab ich mir ja im Laufe der Zeit zugelegt.” *Briefe an die Familie*, 303; letter to Albert and Emma Weill.
  28. In the Critical Report this source is identified by the siglum **Vm2**.
  29. “Gestern war ich nochmals in Dresden u. bin endgültig zur Einsicht gelangt, dass es für mich doch von grossem Vorteil ist, die Premiere des *Protagonist* zu verschieben. Das Werk war schon mehr als  $\frac{3}{4}$  einstudiert, u. man hätte den Termin vom 8. Oktober mit Leichtigkeit einhalten können, wenn nicht Taucher plötzlich in der Nervosität vor seiner Amerikareise den Kopf verloren hätte. Dazu kommt, dass Taucher, der tatsächlich der idealste Vertreter dieser Partie ist u. auf den ich nur sehr ungern verzichten würde, schon am 12. 11. nach Amerika abreist, dass die Oper also 2, höchstens 3mal gegeben worden wäre. Das wäre natürlich sehr nachteilig für den Erfolg. Taucher selbst, Busch u. der Regisseur Gielen sind fest überzeugt, dass mit Taucher in der Titelrolle der *Protagonist* ein Sensationserfolg werden kann. Man versichert mir immer wieder, wieviel Freude man an dem Werk hat u. wie ungern man es aufschiebt. Taucher hat fest versprochen, am 1. März mit der fertig studierten Rolle aus Amerika zurückzukommen, am 20. März soll dann die Premiere sein, worauf das Stück den ganzen April auf dem Spielplan bleibt u. vor allem als einziges Werk eines jungen Komponisten innerhalb der grossen Opernfestspiele herauskommen soll, die die Dresdener Staatsoper für Mai plant.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 21–22.  
Weill had already written his parents two days before, telling them that “the new year began with quite a bit of stress for me, because as of Saturday, Dresden now intends to postpone the premiere by several months, since Taucher has to go to America. Of course that is not altogether bad, because the performance will of course be much better than it would be now, with all the rush. The fact that the work has been accepted—the most valuable aspect of the whole affair—of course remains. And after all, we had never dreamed of seeing the opera so soon. A bit more patience then!” (“Das neue Jahr hat für mich recht aufgeregt angefangen, da in Dresden seit Samstag die Absicht besteht, die Uraufführung um einige Monate zu verschieben, weil Taucher nach Amerika muss. Das ist an sich natürlich gar nicht schlimm, weil die Aufführung dann natürlich viel besser wird als jetzt in der Hetze. Die Tatsache der Annahme, das Wertvollste an der ganzen Sache, bleibt natürlich bestehen. Und schliesslich hatten wir uns ja nie träumen lassen, so bald die Oper zu sehen. Also noch ein bisschen Geduld!”) *Briefe an die Familie*, 304.  
Three days later, on 27 September 1925, Weill once again wrote to his parents about the postponement of the premiere: “With Dresden, it is like this: the rehearsal period is coming to a close—wonderful singers and terrific decor. But before Taucher’s trip to America (November 12) we could have at most 2–3 performances, and that would make a very bad impression on other theaters. Taucher is so fabulous in this role and is confident of it becoming such a smash hit that I do not want to do it without him. Therefore I made the heroic decision to wait for his return and have revised the contract with Dresden accordingly.” (“Mit Dresden ist das so: die Einstudierung ist fast fertig – herrliche Sänger u. famose Dekorationen. Aber vor Tauchers Reise nach Amerika [12. 11.] könnten höchstens 2–3 Aufführungen sein, u. das würde auf andere Bühnen einen sehr schlechten Eindruck machen. Taucher ist in der Rolle so fabelhaft u. verspricht sich einen solchen Bombenerfolg, dass ich auf ihn nicht verzichten möchte. So habe ich also den heldenhaften Entschluss gefasst, auf seine Rückkehr zu warten, u. den Vertrag mit Dresden dahin abgeändert.”) *Briefe an die Familie*, 305.
  30. “Infolge dieses Zwischenfalls muss ich Sie aber ganz prinzipiell ersuchen, die Drucklegung meiner Kompositionen etwas zu beschleunigen. Wenn am Tage der Dresdener Annahme der Klavierauszug fertig gedruckt gewesen wäre, wozu Sie im Sommer reichlich Zeit hatten, so hätte auch Taucher es mit Leichtigkeit geschafft. Da ich bisher alle meine Aufführungen, selbst die Opernannahme, allein u. ohne Ihre Hilfe zustande gebracht habe, ist es für mich sehr ärgerlich, wenn aus diesen äusserlichen Erledigungen noch Schwierigkeiten entstehen. [...] Was den Klavierauszug der Oper anbetrifft, so kommt die Dresdner Abschrift für das öffentliche Erscheinen kaum in Frage. Sie ist ungenau, fehlerhaft u. flüchtig. Wenn ich bald im Besitz eines sauber gestochenen Klavierauszugs wäre, bestände die Aussicht, den *Protagonist* für April noch hier u. in einigen Provinzstädten anzubringen.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 22.
  31. Alban Berg’s opera was also published by Universal Edition.
  32. “Über den Klavierauszug zum *Protagonist* schweigen Sie vollständig. Ich halte es für dringend notwendig, dass spätestens 2 Monate vor der Premiere ein sauberer, exakter Klavierauszug im Handel ist; ich habe beim *Wozzeck* gesehen, wie viel das nützt. Ich ersuche Sie also dringend, bis zum Januar den *Protagonist* herauszubringen, da es

sonst unmöglich ist, neue Annahmen durchzusetzen.“ *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 25.

