Kurt Weill

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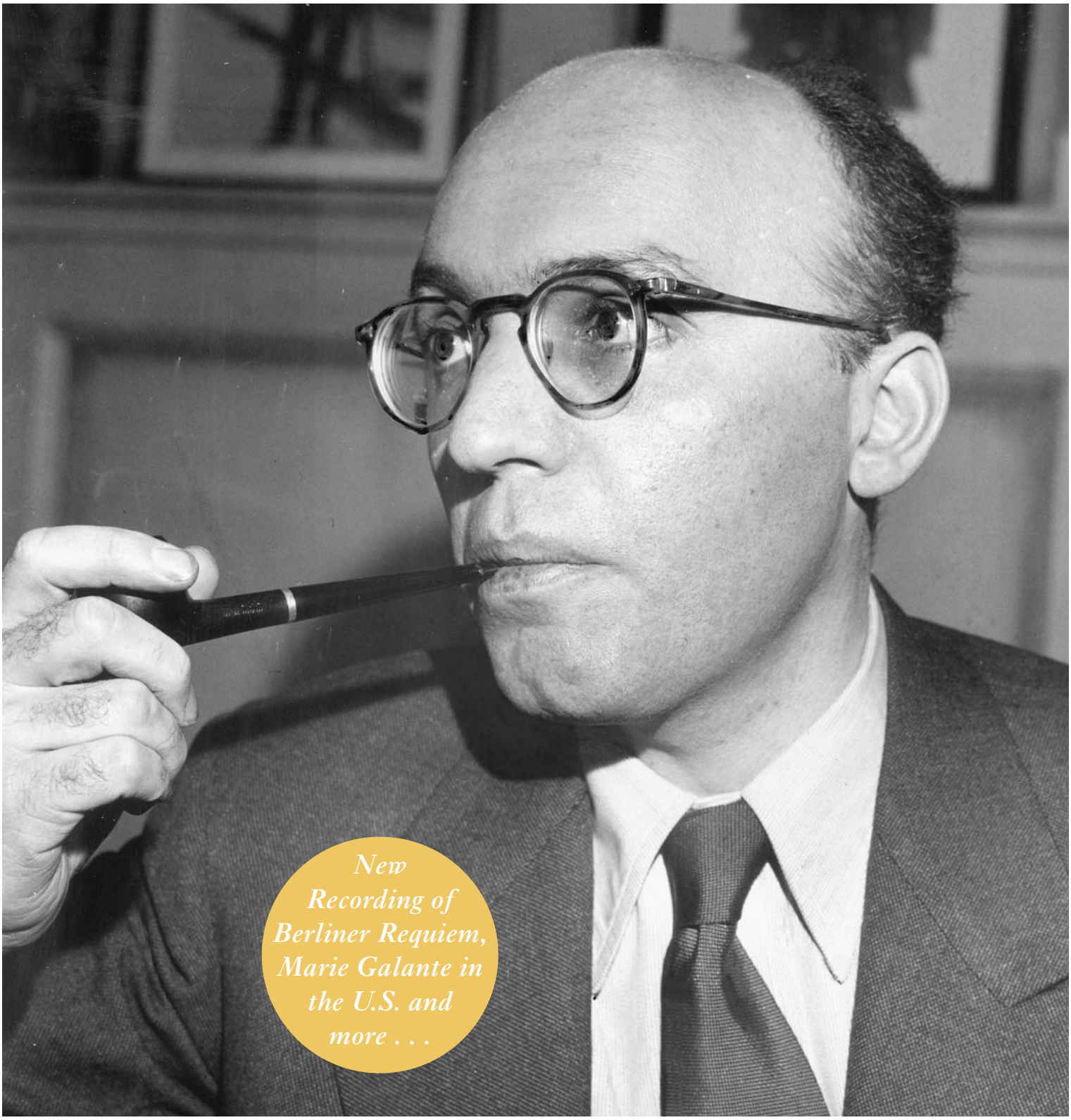

New Recording of Berliner Requiem, Marie Galante in the U.S. and more . . .

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In this issue

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A variety of opinions are expressed in the Newsletter; they do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. Letters to the editor are welcome.

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Cover photo: Weill in 1941. Photographer unknown.

Isabel Bayrakdarian presents an impassioned rendition of "J'attends un navire" in the U.S. premiere of *Marie Galante*. Review begins on p. 17.

Note from the Editor

In the fall of 2006, this Newsletter could happily announce the discovery of the long-lost orchestration to Weill's first stage work, the children's pantomime *Zaubernacht* (1922). Exactly two years later, we are pleased to announce the publication of the full score reassembled from the set of parts found at Yale. The published score, critically edited, is now part of the Kurt Weill Edition, where it carries the eyebrow-raising volume number "0" among the stage works—as nobody could foresee that Weill's orchestration would surface one day.

Zero was precisely the number of productions *Marie Galante* had had in the United States. For this issue of the Newsletter, Eric Salzman filed a report about the admirable venture that brought this unknown play with all its glorious songs and all its challenges as a stage work to New York.

Whereas many of Weill's numbers for *Marie Galante* appeared at least in piano-vocal format, *Das Berliner Requiem* did not see publication during the composer's lifetime, despite the fact that Weill had pursued such plans for about two years. His publisher Universal Edition even listed the work as "forthcoming" in many advertisements between 1930 and 1932. Alas, Weill left the ordering of the *Requiem*'s individual numbers to posterity (for which, as we all know, he "didn't give a damn"). A new recording of *Das Berliner Requiem* offers yet another solution, which Amy Lynn Wlodarski critically probes in a feature article that also takes a hard look at the CD's packaging.

Elmar Juchem

Marie Galante sheet music cover, published by Heugel.

Advertisement for published edition of *Das Berliner Requiem*, printed on the back cover of a piece of sheet music by Universal Edition in 1931.

Commemoration or Exploitation?

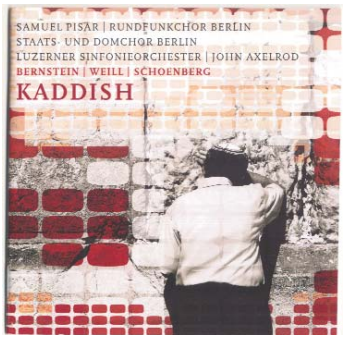
A New Recording Appropriates the Holocaust

By Amy Lynn Wlodarski

Kaddish
Kurt Weill, *Das Berliner Requiem*; Arnold Schoenberg, *A Survivor from Warsaw*; and Leonard Bernstein, Symphony No. 3 (*Kaddish*)

Luzerner Sinfonieorchester
Berliner Rundfunkchor
John Axelrod, conductor

Nimbus Records NI 5807



John Axelrod and the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, together with Nimbus Records and executive producer Michael Haas, have produced an album of three twentieth-century works, meditations upon death and mourning written by Jewish composers. The album's title derives from Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 3—with a new text by Samuel Pisar, which substitutes a personal response to the Holocaust for Bernstein's original meditation on religion in modern life (without ameliorating any of the problems that led Bernstein to seek a new text in the first place). The liner notes for this recording misrepresent Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* as a realistic account of the Ghetto Uprising rather than a largely imaginative recreation and thus also its place in the history of art inspired by the Holocaust. And, of course, Weill's *Berliner Requiem* has nothing to do with the Holocaust at all. Yet all three works have been pressed into service as Holocaust memorials, and it appears that those responsible for the project have failed to grasp the particular aesthetic and ethical questions that confront those who wish to represent the Holocaust in art.

As if the conceptual difficulties of this programming weren't enough, the CD booklet contributes its own set of problems. The first copies released contained a track list for the 1967 version of the *Berliner Requiem* and incomplete notes for David Drew's new one, recorded here for the first time. Although these embarrassments were corrected when the album was re-released, a more general problem persists: the author, Cornelia Weidner (if we can trust the credits), distorts history to create misleading links between the three works and the Holocaust. Fortunately, the recording itself, with its many musical rewards (not least, Drew's new conception for the *Berliner Requiem*) proves its worth despite the obstacles created by its packaging and framing.

Using and Abusing the Holocaust

Linking these works raises several ethical concerns. The liner notes remind us that Lucerne intentionally designs "programmes [that] highlight specific themes in the history of music" (34), and the suggestive cover art for the album—a mourner praying at the Wailing Wall and a photograph of a cemetery—makes explicit that Jewish suffering is the intended theme of this program. The introductory section of the notes adopts a foreboding tone that seems to anticipate the horrors of the twentieth century: "Arnold Schönberg, Kurt Weill, Leonard Bernstein—three Jewish fates, three eminent, albeit very different, 20th century composers. Schönberg and Weill [were] both born in Europe and forced to emigrate after the National Socialists seized power . . . Weill found a new direction as a Broadway musical composer and could well be considered as a predecessor of Leonard Bernstein" (10).

Perhaps more appropriate for a movie trailer, such rhetoric glosses over historical issues that arise from coupling Schoenberg and Bernstein/Pisar with Weill's *Berliner Requiem*, which was written before the Nazis took power in 1933 and has nothing to do with Jewish suffering *per se*. Within this interpretive framework, Weill's piece must function as a harbinger of tragedy, a prophetic voice anticipating the genocide to come, looking forward rather than back to World War I and its immediate aftermath. Perhaps sensing the consequences of these disingenuous associations, Weidner shifts gears suddenly to advance a more general theme: "Besides the, albeit tenuous, common thread leading us from Schönberg via Weill to Bernstein, one other aspect connects the three works: all three pieces are dedicated to the memory of the dead" (10).

But the album's powerful visual, musical, and textual narrative particularizes that dedication as Holocaust commemoration, raising questions about how the recording engages the Holocaust in both historical and representational terms, an issue still much debated in general within Holocaust studies. Saul Friedlander, for example, notes that while the Holocaust "is as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event," it "tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories. [It is] an event at the limits." Such unprecedented disregard for human life raises a central dilemma for historians and interpreters of the

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Holocaust, who wrestle with "a need for 'truth,' and the problems raised by the opaqueness of the events and the opaqueness of language."[1] Nearly sixty years ago Theodor W. Adorno had posed similar questions: "Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today."[2] For Adorno, language proves inadequate to capture the unique horror—the barbarism—of the Holocaust and threatens to relegate it to the same discursive level as other historical phenomena. More recently Hayden White has wondered if these events can "be responsibly emplotted in *any* of the modes, symbols, plot types, and genres our culture provides for 'making sense' of such extreme events in our past? Or do Nazism and the Final Solution belong to a special class of events . . . and [therefore] set absolute limits on what can be truthfully said about them? Do they set limits on the uses that can be made of them by writers of fiction or poetry?"[3]

Berel Lang notes that "the historical limits that apply [are] compounded [when] the constraints (and so, the risks) on historical representation are joined by constraints that hold specifically for artistic representation." For him, supplanting historical voices with memorial or imaginative voices is problematic in the context of the Holocaust: "the denial of individuality and personhood in the act of genocide . . . constitute a subject that in its elements seems at odds with the insulation of figurative discourse and the individuation of character and motivation that literary 'making' tends to impose on its subjects." Lang also argues that the option of silence helps to define the limits of representation: "Silence emerges as a limit precisely because of the *possibility* of representation."[4] Friedlander warns that "the aesthetic dimension inevitably dominates and overwhelms a spectator lacking the necessary knowledge of the events."[5] What we come to know in the end is not the event but its shadow, imbued with the polemics and aesthetic preferences of the artist himself. The limits of representation therefore reveal our own limits of imagination and language, but the ethical consequences are grave: distorting historical fact for dramatic impact or reducing the meaning of the Holocaust to a well-worn slogan such as "never again" transgresses not only representational limits but also the historical event itself.

