

INTRODUCTION

Popular adaptations have played a pivotal role in the transmission of Weill's music for stage and screen. During his lifetime, much of that music circulated in print only in such adaptations. Of the works for the stage, not one was published for sale as a full orchestral score; though produced in the theater, many of them were not even issued in piano-vocal format. In this latter category belong *Happy End*, *Die sieben Todsünden*, *Marie Galante*, *A Kingdom for a Cow*, *The Eternal Road*, *Railroads on Parade*, *One Touch of Venus*, *The Firebrand of Florence*, and *Love Life*. Apart from *Down in the Valley*, none of his scores for the theater or cinema were captured on disc in performances approaching completeness. Only those fortunate enough to attend the theatrical "events" could have encountered Weill's music as he composed it. Otherwise, virtually all non-theatrical performance and reception during his lifetime were based on popular adaptations, either on the "texts" of the sheet music and other types of publications reproduced in this volume or on the numerous recordings that derived from them. The adaptations, whose impact has given rise to all manner of misconceptions about Weill's music, have shaped the identity not only of his output as a whole but of individual works—an identity that the Kurt Weill Edition affirms as dynamic and mutable.

In contrast to songs by the majority of popular tunesmiths, whose melodies had to be fitted with lyrics, harmonized, arranged, and then showcased (often on stage or screen), Weill's songs usually traced a very different trajectory in their quest for a broader public. Asserting that "each show has to create its own style, its own texture, its own relationship between text and music," Weill rarely composed a song without a dramatic context, character, and lyric already in hand. Insisting that performances of his works in the theater utilize as integral components of dramatic storytelling his own unaltered arrangements and trademark orchestrations, he always delegated the "popular exploitation" of individual songs to his publishers and usually entrusted its musical execution to their specialist arrangers. Their task—to conform Weill's music as much as possible to the norms of the marketplace—often proved problematic. In the process of incorporating elements of popular idioms as a means of achieving accessibility to a wider public, Weill had generally refunctioned them and challenged their conventions, often to dramatic, ironic or socio-critical effect. But when such songs were then re-arranged for exploitation as popular music, much of that effect simply disappeared. With access only to these adaptations, some people were hard-pressed to differentiate them from Weill's popular models. Whereas, for example, T. W. Adorno felt compelled to defend Weill's popularity in Germany as a misunderstanding on the part of the public, he did not employ the same interpretive strategy to account for the success of the American works, whose popular adaptations he apparently mistook for Weill's originals.

From at least 1927 until his death in 1950, Weill's attitude toward the "popularization" of his music outside its original dramatic context remained remarkably consistent: "We have attempted to create music that is capable of satisfying the musical needs of broader levels of the population without giving up artistic substance. . . . But in no case is it the purpose of all these efforts to enter into combat with the composer of 'hit-tunes' but rather merely to bring our music to the masses. . . . Under no circumstances should the impression be created that we want to renounce the intellectual bearing of the

serious musician in order to be able to compete fully with producers of lighter market wares. . . . We must not imitate the 'hit' (and it has been proven that we are not really able to do that)."¹ Such an aesthetic agenda, reaching out to a mass audience through such emerging media as radio, cinema, sound recordings, and even television, embodied creative tensions and pragmatic considerations not easily reconciled. In 1929, for example, in the wake of the unexpected success of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Weill felt compelled to defend the popularity of its songs to his publisher, Universal Edition: "The fact that my *Dreigroschenoper* music has been commercialized doesn't speak against it, but for it, and we would be falling back into our old mistakes if we were to deny some music its importance and artistic value simply because it found its way to the masses."² Two decades later, in the wake of the succès d'estime of *Street Scene*, Weill confided to lyricist Langston Hughes: "it's no use fooling ourselves that the songs we have written are hit-parade material, because they are not."³ Yet he chastised his American publisher, Chappell, for not properly exploiting some of the songs in the popular arena and for being equally ineffective in promoting the Broadway opera as a whole to opera companies, particularly in Europe. As Weill approached his fiftieth birthday, he expressed satisfaction that his lifelong dual-purpose agenda was succeeding: "suddenly I've been promoted to the rank of 'classical composer,'" he wrote to his parents; and in one of the last diary entries written before his fatal heart attack he recorded a luncheon conversation with the president of Chappell: "[Dreyfus] is satisfied that [my] songs are being established as [popular] standards."⁴

Documenting how Weill's music was "socialized" within very different environments and for equally diverse "consumers" during his lifetime is, therefore, anything but peripheral to an understanding of his oeuvre. The present volume restricts itself to popular adaptations published during Weill's lifetime, with his permission and even endorsement. A collection of sheet music, vocal gems, and dance arrangements would be unimaginable for a Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartók, or Hindemith, though perhaps not inconceivable for a Mozart, Rossini, or Verdi. Though departing from the philological principles

1 "Wir haben deshalb den Versuch unternommen, eine Musik zu schaffen, die auch das Musikbedürfnis breiterer Bevölkerungsschichten zu befriedigen vermag, ohne ihre künstlerische Substanz aufzugeben. [...] Es handelt sich aber bei all diesen Bestrebungen keinesfalls darum, mit den 'Schlagerkomponisten' in Wettstreit zu treten, sondern lediglich darum, unsere Musik an die Menge heranzuführen. [...] [Es] darf doch unter keinen Umständen der Eindruck entstehen, als wollten wir auch auf die geistige Haltung des ernstesten Musikers verzichten, um vollends mit den Produzenten leichter Marktware konkurrieren zu können. [...] Wir dürfen nicht den Schlager imitieren (und es hat sich oft erwiesen, dass wir dies gar nicht können)." Weill, "Die Oper – wohin?" *Berliner Tageblatt*, 31 October 1929; reprinted in *GS2*, 92–94.

2 "Dass meine Musik zur *Dreigroschenoper* industrialisiert worden ist, spricht ja nach unserem Standpunkt nicht gegen sondern für sie, und wir würden in unsere alten Fehler zurückfallen, wenn wir einer Musik ihren künstlerischen Wert und ihre Bedeutung absprechen würden, nur weil sie den Weg zur Menge gefunden hat." Weill, letter to Hans W. Heinsheimer, 14 October 1929; *W-UE*, 195.

3 Weill, letter to Langston Hughes, 19 April 1947; photocopy in WLRC, Series 40.

4 "[...] bin ich nun plötzlich zu einer Art Klassiker befördert worden" Weill, letter to Albert and Emma Weill, 6 September 1949; *W-Fam*, 419. Weill, Diary 1950, entry of 24 January; WLA, Box 68, Folder 21.

of a traditional historical/critical edition, this volume can lay claim to being an indispensable part of the Kurt Weill Edition, not least because of the crucial questions it provokes. Were such adaptations a symptom or a cause of his popularity? How can popularity be measured: by conformance to stylistic norms, by means of dissemination, by extent of circulation, by longevity of interest? How popular were Weill's songs during his lifetime? What was the financial impact for Weill and his publishers? To what extent were his songs actually adapted for commercial exploitation? How did such adaptations then influence, in turn, the performance and reception of Weill's theatrical works?

These and many other issues are addressed by Charles Hamm, one of the foremost scholars of popular music in the twentieth century, in his magisterial essay, "Popular Adaptations of Weill's Music for Stage and Screen, 1927–1950." Thanks to a sustained, multiyear search, every known popular adaptation of Weill's music published during his lifetime is included in the gallery of covers and its catalogue: workers' choruses, virtuosic violin showpieces, sheet music, vocal gems and selections, polyglot songbooks, newspaper supplements, anthologies, dance band and choral arrangements. Particularly prone to physical deterioration and loss over time, some of these items have

apparently survived only as *unica*. The 176 covers, organized chronologically according to the dramatic source work of the adaptation, tell a colorful tale all on their own. Each of the thirty-eight black-and-white facsimiles is printed at full size and in original format; none has been corrected or otherwise edited. In Hamm's essay, they are called out in the margins as he discusses each in detail.

Some of the items have particular historical interest: for example, in the copy of "Bilbao-Song" which he inscribed to Adorno, Weill added both a three-measure introduction and a three-measure first/second ending to demonstrate how the song had been performed onstage in *Happy End*. In the sheet music of "Speak Low," the editorial comma that sneaked erroneously into the song's first line offers a trenchant example of how a small detail in a popular adaptation conditioned performances, critical response, and academic discourse, even a half century after the composer's death. In reflecting the changing fortunes of Weill's popular image, these and the other adaptations presented in this collection preserve an essential aspect of his enduring legacy.

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