33. “Auch der Klavierauszug vom *Protagonist* müsste nun bald erscheinen; vielleicht können Sie die schlimmsten Fehler durch Überkleben beseitigen.“ *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 28.
34. On 24 August 1926 Weill wrote to Universal: “By return mail I am immediately sending you back the manuscript of the piano reduction of *Protagonist* with a note that I accept this rendition. I assume I will once more receive corrected proofs, as I now have only glanced through it.” (“Mit gleicher Post sende ich Ihnen das Manuskript des Klavierauszugs von *Protagonist* sofort zurück mit dem Bemerkten, daß ich mit dieser Ausführung einverstanden bin. Druckkorrekturen bekomme ich wohl noch einmal, da ich es jetzt nur durchgesehen habe.“) *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 36.
35. However, Weill did sign off on the libretto in a letter of 31 May 1926 to Universal Edition: “I have no more revisions to undertake on the libretto of *Protagonist*.” (“An dem Textbuch zu *Protagonist* habe ich keine Änderungen mehr vorzunehmen.“) *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 34. The separate publication of the libretto by Universal Edition can therefore be seen as having been specifically approved by Weill.
36. “Ich hoffe sehr, dass Sie für Erfurt wenigstens eine neue *Protagonist*-Partitur angefertigt haben, da ich gewisse Striche u. Reduktionen im Orchester aus Dresden keineswegs allgemein durchgeführt wissen möchte.“ *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 40.
37. “Sie selbst werden ja nicht leugnen können, dass es eine erhebliche Schädigung meiner Interessen bedeutet, wenn von dem *Protagonist* noch jetzt, nachdem er bereits dreimal angenommen ist, das Aufführungsmaterial nur einmal vorhanden ist. Bei dieser Gelegenheit darf ich auch noch darauf hinweisen, dass es wohl kaum tunlich sein dürfte, meine Originalpartitur an die Bühnen zu versenden, ohne dass eine Kopie davon genommen wird.“ *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 46.
38. In the Critical Report, these sources are identified as **Fm1** and **Fm2**, respectively.
39. “Die Festlegung der Retouchen im *Protagonist* habe ich gleich in der Partitur selbst vorgenommen. Alle Striche, Retouchen u. Einzeichnungen mit Blaustift stammen von mir u. gelten als endgültig. Ich glaube, Sie können die Partitur, so wie sie von mir jetzt eingerichtet ist, dem Kopisten übergeben.“ *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 95.
40. There is no other documentary evidence of Weill having worked on such a project; the paper must have received this information directly from Weill or a person close to him. Bax’s “play for music,” *Midsummer Madness*, was published in 1923; Cecil Armstrong Gibbs set it to music the following year, when it enjoyed a run of more than one hundred performances in London.
41. “Kurt Weill, der Komponist der einaktigen Oper ‘Der Protagonist’, die am Sonnabend dem 27. März an der Staatsoper zur Uraufführung gelangt, ist vor gerade 25 Jahren in Dessau geboren. 18jährig kam er zu Humperdinck auf die Berliner Hochschule für Musik; bereits nach einem Jahre aber gab er seine Studien wieder auf und betätigte sich als Korrepetitor in Dessau, später in Westfalen. Im Herbst 1920 nahm ihn Busoni in Berlin als Schüler auf, und aus der Schülerschaft entwickelte sich bald eine persönliche Freundschaft. Der junge Weill wurde der Famulus des Meisters. In Berlin erlebte er 1922 die erste Aufführung eines größeren Werkes, der Pantomime ‘Zaubernacht’. Danach hat er sich vor allem mit folgenden Werken bekannt gemacht: ‘Fantasie, Passacaglia und Hymnus’ für Orchester; Streichquartett (Frankfurter Musikfest 1923); Chöre[,] ‘Frauentanz’ (Salzburger Musikfest 1924); Rilke-Lieder mit Orchesterbegleitung; Konzert für Violine mit Blas-Orchester. Seine erste Oper ‘Der Protagonist’ vollendete Kurt Weill im Frühjahr 1925. Seitdem schuf er einen zweiten Einakter ‘Royal Palace’ (Text von Iwan Goll). Zurzeit arbeitet er an einem heiteren Sommernachtsspiel nach dem Englischen von Clifford Bax. Kurt Weill ist in Dresden eingetroffen und nimmt an den letzten Bühnenproben zur Uraufführung seiner Oper teil.” Newspaper clipping in **WLRC**, Series 50A ([mis-] identified as “Birnach Anzeiger”; probably *Pirnaer Anzeiger*). All press reviews are quoted from the collection at **WLRC**.
42. It may seem suprising that a woman was cast in the role of *Dritter Schauspieler*, especially as, during the pantomimes, this results in a woman playing a man playing a woman. Apparently Weill had no objections to this casting; follow-up productions cast a woman in the role as well.
43. The cast list as well as photos of the stage and the two lead characters are reproduced in David Farneth, with Elmar Juchem and Dave Stein, *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2000), 50.
44. “Josef Gielen hat das Stück in Szene gesetzt. Er ist Schauspiel-Inszenator. Wie bei vielen dieses Amtes und Berufes scheint auch bei ihm tiefste Lust und Neigung auf die Opernbühne gerichtet zu sein. Gielen hat den Schauplatz – einen altenglischen Landgasthof – in der Art Tairoffs mit Gestänge und Gerüsten ausstaffiert, an denen im überkurzen Ablauf des Stückes Kasperle-Theaterdekorationen aufgehängt werden, innerhalb deren sich die Probier-Szenen abspielen. Auch Adolf Mahnke und Direktor Hasait haben an der Aufstellung dieses Bühnenbildes Anteil. Mit Maler-äugen gesehen, hat Professor Fanto wirkungsvolle Trachten entworfen.“ *Dresdner Volkszeitung*; **WLRC**, Series 50A.
45. “Das Publikum nahm diese ‘Zukunftsmusik’ zunächst willig hin, wurde aber einige-male unruhig und am Schlusse wogte der Kampf zwischen den zahlreichen und gut im Hause verteilten Anhängern dieser modernsten Musik und den Gegnern gewaltig hin und her. Der Hauptdarsteller Kurt Taucher wurde für seine wirklich große Leistung mit Beifall überschüttet, als sich aber auch der Komponist zeigte, ertönte Zischen und Pfeifen. Es war ein Kampf der Parteien, wie man ihn in der Dresdner Oper kaum erlebt hat.“ *Zwickauer Zeitung*; **WLRC**, Series 50A.
46. “Im Zeichen eines starken Premierenerfolges ging dieses Werk radikal fortschrittlicher Gesinnung in Szene. Der ‘Eine Akt Oper’, wie Georg Kaiser die Dichtung benennt, zu der Kurt Weill als Fünfundzwanzigjähriger die Musik schrieb, spielt fünfundfünfzig Minuten; und als sich der Vorhang senkte, setzte ein Beifall ein, der tatsächlich zwanzig Minuten währte. Selbstverständlich nicht unwidersprochen, teilweise auch bewußt zu einem Erfolg für den Hauptdarsteller Kurt Taucher ungedeutet [recte: umgedeutet], aber doch so stark und mehrheitsbetont, daß der junge Komponist mit dem Dirigenten Fritz Busch und den Sängern ungezähltemale erscheinen mußte.“ *Fränkischer Kurier*; **WLRC**, Series 50A.
47. “Bei der Uraufführung ‘Der Protagonist’ wurde in der Dresdener Staatsoper ein Kampf zwischen den Anhängern der atonalen und tonalen Musik ausgefochten, der erhitzte Formen annahm. Johlen, Zischen und Pfeifen wurde durch unglaubliche Beifallsstürme übertönt. Immer wieder rief man den anwesenden Komponisten Kurt Weill, Generalmusikdirektor Fritz Busch und die Hauptdarsteller. Zahlreiche auswärtige Vertreter der Presse, Intendanten, Theaterdirektoren, Verleger, Kapellmeister wohnten der Aufführung bei. Wurden doch Wunderdinge ein Jahr lang von dem Erstlingswerke des Famulus und Schülers aus Busonis Meisterklasse berichtet.“ *Meißner Tageblatt*; **WLRC**, Series 50A.
48. “Die Dresdener Staatsoper versichert mir, dass ein solcher Erfolg eines Erstlingswerkes ganz einzigartig ist. Die 2. Aufführung war glänzend besucht u. brachte wieder 20 Hervorrufe. Bei der 3. Aufführung (14. IV.) werde ich anwesend sein.“ *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 30.
49. “Es ist doch recht aufregend, über Nacht eine Weltberühmtheit zu werden. Auch die paar schlechten Kritiken kommen mir sehr gelegen, weil bei einer einstimmig günstigen Presse die Ansprüche an mich ins Masslose steigen würden. Das Telefon bei mir kommt nicht zur Ruhe. Und immer die gleiche ehrliche Begeisterung. Wer hätte das gedacht!” *Briefe an die Familie*, 315; postcard to Albert and Emma Weill.
50. “Aus Dresden zurückgekehrt, drängt es mich, Ihnen unmittelbar nochmals zu danken: Vor allem Ihnen selbst für den Mut und die Überzeugungskraft, mit der Sie sich für mein Werk einsetzten, wie auch für die sorgfältige Vorbereitungsarbeit, die einzig eine so unvergleichliche Aufführung ermöglichen konnte. Dann möchte ich Sie bitten, allen, die zum Gelingen des Ganzen beigetragen haben, den Ausdruck meiner großen Dankbarkeit zu übermitteln: dem prachtvollen Kurt Taucher für seine überwältigende Leistung; Elisa Stünzner für ihre rührend-zarte Ausdruckskraft; Herrn Josef Gielen samt seinen Helfern Mahnke, Fanto und Hasait für die hin-reißende Regietat; allen Sängern, die ich nicht einzeln nennen kann, vor allem aber auch der wundervollen Staatskapelle, insbesondere den acht Musikern des Bläseroktetts, für ihre aufopfernde Arbeit. Ich bin mir bewußt, daß Ihrer energischen Initiative und der unüberbietbaren Leistungsfähigkeit Ihres Instituts der große Erfolg zu danken ist, den mein Werk errungen hat.“ *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 1 April 1926; *Dresdner Nachrichten*, 1 April 1926; **WLRC**, Series 50A.
51. “Ein ausgezeichnetes Textbuch. Stark an dichterischen, wertvollen Werten. Wie geschaffen für eine Oper. Es ist das alte Lied der Eifersucht. Eine Bajazzo-Variante. Nur daß der harte Stahl die Schwester tödlich trifft. Auch hier eine reisende Schauspielertruppe, Spiel einer Komödie, die in blutige Tragödie umschlägt. [...] Es fehlt [in der Musik Weills] der göttliche, fortreisende Funke. Der lodernde Brand, der alles zum Glühen bringt. Daran, daß man derartige Klänge mit anderen Ohren hören muß, hat man sich schon gewöhnt. Ich habe in der jüngsten Musik weit Schlimmeres gehört. Aber eins hat der Komponist nicht beseitigen können. Daß man sich trotz Kürze der Oper und aufpeitschender, nebenbei auch drolligen Handlung anfängt zu langweilen. Und diese Schuld trägt nur der Komponist. Erst zum Ende hin findet Weill Gewalt des Ausdrucks. Und bei den Schlußworten des Protagonisten kann er sich auch, trotz alles Widerwillens gegen die Melodie, dieser nicht entziehen.“ *Sächsische Staatszeitung*; **WLRC**, Series 50A.
52. “Georg Kaisers Stück ist das Produkt kühlen Raisonnements, gemacht, aber nicht geschaffen. Der Kern ist eine Eifersuchtstragödie. Der Bruder, der Held des Stückes, der gefeierte Mime, liebt die Schwester und tötet sie, als sie ihm bekennt, daß sie einen andern liebt. Dieser Tatbestand wird nur dialektisch etwas verschleiert durch die Annahme, sie verkörpere ihm Wahrheit und Reinheit. Das Drum und Dran ist ‘Theater’ mit zum Teil schon etwas verbrauchten Requisiten, wie es u. a. das Theater auf dem Theater: der geniale Schauspieler, der während des Spiels wahnsinnig wird, sind. Dazu die Ariadne-Reminiszenz von der Auswechslung einer [sic] heitern durch ein tragisches Spiel auf Kommando eines Herzogs, der in England zu Shakespeares Zeiten seinen Gästen eine groteske Pantomime vorführen lassen will. Das Ganze also ein Bühnenstück, das ganz vom literarisch-artistischen Standpunkt aus verfaßt ist, ohne jede Rücksicht darauf, daß die Musik doch einmal keine Gehirnkunst ist. Und daß nun der aus Busonis Schule stammende Kurt Weill sich ausgerechnet diese Blüte, ehrlich gesagt, perverser Mentalität zur Vertonung aussuchte, zeigt schon, daß auch er mehr Verstandes- als Gefühlsmusiker ist. Hier konnte er gar nicht anders als sich mit einer dienenden Rolle, der des Untermalers des forciert grotesken Bühnengeschehens, begnügen. Und da läßt sich zum wenigsten nicht bestreiten, daß er sich insofern mit Ehren aus der Sache zieht, als er den Ton der grellen Farbigkeit ausgezeichnet trifft. Die aufdringlich gellenden Klänge eines Bühnenorchesters, das im musikalischen Bild eine Art Concertino darstellt, erhöhen die Wirkung der auf

einer fesselfreien Harmonik ruhenden Kakophonien, die recht gut sich den szenischen Vorgängen anpassen. Und, daß auch zu dieser Art Musik absolutes Können gehört, das will ich durchaus nicht in Abrede stellen." *Chemnitzer Zeitung*; WLRC, Series 50A.