One wonders if the packaging of the album was merely assembled in haste or if those responsible did not take seriously enough their task of musical Holocaust curation. Might the Holocaust theme have been chosen primarily to increase marketability of the album by exploiting the popularity of the Holocaust industry today?

The *Kaddish* Symphony and the Limits of Holocaust Representation

Leonard Bernstein dedicated the *Kaddish* Symphony to the memory of President Kennedy, thereby linking the work to a particular American tragedy. In its original form the symphony only obliquely engages the Holocaust and its impact on American Jews. When he began work on it in 1961, Bernstein could scarcely have foreseen the world events that would unfold during its gestation, including the Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, the Cuban missile crisis, and Kennedy's assassination. As David Schiller notes, this was a period of "growing malaise" in organized religious life for American Jewry, and Bernstein's text certainly addresses the end of optimism and religious faith of the 1960s.[6] Bernstein's opening "Invocation" portrays the narrator as skeptical of God's omnipotence; the text articulates a longing for the security of religion and an uncertainty about the fate of future generations:

> O, my Father; ancient, hallowed,
> Lonely, disappointed Father:
> Rejected Ruler of the Universe
> […]
> I want to pray. I want to say Kaddish.
> My own Kaddish. Listen, Almighty,
> With all your might; there may just be
> No one to say it after me.

Bernstein's earnest attempt at post-Holocaust theology and the preservation of cultural memory met with harsh criticism from several quarters. Many critics found the libretto to be in "poor taste," with critic Winthrop Sargeant questioning whether an individual voice is ever capable of speaking universally as "the voice of humanity." Prominent Jewish theologians, including Rabbi Andre Ungar, challenged the composer to "make up his mind whether God exists or not, and if by chance and with man's gracious permission he does, whether it is might or morals that he lacks."[7]

Bernstein himself was never fully satisfied with his text; he attempted several revisions over the course of his life. Since his death, Bernstein's executors have authorized several new texts for the work, generally only on the basis of an author's close personal relationship with the composer.[8] Samuel Pisar, an Auschwitz survivor and a close friend of Bernstein, achieved such favor on the grounds that Bernstein himself had approached Pisar about a new text in 1989. Pisar's contribution premiered at the 2003 Ravinia Festival in Chicago; its European premiere in Lucerne in 2006 is presented on this recording. Pisar's version deviates drastically from Bernstein's original text in that it privileges "the mourning of the Shoa[h] victims. While Bernstein still grapples with the basic human debate with God and with personal faith, Pisar has placed . . . the Jewish victims of the National Socialist regime at the centre of the piece" (13–14), as the new "Invocation" evinces:

Leonard Bernstein. Photo courtesy of The Leonard Bernstein Office, Inc.

> My first tears are for my family, eternal victims of religious and ethnic persecution, that reached its historic climax before my bar mitzvah, and destroyed everyone and everything around me, while you, supreme ruler of the universe, stood idly by.
>
> Equally distant and indifferent were you, as I agonized at Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Dachau, where Eichmann's and Mengele's gruesome reality eclipsed Dante's vision of inferno.

Pisar's text spares no anguished image, as it angrily recalls the extermination of loved ones ("my father tortured . . . my little sister, who had hardly lived"), the totality of the genocide ("all wiped out, in one fell swoop, according to the unfathomable logic"), and the need to remember ("to forget, to numb the pain, to dim the memory, would be a betrayal of those who died"). Pisar frequently invokes images and phraseology that have become Holocaust clichés, including this description of the gas chambers:

> I was there . . .
> After the doors were shut,
> They had only three minutes to live.
> Yet they found enough strength
> To dig their fingernails into the walls
> And scratch in the words: "never forget!"

Lawrence Langer has argued convincingly that such representations "lead us away from a clear understanding of [the Holocaust], because they falsely imply that keeping alive its memory would be sufficient to prevent future genocides."[9] The new text's uncompromising focus on the horror of the Holocaust clashes with Bernstein's vernacular idioms and theatrical gestures. Pisar's prose remains pointedly monothematic, with few hints of the self-awareness and eloquence of other Holocaust authors such as Primo Levi or Aharon Appelfeld. Although Bernstein's own 1964 and 1977 versions also lacked grace and literary merit, Pisar has produced yet another unsatisfying version of the *Kaddish* Symphony, one which further divorces the work from its original context and offers no new approach for coming to terms with the Holocaust.

And, unfortunately, the performance of the Symphony is the weakest of the three works on this recording. Pisar himself narrates, but he sounds oddly unfamiliar with his own text; he reads with awkward inflections and lacks dramatic conviction. There is a strange disjunction between the melodramatic tone of his poetry and his flat presentation. The Rundfunkchor Berlin is also less impressive in this performance than in the others on the disc, predominantly because of frequent imbalance between the vocal forces and the orchestra, particularly the brass section, which too often drowns out the choir. Soprano soloist Abbie Furmansky offers an uneven performance, one that brings much, sometimes too much, heft to Bernstein's vocal writing. Especially after Pisar's spoken introduction to the fourth movement—"I remember my grandmother's sweet voice singing me lullabies"—Furmansky's voice seems too heavy-handed. Her wide vibrato and "under-pitched" intonation are particularly noticeable on sustained notes and in those passages where she is doubled by the Lucerne Symphony. Due praise must be extended, however, to the string section, which handles Bernstein's harmonics, pitch clusters, and lyrical writing extremely well. Their intonation, especially in the highest registers, lends a shimmering timbre to some of the sparser portions of Bernstein's score. Overall, however, the orchestra tends to overwhelm Bernstein's choral settings, even the Kaddish prayer itself. Given its ideological packaging, a performance that obscures the Hebrew prayer might again suggest that the Holocaust and Jewish culture were perhaps not a primary concern of this project.

Misunderstanding *A Survivor from Warsaw*

Weidner's muddled historical notes for Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947) misconstrue the composer's intentions and imply that the subject of his cantata was a historical person rather than a fictional character. Nearly every sentence of her opening paragraph requires factual correction:

> Arnold Schönberg's Opus 46 is a requiem dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. Even today it is still regarded as the epitome of antifascist music. A melodrama for narrator, male choir, and orchestra, it was created in a few days in 1947 and represents Schönberg's entirely personal reaction to the horrors of the Nazi dictatorship and an acknowledgement of his own Jewishness. The composition was commissioned by the Kussewitzky [*sic*] Foundation to whom Schönberg also dedicated the work (12).

In fact, Schoenberg never referred to *Survivor* as a requiem, a term that Weidner no doubt chose in order to connect *Survivor* with the *Berliner Requiem,* which precedes it on the recording. Nor did Schoenberg dedicate *Survivor* to "victims of the Holocaust," but to the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in memory of Natalie Koussevitzky (as Weidner points out three sentences later). The cantata was not "created in a few days in 1947," an assertion that lends Schoenberg the aura of an inspired genius working for the Jewish cause. The Koussevitzky Foundation had commissioned an orchestral work from Schoenberg in July 1947, but Schoenberg responded by offering his current vocal project rather than a new piece. The Foundation's leadership replied that they would not want their preference for an orchestral work to inhibit Schoenberg's creative talent. Schoenberg completed *Survivor* a month (not a few days) later and sent the manuscript to Koussevitzky with a request that the commission fee be sent "as soon as possible, because I am in the hands of terrible crooks, publishers, recording companies, etc."[10]

Among the most baffling of Weidner's assertions is that *Survivor* "represents Schönberg's entirely personal reaction to the horrors [of the Holocaust] . . . and an acknowledgement of his own Jewishness." As Michael Strasser has documented, the dramatic outline of *Survivor* did not originate with Schoenberg but with Corinne Chochem, a Russian dancer who had invited the composer to contribute a piece to a postwar anti-fascist, commemorative recording. Schoenberg abandoned that project because of Chochem's limited financial resources, despite her appeal to his Jewish heritage in her final letter: "I wish we were in the position of a wealthy patron. However, my recognition and awareness as to what such an album would be to Jewish cultural life and to the musical world . . . is greater than my ability to pay adequately. Unless the composers are willing to help me carry this project through, I may have to stop right there."[11] Schoenberg withdrew from the project immediately and made no bones about his financial needs: "When I take 'time out' I can do this only to earn money, because my grocer and the State (asking taxes) demand it. I have done throughout my whole life so much for idealistic ends (and so

Arnold Schoenberg. Photo courtesy of the Arnold Schoenberg Center.

little has to be [*sic*] returned to me in kind) that I have done my duty."[12] Schoenberg's words manifest bitterness about doing *pro bono* work for Jewish causes and suggest that he had little interest in composing a Holocaust memorial without monetary compensation. Although the cantata unquestionably arises from Schoenberg's own cultural association with Judaism, the composer never explicitly proclaimed the work to be a reflection of his dedication to the Jewish faith.

Weidner, however, dives right into the murky waters of authorial intent:

> It is Schönberg's interior motives that colour the work: he was personally affected by the terrible news that reached America after 1945. At the beginning of 1947, he found out that the death of his brother Heinrich in 1941 had not been due to surgery as initially thought but that his brother had been a victim of the NS euthanasia programme. His cousin Arthur Schönberg also died in the Holocaust. A Survivor from Warsaw did survive—in the sewers of the Warsaw ghetto (p. 13).

The sudden shift from historical information about Schoenberg's family to the "Survivor" in the cantata creates a false connection, implying that the "Survivor from Warsaw" was a real person and not a fictionalized character. In truth, Schoenberg wrote the libretto for *Survivor* as a largely imaginative account of the Warsaw Ghetto, based partially on reports of the Vilna Ghetto provided by Chochem.[13] The libretto contains several historical inaccuracies, the most egregious being that gas chambers were never located in the ghetto. Even contemporary critics challenged the historical veracity of the work, most notably Kurt List, who wrote Schoenberg to object to such departures. The composer responded that "even if such things have not been done in the manner in which I describe in the *Survivor*, this does not matter. The main thing is that I saw it in my imagination."[14] In the preface to the published edition (Bomart Music Publications, 1949), Schoenberg admitted his narrative "was based partly upon reports which I have received directly or indirectly." In 1962, in a radio address in Bremen, Adorno objected to Schoenberg's attempt to represent musically the unimaginable, to "turn suffering into images, harsh and uncompromising as they are." The use of a Jewish prayer "makes an unthinkable fate appear to have some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims."[15]

In contrast to Weidner's accompanying note, the Lucerne Symphony delivers perhaps the most accurate musical account of Schoenberg's *Survivor* on the market today. The orchestra's close attention to Schoenberg's markings allows it to capture many of *Survivor*'s expressionistic dimensions. The strings and brass shift deftly between passages of horror, in which they emphasize strident or shrill timbres without sacrificing intonation, and those of human reflection, which call for a warmer sound. The highly amplified percussion makes it a more audible presence than in other recordings. Yet at times this detracts from the performance, especially when the timpani drown out other musical lines or obscure pivotal dynamic shifts that Schoenberg intended as a portrayal of violent schisms of memory. Unfortunately the performance of the vocalists diminishes the dramatic impact of the traumatic work. Narrator Noam Sheriff loses momentum with an understated delivery, most notably on sustained notes ("the grandiose moment"). His depiction of the Feldwebel, whom Schoenberg specifically describes as "speaking in a shrill, breaking voice," seems strangely uninvolved; Sheriff intones the text with dead calm and civility rather than barking commands and threats with growing impatience. The Rundfunkchor Berlin also lacks urgency in its rendition of the *Shema Yisroel*, which sounds overly precise and rehearsed, so that the terror and passion of the final moment come across as subdued, even anti-climactic.

Rethinking Weill's *Berliner Requiem*

In his "Notes on a Reconstruction," David Drew credits Nils Grosch's recent research with the inspiration to prepare a new sequence for *Das Berliner Requiem*, which had been assembled largely from pre-existing settings of poems from Brecht's *Hauspostille*, received only one or two performances, was not published, and would never achieve a stable identity during Weill's lifetime. With the loss of both the holograph score and the original performance materials, previous performances and recordings were based on Drew's performing edition from 1967, in which the "Großer Dankchoral" functioned as both opening and closing number. Then, in 2000, Drew tested several revised versions. Grosch's research had identified four distinct conceptions of the *Requiem,* all of which inform Drew's revisions to some extent. In November and December 1928, Weill had initially conceived what Grosch calls version (A), on commission from the Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft for a project seeking to introduce modern works by German composers to the general public through a series of radio broadcasts. Weill's first conception of the work (not yet a "version" by any means) apparently met resistance from the censors, particularly to the penultimate movement, a satirical march titled "Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen." In what Grosch describes as an act of "self-censorship," Weill omitted the Potsdam march from this planned *Requiem*, leaving a version (B) with only seven movements that was broadcast on 22 May 1929.[16]

Version A	Version B
1. Vom Tod im Wald	1. Vom Tod im Wald
2. Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen	2. Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen

3. Vom ertrunkenen Mädchen	3. Vom ertrunkenen Mädchen
4. Marterl	4. Marterl
5. Erster Bericht	5. Erster Bericht
6. Zweiter Bericht	6. Zweiter Bericht
7. Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen	7. [Omitted]
8. Großer Dankchoral	8. Großer Dankchoral

The third version (C), which Weill completed and sent to Universal Edition in 1929, contained several noteworthy changes. First, Weill deleted "Vom Tod im Wald," because it was "an older piece [whose music] doesn't quite fit the context of the *Requiem*."[17] Second, he moved "Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen" closer to the end, after the two reports on the unknown soldier. Third, he shifted the "Großer Dankchoral" to the beginning of the piece, to serve as a prelude. Finally, he reinstated the Potsdam march as the closing movement, to end on a satirical note.

Version C	Version D
1. Großer Dankchoral	1. Großer Dankchoral
2. Vom ertrunkenen Mädchen	2. Vom ertrunkenen Mädchen
3. Marterl	3. Marterl
4. Erster Bericht	4. Die Legende vom toten Soldaten
5. Zweiter Bericht	5. Erster Bericht
6. Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen	6. Zweiter Bericht
7. Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen	7. Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen

On 4 June 1929, days after the first performance on Frankfurt Radio, Weill asked Universal Edition to delay publication of the *Berliner Requiem* until after the premiere of his opera, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*; Weill explained that "Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen" now "played an important role" in the opera. Shortly before the premiere of *Mahagonny*, Weill sent Universal Edition what he called the "final sequence" for the *Requiem*, a version (D) which omitted "Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen" and added "Die Legende vom toten Soldaten" as the centerpiece of the *Requiem*, even though the only surviving score of that piece calls for *a cappella* mixed chorus. Grosch advocated performance of Weill's original conception (Version A), because it is "the most convincing of all available forms in its function and conception; it also [represents] the form the work had directly before the censorship procedure." He also argues strongly for inclusion of the Potsdam march:

> The removal of Potsdam from later editions was closely related to the April 1929 censorship of the broadcast performance. The censor's decree, which cost the march its position in the *Requiem* (with the exception of the broadcast version, it is present in all other versions as the conclusion), strongly suggests that we should include this movement in the piece today, so that we do not repeat the act of censorship.[18]

Though Version A never moved beyond an initial planning stage, Drew apparently concurs, at least in part, with Grosch and therefore has reinstated the Potsdam march as the penultimate movement of latest reconstruction. However, he does not reproduce Grosch's Version (A) precisely. Instead, he retains some of Weill's editorial decisions based on musical style (e.g., the exclusion of "Vom Tod im Wald") and affirms the priority of *Mahagonny* by declining to include "Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen." Nevertheless, Drew's "Lucerne Version" is strikingly different from his 1967 performing edition.

1967 Edition	"Lucerne Version"
1. Großer Dankchoral	1. Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen
2. Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen	2. Marterl; Grabschrift
3. Marterl	3. Erster Bericht
4. Erster Bericht	4. Zweiter Bericht
5. Zweiter Bericht	5. Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen
6. Großer Dankchoral	6. Großer Dankchoral.

As Drew notes, his new version preserves the two diptychs that appear in all of Weill's conceptions, reclaims "Zu Potsdam," and "rejects the alpha-and-omega symmetry" created by beginning and ending the *Requiem* with the "Großer Dankchoral" (12).

Drew identifies another factor that caused him to revise the 1967 version: "after many performances in Europe and the USA and several commercial recordings, the [1967] edition had acquired an unforeseen and unwarranted status" (11). Drew's "Lucerne Version" draws on new source evidence, but his decision to open the work with the "Ballade" warrants further discussion because it departs from all of Weill's known conceptions of the *Requiem* and thus seems informed more by arbitrary aesthetic considerations than by scrupulous regard for textual history.

All of Weill's versions of the *Requiem* begin with a prelude, either "Vom Tod im Wald" or the "Großer Dankchoral." But Drew's latest *Requiem* eschews such formalities, beginning instead with the "Ballade," a spare setting for men's chorus and guitar that might seem a curious choice given the passivity of the movement, which stays close to E minor as the text paints the portrait of a corpse slowly sinking into the depths of a river:

> In truth, the *Requiem* never had a beginning, nor even a false start. . . . Brecht remembered nothing of the *Requiem* when Lotte Lenya spoke to him about it in 1955 and sang "Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen" for him. The poem ranges from Shakespeare's Ophelia to Rimbaud's Les Illuminations without thought of Christian redemption. God is oblivious; decay and renewal are circular. The "Ballade" for chorus and guitar only is the first number we hear in this recording. It is not "the beginning." In the beginning is—silence (12).

Such an explanation ignores Weill's consistent placement of "Ballade" after a prelude and borders on the metaphysical, with its allusion to creativity emerging from the void; yet ironically Drew's invocation of silence resonates with certain theories of Holocaust commemoration. By beginning with the image of a drowned woman, the *Requiem* concerns itself with an individual subject with an overt reference to the murder of Rosa Luxemburg instead of a more universal topic, as in the "Großer Dankchoral."

Drew discusses another revision in an appendix to his "Notes on a reconstruction": the addition of "Grabschrift" to the second movement ("Marterl"): "[The second movement is] an experiment: the number that follows "Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen" has

two alternative single-stanza texts, "Marterl" and "Grabschrift"—the one private and personal, the other public and political; in this recording, as in the Lucerne concert of August 2006, the two stanzas are performed consecutively" (12). In order to accommodate both texts, the orchestra repeats the music for "Marterl," thereby doubling the length of the song. A solo tenor sings "Marterl" to suggest an individual lament for "die Jungfrau Johanna Beck," whereas a men's choir performs "Grabschrift" in unison, with obvious allusions to Luxemburg ("Die rote Rosa schon lang verschwand"). Drew knew of both texts when he compiled his 1967 edition of the *Requiem*, but at that time he rejected interpolation of "Grabschrift" on the basis that "the alternative text had been added to the [non-autograph manuscript] in another hand."

At first glance, the decision to include both texts may seem to overcompensate for the censorship of Weill's original *Requiem* through superfluous references to Rosa Luxemburg, and it may be subject to criticism on that ground. However, in a letter to Universal of 6 January 1930, Weill did instruct his publisher to print this movement in the score of the *Requiem* "exactly as [it is printed] in the Song-Album, with two texts." The *Song-Album* of 1929 presents "Marterl" with "Hier ruht die Jungfrau" *and* the alternative text "Die rote Rosa." Although Drew does not cite Weill's instruction in his note, he seems to have responded to the composer's stated intention for version (D).

Whether or not you find Drew's latest version philologically convincing, the work which has least to do with the album's imposed theme receives the best performance. Axelrod and the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra respond sensitively to Weill's score. The sound is nuanced and evenly balanced. The brass section makes quite an impression in the "Erster Bericht," with its unified articulation. But the Rundfunkchor Berlin really steals the show. Their every appearance exhibits seamless vocal blending and superb intonation, especially in the *a cappella* Potsdam march. Their interpretive skills are on full display in the haunting rendition of "Ballade," which captures beautifully the pacing and poetic nuances of Brecht's text. Their warm sound adds a human dimension to the coldness of the poetry and gives the performance added depth and sincerity. Although Weill instructs the vocalist in "Marterl" to sing quietly in an almost detached manner, soloist Jan Remmers breaks this placidity at times, generally when the vocal line veers into the higher register. Singing the same melodic line, the Rundfunkchor effortlessly renders its high notes, maintaining both elegant phrasing and poetic conviction. The performance of this new take on the *Requiem* is the highlight of the recording.

Notes

1. Saul Friedlander, "Introduction," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 2–3; 4.

2. Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society (1951)," in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 210.

3. Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 37–38.

4. Berel Lang, "The Representation of Limits," in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 315; 316; 317.

5. Friedlander, 16.

6. David Schiller, "'My Own Kaddish': Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 3," in *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 186.

7. Winthrop Sargeant, "Kaddish," *New Yorker*, 18 April 1964, 185; Andre Ungar, "The Theology of Leonard Bernstein," *Jewish Spectator* 29 (October 1964): 9–10, both as cited in Schiller, "My Own Kaddish," 189.

8. Judith Clurman, "Shaking a Fist at the Almighty: A Daughter's Perspective on Bernstein's Kaddish Symphony," *The Juilliard Journal Online* 19/3 (November 2003).

9. As discussed by David H. Jones in his review of Lawrence L. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 22/1 (2008): 110.

10. Michael Strasser, "*A Survivor from Warsaw* as Personal Parable," *Music and Letters* 76/1 (1995): 54–55; 55.

11. Letters from Corinne Chochem to Schoenberg, 2 April 1947 and 22 April 1947; Arnold Schoenberg Center (ASI): Letters 10402 and 10401.

12. Letter from Schoenberg to Chochem, 23 April 1947; ASI: Letter 4255.

13. David Schiller has posited that Schoenberg "conflated two phases of the history of the Warsaw Ghetto" including the Great Liquidation of 1942 and the Ghetto Revolt of 1943. See David M. Schiller, *Bloch, Schoenberg, and Bernstein: Assimilating Jewish Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96.

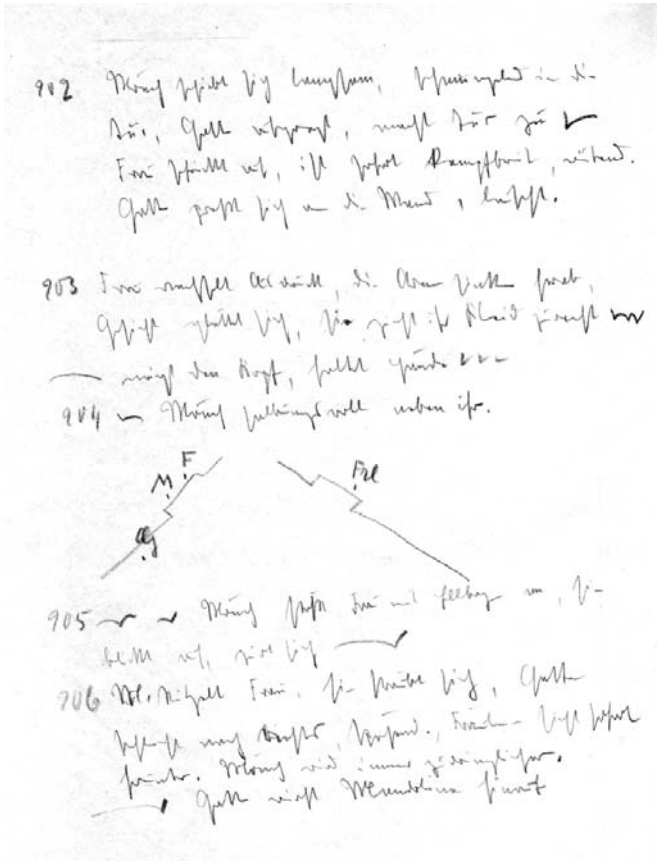
14. Letter from Schoenberg to Kurt List, 1 November 1948, as cited in *Arnold Schoenberg Self-Portrait: A Collection of Articles, Program Notes, and Letters by the Composer about His Own Works*, ed. Nuria Schoenberg Nono (Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Belmont Music Publishers, 1988), 105.

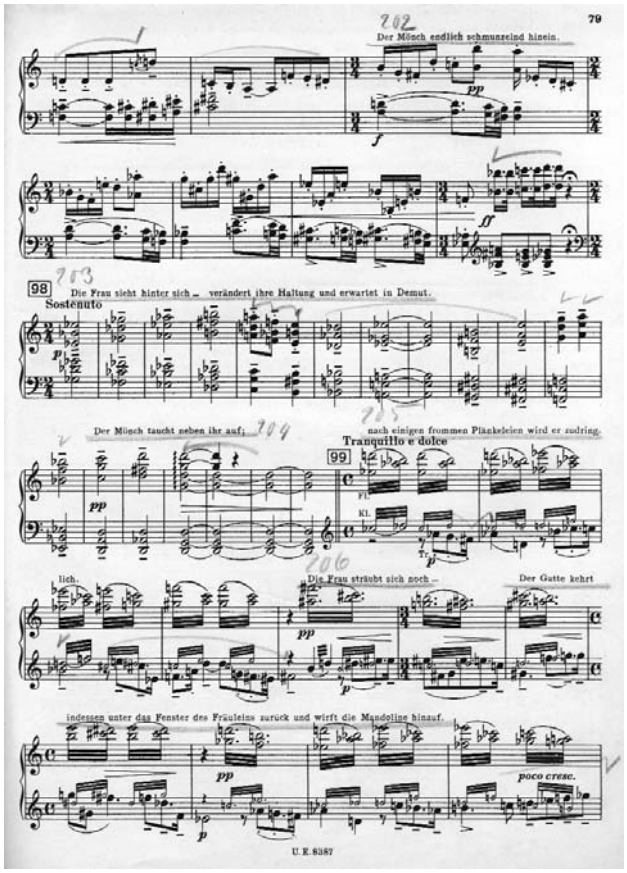
15. Theodor Adorno, "Engagement," in *Notes to Literature* II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 88.

16. See Nils Grosch, "'Notiz' zum *Berliner Requiem*: Aspekte seiner Entstehung und Aufführung," in *Kurt Weill-Studien*, ed. Nils Grosch, Joachim Lucchesi, and Jürgen Schebera (Stuttgart: M & P, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1996), 64.

17. Letter of 21 April 1929, cited in Grosch, 65. Weill's correspondence with Universal Edition is held by the Sibley Music Library of the University of Rochester: Universal Edition-Kurt Weill Correspondence, Special Collections 2001.1.

18. Grosch, 71.



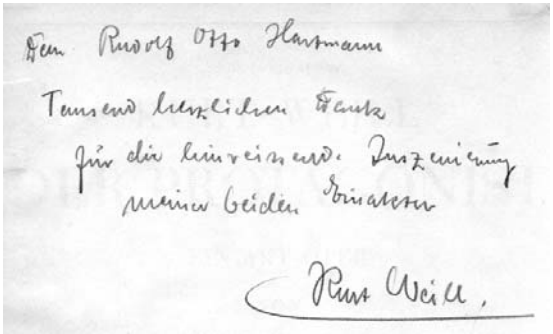


News from the Archive

On 4 April 1928 the Theater Altenburg presented Weill's one-act operas *Der Protagonist* and *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*. This production became historic for several reasons: (1) for the first time, these two works appeared as a double bill; (2) also for the first time, Weill's former student Maurice (de) Abravanel conducted a work by Weill; and (3) Weill was extremely pleased with what he saw, reporting to his publisher on 9 April 1928: "The general management sent a car to pick me up, because they feared a scandal was about to happen. All the more surprising, then, that the entire house applauded after each work: 13 curtain calls after *Protagonist* and 15 after *Zar*. This favorable outcome in such a small town seems to be another proof that the combination of these two works is a surefire thing for any stage."

Last summer, the Weill-Lenya Research Center acquired two unique documents that offer richly detailed information about the historic production: a piano-vocal score of each work, interleaved with extensive notes by stage director Rudolf Otto Hartmann, and inscribed by Weill. (See above for an example of Hartmann's notes placed in the score, from the First Pantomime in *Der Protagonist*, and below right for Weill's dedication.) A photo of the First Pantomime, as staged in Altenburg, is printed below left (photo: W. Rothe).

Weill's dedication reads, "A thousand heartfelt thanks for the captivating production of my one-acts."



Rudolf Hartmann. Photo: ThStA Altenburg, Bildersammlung Nr. 2433-15

Operatic stage director Rudolf Otto Hartmann (1900–1988) held positions in Bamberg, Altenburg, Nuremberg, Berlin, and Munich. During his tenure in Altenburg (1924–28) he was already "Oberspielleiter der Oper" (chief director of the opera). In 1930 he was unable to stage *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in Nuremberg. In 1937 Clemens Krauss offered him the chief position at the Munich Opera, where Hartmann became Richard Strauss's confidant and favorite director; he staged the world premieres of *Friedenstag*, *Capriccio*, and *Die Liebe der Danae*.

Weill ist befriedigt ...

Der Komponist der beiden Opern „Der Protagonist" und „Der Zar läßt sich photographieren" hat anläßlich der hiesigen Erstaufführung seiner Werke, der er beiwohnte, nachstehendes Schreiben an die Generalintendanz des Landestheaters gerichtet:

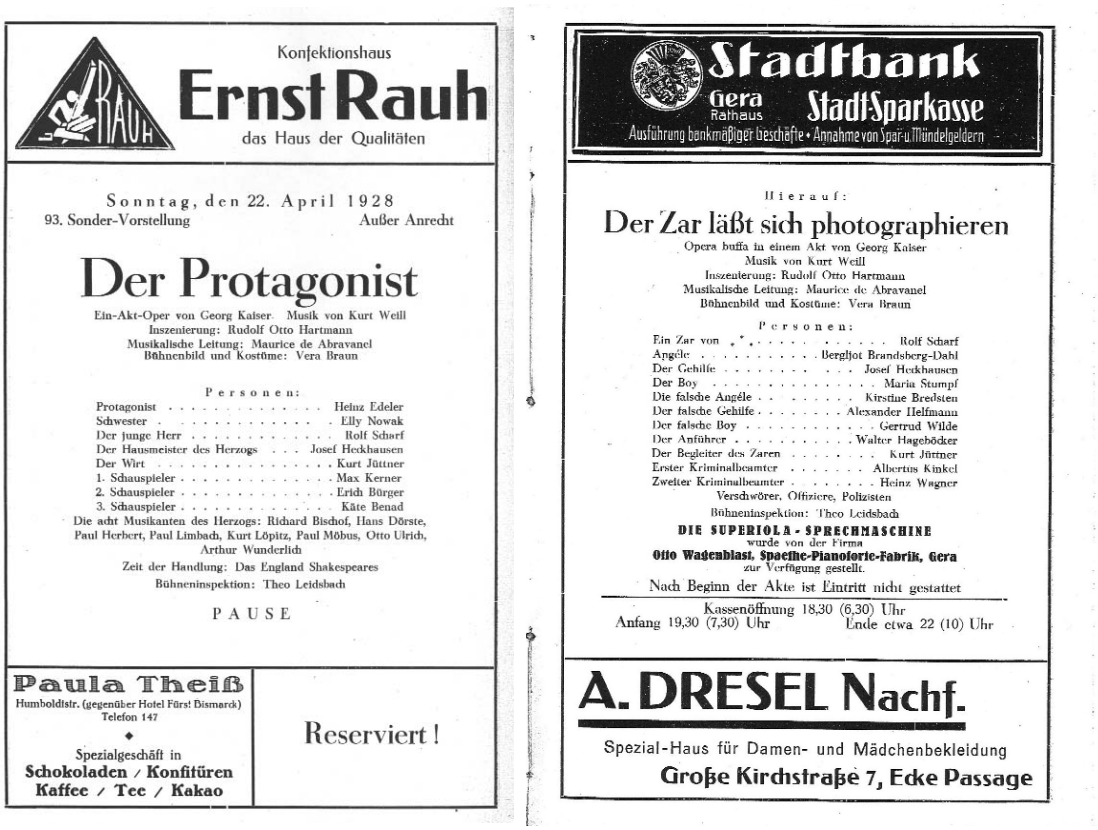
Kurt Weill,
Charlottenburg, Berlin, den 9. 4. 1928.
Luisenplatz 3/II.

Sehr geehrter Herr Generalintendant!

Lassen Sie mich Ihnen noch einmal für die prachtvolle Aufführung meiner beiden Opern „Der Protagonist" und „Der Zar läßt sich photographieren" meine große Dankbarkeit aussprechen. Dank Ihrer energischen Initiative und der bewundernswerten Leistung Ihrer Mitarbeiter haben Sie eine der eindrucksvollsten Aufführungen beider Werke zustande gebracht. Ich weiß nicht, was ich mehr bewundern soll; die wundervolle Präzision der musikalischen Arbeit Ihres Dirigenten M. de Abravanel und die erstaunliche Einfühlungsgabe, mit der er sich in die Gedankenwelt meiner Werke einlebte, oder die einfallsreiche und phantasievolle Inszenierung R. O. Hartmanns, die völlig aus dem Geist der Musik heraus mit überraschender Lebendigkeit das Geschehen abrollen ließ. In jedem Fall möchte ich Sie bitten, allen Mitarbeitern an dieser Aufführung, Herrn de Abravanel, Herrn Hartmann und Fräulein V. Braun, ferner den vorzüglichen Vertretern der Hauptrollen: den Damen Nowak, Brandsberg-Dahl und Bredsten, den Herren Edeler und Scharf, schließlich auch den Herren des Chores und des Orchesters den Ausdruck meiner Dankbarkeit zu übermitteln. Ich bin sehr erfreut, diese Aufführung miterlebt zu haben, die für mich als erste gemeinsame Darstellung beider Werke erhöhte Bedeutung gewinnt.

Mit den herzlichsten Grüßen

Ihr aufrichtig ergebener
gez. Kurt Weill.



Above: The program from the double bill as presented in neighboring Gera (photo courtesy of Archiv Theater und Philharmonie Thüringen). Top right: a letter from Weill to the Generalintendant of the Landestheater was published in the *Altenburger Zeitung* of 11 April 1928. He expressed his gratitude and enthusiasm for the production, singling out Abravanel, Hartmann, and several singers by name.

Remembering Alma Jo Révy-Staub (1909–2008)

Alma "Jo" Révy-Staub, Weill's long-time friend and confidante, passed away in Männedorf, Switzerland, on 12 August 2008, at the age of 99. Born on 18 April 1909 as the daughter of the arts patrons Emil Staub and Alma Staub-Terlinden, she studied ballet with Trudi Schoop, a famed Swiss comic dancer, but had to abandon a dancing career because of the after-effects of a case of rheumatic fever. In the 1930s she turned to costume design and moved to Berlin, where she married the director Richard Révy around 1933 in a ceremony at the city's Gedächtniskirche. They had one son, Thomas (1937–1994). Weill met the Révys in 1934 during his exile in France and encouraged Lenya to stay with them when Lenya was recovering from surgery. Lenya knew Richard Révy from her days as a dancer at the theater in Zurich, and it was he who introduced her to the playwright Georg Kaiser in the early 1920s in Berlin.

Although neither of the Révys was Jewish, they both emigrated to the United States in protest of the Nazi regime. Richard left ahead of his family, and Alma Jo, accompanied by her son and her mother, arrived in New York on 2 March 1939, where Weill—on his 39th birthday—and Lenya greeted them at the pier. After a brief stint on the East Coast, the Révys moved on to California, where they settled in the Los Angeles area. During his various Hollywood engagements in the 1940s, Weill would stay in regular contact. Because of Weill's special relationship with Jo, Lenya informed her immediately of Weill's sudden passing so she could attend the funeral on 5 April 1950 at Mount Repose cemetery in Haverstraw.

After Richard Révy passed away in 1965 and her mother in 1970, Jo Révy moved back to Switzerland, living for most of these years in Zug. During the last months of her life she lived in her childhood home, now a nursing home, and she died in her sleep in her parents' room. Some of her letters to Weill have been preserved at Yale, but they remain sealed, at her request, until 2033. She is survived by five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

In California, 1947. Photo courtesy of the family.

In Berlin, 1932. Photo courtesy of the family.

In Männedorf (near Zurich), April 2008. Photo: Suzanne Révy

Books

Brecht at the Opera

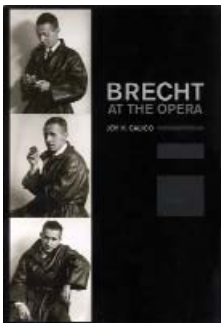
Joy H. Calico

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, xvi, 282 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-520-25482-4

Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny

Bertolt Brecht
Translated and edited by Steve Giles

London: Methuen Drama, 2007, xxxiv, 136 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-7136-8674-6



While over the years Brecht's engagement with the operatic genre may have prompted occasionally complex and contradictory pronouncements on topics such as epic theatre, *Verfremdung*, separation of the elements, intoxication (of the emotional kind) and, possibly most notoriously, the culinary principle, it's probably fair to suggest that his starting position is not all that remote from Noel Coward's well-known apothegm: "People are wrong when they say that the opera isn't what it used to be. It is what it used to be. That's what's wrong with it." The one constant running through Brecht's work on the various operatic projects that occupied him over four decades, together with his scattered theoretical observations, was the necessity to renew the opera, to rid it of its past excesses and make it speak to contemporary audiences.

As Joy Calico, in her exhaustive (and, it must be said, at times exhausting) study, points out, her use of "at" in the title is "polysemous, like many common prepositions," meaning not only "the playwright is in attendance," but also including another use of the preposition—as in Peter Grimes being "*at* [her italics] his exercise" (p. 15). Well, yes, or maybe even as in ". . . variance with" or ". . . cross purposes."

Over five chapters, addressing issues ranging from the *Lehrstück* and the new audience contract, through the operatic roots of *Gestus,* operatic fragments, the *Lukullus*-affair and Brecht's legacy for opera, along with almost one hundred pages of notes and bibliography, the author demonstrates an impressive command of the literature and familiarity with Brecht's writings on, and experiments with, opera as part of the modernist project. She is particularly astute on the functions of music in the *Lehrstück,* on the connections and disjunctions between Brecht's and Wagner's theories on pre-Wagnerian opera and music drama ("Because music drama was a reaction against the then-prevailing style of opera, Brecht's response to music drama resulted in a return to its predecessor and even shared some elements with music drama indirectly" [p. 41]), and on the complicated course of the *Lukullus*-affair, with its to-ing and fro-ing between the various official arms of the GDR cultural establishment, supporters and critics in the West, and Brecht and Dessau as librettist and composer. And elsewhere she demonstrates a skillful handling of, and insight into, various sources, with her teasing out of the complex and, on Brecht's part, deliberately obfuscating process of trying to organize the all-black production of *The Threepenny Opera* in the U.S. in 1941–42.

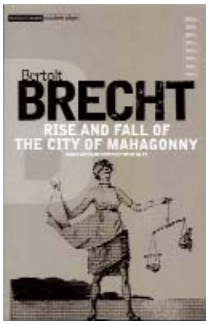
On the other hand, although her 33-page, densely argued chapter on "The Operatic Roots of Gestus in *The Mother* and *Round Heads and Pointed Heads*" represents a comprehensive attempt at defining this frequently adduced concept both in terms of Brecht's and Eisler's understanding of it, as well as its—for the audience—realization in performance, there are times when her fondness for the inert idiolect of theory strangles any valid point she is trying to make. I may be alone in choking on the alphabet soup of sentences such as the following: "I will show that the by-product of situating the gestus in the musical score, therefore requiring a sounding body for realization, is that the body produces the voice-object in the process, a phenomenon that dominates all else on stage and resists containment via the gestus" (p. 44). But confronted with such oracular enigmas (and there are many others throughout the study), this reader (or "spect-actor," a coinage used throughout the book) could not avoid recalling the response of Brecht's Herr Keuner to the philosophy professor who came to pass on his wisdom: "You sit uncomfortably, you talk uncomfortably, you think uncomfortably. . . . You talk obscurely, and you create no light with your talking. Seeing your stance, I'm not interested in what you're getting at." Brecht's targets, with this little parable, are two-fold: first, he is deriding what James Wood has referred to as the fondness of literary theorists for justifying their most abstruse prose as "writing the difficulty"; second, he is insisting on the integral relationship between words and actions, what Hamlet, in his advice to the players, sums up as suiting the action to the word, the word to the action. For the performer (and speaker) it is essential to focus attention on the specificity of what he is saying and doing, and to be aware of what is occupying him physically while he is speaking or singing. Generalized attitudes and a broad-brush approach have no place in pinning down the nub of a speech or scene—as any director or performer worth his salt well knows. Calico too often slips into the trap of obscuring Brecht's arguments (what he elsewhere decried as "making obscurity more obscure") with her own theorizing; when she relies on Brecht's and Weill's own words, the reader has less difficulty in grasping both the, er, gest and gist.

Although there are perceptive comments on such matters as "gestic musical citation" (p. 63) and "the two dimensions of gestus [that] can be discerned in a musical setting" (p. 57), there is, oddly, little discussion or analysis of Brechtian (or Weillian, or Eislerian) performance practice. It is surely a gross overstatement to assert that "it is plausible, if not likely, that no performer has ever performed nor any audience ever perceived the meanings of these texts quite the way Brecht and Eisler envisioned them" (p. 55). Are we to infer then that Ernst Busch, Gisela May, or Therese Giehse didn't even come close to an idiomatic performance? Aural and visual

recordings suggest otherwise—not to mention my own clear recollections of the latter two on stage (in productions and cabaret presentations) where music was an integral element of the performance. The author constructs a case that Brecht discouraged performers from singing the melody by relying on a doubtful translation of one of his remarks: "If [the actor] drops into the melody it must be an event"—first, by reading the "if" as "a strong qualifier" (p. 40), and later by adding the gloss "'If' one deigns to sing the melody . . . " (p. 51). But simply repeating an assertion doesn't make it true. In fact, the German construction Brecht uses doesn't even include the word "wenn" ("if"); the original runs, "Mündet er in die Melodie ein, so muss dies ein Ereignis sein; zu dessen Betonung kann der Schauspieler seinen eigenen Genuss an der Melodie deutlich verraten." The metaphor Brecht is using here has nothing to do with the haphazard, accidental notion of "dropping in," but to the idea of the inevitable flow of a river, of going towards the melody. On a sliding scale between, say, probable and improbable, or inevitable and random, the inverted construction he deploys implies a position closer to the former than to the latter, and could equally well imply "whenever." (Listen to early recordings of songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper* by Lenya or Carola Neher to hear how singers under Brecht's direction approached melody.)

Finally, Calico's confident assertion, "parsing [Brecht's and Wagner's] theories is complicated because both artists succeeded in imposing closed systems of theory and art" (p. 46) ignores so many instances of an open-ended relationship between theory and practice that one wonders about the exact bases of Dr. Calico's argument. Just a glance at the epilogue to *The Good Person of Sezuan*—"We see the curtain closed and all the questions open"—would surely have prompted a more cautious and judicious evaluation of Brecht's aesthetic and ideological position. While it is true that many critics have relied on Brecht's dramatic theories to evaluate Brecht's works, thus creating a sort of "closed system," it is also true that Brecht, in true dialectical fashion, didn't approve of this practice. In the *Theaterarbeit*, he declared, "a lot of my remarks about the theater are wrongly understood. I conclude this above all from those letters and articles that agree with me. I then feel as a mathematician would do if he read: Dear Sir, I am wholly of your opinion that two and two make five." As John Willett noted fifty years ago: "The point can be grasped without the theory. It cannot be grasped from the theory alone."

While Dr. Calico is justified in privileging musicological and musico-theatrical issues in her discussion of *Mahagonny*, it is nevertheless a little surprising that while Karl Marx is absent from her index, Fredric Jameson's name appears three times. (This is the same Jameson whose study *Brecht and Method*, quoted by Calico, constructs an entirely fallacious argument on the author's inability to distinguish between the German words *Absicht* and *Ansicht*.) Steve Giles is far more at home with Marxist and other ideas, as the



introduction to his effective and functional translation of Brecht's revised *Versuche* text for the opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* demonstrates. He spells out clearly and concisely some features, present even in the 1927 version, which Calico overlooks: "It is experimental, it reconceptualises the role of the audience, and it engages with key aspects of contemporary capitalism, notably the ubiquity and omnipotence of money" (p. xxx).

Moreover, he is especially good on the "Janus-faced" nature of the work, pointing out both how and why "it represents the first significant articulation of his later Marxist humanism, yet, at the same time, yields up the last gasp of his earlier period" (p. xvii-iii) before concluding that "the Marxian categories deployed by Brecht criticism are somewhat tangential to the world represented in *Mahagonny*" (p. xxiv). These might be merely provocative assertions without Giles's perceptive positioning not only of the work itself in Brecht's and Weill's oeuvre but also his contextualizing of it *vis-à-vis* theatrical and sociological trends in Weimar Germany. Particularly relevant to this aim are the sections he has included on Notes and Variants, Texts by Brecht, and the valuable and instructive summary devoted to the reception history of the work at the time.

And yet, as the opera says, "etwas fehlt." It is puzzling that in all the material he cites relating to the wider sources for Brecht's libretto he makes no mention of, above all, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*—surely an important model for the utopia/dystopia dialectic that lies at the heart of the work. (Brecht first mentions the book in a notice from 1928, singling it out as one of the best books of the year.) More contentious for some readers, however, might be the absence of any significant assessment of Kurt Weill's role in the work—although Weill's contribution had been surveyed in the Willett/Manheim editorial material for the 1979 edition of the Auden/Kallman translation. This absence occasionally leads to instances where the editor seems to presuppose a close familiarity on the reader's part with the score (as on p. xxiv, where he notes Begbick's concern over lack of payment "is also made explicit in the musical rendering of her lines: But because *my* three bottles of whisky . . ."). Some brief explanation of the relationship between text and music would in this case, as in others, have been helpful.

And although the author's approach to the task of translating the libretto is clearly spelled out—". . . to 'fit' my translation to Weill's music . . . I have laid greater emphasis on retaining the German text's line length and rhythm, as opposed to its rhyme schemes" (p. 3)—there are still problems with such an approach. This is not like translating, for example, the strict alexandrines of Molière or Racine into English, where the recourse to blank verse has regularly yielded great benefits. A translated operatic libretto which, in the original, relies on regular rhyme schemes and metric patterns, can give a false sense of looseness at times, if this tight knit of music and rhymed, metrically regular text is disrupted. On the other hand, Giles's version is eminently singable (though his deletion of the upbeat into the refrain—"Denn wie man sich bettet"—of Jenny's song in Scene 16, while also retaining Auden and Kallman's extra syllable at the end of the line, is problematic). And his sense of the tone of Brecht's original is notably more reliable than that of other versions. Above all, as the final sentence of his introduction indicates, reinforcing a notion Brecht himself regularly invokes in his comments on the work: "*And* [original emphasis] it's fun!"

Michael Morley
Flinders University

Videos

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Los Angeles Opera
John Doyle, director
James Conlon, conductor
Gary Halvorson, video director

EuroArts 2056258

"Brecht contra Weill" has been the burden of much discussion of *Mahagonny*. After the 1930 premiere, two geniuses of committed theater continued to "refashion" it in their own ways—Brecht in the *Versuche* essay he appended to the publication of *his* libretto, and Weill in the many revisions of *his* score. Hanns Eisler, who became Brecht's more pliant collaborator after the break with Weill, once remarked that the composer had never understood what Brecht was aiming for. (He should have added "and vice versa," David Drew suggested.) Whatever their differences and disagreements over *Mahagonny*—an opera contemplated from 1927, when the *Mahagonny* "Songspiel," as a first sketch for it, appeared in Baden-Baden—the piece engaged two great creators at a peak in their powers. It has its "problems," sure. Where do we place the Benares-Song, dropped from the famous Berlin production in 1931 and from Brecht's *Versuche* text, with its music too good to lose? Where, if anywhere, do we place the "Crane Duet," the lovely lyrical episode added as an afterthought? There's no "definitive" score but rather, as with Verdi's *Don Carlos*, a series of possibilities, determined anew by the cast and circumstances of each performance.

This is a serious and stirring account of a great opera, distinguished on many counts, and especially by James Conlon's masterly conducting. That's what comes across most powerfully on this disc. Like many people, I was stunned by the opera when I first heard it—in the 1956 Philips recording, with Lotte Lenya as Jenny. I saw it staged first in Hamburg in 1962, and the next year at Sadler's Wells; have seen it often since; and have never failed to respond to its power. In *The New Yorker*, years ago, I voiced qualms about being able to write a "serious" criticism of the piece, since every performance of it knocked me sideways. Weill's music got under my skin. Several of those performances were good. Others sacrificed Weill to Brecht, or tried to turn the opera into a cabaret, or allowed a particular director's personal perceptions to be dominant. But every one of them was knock-out. And so is this DVD, even for someone who didn't see the performance live at Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. The video director is named as Gary Halvorson, and the "DVD producer" as Tobias Möller. Full shots of Mark Bailey's set are seldom shown. It seems to have been a simple, basic, unsplashy setting, variously decked to present the singer or singers of each episode in close, vivid presence, and it culminates in an overwhelming finale.

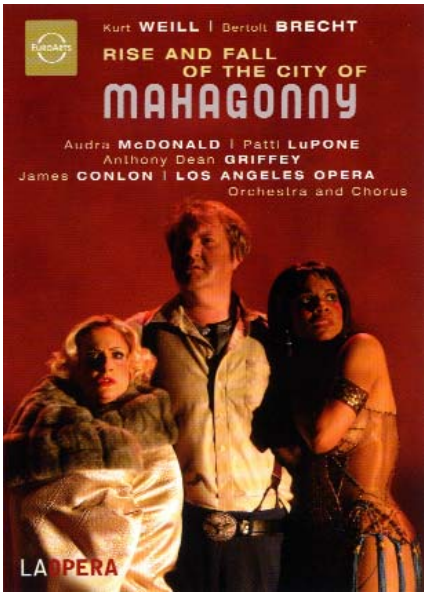
In a booklet essay, James Conlon "places" *Mahagonny* between "opera, musical theater, and specifically Brechtian theater." In the performance he maintains the precarious balance. Patti LuPone, Mrs. Lovett in John Doyle's transatlantic production of *Sweeney Todd*, was bold casting for Widow Begbick, a role that Astrid Varnay, Bayreuth's great Isolde and Brünnhilde, played (none too well) at the Met in 1979. LuPone hits all the notes, truly, and she plays the part to perfection. Her face is always expressive. Facial expression (remember Callas, compare Tebaldi) is a potent part of a great singer's attributes, and in a video version, with its close-ups, it becomes doubly important. Audra McDonald's earnest facial expression when in the great finale she reprises "Oh, moon of Alabama" goes to the heart of the opera. She's a wonderful Jenny: beautiful to behold, true and pure of tone, and mistress of legato phrasing (even if, like most modern singers, she lacks an accomplished trill). Legato is what Anthony Dean Griffey's Jimmy sometimes lacks, when he breaks Weill's long phrases into syl-la-bic utterance. His singing is substantial, free and clear and full, but his face—we see it often in close-up—remains blankly inexpressive.

Robert Wörle is an ideal Fatty, a smooth, limpid, lively tenor in the Eating scene and again at his revival in the finale. Donnie Ray Albert is a strong Trinity Moses. Jimmy's Alaskan chums—Jack (John Easterlin), Bill (Mel Ulrich), and Joe (Steven Humes)—are very good singers all, but are revealed by the close-up scrutiny of their faces as unremarkable actors. And too many of the words are lost. LuPone's disappear when the line goes high. Surtitles are available at the touch of a button—but only in abbreviated Spanish, French, or German. The opera is sung in Michael Feingold's English translation. It's neat, but it fits Weill's music less closely, I think, than the David Drew/Michael Geliot translation used by Sadler's Wells and by the Met.

Textual points? It's a good, full edition. McDonald sings the "Lenya version," not the original, of "Ach, bedenken sie." "Benares" is retained. But Moses for some reason fails to sing in his eighteen bars in the "Love" scene (pp. 176–77 of the vocal score). Instead of the "Crane Duet" inserted where Weill suggested it might most suitably go, we have the (very moving) alternative, Jimmy and Jenny's spoken dialogue over music (p. 289).

Conlon's conducting is continuously, and cumulatively, gripping. The two-part inventions, the counterpoint, the chorales, and the great tunes all "get under one's skin," and the terrific finale crowns all. Bach and Mozart lie behind it. In the credits that scroll past while one tries to regain composure, the principal players of orchestra are named—rightly, for their contributions to the marvelous score are eloquent. John Doyle's staging of the finale includes "contemporary relevance"—remains returned from Iraq or Afghanistan while the chorus sings "Nothing you can do will help a dead man." This great opera goes even deeper than that, probes every belief by which we try to live. In that spirit Conlon and his cast perform it.

Andrew Porter
London



Performances

Street Scene

Mittelsächsische Theater
Freiberg and Döbeln

Premiere: 16 June 2008 (Freiberg)

With forty-two thousand and twenty thousand residents respectively, it's almost a miracle that Freiberg and Döbeln, two small towns in Saxony (located within a triangle formed by the cities of Leipzig, Dresden, and Chemnitz), successfully operate a shared theater company that produces plays, operas, and concerts. Perhaps this persistence in the face of the demise of so many theaters in former East Germany is nourished by the fact that Freiberg has one of the country's oldest municipal theaters, established in 1791. When I arrived in Döbeln on a chilly Saturday in July, I couldn't help but notice that the town seemed deserted. Only a few people occupied the two beer gardens in front of City Hall, and the ornate theater was closed. But a couple of hundred meters away, there was a flurry of activity in the Nikolaikirche. The theater has made it a tradition to stage the season's last premiere in this church (it's convenient that Freiberg also has a Nikolaikirche), and general manager Manuel Schöbel and *Generalmusikdirektor* Jan Michael Horstmann made a bold decision by programming *Street Scene*.

The orchestra is squeezed into the choirloft surrounding the altar. A good-sized scaffold to the left of the altar represents the brownstone where the Maurrant family's tragedy unwinds. As space is precious, Schöbel (who doubles as stage director) utilizes every corner of the church: the action takes place in the altar space, in the center aisle, and on the side galleries, which represent balconies or roof decks. The performers almost touch the spectators in this familial atmosphere; it is obvious that the audience knows "its" ensemble, so everybody is eager to get to know the unfamiliar work.

Strangely enough, *Street Scene* in Döbeln somehow works. More than half a century after the opera's (highly controversial) German premiere, this society is a lot closer to the work's "salad bowl" milieu; even if some politicians are still in denial, Germany has become a multi-cultural nation. The Döbeln team used Lys Symonette's translation. With the Berlin accent toned down, the work could take place anywhere in Germany. Moreover, Schöbel's directing style shows that urban talk isn't that far from small-town gossip, rural intrigues, and back fence chats. When some lines are sung in English, the audience seems slightly irritated (rightly so, because it is at odds with this staging's overall concept), but it points to another reason for the production's success: after years of exposure to Anglo-American pop, Weill's music is a lot more familiar to contemporary German audiences. For instance, it seems perfectly normal when the janitor, cast here with a Caucasian (Guido Kunze), leisurely arrives on his bicycle, singing a blues, just like "one of us."

Mrs. Fiorentino (Susanne Engelhardt). Photo: Detlev Müller

Some instances of compression, however, indicate that *Street Scene* really is too big a piece for the small ensemble. The Hildebrand and Olsen families are collapsed into one (named Olsen); Lippo Fiorentino is not a violin instructor but a generous ice cream vendor—which works for the "Ice Cream Sextet," but we lose the meaning of Dvorak's Humoresque right before the murder. And the voices, too, are stretched too thin: Angelo Raciti's tenor lacks the needed versatility for the role of Sam, Esther Hilsberg's Rose has pitch problems in the upper registers, and Juhapekka Sainio's Frank Maurrant suffers from muddled diction. In terms of acting, all three do fine, as does Katharina Wingen, who plays Anna as a woman young at heart, trapped in an early and unhappy marriage. The Maurrant family relationships are carefully and sensitively drawn, a credit to both the actors and the director.

The Mittelsächsische Philharmonie and the chorus of the Mittelsächsische Theater find the right tone for Weill's score. Despite cramped quarters and limited visibility, there are hardly any problems of coordination, and Horstmann's intelligent conducting intensifies the drama. Conductor, director, and set designer (Walter Schütze) even succeed in making the unusual venue plausible. The sacred aura is not pushed aside but made part of the concept. At the beginning, the brownstone is draped in black, a small portrait of a young woman (Anna Maurrant) is placed in front of it, and a young man (Sam Kaplan) squats down. Outside the church three trombones play a signal; then Anna's coffin is carried up the center aisle, followed by a priest and the congregation singing a wordless chant. Only after a moment of silence does Horstmann, who was disguised as the priest, give the downbeat. The black curtains are pushed quickly to the sides, and the action unfolds retrospectively.

When the chorus intones the moving lament, "The Woman Who Lived Up There," after Anna's death, we see, if only briefly, a society in which each individual looks after the other—except for the pitiless Emma Jones (Rita Zaworka) who stands to one side, arms folded, the first one ready to return to the prosaic reality of dog-eat-dog society. This contrast is powerful, and seldom have I heard the idealistic force of Weill's music as it came through here in Döbeln. Once again, it seems that the smaller houses are the ones that keep the theater vigorous in Germany.

Andreas Hauff
Mainz

Performances

Marie Galante

Opéra Français de New York

Premiere: 13 November 2008

This legendary work, the only French theater piece to emerge from Weill's stay in Paris from 1933 to 1935, produced a sheaf of memorable songs and a dim memory. After its original production in Paris (which opened at the very end of 1934 and barely made it into 1935), it seems to have been produced only once or twice in small French theaters and, notably, at Rome Opera in 2007 (there is a montage of short clips from this production on YouTube set to the original instrumental version of "Youkali" but, annoyingly, without vocals). And now the Opéra Français de New York production at Florence Gould Hall.

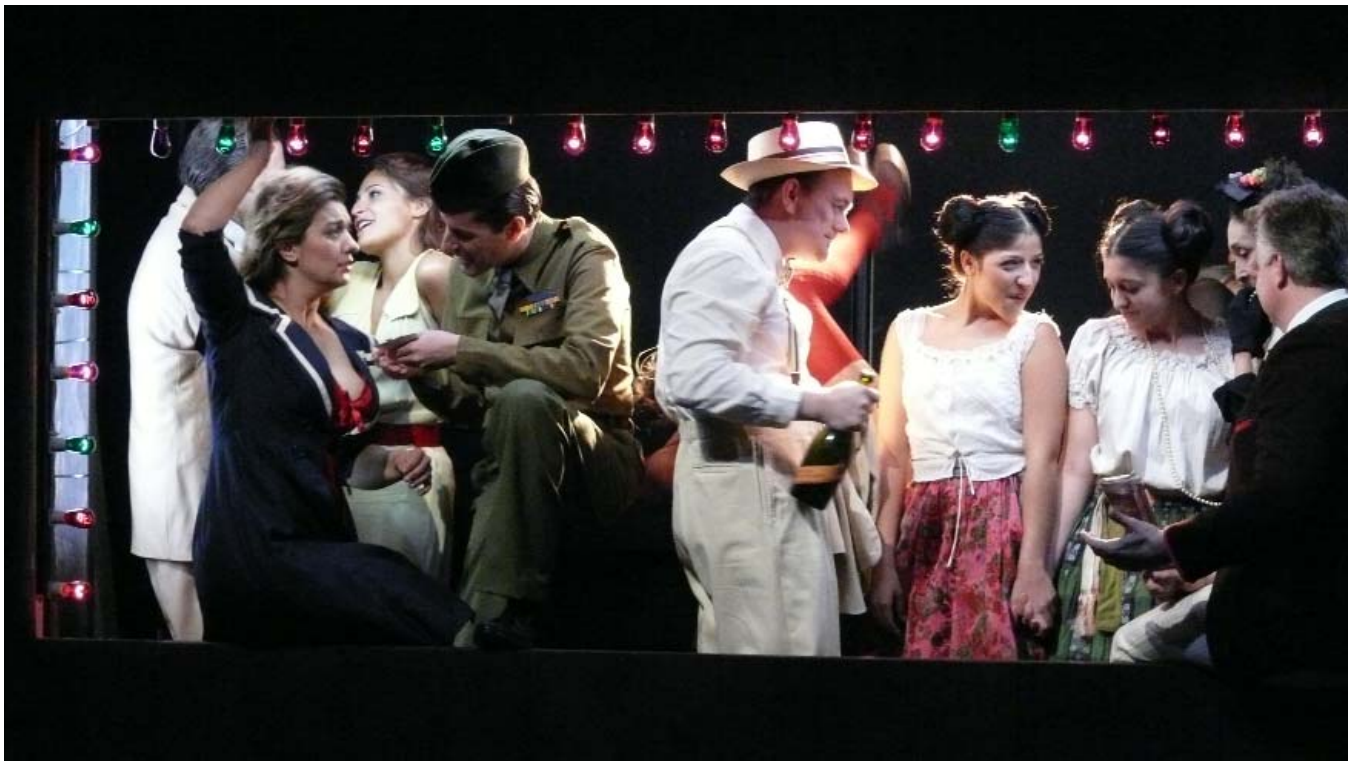
Marie Galante exists in several forms. The original novel by Jacques Deval was a successful potboiler in an exotic, noir-ish genre. It was translated into English under the anodyne title of *That Girl* and then, somewhat unbelievably, turned into a Hollywood film under its original title. For Weillians it exists as a wonderful set of songs and incidental music, the residue of a failed dramatic adaptation. This overstuffed play with music resists revival even after having undergone some severe liposurgery. I cannot pretend to have read or studied all of the versions, but I have looked at some of them and I think I can say, without fear of contradiction, that not one—long or short, detailed or cut to the bone—makes very much sense (except possibly the movie; see below). Compared to *Marie Galante*, *Happy End* is a seamless, textbook weave of story, song and dance, cautionary tale, and great music.

But amidst its incomprehensible jumble, there is, in fact, a fascinating *Marie Galante* story. The plot may not be worth unraveling (I doubt it can be done), but the story behind the piece tells us a lot about its creators, particularly Weill during the most difficult period of his career.

Weill went into exile irrevocably in March 1933. He received a timely warning of his imminent arrest by the new Nazi regime, so he threw a few belongings into his car and drove to France with Caspar and Erika Neher. Not with Lenya; as we now know, they were by then separated, to be reunited a couple of years later, just before sailing to America. Because of the huge success of the *Dreigroschenoper* (the Pabst film version was released in French as *L'opéra de quat' sous* and the stage work had been performed in Paris in 1930), his reputation had preceded him and he had some hope of getting work. In fact, he was marooned in Paris, looking for commissions in a language that was supposedly not very congenial to him (although the few times he tried it, he did very well). In the end, he received only a single and, one may add, singular commission for the French spoken theater: to write music for the stage version of the Deval novel. Weill's account of the experience is extremely negative; Deval was apparently not much of a collaborator and the show was a flop. But for all his faults as a playwright, Deval was an effective lyricist, and the theme of exile and existentialist (rather than Brechtian) alienation lies at the heart of *Marie Galante*'s musical numbers.

Deval, whose real name was Jacques Boularan, was a type of pop/pulp writer who hardly exists anymore in France (or, for that matter, anywhere in Western Europe). Exile recurs as a major theme in his work, and it is ironic that he ended up in exile himself in New York during World War II. His most famous and successful work, *Tovarich*, is a tale of Russian exiles in Paris. Like *Marie Galante*, it started life as a novel and subsequently became a play, a film, and a musical. In fact, it was the success of the stage version of *Tovarich* that prompted the idea of converting *Marie Galante* in the same manner. The story of a young Bordelaise (Deval was from Bordeaux himself), kidnapped and taken to the New World, first appeared in 1931 as a pulp novel—exile, intrigue, sex, and violence in an exotic locale, the Panama Canal Zone. Not only was the novel instantly translated into English but the Hollywood film adaptation (starring one Ketti Gallian in the title role, along with Spencer Tracy, Helen Morgan and a happy ending) followed on its heels, released in October 1934. The film was not a success—it was perhaps a little ahead of the vogue for spy films set in exotic locales (think *Casablanca* ten years later), but it is still available and, in spite of its Hollywoodisms, does a better job at creating relationships between the characters and a semi-believable plot line than the original. And, finally, the musical version. A popular actress and singer named Florelle was cast as Marie; she had played Polly in *L'opéra de quat' sous* and

Act I (Scene 1): Marie (Isabel Bayrakdarian) sleeps as Captain Letuvier (Tom Brangle) orders the mate (Grant Neale, holding the ship model) to cast off. Photo: Jacqueline Chambord



Act I (Scene 3) in the dance hall: Marie is second from left. Photo: Jacqueline Chambord

may have provided a direct connection to Weill. Alas, the play was no more successful than the movie, but the French publisher Heugel brought out a folio of songs and other music and the preservation of most of the score in this form gave the piece an afterlife. Florelle recorded four of the *Marie Galante* songs, and the show went down in history when "J'attends un navire" was taken up by the Résistance during World War II.

The problems of the music cues in this piece are considerable. "Le roi d'Aquitaine" is an "English waltz," which Marie sings to lighten the last moments of a dying man by the name of Josiah. The subsequent death of this character seems as irrelevant as anything else in the piece, but it gave Weill the chance to write "Le train du ciel," a striking (and rather scary) gospel dirge for a black male vocal ensemble that materializes out of nowhere at the appropriate moment. This seems to have been the most striking event in the whole show for the original audiences and was mentioned approvingly by the critics (who failed to notice "J'attends un navire"!). "Le grand Lustucru" is an odd bogey-man song about an ogre who eats little children; it is sung by Marie herself as an omen of her own coming demise. Who or what is le grand Lustucru and what does this grotesque bit of folklore have to do with Marie's life and death? Why is Marie killed and by whom? In the movie, it is at least reasonably clear that she has stumbled on a plot to destroy the U.S. Navy, but in the play none of this is spelled out. It would seem that when a truly good person like Marie is forced to deal with the rotten real world and its hypocritical morality, she must pay the price. Death is, it seems, the ultimate exile.

Although there is no known score or script that lays out exactly how the music of *Marie Galante* appeared in the original show, the existence of other numbers has long been known. The best-known of these pieces is the "Tango-Habañera," later converted to "Youkali" with a set of lyrics by Roger Fernay about an alluring mythical island of dreams. Fernay, an editor at Heugel and a successful lyricist (he is also said to have been co-lyricist for some of the *Marie Galante* songs, but this is not noted on the printed music), may have added these lyrics later when "Youkali" was published in August 1935. But the "Youkali" lyrics are as appropriate to *Marie Galante* as almost anything else in the show, and I wouldn't be surprised if they had been added during the run.

The name *Marie Galante* may suggest that our heroine is the classic prostitute-with-a-heart-of-gold, but Deval seems to have regarded her as something slightly different—a free and gallant spirit, and something of a child of nature (perhaps not unlike Wedekind's Lulu) who has no compunctions about challenging the conventional mores of society but who, in the end, has to suffer for her willingness to flout the rules. She "goes with men" to try and earn her passage back to France and, in the process, gets involved with some shady characters from the four corners of the earth, all spying on each other and hatching obscure plots. The only really admirable character, besides poor sweet Marie herself, is the aforementioned Josiah, who had helped her out at a crucial juncture. Marie gets to go back to Bordeaux, but only in a coffin; her death is hardly more comprehensible than anything else in the piece but it provides, it seems, the required unhappy ending.

The best one can say about the Opéra Français de New York production is that they tried. As many of the original musical elements as could be rediscovered were included. An outstanding feature was the use of the wonderful original orchestrations performed by an excellent New York chamber orchestra conducted by Yves Abel. But the "reconstruction" didn't stop there. In an effort to beef up the musical quotient of the piece, two other songs from Weill's Parisian interlude were orchestrated and added to the production. "Complainte de la

Seine" and "Je ne t'aime pas" were both originally commissioned, performed, and recorded by the chanteuse Lys Gauty; the texts are by the strange and mystical poet Maurice Magre. Except for the fact that they were written in French, these songs are quite remote from *Marie Galante*. The former gives voice to the sad and ugly side of the life of the French capital as seen from the dark depths of its river. The latter, a jilted lover's lament in the form of a slow tango, was shoehorned into the play with the suggestion, out of nowhere, that one of the local prostitutes is Marie's real Panamanian lover. The back story for this is quite invisible (did I miss something earlier in the show?). Why would she be telling Marie (and us) that she never really loved her anyway? Another mystery. The decision to include these two "extra" songs does expand the musical range of the score but adds nothing to the coherence of the work.

In contrast to the attempts at musical expansion, the play portions of *Marie Galante* were edited down to the vanishing point. Although it is difficult to fault the decision to cut the script of this vastly overwritten potboiler (Weill himself complained that Deval's adaptation of the material from his novel was hardly more than a mechanical transcription of the book's dialogue), the scenic and dialogue scraps that survive do not cohere. The directors' decision to perform the spoken scenes in English and the songs in French, while understandable, provides still another distancing effect that is neither Brechtian nor Weillian (nor, for that matter, Devalian). Ultimately, the complete absence of interaction between the characters leaves everyone on stage at loose ends, a failure that even the richness of the songs and enticing original orchestrations cannot overcome. What is happening between these people? Nothing. Not even lust.

Isabel Bayrakdarian as Marie has the best shot, not once but twice in a row, in a production that sets up the song version of "Youkali" and follows it with "J'attends un navire" to end the first act. These are both powerful songs (and she sings them powerfully), but they work in the show because they have a little something by way of context: Marie's exile and her passion to get back to France. There doesn't seem to be much else driving any of the other characters or the plot. Ariana Chris gets a big moment with "Je ne t'aime pas" (nicely orchestrated for the *Marie Galante* ensemble by Matthew Scott) but the song is more baffling than affecting because it is not set up.

What *Marie Galante* needs is a completely new script with a more engrossing story about alienation and exile told in a manner that integrates the existing music, creates some kind of dynamic between the characters and their passions, and generates the musical moments in a way that makes them feel as though they are earned. Maybe someone should look seriously at that much-maligned movie version. Such a reworking may not really be possible, but without it, the piece is destined to remain in that special limbo reserved for great musical accomplishments that don't hold the stage.

Eric Salzman
New York

Eric Salzman has been involved in the development of new music theater for the past four decades. His book (with Thomas Desi) on *The New Music Theater* ("Hearing the Body, Seeing the Voice") was recently published by Oxford University Press. He was the producer/artistic director for many classic Nonesuch recordings including *The Unknown Kurt Weill* and *Silverlake*, as well as his own *Nude Paper Sermon* and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (with Michael Sahl). www.ericsalzman.com

Act II (Scene 6): Marie sings "Le roi d'Aquitaine" to Josiah (Will Badgett) as Poldine (Ariana Chris) looks on. Photo: Jacqueline Chambord

Performances

Happy End

St. Pauli Theater
Hamburg

Premiere: 26 October 2008

No fewer than thirty-eight years have passed since *Happy End* was last seen on a Hamburg stage, when Wolfgang Liebeneiner's production at the Hamburg Kammerspiele opened to great acclaim. Given the long hiatus, people wondered how the much-deprecated piece might fare in a new staging at the St. Pauli Theater. As far as Weill and Brecht are concerned, this theater seems to be following in the footsteps of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm. For the Hamburg theater hoped—as Ernst Josef Aufricht did in 1929—that the piece would repeat the tremendous success of an earlier *Dreigroschenoper* production. Alas, in both cases such hopes remained unfulfilled.

If this new production indeed aspires to a kind of "authenticity," it's not the kind of authenticity we need. To be sure, the musical numbers are all in place and they sound as Weill conceived them. Matthias Stötzel, who was less impressive when he led the performances of *Dreigroschenoper* five years ago, conducted his excellent ensemble at a very high level with panache. But this production suffers from uninspired stage direction, cliché-ridden sets, and a dull performance by Peter Lohmeyer as Bill Cracker. On a "celebrity" scale, Lohmeyer ought to have been the evening's star. But in light of his acting and singing (or lack thereof), he trailed—along with "star" no. 2 of the evening, Angela Winkler (the Lady in Gray)—the otherwise fine cast by a wide margin. We often find that producers don't take singing skills into account when it comes to casting Weill-Brecht works. Such compromises might be forgivable if extraordinary acting makes up for musical deficiencies. But Lohmeyer sings *and* acts poorly. His vocal range barely covers a third, and even amplified his voice doesn't fill the space. His acting is drab, facial expressions practically nonexistent, and his gestures seem awkward. Obviously the producers banked on his popularity (Lohmeyer is famous for both film and television work in Germany), hoping it would sell tickets. Angela Winkler, on the other hand, goes over the top when she transforms her role as the Lady in Gray into that of a witch, confusing Bill's beer hall with a gingerbread house, where she imprisons gangsters rather than Hansel and Gretel. To top it off, a cheap director's idea forces her to "whack" not one but two Santa Clauses.

Lilian Holiday (Anneke Schwabe) and the Salvation Army Major (Peter Franke). