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.1 Hitherto the full score of the opera 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 première at the Dresden Staatsoper on 27 March 1926, Der Protagonist occupies a special place in Weill’s œuvre. 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.”

With the successful première 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 première 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.”

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.”) 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 Grüneheide, 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 Gay 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. Lenya (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.”

Weill dedicated Der Protagonist to Lotte Lenja.

II. Genesis

In the essay titled “Bekenntnis zur Oper” (Commitment to Opera) that he contributed to the Blätter der Staatsoper, distributed in connection with the première 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
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.  

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 cafes 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." 9

Quite by chance Weill met Kaiser in Vienna. "I ran into Kaiser here at St. Mark's Square," he wrote to his family on 19 March, "The world is a farce [Aufenthater], but a beautiful one—south of the Alps." 9 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." 10

Weill resumed work on the ballet-pantomime after his return to Berlin in the summer of 1924. 11 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. 12 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, "Bekenntnis 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 lusty 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. 13

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." 14 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." 15 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." 16 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. 17
Thematical 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. 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. 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.”

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 am 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.”

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 Cologn 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.

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 seemed 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.

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 in any case. (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 not do much meet with broad cooperation there. On the other hand, I could also ruin any future prospects with Cologne.24

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:25 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.26

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, Käptzen (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."27

A blueline 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.28 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 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.29

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.30

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.31 I implore you to issue Der Protagonist by January; otherwise it will not be possible to place the work elsewhere."32

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."33 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.34 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 Taktilstock 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 fotografieren, 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.39 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 rehearsals, 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.”40 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.”41

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.38 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 copysists, 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.”42 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 Buonni admitted him as a pupil; out of this apprenticeship a friendship soon evolved. The young Weill became the maestro’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 mid-summer night’s play based on the English original by Clifford Bar.43 Kurt Weill has arrived in Dresden and is participating in the final stage rehearsals of the opera.44

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: Kurt Taucher (Protagonist), Eliza Stünzner (Schwester), Paul Schofler (Der junge Herz), Ludwig Eybisch (Der Hausmeister des Herzogs), Adolph Schoepf-
lin (Der Wirt), Robert Büßel (Erster Schauspieler), Rudolf Schmalnauer (Zweiter Schauspieler), Elfriede Haberkorn (Dritter Schauspieler). Others listed were 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. The issue of the Blätter der Staatsoper distributed in connection with the premiere (1926–26 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 Old 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.44

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 "C") for the Zweischauer 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.45

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 undermine 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.46

And "E. R." in the Meißener 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 familiar and pupil from Busoni's master class.47

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)."48 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 it?"

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.49

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, Schnrcker, 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 arthistorical 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.50

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 penetratngly 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.

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, emerges a melody that presents the 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.

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 music’s 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.

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 theatrical 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 bold 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.

“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 inter- vene 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 and is undoubtedly one of the strongest and most extraordinary talents of the present day. Der Protagonist cannot be represented by any other work. His melodic 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.

Karl Johann Perl, quoted earlier, wrote in the Frankfurter 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 melodically inventive, 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 Schauspielsaal 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.

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 Staats-theater 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\textit{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 recognizes 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 incise 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.  

The notoriously conservative Max Marschalk, writing in the \textit{Berliner Morgenpost} (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:

Well, 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 parodic octet of the upper winds to illustrate the comedy; the droll vocalizations of the wordless players, vocal quarter, and wind accompaniment. The first outpouring of the Sister’s confession. The tragic pantomime, dark colors, and building continua 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 shadow. . . . Was it a purely intellectual pleasure which was 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 nonphilosophical 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.

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 \textit{Frankfurter Zeitung}, which is particularly important, was excellent; also Breslau, Mannheim, Vienna, etc. To 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. 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 fed. There wasn’t so much of that going on for me, since my circle of acquaintances is composed mainly of “col-
leagues,” 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.” Not that I could give a damn now.”

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 fotografieren, 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). 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 works, which drew attention away from expressionism as the predominant musical style, paralleled by Weill’s own development as reflected in works such as the Singspiel Mahagonny (1927) and, above all, Die Dreigroschenoper (1928).

In a letter to Weill from 15 March 1927, the publisher directly mentions the first problem: “[W]e would welcome it if the difficulty of find-
ing a work for Der Protagonist could be resolved.” 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.” 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 Ivan Goll. Der Protagonist was then performed with pieces such as the pantomime Der Schneemann by Erich Wolfgang Korngold (in Nuremberg), Djamilah by Georges Bizet (in Leipzig), or Angélique by Jacques Ibert (in Essen). The one-act opera Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren, also with a libretto by Georg Kaiser, was announced by Weill as a “wonderful complement” to Der Protagonist (let-
ter 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 num-
ber 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 fotografieren did not so much give Der Protagonist added momentum as it eclipsed it.

Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren 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 wide-
spread 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 Staatsop-
er, 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 seri-

cously thinking about a combination of Royal Palace and Na und? (the lat-
ter 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 cer-
tainly auspicious enough to enable you, in all likelihood, to get Protago-
nist and Royal Palace accepted.”

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 pre-
miere, 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 dis-
turbed 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 togeth-
er 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 immedi-
ately and energetically take the matter into your own hands.”

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 irre-
trievably lost, apparently because Universal Edition failed to make even a single copy of Weill’s full score, which, along with the sole set of orches-
tra parts, was never retrieved after its production in Essen in 1929 (fortu-
nately 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.” 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 reflects 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 start-
ing 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 “Musizieroperator,” to use another untranslatable label of the time), whose dress rehearsal and premiere Weill attended. Above all, it was Weill himself, with the Singspiel 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.”

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.”

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.” “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 Pernon.”

The first performance of Der Protagonist with Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren, 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.

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 evidenced 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.”

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 (Glück 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 barbel-organ dirty 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 a dangerous libretto author. Kaiser, the—how should one put it?—creator of dramatic thought games [Denkspiele] 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 theepian 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—at achieving “breathtaking tension” is the cheapest thing there is. As 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.

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 earliness of Le Sacre and the current ‘dis-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 its 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.

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

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 eradicate 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.

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. 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.”

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 reacquaint 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 Ovóti. Also in 1960, Italian Radio (RAI) produced a recorded version of the work (once again in Italian), under the direction of Bruno Maderna, which was first broadcast on 18 December 1960. 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. 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.

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 “hersay”
- the limited availability during the immediate postwar years of the Weill works that had been published by Universal
- 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
- 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 of Weill, were being performed again by the late 1940s and remained in the repertoires of numerous opera houses.

All these factors repeatedly came 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 unconcluded, 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 resurfaced. 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 premiere of Kurt Weill's one-act opera Der Protagonist (to a text by Georg Kaiser), that audience was only sparingly 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, 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.

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'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) reminded us of the fact that, even before Die Dreigroschenoper, Weill (after studying with Hamperdink 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 ritually 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 "muzikantisch" 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.

The anonymous critic of the Rhein-Ruhr Kompas (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.

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 unthinkably 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 Stadt, recently revived in Leipzig, 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 Düsseldorf 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.

Well'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 Carmina burana and even anticipates it. Only for a few moments, in the declaration of the major-domo, do we hear the psalm-like tones of the beggar king Peachum. 87

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. 88

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 on stage and hearing her voice, which one knows so well from her records, is thrilling. 89

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 dramaticurgy that remains effective, provided one decides to shorten the concertistic longues of the pantomime wind music. 90

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 verismo, was 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. 91

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-Three Penny 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 scurrility (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 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. 92

Nicholas Kenyon, in his review in 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-acter 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 grim-faced 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 Kaest) 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 Adagio chino 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. 93
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 1920s and 1930s 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.95

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 Alfonz Neukirchen in April 1958—namely, engagement of “the finest forces” to perform with “the utmost artistic power and sophistication.” Nicholas Brüer directed the Bregen 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 Historically 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 Bregen are first and foremost the musician: the Wiener Symphoniker under Yakov Kreizberg, especially the beguiling ensemble of eight wind players who, clothed as lemur chassis, mingle with the troupe of actors. This Bregen 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 babbles, 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.99

(Translated from the German by Stephen Hinton)

Notes

1. In the holograph fair copy of the play from 1920, however, Kaiser used the designation “Einkäter” (“one-actor”); 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 Werks, Kritische Schriften zur Musikwissenschaft 41 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994), 2: 154.


8. “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. “Hier hatten wir das, was wir suchten: ein zwangloses unsichtbares Ineinandergreifen von Oper und Pantomime.” Musik und musikalisches Theater, 47.


Brief an die Familie, 305, letter to Albert and Emma Weill.