53. "Dieses stark dramatische, in einigen kurzen Episoden aber auch von Lyrik durchsetzte Buch ruft nach Erfüllung in Musik. Des jungen Kurt Weill Partitur gibt diese Erfüllung. Aus einem sparsam behandelten Orchester von seltsamer Farbigkeit der Streicher und Bläser steigt eine Melodie auf, die den Solisten reiche Möglichkeiten zu kantabler Entfaltung bietet. Von zart-schwebendem, lyrischem Ausdruck sind die kurzen Zwiegesänge, voller Plastik und Humor die Pantomimenmusik mit dem höchst originellen Quartett. Und wie überzeugend und schön wandelt sich auch musikalisch das Stegreifspiel zum Drama, wie tief und erschütternd deutet hier die Musik das Wesen des innerlich zerrissenen Mimen, der mit dem Mord an der Schwester auch sich selbst zerstört! Diese Partitur, aus einer starken inneren Anschauung heraus organisch geworden, zeigt Kurt Weill als einen von Musik erfüllten Menschen, der die Gesetze Bühnensinnlich-faßbaren und musikalisch-absoluten Gestaltens in neuer und eigenartiger Weise miteinander vereinigt." *Deutsche Tageszeitung*; WLRC, Series 50A.
54. "Nun die Musik Weills. In der Dichtung und in der bildenden Kunst hat man den sogenannten Expressionismus hinter sich. Im Musikalischen steckt man noch mitten drin. Dieser Vergleich ist wohl berechtigt; wenn man sich sagt, daß die Atonalität in der Musik dem Gegenstandslosen in der Malerei und dem sprachlich Unlogischen in der Dichtung entspricht. Die sozusagen amorphe Musik hat gewiß Möglichkeiten, nicht der Entwicklung, aber gleichsam abenteuerlicher Expeditionen in die Randgebiete. Nur entschiedenste Kühnheit vermag sie übers Peinliche des bloßen Geräusches hinauszuhoben. Diese letzte Kühnheit, die wohl Alban Berg immerhin hatte, fehlt Kurt Weill. So war das Ergebnis am Sonnabend zu drei Vierteln nervös machende Langeweile. Atonale Musik muß überrumpeln, oder, um es vulgär zu sagen, man merkt den Schwindel und denkt etwa, wenn jetzt da oben einer 'Alle Vögel sind schon da' singen würde, es paßte ganz genau so und fiel nicht auf. Aber, wie gesagt, wir stecken noch mitten drin. Vor fünf bis zehn Jahren hätte man Ähnliches über August Stramm oder Kandinsky auch nicht sagen dürfen, ohne Gefahr zu laufen, als finsterner Reaktionär verachtet zu werden." *Zittauer Morgen*; WLRC, Series 50A.
55. "Die Komposition Kurt Weills hat mehrere interessante Eigentümlichkeiten. Die beiden konträren Stilarten: hier drastische Komik, da düstere Tragik, veranlassen Weill, sich zweier Orchester zu bedienen, dem üblichen vor und einem zweiten auf der Bühne. Das letztere, ein Bläseroktett, begleitet die mehr äußerlichen Vorgänge der Schauspielerprobe, also die beiden Pantomimen. Das Hauptorchester dient zur Stützung des Gesanges. Meistens musizieren beide getrennt. Auffallend ist die häufige Verwendung des Rezitativs, das der moderne gedankliche Dialog Kaisers fordert. Weill ist eine Begabung unter den jüngsten Komponisten, auf die man sich achten müssen. Die Art und Weise, wie er die von Kaiser fast nur skizzenhaft angedeuteten seelischen Zusammenhänge zwischen Protagonist und Schwester psychologisch erweitert und bloßlegt, beweist angeborenes musikalisches Temperament. Wie die Steigerungen und Übergänge der in diesem schwierig zu vertonenden Werke sich hart aneinander stoßenden verschiedenen Stimmungen angelegt sind, das verrät einen erstaunlich sicheren Bühneninstinkt. Der Höhepunkt mit dem Mord des Protagonisten an der Schwester ist eine große Leistung. Das Orchester gewinnt hier einen bannenden und unabwendbar zur Katastrophe vorschreitenden Ausdruck, der unmittelbar packt. Die lange Pause nach der Tat ist besonders eindrucksvoll. Gesangstechnisch fordert Weill Außerordentliches bei den Hauptpartien des Protagonisten und der Schwester. Hier fließen förmliche Ströme von Klang, die für Weills melodische Erfindungsgabe zeugen. Kurt Weill ist eine Hoffnung, erst 26 jährig (geboren in Dessau), hat er mit seiner ersten Oper berechtigtes Aufsehen erregt. [...] Die Staatsoper tat gut daran, die jüngste deutsche Musik durch einen ihrer besten Vertreter zu Worte (zu Klänge) kommen zu lassen." *Breslauer Zeitung*; WLRC, Series 50A.
56. "Das Ineinandergreifen von Oper und Pantomime, das übersteigerte Schauspieler-tum des Protagonisten, die lyrische Aussprache zwischen Bruder und Schwester, die knappe Liebesszene geben der Handlung glückliche, bühnenmäßige Momente, der Musik Gelegenheit, sich dramatisch zu entfalten, zu kulminieren, abubrechen, kurzum, die ganze Skala vom Heiteren zum Tragischen zu durchlaufen. Spannung vom ersten bis zum letzten Ton. Acht Musikanten ist gewissermaßen die Rolle des antiken Chors zugeordnet: sie eröffnen das Stück, als handle es sich tatsächlich um eine Vorstellung für den Herzog, sie greifen dann als Begleiter der Pantomime auf der Bühne selbst ein und entlassen uns schließlich wieder mit Fanfaren. Diesem Bläseroktett steht unten im Orchester eine Besetzung mit Streichern, Schlagzeug, je zwei Oboen und Baßklarinetten, je drei Hörnern und Posaunen gegenüber. Weill war Schüler von Busoni und ist zweifellos eines der stärksten und eigenartigsten Talente der Gegenwart. Der Protagonist bedeutet für ihn den 'großen Wurf'. Seine Tonsprache ist so knapp, sein Melos so expansiv, die Instrumentierung so originell, daß kein Gedanke an irgendwelche Vorbilder wach wird. Und vor allem: diese Musik hat Tempo, ein unheimliches, sich an der Handlung entzündendes Tempo –, das Tempo eben, das die Bühne verlangt. Der Erfolg des Werkes übertraf alle Erwartungen. Neben den zahlreichen musikalischen Gästen, der Presse und den Theaterfachleuten wurde auch das sonst dem Neuen gegenüber zurückhaltende Opernpublikum fortgerissen: der junge Komponist wurde mit den Darstellern wohl vierzigmal gerufen." *Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung*; WLRC, Series 50A.
57. "Kurt Weill bringt für die Vertonung dieses weniger zwiespältigen als doppelstirnigen Buches ein eminentes stilistisches Können mit. Die Partitur trägt unverkennbar

Nummerncharakter, ihre Form erwächst aber organisch aus der Handlung, die von einer Nummerneinteilung wenig weiß; und dennoch ist die Synthese vollkommen. Das Pantomimische herrscht vor, jedoch die drei Figuren, Protagonist, Schwester und Liebhaber, singen weitausgespinnene Kantilenen, die ein wundervoll durchsichtiges Orchester begleitet, von dem ein Teil für sich auf der Bühne musiziert, was klanglich zu ganz neuen Wirkungen führt. Zwei weitere Figuren, Wirt und Herzogs Hausmeister, bleiben nebst den anderen im Opernschema haften. Anklänge an den Zeitstil (Strawinsky und Alban Berg, um nur die zwei zu nennen) sind natürlich fühlbar, ohne die ausgesprochene Individualität Kurt Weills auch nur im geringsten in Frage zu stellen. Die frei sich entwickelnde naturhafte Polyphonie seiner Satzweise läßt eine Melodik von seltsam herber Innigkeit aufblühen; im übrigen besitzt diese Musik starke dramatische Kraft und, was besonders dem Abschluß zu seiner Wirkung verhalf, ein sicheres formales Empfinden. Die Aufführung unter Fritz Busch, mit Josef Gielen vom Schauspielhaus als Regisseur, ließ, was Musikalisches und Gesangliches anlangt, keinen Wunsch offen, versagte aber leider im Tänzerischen ganz. Man denkt sich dafür eine Russentruppe, deren Mitglieder ideale Sänger sein müßten." *Fränkischer Kurier*; WLRC, Series 50A.

58. "Diese einaktige Oper, deren erfolgreiche Uraufführung im sächsischen Staatstheater schon erwähnt wurde, ist das Werk eines Fünfundzwanzigjährigen. Und als solche eine unzweifelhafte Talentprobe und somit eine Verheißung. Soweit es für eine Musik wie diese, die völlig auf das System der traditionellen Harmonik verzichtet, noch eine weitere Entwicklung geben kann. Busonis 'Faust', von Weill als dem bevorzugten Schüler des Meisters gekannt und verehrt, ist der unmittelbare Vorgänger zu der neuen Oper. Und diese hat vor jenem, dessen Phantastik allzuoft von dem Rationalismus des Theaterkritikers überschattet wurde, den Vorzug einer ungemein starken dramatischen Verdichtung und Gipfelung voraus. Denn Georg Kaiser hat mit seinem 'Akt' wiederum bewiesen, daß er die Notwendigkeiten der Bühne genau kennt und daß bei aller bekannten Routine seine Geschöpfe in Wallung, Aufschrei, Entsetzen dem Theater in ihnen und um sie Genüge tun, wie kaum irgendwelche anderen Kinder der Gegenwartsbühne. [...] Was Kaiser neu gibt, ist so kühn wie geistvoll: nicht die Geliebte, sondern die Schwester ist das Opfer, dem Bruder durch die sublimsten erotischen Schwingungen verbunden. Und vor allem dies: der Sinn der pantomimischen Posse, Eifersucht zu kurieren, schlägt auf den Wunsch des hohen Auftraggebers ins Tragische umgebogen, in entsetzlicher Wucht auf den Helden zurück. Jetzt wogen blutrote Nebel um ihn, jetzt heulen alle Furien seiner Herzenshölle, jetzt bricht in Wahrheit der schwankende Bau seines künstlerischen Seins zusammen. Zwei Leichen zeigt die Szene: tragischer als der entseelte Körper des jungen Weibes der entgottete Künstler, der die Welt für sich, durch sich erobert. Es ist also die Tragödie des Genies. Hat der Komponist dieser glänzend geformten Idee die musikalische Erfüllung bieten können? Weills Musik ist am stärksten und wirklich ergreifend, wo die Szene sich auf die tragische Wendung einstellt. Das Doppelorchester mit je zwei Flöten, Fagotten, Klarinetten und Trompeten auf der Bühne (es sind die Musikanten des Herzogs, für den die Pantomime gespielt wird) zeigt hier tonmalerisch die Hand des Könners. Ebenso fesselnd ist ein rhythmisch scharf ausgeprägtes Presto der Holzbläser bei der Burleske. Wie überhaupt die Fähigkeit, durch die rein sinnlichen Klangeffekte zu charakterisieren, überall zutage tritt. Wesentlich unpersönlicher gibt sich das Lyrische, und auch in den dramatischen Höhepunkten zeigt sich weniger Kraft als Brutalität. Nach melodischen Einfällen darf man überhaupt nicht fragen. Den Sängern wird das Äußerste zugemutet; nur ein völliges Aufgehen in der inneren dramatischen wie musikalischen Architektur der Rolle kann hier Gelingen schaffen." *Frankfurter Zeitung*; WLRC, Series 50A.
59. Marschall is paraphrasing Weill's essay "Bekenntnis zur Oper": "so kann uns die Oper wieder das kostbare Gefäß sein, um Ströme inneren Gesanges aufzunehmen." Weill's essay appeared in the *Blätter der Staatsoper Dresden* Spielzeit 1925/26, no. 13 (1 April 1926), 97–99; reprinted in: *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 45–47.
60. "Wie das Schauspielertum des Protagonisten 'übersteigert' ist, so ist in diesem problematischen Werke übersteigert die Wortdichtung und die Tondichtung. Gar zu absichtsvoll ist darauf hingearbeitet, einmal etwas ganz anderes zu bringen, mit etwas ganz anderem zu überraschen. Ob Weill eine spezifisch musikalische Begabung hat, ob er in der Erfindung stark und eigenartig ist, läßt sich nach dieser kleinen Oper mit Sicherheit nicht feststellen. Erfinderisch ist er jedenfalls, und zwar im Ersinnen von Mißklängen und von musikalischen Geräuschen, mit denen er die Bizarrerien auf der Bühne begleitet. Es liegt ihm ganz ungemein viel am Effekt, und er errechnet den dramatischen Effekt hier und da so sicher, so raffiniert, daß wir geneigt sind, anzunehmen, er würde noch einmal eine erfolgreiche Oper schreiben, wofern ihm sein Geschick nur ein gutes Buch, ein wirklich opernhafte gutes Buch in die Hand spielt. Nach der Katastrophe gibt es eine lange Pause des vollkommenen Schweigens. Das wirkt stark; die Wirkung wird nicht durch die positiven, sondern durch die negativen Mittel des Komponisten herbeigeführt. Nun aber spinnt Weill den musikalischen Faden wieder an; und wie er anspinnt und fortspinnt und dem Protagonisten das letzte Wort erteilt und seinen Opernversuch zum Abschluß bringt, das darf man vielleicht als begabt empfinden und als einen Hoffnungsschimmer nehmen für weitere Arbeit und Betätigung auf dem immerhin heißen Boden der Oper. Ist Weill ein Komponist, der mehr kann als Geräusch- und Dekorationsmusik schreiben, so wird ihm der große Wurf ja noch einmal gelingen. Einstweilen ist ihm die Oper noch nicht das kostbare Gefäß, bereit, die Ströme seines inneren Gesanges aufzunehmen. Ich bediene mich seiner Worte; er liebt es nämlich, sich poetisch auszudrücken. Vielleicht aber auch gaukelt ihm seine Phantasie nur Ströme seines inneren Gesanges vor. Der Hörer, der mit rhythmischen und harmonischen Experimenten, mit scharfer Deklamation, mit Orchestereffekten abgespeist wird, kann mit dem guten Willen nicht vorlieb nehmen. Er vermißt, trivial ausgedrückt, die Melodie, in der allein sich Seelisches offenbart." *Vossische Zeitung*; WLRC, Series 50A.

61. "Weills Musik taucht Gesang und Pantomime, welche wechselnd das Geschehen erfüllen, mit bewundernswerter Schlagkraft in eine Welt von Klang und Rhythmus, die ungeachtet ihrer ganz logischen Herkunft aus dem Stile von Busonis ‚Harlechino‘ [sic] etwa über Stravinsky zu einer ganz eigenen Note gelangt. Das burleske Spiel der ersten Pantomime, von einem besonderen Bühnenorchester aus acht Bläsern unter- und übermalt, läßt Weills skurrilen Humor spielen, aber erst wenn er mit dem Dichter in die Zone des Tragischen gerät, löst sich in ihm ganz die Inspiration zu allerstärkster dramatischer Wucht mit den Mitteln schärfster Harmonik und einer Instrumentation, die über Schönberg oder Bergs ‚Wozzeck‘ hinaus letzte Klarheit und schon stilbildende Wahrheit des Ausdrucks erreicht." *Berliner Morgenpost*; WLRC, Series 50A.
62. "Die Stimme behandelt Weill, der gar nicht naturalistisch, sondern stilisierend eingestellt ist, als ein vokales Instrument, nicht deklamatorisch, auch nicht instrumental, sondern eben als Stimme an sich. Er liebt darum eine neue Melodie mehr, als Rücksicht auf das Wort. Es ist ein wichtiger Weg ins moderne Gesangliche hinein, Zukunft der Oper. Das Wort wird an entscheidenden Stellen ganz fallen gelassen. Bei Interjektionen feierlicher, tragischer, spottender Gefühle, die im Ton leben, bei lyrischen Steigerungen, die sich nur noch in der Koloratur aussingen, in dieser neuen Koloratur, die die Worte – Heimlichkeiten, Lüge, Liebe – diese andeutend spielenden Worte auf die singenden Lippen nimmt und in der absoluten Tonsprache des Duetts zergehen läßt, wie späten Schnee auf warmer Erde. Wie oft habe ich diese Perspektive der Oper empfohlen. Nun erlebe ich sie. Der musikalische Stil von Weill ist etwa zwischen der psychologischen Intellektualität von Busoni und der fast gezeichneten Bläsergraphik von Strawinsky. Aber er ist durchaus eigen, selbständig, von Niemandem abhängig. Er liebt den Bläserklang, der heute überall auf den Streicherton der Romantik reagiert. Jede Romantik, jede Ekstase ist vorüber, landschaftliche und seelische Schatten liegen leicht gebreitet, aber der Ausdruck der Empfindung ist irgendwie gebunden in der Sprache der Musik, die ihre großen und starken Nuancen, ihre schweigenden Niederungen aus eigenem Wesen bildet. Es ist Klasse der antiromantischen trotz aller Charakteristik der Typen im Grunde absoluten und nur sich selbst verantwortlichen Musik, die heut über die Welt streicht. Ihre Sprache ist von letzter moderner Freiheit, ohne Grimasse und Bosheit. Sie reift sich im Laufe des Stücks immer mehr aus. Der Aufbau ist grandios. Der erste Durchbruch erfolgt bei der Ahnung des Schauspielers vom kommenden Wahnsinn. Eine ungeheure Steigerung, auf die das große Sordinato der Liebesszene der Schwester gesetzt ist. Ein Duett, das in reiner Musik zerfließt. Die dummen, hochmütigen Akkorde des Hausmeisters, der die Buffopantomime befiehlt. Der tänzerische Übergang. Das köstliche parodistische Oktett der oberen Bläser als Illustration der Buffoneske. Die drolligen Vokalisationen der sprachlosen Spieler, Stimmenquartett zum Bläserakkord. Die erste Flut der schwesterlichen Beichte. Die tragische Pantomime, dunkle Farben, allmählich ein Kontinuo in Holzschlägelpauken, elementar sich verstärken, h-cis, Riesenschaukel der Tragödie, ausbrechende Schreie der dissonanten Instrumente, reines D-dur der oberen Trompeten als Richter, übrig bleibendes G-moll der unteren Posaunen als Nachklang. [...] War es rein geistiger Genuß? War es verstandesmäßige Entdeckung neuer Opernwelten? Vielleicht war es etwas davon, aber nur im Bewußtsein des Kritikers, der die Fäden der Entwicklung dieses unüberwindlichen Genres in der Hand hält und prüft. Für den nicht philosophischen Theaterbesucher war es unmittelbare Wirkung, Bühnenerlebnis in neuer Form, Tatsache einer musikalischen Begabung, die nicht nur aus Wissen in die Zukunft blickt, sondern aus Können sie sich erobern wird, aus der zwingenden Kraft der Erfindung und Phantasie. Das ist der Schritt des Schülers über den Meister Busoni hinaus." WLRC, Series 50A. Facsimile reprinted in *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents*, 51.
63. Emil Hertzka (1869–1932) was the director of Universal Edition.
64. Weill's reference is to a possible production of *Protagonist* at one of the Berlin opera houses.
65. "Täglich kommen noch Kritiken aus Provinzblättern. Frankfurter Zeitung, die ja besonders wichtig ist, war ausgezeichnet, ebenso Breslau, Mannheim, Wien u.s.w. Ich habe bis jetzt schon mehr als 20 restlos anerkennende Kritiken, darunter ungefähr 10 in sensationeller Aufmachung. Es war eben tatsächlich ‚der‘ grosse Opern-erfolg der Saison. Über die Auswirkung weiss ich noch nichts. [...] Mit Hertzka wird es über kurz oder lang zu einem Krach kommen, da er natürlich meinen Vertrag ändern muss. Vorläufig sucht er mir gegenüber krampfhaft die Tatsache zu ignorieren, dass ich über Nacht einer der erfolgreichsten Opernkomponisten geworden bin. Das sind recht unliebsame Geschichten. – Dass Ihr so gefeiert worden seid, hat uns riesig gefreut. Bei mir war davon nicht so viel zu merken, weil mein Bekanntenkreis sich ja meistens aus ‚Kollegen‘ zusammensetzt, deren Begeisterung sich begreiflicherweise nicht so laut äussert. Jetzt wird mit allen erdenklichen Mitteln gegen eine hiesige Annahme intrigiert, u. da mich mein Erfolg noch mehr isoliert hat, wird die Berliner Aufführung kaum zustande kommen. Aber das kann mir jetzt wurscht sein." *Briefe an die Familie*, 316; letter to Albert and Emma Weill.
66. The Hanover production culminated in a scandal that stirred up waves in the provincial press. Catholic and Protestant organizations as well as conservative women's groups protested the indecent pantomimes, especially the character of a lecherous monk. The entire work was soon labeled "un-German." For a detailed account, see Ines Katzenhusen, "Kurt Weill in der Provinz: Der Skandal um die Erstaufführung der Oper *Der Protagonist* in Hannover (Spätwinter 1929)," in: *Kurt Weill-Symposium: Das musikdramatische Werk: Zum 100. Geburtstag und 50. Todestag*, ed. Manfred Angerer et al., Beiträge der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Musik 11 (Vienna: Doblinger, 2004), 43–61.
67. "[Wir] würden es sehr begrüßen, wenn [...] die Schwierigkeit, ein Werk zum *Protagonist* zu finden, behoben wäre." *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 52.
68. See *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 26.
69. "Ich machte dann meine Gründe für eine gleichzeitige Annahme des *Protagonist* geltend. Kleiber ist keineswegs abgeneigt; er will sich jetzt eingehender mit dem Werk befassen, und falls noch eine Aufführung stattfindet, bestimmt nach Dresden fahren. Aber – wie vorauszusehen war – sträubt er sich vorläufig noch ein bisschen, ein Werk herauszubringen, das in Dresden schon Erfolg hatte. Und vor allen Dingen hat er durch eine unglückselige Zeitungsnotiz von meinem neuen Werk gehört u. denkt nun ernstlich an eine Kombination *Royal Palace* mit *Na und?* (das ungefähr zwei Stunden dauert). Ich versuchte ihm diesen Plan mit allen Mitteln auszureden. Er schwankt nun zwischen beiden Möglichkeiten, u. die Situation ist entschieden so günstig, dass Sie mit grösster Wahrscheinlichkeit eine Annahme von *Protagonist* u. *Royal Palace* durchsetzen können." *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 33.
70. "Eben schreibt mir ein bekannter deutscher Generalmusikdirektor: ‚Wann beginnt eigentlich die U.E. mit der sonst üblichen Propaganda? Die Stille kommt mir etwas merkwürdig vor.‘ Es ist also glücklich so weit, dass aussenstehenden Musikern Ihr Schweigen bez. des *Protagonisten* auffällt. Ich gestehe Ihnen, dass ich darüber aufs tiefste verstimmt bin. Die Intendanten sagen sich natürlich: wenn sich der Verleger so ausschweigt, kann es mit dem Erfolg nicht so weit her sein. Wenn der Prospekt noch nicht fertig ist, hätten Sie wenigstens eine Mitteilung herausgeben müssen. Der Erfolg des *Protagonist* stand in nichts hinter dem des *Wozzeck* zurück, die Presse ist genau so sensationell, u. überall, wo von moderner Oper gesprochen wird, werden beide Werke nebeneinander genannt. Jeder, der dabei war, kann Ihnen bestätigen, dass noch keine Erstlingsoper eines 25jährigen einen solchen Erfolg gehabt hat. Durch Ihr Verhalten sieht es nun so aus, als sei es der übliche Achtungserfolg gewesen. Sie setzen sogar Ihre Taktik fort, mir die weiteren Annahmen zu überlassen. Wenn Ihnen an einer Annahme in der hiesigen Staatsoper [in Berlin] liegt, so muss ich Sie dringend ersuchen, die Sache sofort u. energisch in die Hand zu nehmen." *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 32.
71. "Dies sollte jedoch nicht an der Überlegung hindern, daß es historiographisch zweckmäßig sein könnte, eine – nicht als ‚Spätromantik‘ etikettierte – ‚musikalische Moderne‘ bis zum Zusammenbruch des Expressionismus, der sich 1924, mit dem Ende der Inflation, gleichsam als Bankrott über Nacht ereignete, reichen zu lassen." Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hermann Danuser, vol. 5 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2003), 323.
72. "Heute ist der Vertrag *Protagonist* mit Essen perfekt geworden." *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 32; letter from Hans Heinsheimer.
73. "Auf Einladung des Erfurter Stadttheaters war ich dort zur Premiere des *Protagonist*. Es war eine recht anständige Aufführung u. die Wirkung beim Publikum eine ganz ähnliche wie in Dresden, nur dass ein ungeschultes Provinzpublikum noch sprachloser sein muss. Jedenfalls hat diese Aufführung deutlich bewiesen, dass der *Protagonist* auch für kleinere Theater durchaus möglich u. erfolgreich sein kann." *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 42.
74. "Das Stück ist glänzend studiert u. die Aufführung reicht musikalisch oft an die Dresdener heran. *Protagonist* gut, Schwester schlecht. Wetzelsberger [der Dirigent der Aufführung] ausgezeichnet u. ein reizender Kerl. Salzburger, also mit allen guten u. ohne die schlechten Eigenschaften des Wiener. – Das Stück wirkt wieder außerordentlich. Aber man erwartet einen Skandal. Na schön." Symonette and Kowalke, *Sprich leise*, 62. The English translation is from Symonette and Kowalke, *Speak Low*, 52.
75. "Soeben aus Nürnberg zurückgekehrt, kann ich Ihnen zu meiner Freude einen sehr grossen Erfolg meines *Protagonist* melden. Es war ausverkauft, das Publikum ging begeistert mit, die I. Pantomime hatte einen richtigen Sondererfolg u. am Schluss gab es zahlreiche Hervorrufe. Allerdings übertraf auch die Aufführung alle meine Erwartungen, sie war ungemein präzise, durchsichtig u. eindrucksvoll. Die Gesamtwirkung war stellenweise noch stärker als in Dresden. Dirigent: Wetzelsberger, Titelrolle: Fritz Perron." *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 60.
76. "La musique n'illustre pas l'action : elle est l'action même. Le texte exprime le drame extérieur, visible. Sur un plan plus profond, la musique exprime l'action psychologique, inaccessible au langage. Tout comme son collaborateur, Weill évite soigneusement tout ce qui pourrait altérer la clarté du drame et en abaisser le niveau. Il ne pleure pas la mort de la sœur, et ne nous incite nullement à prendre part au désespoir du héros. Il se contente de les montrer, mais avec une telle justesse que l'auditeur est saisi.  
C'est ce qui donne à l'œuvre sa valeur singulière. *Le Protagoniste* est, pour autant que je sache, le premier essai réussi d'un opéra qui émeut l'auditeur en laissant son émotion de sympathie totalement de côté. On ne saurait, après une audition, prétendre en connaître la musique en soi ; sa facture est pour cela trop personnelle et trop neuve ; mais elle exprime pleinement, dès la première audition, ce qu'elle veut exprimer, avec une puissance élémentaire." Maurice de Abravanel, "Allemagne," *La revue musicale* 7, no. 9 (July 1926): 77.
77. "Durch seine Dreigroschenopern-Musik hat mich Kurt Weill völlig mit sich ausgesöhnt. Da hatte ihn eben der dramatische Herrichter Bert Brecht am Schnürchen: Kurt Weill durfte nicht durchkomponieren. Und schuf daher, als Musikarrangeur, die geschickteste, reizendste aller Schauspielmusiken. Wenn wir uns nun vom Dreigroschenopernmann zum Georg-Kaiser-Verbündeten zurückwenden – denn wir haben ja den Protagonisten vor etwa zwei Jahren in Dresden gehört –, ja dann erscheint Kurt Weill noch mitten in der Krise. Aber es fällt vom heutigen ein Licht auf den gestrigen. Und da er besser aufgeführt wird, wirkt sein krisenhaftes Werk um so stärker als damals." *B. Z. am Mittag*; WLRC, Series 50A.

78. “Bei Weills beiden Einaktern ist Problematik vorhanden, aber sie ist sehr einfach zu lösen. Sie liegt in der Frage, warum so wenig Musik an und in diesen beiden Werken ist. Es gibt Leute, die der Meinung sind, dass der Mangel an Musik ein Weg zu einer neuen Opernform ist (schon Gluck war früher einmal ungefähr dieser Meinung). Allein diese Meinung hat Kurt Weill selbst widerlegt, indem er auf den ‚Protagonisten‘ von 1925 und auf den ‚Zaren, der sich photographieren lässt‘, von 1927 anno 1928 die ‚Dreigroschenoper‘ folgen liess. Man kann auf hundert Arten melodischen Ausdrucks selig werden, aber in irgendeiner Form muss man Melodist sein. In der Drehorgelweise der ‚Dreigroschenoper‘, in dem Stossgebetlein des Mister Macheath, der vor dem Gehenktwerden steht, steckt unendlich mehr Musik als in diesen zwei Opern zusammengenommen.
- Georg Kaiser [...] ist ja ein gefährlicher Textdichter. Kaiser, der – wie heisst es doch? – dramatische Denkspieler, ist der unmusikalischste Dichter, den es gibt; er könnte höchstens an Unmusikalität von Carl Sternheim übertroffen werden. Was ihn als Librettist trotzdem empfiehlt und über diesen Mangel an Musikalität hinwegtäuscht, ist die Knappheit seiner Sprache und Szene, und sein Sinn für symmetrische Form. So wenig im ‚Protagonist‘ der geschraubte Titelheld, der im schauspielerischen Paroxysmus die Schwester ersticht, zum Helden einer Oper geschaffen ist, so sehr ist die Einlageszene, erst burlesk, dann tragisch gewendet, ein operndramaturgischer Einfall. Diese beiden Pantomimen haben Weill mit Recht gereizt. Aber musikalisch ausgenützt hat er den Kontrast nicht. Der ‚Protagonist‘ ist, als Oper, eine Art von Meerwunder: der Fischschwanz der ‚Spannung‘ hängt ihm an – ‚atemberaubende Spannung‘ in der Musik zu erzielen, ist das billigste, was es gibt – : der andere Teil des Monstrums ist formalistische Oper, die Situation, nicht das Wort wird komponiert: Aufgeregtheit, Gemessenheit, Zärtlichkeit, alles in einer unkonventionellen, aber auch uneigentlichen Tonsprache.” *Berliner Tageblatt*; WLRC, Series 50A.
79. “Wenige Wochen nach dem ‚Cardillac‘ kamen die beiden Georg Kaiser-Einakter von Kurt Weill heraus. Man hat für die Bekanntschaft sehr zu danken: in beiden Stücken zeigt eine Formgesinnung sich an, die sich unnachlässig an die aktuellen Probleme begibt, kompositorisch nicht anders als in der Wahl des literarischen Gegenstandes, und die mit der neoklassizistischen Ideologie kaum mehr zu tun hat als mit romantischem Musikdrama von ehemals. Zugleich ist dem Komponisten genug musikalische Potenz zuzutrauen, seine Absicht zu realisieren. Es fällt schwer, solche Absicht, die noch nicht unvermittelt sich darstellt, abstrakt zu benennen. Mit dem Spielideal, das Weill aus der Busoni-Schule blieb und das die Textkonstruktionen mit ihrer Anti-theretik von Realität und Schein besonders nahelegen, ist wenig mehr gesagt als die strikte Abweisung des romantischen Psychologismus. Ihrem szenischen Gegenstand wendet sich Weills Musik in einer eigentümlichen Motorik zu: einer Motorik, die sich weniger von den geschwungenen Kurven des psychischen Totalverlaufs inspirieren lässt als von der sichtbaren Geste des theatralischen Augenblicks; die sich auch nicht auf vorgegebene Musizierformen stützt, sondern ihre Impulse unvermittelt der Bühne verdankt. Es führt also doch ein Weg von Weill zu Strawinskij, aber da ja die Komponisten, die sich von Strawinskij anregen lassen, dort die reiche Wahl haben, so ist es allein schon als Zeichen sehr guten und echten Instinktes zu notieren, an welchen Strawinskij Weill anknüpft: die Bodenständigkeit des Sacre und das Dixhuitième von heutzutage bleiben rechts liegen und bloß der Soldat wird erinnert, einmal im ‚Protagonisten‘ an der musikalischen Oberfläche und durchaus im Geiste. Das legt nun auch den Zugang zu den tiefer liegenden Intentionen der Weillschen Dramatik frei. Es ist hier keinesfalls um die Spiegelung des Dramas zu tun, sondern um dessen Dissoziation in Partikeln; einzig aus den Bruchstücken der geschlossenen Handlung komponiert sich die Weillsche Oper. Wenn er heute ein darstellendes, kein handlungsmäßiges Theater verlangt und sich seine Texte danach sucht, so zieht er damit lediglich die literarische Konsequenz aus seiner musikalischen Verfahrensweise. Die Einheit des dramatischen Individuums, die bis heute fast stets noch als Bezugskraft dramatischer Musik fungierte, wird zerschlagen und das pantomimische Spiel ist eher Mittel ihrer Vernichtung als Transposition in jene vorgeblich reinere Region zweiter Wirklichkeit, mit der in der Musik wenig Ehre mehr eingelegt werden mag. Besonders gut kommt das alles im ‚Zaren‘ heraus, der denn auch trotz aller szenischen Meriten dem Publikum nicht recht gefallen wollte [...]. Wenn, zumal im ‚Protagonisten‘, nicht alles so gelungen scheint, so ist man geneigt, vorweg der Schule die Schuld zuzumessen: denn bei aller anregenden Kraft hat Busonis Mißtrauen gegen die musikalische Konstruktion und sein Widerstand gegen jegliche plastische Profilierung einige Verwirrung geworfen in eine Generation, die an der ästhetizistischen Wiederholung verlorener serenitas kein Genügen mehr hat. Vor allem ist die Gefahr, daß die Busoni-Doktrin der energischen technischen Selbstbesinnung im Wege ist, wie denn Busonis kompositorische Technik sich niemals ganz konsolidiert hat. So ist auch im ‚Protagonisten‘ manche Lösung technisch nicht von höchster Dignität; es mangelt gelegentlich an kontrastierenden Charakteren, die gegeneinander auskonstruiert wären, und der Orchestersatz wirkt bei aller Sauberkeit und Deutlichkeit des Stimmenverlaufs in der instrumentalen Phantasie nicht ganz sicher.” Theodor W. Adorno, “Frankfurt a. M.,” *Die Musik* 20, no. 12 (September 1928): 923.
80. “Die Aufführung unter der lebendigen Direktion von Nettstraeter, der einfallsreichen Regie von Mutzenbecher sehr anständig; nur hätten manche Sänger, etwa der darstellerisch gewandte Protagonist, sich mehr aussingen dürfen.” *Ibid.*, 924.
81. “Aus Frankfurt zurückgekehrt, möchte ich Ihnen gleich ausführlich berichten. Es war, ohne grosse Umschweife, die schlechteste Aufführung, die ich bisher von einem eigenen Werke erlebt habe. Musikalisch unpräzise und mangelhaft vorbereitet, mit einer restlos unbegabten Regie, die mit den üblichen Mätzchen völlig an der Sache vorbeiszenierte. Ich habe 5 Tage damit zugebracht, die gröbsten Fehler auszumergen, aber gegen eine prinzipiell falsche Einstellung und gegen Unvermögen kann man vergeblich kämpfen. Wenn ich trotzdem einen sehr ansehnlichen Publikumerfolg feststellen kann (10 Vorhänge nach *Protagonist*, 15 nach dem *Zaren*) so ist das für mich ein erfreulicher Beweis dafür, dass die beiden Werke auch den Anfeindungen einer völlig entstellenden Aufführung standhalten. Schade ist nur, dass die Frankfurter Presse aus dieser Darstellung ein völlig falsches Bild gewinnen musste, doch sind die Herren vom Opernhaus überzeugt, dass sich auf Grund des Publikumerfolges eine gute Aufführungsziffer erreichen lässt.” *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 129.
82. Strobel reviewed the Erfurt performance for *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 9, no. 3 (March 1927) and the Berlin performance for *Neue Badische Landeszeitung*, 19 October 1928. A report and summary of his pre-concert lecture appears in *Geraer Zeitung*, 26 April 1928. In addition, Strobel provided program notes for the performance in Essen (“Zu Kurt Weills *Protagonist*,” *Der Scheinwerfer* 5, no. 11 [February 1932]: 1–3). Photocopies in WLRC, Series 50A.
83. “Auch diesmal zeigte sich, daß dieser ‚Akt Oper‘ eine der überzeugendsten Schöpfungen moderner Musikdramatik ist. Mit genialem Instinkt erkennt der Vierundzwanzigjährige die musikalischen Möglichkeiten dieses fabelhaft wirksamen pirandellesken Einakters von Georg Kaiser. Man spürt, daß er von Strawinsky herkommt – trotz des Studiums bei Busoni. Aber wie er die unerhörte Spannung des Stückes durch die Musik steigert, wie er die melodisch-dramatische Ausdruckslinie neuartig, kühn, oft atembeklemmend führt, wie er Lyrisches im überschwenglichen Duett zwischen Liebhaber und Schwester aufklingen läßt, wie er unter Verzicht auf nervenkitzelnde Klanggestaltung die klar abgegrenzten Szenenkomplexe gegeneinander stellt und das Stück in mächtiger dynamischer Kurve aufbaut, wobei die acht Bläser auf der Bühne, welche die Pantomimen begleiten, und das Hauptorchester wundervoll zusammenwirken: das alles ist durchaus originell, neu, ohne an Schlagwortformeln gebunden zu sein, das verrät eine elementare dramatische Begabung. Immer ist diese Musik unmittelbar, blutvoll, jugendlich überschäumend, im Technischen von ganz erstaunlicher Fertigkeit. Und vor allem herrscht ein dramatisches Tempo wie kaum in einem anderen modernen Werk.” *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 9, no. 3 (March 1927): 140.
84. The *Protagonist* was Antonio Pirino, *die Schwester* was Ines Bardini, and *der junge Herr* was Ferdinando Li Donni. The set was designed by Leardo Rossi; the stage director was Leo Nedomansky. Further details about the cast have not yet been discovered. The Italian translation was by Marcello Cortis who also sang in a studio recording of *Der Protagonist* under Bruno Maderna.
85. The broadcast of *Protagonist* (“Il protagonista”) was paired with *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* (“Lo zar si fa fotografare”). The cast of *Protagonist* was as follows: *Protagonist*: Petre Munteanu; *Schwester*: Edda Vincenzi; *Der junge Herr*: Marcello Cortis; *Der Hausmeister*: Amedeo Berdini; *Der Wirt*: Renzo Gonzales; 1. & 2. *Schauspieler*: Ugo Trama and Teodoro Rovetta; 3. *Schauspieler*: Laura Zanini; Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma della RAI. Information about the Naples and Rome productions was graciously provided by Arrigo Quattrocchi.
86. DGG 3 LP 2740 153. The London Sinfonietta played under the direction of David Atherton.
87. Capriccio 60 086. The Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was directed by John Mauceri. The recording cast was as follows: *Protagonist*: Robert Wörle; *Schwester*: Amanda Halgrimson; *Der junge Herr*: Alexander Marco-Buhrmeister; *Der Hausmeister*: Corby Welch; *Der Wirt*: Matteo De Monti; 1. *Schauspieler*: Johannes von Duisburg; 2. *Schauspieler*: Jan Buchwald; 3. *Schauspieler*: Matthias Koch.
88. See especially Kim H. Kowalke, “Music Publishing and the Nazis: Schott, Universal Edition, and Their Composers,” in *Music and Nazism: Art under Tyranny, 1933–1945*, ed. M. Kater and A. Riethmüller (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2003), 170–205, especially 188ff.
89. Adorno’s Weill polemics exercised a formidable influence, delaying or even preventing German reception of Weill’s American works altogether.
90. *Die Straße* refers to *Street Scene*, which had its German premiere in Düsseldorf in 1955. Comprehensive documentation of the critical reception of this production can be found in *Street Scene: A Sourcebook*, ed. Joanna Lee, Edward Harsh, and Kim H. Kowalke (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, 1994), 29–44.
91. “Jedes der nach 1933 blockierten Kunstwerke muß bei seiner Wiederbelebung eine Bewährungsprobe durchstehen, die darüber Zeugnis ablegt, ob die künstlerische Substanz und der Wahrheitsgehalt groß genug sind, um eine Epoche völligen Verschwindens und Vergessens überwinden zu können. Es stellt sich häufiger dabei heraus, daß Werke, die zwischen dem ersten Weltkrieg und 1933 als bestürzende Notwendigkeit erschienen, bei ihrem späten Wiederauftauchen alle Aktualität verloren hatten. Auch eine andere Frage ist in diesem Zusammenhang von Bedeutung. Während es in der Malerei und in der Literatur verhältnismäßig schnell gelungen ist, der gegenwärtigen mittleren Generation das zwangsweise Versäumte nachträglich umfassend anzubieten und in den geistigen Kreis einzubauen, braucht das Musiktheater eine viel längere Zeit, um den Nachholbedarf desjenigen Publikums zu erfüllen, das ehemals berühmte Werke nur vom Hörensagen kennt und sie nun in einer völlig veränderten Grundsituation als erstmalig und neu erleben muß.
- In Duisburg war das Publikum bei der Matinee-Premiere von Kurt Weills einaktiger Oper ‚Der Protagonist‘ (nach einem Text von Georg Kaiser) nur spärlich vertreten; es war aber, nicht nur am Applaus, deutlich zu verspüren, daß diese Aufführung der Deutschen Oper am Rhein Grund gefaßt hat. Das liegt daran, daß dies Werk inhaltlich zeitlos bleibt und tiefe Bezirke menschlichen Denkens und Fühlens aufreißt, daß die Musik kräftig und voller Eigenleben ist und nach mehr als dreißig Jahren noch zutiefst wahr und sicher erscheint. Diese Wiederaufnahme war



notwendig und hat sich gelohnt; sie schloß eine Wissenslücke und vermittelte, ganz anders als die ‚Dreigroschenoper‘ und ‚Die Straße‘, ein Bild des Komponisten, dem der Song nur eines der vielen möglichen Kunstmittel war, dessen Meisterschaft aber auch auf anderen Wegen ihre Bestätigung fand.“ *Der Mittag*; WLRC, Series 50A.

92. “Das 1926 in Dresden uraufgeführte Operchen hat indessen seit jener Jugendzeit des deutschen Expressionismus einigen Staub angesetzt. Vielleicht vermöchte es bei einer ganz hervorragenden Besetzung der Titelpartie noch zu fesseln. Im ‚Normalfall‘ wird es bei einem gewissermaßen historischen Interesse bleiben. Dabei stellt Georg Kaisers Text durchaus literarische Ansprüche. Sein Titelheld ist ein genialischer Schauspieler, dem sich Spiel und Wirklichkeit leicht verwirren. Er wird in einer solchen Situation zum Mörder seiner Schwester. Das ist typisch Kaisersche Konstruktion, preziös, überraschend und zugleich von sinnfälliger Bühnenwirkung. Einiges davon bekommt auch die Musik Weills in den Griff. Sie hat durchaus etwas von der großen Geste, von dem Pathos des schönen Scheins, und sie ist reizvoll dort, wo sie ironisieren kann. Doch selbst für das einstündige Werk sind die Einfälle nicht plastisch genug.“ *Westdeutsche Allgemeine*; WLRC, Series 50A.

93. “Am eingängigsten hat man die ironisch illustrative Klanggebärde des jungen Weill im Ohr. Für die Pantomime des gedoppelten Eifersuchts paares sprudelt er über an ulkigen oder frivolen Klangfetzen und Figuren. Ziemlich unbekümmert bemüht er ein dickes Instrumentarium, das sich indes strecken- und schockweise in dünne, durchsichtige Klangrastrer löst. Phantastisch anzuhören, fast verdächtig gekonnt schon, und insgesamt freilich zu wenig noch kontrolliert oder stilisiert.“ *Die Welt*; WLRC, Series 50A.

94. “Ein einzelnes, ungewöhnlich erfolgreiches Werk kann seinen Autor einseitig so berühmt machen, daß er in seinem Gesamtschaffen ein fast unbekannter bleibt. So erging es dem Komponisten der ‚Dreigroschenoper‘. Kurt Weill aber hat auch später komponiert (an seine große Oper ‚Die Bürgschaft‘ erinnerten die Berliner Festwochen 1957, an den amerikanischen Musical-Weill erinnert die Aufführung der ‚Street scene‘ in Düsseldorf-Duisburg). Daran, daß Weill aber auch bereits vor der ‚Dreigroschenoper‘ ein profilierter, eigenwilliger, an Humperdinck und Busoni geschulter Komponist war, im vulkanischen Brodeln der expressionistischen zwanziger Jahre, erinnert jetzt eine Aufführung des ‚Protagonist‘ (uraufgeführt in Dresden unter Fritz Busch, 1926) in der Rheinoper. Im Duisburger Hause erschien diese Erstausführung als Studio-Matinee. Georg Kaiser schrieb den Text zu dieser einstündigen, ins Geistige verschobenen, ebenso fiebernd wie eiskühn, ‚Bajazzo‘-Variante. [...] Weills Musik ist ein buntes Prisma, gärend, voll von – damals – neuen Zeichen. Viel Hindemith-Verwandtes hört man in dem Parlandostück und seinen reichbebilderten Orchesterbegleitungen. Reizvolle, eigenwillige Bläserpartien begleiten die ‚Pantomime‘, bis sie wieder ins Singen und Sprechen zurückschlägt. Orffsche Vokalisieren (vorweggenommene ‚Abstrakte Oper‘ Blacher – Egk) hört man schon und insgesamt ein Kaleidoskop des damals Neuentdeckt-Musikantischen. – Eine wertvolle Wiederentdeckung ist es, in vielem unerwartet frisch noch, doch als ganzes, als Verpackung eines Georg-Kaiser-Textes, wie vieles dieser sprühend-lebendigen Jahre, angestaubt.“ *Rheinische Post*; WLRC, Series 50A.

95. “Weill ist für die meisten nur der musikalische Autor der ‚Dreigroschen-Oper‘. Die frühen Werke wie jener ‚Protagonist‘ waren längst vergessen. Während man gleich nach dem Kriege auf anderes aus der gleichen Zeit sofort zurückgriff – so auf Alban Bergs ‚Wozzeck‘ und Paul Hindemiths ‚Cardillac‘ –, fand sich für Weills erste Auseinandersetzung mit der Oper, die er dann selber auf ganz anderen Wegen weiterführte, kein Interesse. Und doch hat die Wiederaufführung nach dreißig Jahren Bedeutung, läßt sie doch beispielhaft erkennen, wo damals für die junge Generation die Ansatzpunkte zu einem neuen Musiktheater gelegen hatten. Bei wenigen Werken aus der Zeit zwischen den Kriegen wird so klar wie bei diesem Opernerstling Weills, daß der Rückgriff über die Romantik hinweg auf das Barock – und nicht die später erst in den Vordergrund getretene Überwindung der Romantik mit ihrer Auflösung der Chromatik zur Atonalität – der Ausgang war.“ *Rhein-Ruhr Kompass*; WLRC, Series 50A.

96. The reference is to *Street Scene*; see note 86.

97. “Kein Geringerer als Georg Kaiser, vor drei Jahrzehnten Deutschlands meist gespielter Gegenwartsdramatiker, hat das Libretto zu Kurt Weills Oper ‚Der Protagonist‘ geschrieben. Und es will nicht weniger heißen, daß Fritz Busch 1926 in der Dresdener Staatsoper mit diesem einstündigen Opernakt den jungen Operndebütanten Kurt Weill vorstellte. Bis dahin war der Busoni-Schüler Weill nur einem kleinen, fortschrittlichen Kreis als Komponist von Kammermusikwerken, von Chören und einem Violinkonzert bekannt.

‚Der Protagonist‘ war die erste von drei Opern, mit denen der damals Sechszwanzigjährige die Aufmerksamkeit auf sich lenkte. [...] Zwei Jahre später fand Weill mit der ‚Dreigroschenoper‘ seinen eigenen, unverwechselbaren Stil, der freilich ohne die Texte Bert Brechts nicht denkbar war.

Die sentimental und grimmigen Songs von Weill sind oft nachgeahmt, aber nicht wieder erreicht worden. Auch von ihm selbst nicht. Was danach noch folgte, die dreiaktige Fassung des ‚Mahagonny‘ und die ‚Bürgschaft‘, blieb hinter der Geschlossenheit und Schlagkraft der ‚Dreigroschenoper‘ zurück.

Mit der Emigration des Komponisten begann die amerikanische, die kommerzielle Phase seiner Bühnenproduktion, für welche die kürzlich in Duisburg wieder aufgefrischte Volksoper ‚Die Straße‘ trotz einiger dramaturgischer Verbesserungsversuche ein nicht immer erfreuliches Beispiel ist. Im ganzen hat sich Weills Newyorker Boulevard-Theater mit seiner zähen Mischung aus Puccini, Vulgärmelodik und Jazz

als ein Opernimport von geringeren Graden erwiesen. Trotz einiger Versuche haben die amerikanischen Werke Weills bei uns keinen Boden fassen können.

Nach dem Spätwerk nahm sich die Deutsche Oper am Rhein zu Duisburg in einer Studio-Matinee [...] dieses frühen ‚Protagonisten‘ an, der wohl seit dreißig Jahren nicht mehr gespielt worden ist. Daß das Stück trotz dieser verdienstlichen und aufschlußreichen Wiederbelebung den Weg ins Repertoire finden könnte, ist kaum anzunehmen. Merkwürdigerweise liegt das nicht an der frischen, lebhaft inspirierten Musik, sondern am Text. [...]

Weills behende Musiksprache ist von einer überraschenden kontrapunktischen Sicherheit, dabei durchaus bühnenwirksam. Die Wahnsinnstat des Mimen wird nicht psychologisch illustriert, sondern in einem neobarocken Musizierstil, der Hindemiths ‚Cardillac‘ nicht fernsteht und sogar vorwegnimmt, kunstvoll kontrapunktiert. Nur in der Deklamatorik des Haushofmeisters klingt für Augenblicke der psalmodierende Ton des Bettlerkönigs Peachum an.“ *Kölnische Rundschau*; WLRC, Series 50A.

98. “Die Früchte dieser Ausgrabung wird allerdings die Bühne ernten, die den ‚Protagonist‘ mit ihren allerbesten Kräften besetzt, theatralisch so wirkungsvoll wie möglich inszeniert und ihn, gekoppelt mit einer anderen Kurzoper, ins Repertoire nimmt.

Denn es erwies sich eindrucklich, daß der ‚Protagonist‘ nach dreißig Jahren kein Objekt mehr ist für ein Studio, für das Experimentiertheater. Seine Form, sein Inhalt sind geschichtlich eingeordnet. Aber seine Realisierung bedarf der höchsten artistischen Kraft und Verfeinerung. Die Aufgabe, die dem Titelhelden, dem Leiter und Star einer Schauspielertruppe zu Shakespeares Zeiten, gestellt ist, kann nur von einem Sänger gelöst werden, der zugleich ein genialer Komödiant ist. Hat es außer Caruso einen solchen Glücksfall gegeben? [...]

Wie aber, um Himmelswillen, soll ein Tenor diese ungeheure Aufgabe lösen, der sich in der entscheidenden Szene nicht einmal auf den Glanz und die Verführungskraft seiner Stimme verlassen kann? Hier dürfte der Grund dafür liegen, daß der ‚Protagonist‘ nicht mehr aufgeführt wurde.“ *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*; WLRC, Series 50A.

99. “Von der ‚neuen Aesthetik‘ Busonis stammen, wird uns gesagt, die wichtigsten Anregungen zum ‚Protagonisten‘ – die mit deutscher Gründlichkeit und wenig Humor überdehnte ‚komische‘ Pantomime, das vielberufene Klassizistische, die Commedia dell’arte. Der Rest ist massives ‚Schicksalstheater‘, ist Leoncavallo ohne gleichwertige melodische Inspiration: handfeste, zweifellos sehr talentierte Korrepetitorenmusik. In der Pantomime: ganz leise Vorahnung des künftigen Weill. [...] Ernst und ernst zu nehmen war der Abend, wie schon gesagt, im Grunde erst mit dem letzten Stück. Die ‚Sieben Todsünden‘ [...]. Lotte Lenya in natura auf der Bühne zu sehen und ihre Stimme zu hören, die man so gut von ihren Platten kennt, ist ergreifend.“ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; WLRC, Series 50A.

100. “‚Der Protagonist‘ (den die Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf vor zwei Jahren erstmals wieder auf seine Bühnenwirksamkeit überprüft hat) ist der Geniestreich des 25jährigen Weill, der mit diesem Erstlingswerk sogleich überzeugend seine Berufung zum Theaterkomponisten dokumentiert hat. Faszinierend wirkt auch heute noch, wie Weill in diesem Spiel des Theaters auf dem Theater zwei musikalische Sphären miteinander verschränkt, indem er dem normalen Orchester ein Bühnenorchester gegenüberstellt, das die Welt des realen Opernspiels von der gespielten Pantomime trennt und zum Schluß (wenn der Protagonist diese Welten nicht mehr zu unterscheiden vermag) verhängnisvoll zusammenfällt. Ein musikdramaturgisches Meisterstück, das immerhin noch seine Wirkung tun kann, wenn man sich entschließt, die konzertanten Längen der Pantomimen-Bläsermusik zu kürzen.“ *Melos* 27, no. 6 (June 1960): 187–88.

101. *The Musical Times* 127, no. 5 (May 1986): 286; WLRC, Series 56, Folder 10.

102. *Financial Times*, 14 March 1986; WLRC, Series 56, Folder 10.

103. *The Observer*, 16 March 1986; WLRC, Series 56, Folder 10.

104. *New York Times*, 6 August 1993; WLRC, Series 50A.

105. “Kurt Weills ‚Der Protagonist‘ aus dem Jahr 1926 macht das Theater zum Thema: Auf die breite Bühne sind zur Eröffnung der Bregenzer Festspiele vier lange, plüschige Kinositzreihen (Ausstattung: Raimund Bauer) ineinander gekeilt. Der Protagonist ist ein Theaterprinzpal, der mit seiner Truppe Eifersuchtsdramen einstudiert: Banalität und Ernst, Nonsens und Pathos wechseln sprunghaft, ebenso Realität und Spiel. Zur Truppe des Protagonisten zählt auch eine Frau, die er – fälschlicherweise? – als seine Schwester ausgibt. Doch als er bei ihr einen Liebhaber entdeckt, ermordet er sie mit übersteigter Theatralik. Weills Opernerstling ist beides: veristisch-packender Leoncavallo-Bajazzo und expressionistischer Alban-Berg-Wozzeck, der gleichsam fragt: Was ist das, was in uns Schauspielern mordet? Protagonisten sind in Bregenz dabei zuvörderst die Musiker: die Wiener Symphoniker unter Yakov Kreizberg, insbesondere ein betörendes Ensemble von acht Bläsern, die sich, als Lemuren kostümiert, unter die Schauspieltruppe mischen. Der sensationelle Erfolg des Stücks, das den 26-jährigen Weill beim Publikum sofort auf eine Stufe mit dem ‚Sacre du Printemps‘-Komponisten Strawinskij hob, läßt sich bei dieser Bregenzer Entdeckung vor allem bei den beiden effektvollen Pantomimen nachvollziehen. Den Text Georg Kaisers auf Liebesgestammel reduzierend, kommen sie teils atonal, aber dennoch eingängig elegisch daher. Was geistreiches Amüsement und dessen Reflexion betrifft und ebenso die Verbindung von Populärem mit Intellektuellem, ist das Musiktheater 90 Jahre später nicht viel weitergekommen.“ *Der Tagesspiegel*, 23 July 2004.