28. In the Critical Report this source is identified by the siglum Vm2.


Weil schon einmal geschrieben hat, dass er noch einige Tage, bevor die Uraufführung, oft noch einen Einblick in die Situation haben, u. ich bin immer wieder damit beschäftigt, die Szenkar durch die Zeit hindurch vorzubereiten. Ich werde u. alle Aussichten zerstören, um den Besuch meines Dresdner Regisseurs Gießen zu ermöglichen. Es ist ja auch noch nicht viel zu weit, um bald mit der Premiere zu beginnen."

Brief an die Familie, 304, letter to Albert and Emma Weill.


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Brief an die Familie, 304, letter to Albert and Emma Weill.


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 have now only glanced through it.” (“Mit gleicher Post sende ich Ihnen das Manuskript des Klavierauszugs von Protagonist sofort zurück mit dem Bekenner, daß ich mit dieser Ausführung einverstanden bin. Druckkorrekturen bekommen ich wohl noch einmal, da ich es jetzt nur durchgesehen habe.”) Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition, 26.


38. In the Critical Report, these sources are identified as Fm1 and Fm2, respectively.


40. There is no other documentary evidence of Weill having worked on such a project; the manuscript must have received this information directly from Weill or a person close to him. So, in 1926, his “Magic theatre” 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.


42. “Es ist doch recht aufregend, über Nacht eine Weltdokumentarität zu werden. Auch die paar schlechten Kritiken kommen mir sehr gelegen, weil bei einer einstimmig günstigen Presse die Ansprüche an mich ins Massowe steigen würden. Das Telefongespräch mit 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.


49. “There is no other documentary evidence of Weill having worked on such a project; the manuscript must have received this information directly from Weill or a person close to him. So, in 1926, his ‘Magic theatre’ 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.”


53. "Dieses stark dramatische, in einigen kurzen Episoden aber auch von Lyrik
nachweisbarem Element, der die Gesetze bühnensinnlich-faßbaren und musikalisch-absoluten
Erwartungen. Neben den zahlreichen musikalischen Gästen, der Presse und den
menschlichen Zusammenhängen zwischen Protagonisten und Schwester psycholo-
ständische wie den Substanz der musikalischen Architektur der
Nummerncharakter, ihre Form erwächst aber organisch aus der Handlung, die
Verständlichkeit der Worte und die Tondichtung, Gut zu
52. "Kurt Weill bringt für die Vertonung dieses weniger zwiespältigen als doppelstirnigen
musikalischen und Bildungskreis läßt die Melodie von seltens herber Innigkeit auftauchen; im übrigen besitzt diese
mengenmomente, die der Wirkung auf die Zuhörer nicht nur im Sinne klarer, sondern in einem
dramatischkeitsartigen Streben nach Selbständigkeit der Bühne. Das letztere, ein Bläseroktett, begleitet die mehr äußerlichen Vorgänge
musikalischen Gesangstechnik fordert Weill Außerordentliches bei den Hauptpartien des
menschlichen Zusammenhängen zwischen Protagonisten und Schwester psycholo-
Durch das Schauspieltum des Protagonisten 'übersteigert' ist, so ist in diesem
keine bühnensinnlich-faßbaren und musikalisch-absoluten
musikalische Begabung hat, ob er in der Erfindung stark und eigenartig ist, läßt sich nach diesen kleinen Opern mit
besonders von musikalischen Geräuschen, mit denen er die Bizarrerien auf der
Das erweiterte System der traditionellen Harmonik vertreten, noch eine
die kühne und stilistisch feine Komposition ist zweifellos eines der stärksten und eigenartigsten Talente
musikalische Begabung hat, ob er in der Erfindung stark und eigenartig ist, läßt sich nach diesen kleinen Opern mit
57. "Kurt Weill bringt für die Vertonung dieses weniger zwiespältigen als doppelstirnigen
musikalischen Repertoire begegnet, die größtenteils mit der Musik des Komponisten vertraut sind.
entspricht. Die sozusagen amorphe Musik hat gewiß Möglichkeiten,
der Musik das Wesen des innerlich zerrissenen Mimen, der mit dem Mord an der
musikalische Begabung hat, ob er in der Erfindung stark und eigenartig ist, läßt sich nach diesen kleinen Opern mit
Musik das Wesen des innerlich zerrissenen Mimen, der mit dem Mord an der
die Handlung glückliche, bühnenmäßige Momente, der

*einer fesselfreien Harmonik ruhenden Kakophonien, die recht gut sich den
Musik das Wesen des innerlich zerrissenen Mimen, der mit dem Mord an der
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55. "Die Komposition Kurt Weills hat mehrere interessante Eigentümlichkeiten. Die
beiden konträren Stilarten: hier drastische Komik, da düstere Tragödie, veranlassen
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56. "Das Ineinandergreifen von Oper und Pantomime, das übersteigerte Schauspiel-

54. "Nun die Musik Weills. In der Dichtung und in der bildenden Kunst hat man den
musikalische Begabung hat, ob er in der Erfindung stark und eigenartig ist, läßt sich nach diesen kleinen Opern mit

58. "Diese einaktige Oper, deren erfolgreiche Uraufführung im sächsischen Staats-

59. "Diese einaktige Oper, deren erfolgreiche Uraufführung im sächsischen Staats-

60. "Wie das Schauspielertum des Protagonisten 'übersteigert' ist, so ist in diesem
musikalische Begabung hat, ob er in der Erfindung stark und eigenartig ist, läßt sich nach diesen kleinen Opern mit

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61. "Weills Musik taucht Gesang und Pantomime, welche wechselnd das Geschehen
rückerscheinen aus dem Stile von Busonis und über Schönberg oder Bergs "Wozzeck" hinaus
kurz nach der Eröffnung des Kritikers, der die Fäden der Entwicklung dieses unüberwindlichen Genres in
richtung auf das Wort. Es ist ein wichtiger Weg ins moderne Gesangliche hinein,
acht Bläsern unter- und übermalt, läßt Weills skurrilen Humor spielen, aber erst
schneidet sich ja meistens aus 'Kollegen' zusammensetzt, deren Begeisterung sich begreif-
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2. Schauspieler: Matthias Koch.

3. Schauspieler: Amedeo Berdini; Der Wirt: Marco Ferraro; Der Protagonist: Robert Weller; Der Scheinwerfer: Ines Bardini, und der Tischmann: Ferdinando Li Donni. The set was designed by Leo Rossi; the stage director was Leo Nedomansky. Further details about the cast have not yet been documented. The Italian translation was by Marcello Cortis who also sang in a studio recording of Der Protagonist under Bruno Maderna.


9. "Der Wirt": Matteo De Monti; "Der Scheinwerfer": Ines Bardini; "Der Protagonist": Robert Weller; "Schwester": Laura Zanini; Orchesterwirke: Di Roma der RAI. Information about the Naples and Rome productions was graciously provided by Arigo Quaratz.:

10. "Protagonist“: Dario Parravicini; "The Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was directed by John Barbirolli. The recording was made under Bruno Maderna. The Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was directed by John Barbirolli. The recording was made under Bruno Maderna. The Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was directed by John Barbirolli. The recording was made under Bruno Maderna. The Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was directed by John Barbirolli. The recording was made under Bruno Maderna. The Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was directed by John Barbirolli. The recording was made under Bruno Maderna.
“Der Protagonist’ (den die Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf vor zwei Jahren erstmals wieder auf ihre Bühnenwirksamkeit überprüft hat) ist der Geniestreich des 25jährigen Weill, der mit diesem Erstlingswerk sofort überzeugend seine Berufung als deutscher Expressionismus aufs Spiel gebracht hat, und insgesamt freilich zu wenig noch kontrolliert oder stilisiert.”

“Die Takte der 'neuen Aesthetik' Busonis stammen, wird uns gesagt, die wichtigsten Anregungen zum 'Protagonisten' – die mit deutscher Gründlichkeit und wenig Humor überdehnte 'komische' Pantomime, das vielerlei Klassizistische, die Commedia dell'arte. Der Rest ist massive 'Schicksaltheater', ein Bild des Komponisten, dem das Spätwerk nicht mehr aufgeführt wurde.”

“Die Erstauflage war allerdings die Bühne errnt, die den 'Protagonist' mit allerbesten Kräften besetzte, theatralisch so wundervoll wie möglich inszeniert und ihn, gekoppelt mit einer anderen Kurzoper, ins Repertoire nimmt.”


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“Wie sollten ein nicht immer erfreuliches Beispiel ist. Im ganzen hat sich Weill in diesem Spiel des Theaters auf dem Theater zwei musikalische Sphären von einer überraschenden kontrapunktischen Tiefe, dabei durchsichtige Klangraster löst. Phantastisch anzuhören, fast verdächtig gekonnt...”

“Die Erstauflage war allerdings die Bühne errnt, die den 'Protagonist' mit allerbesten Kräften besetzte, theatralisch so wundervoll wie möglich inszeniert und ihn, gekoppelt mit einer anderen Kurzoper, ins Repertoire nimmt.”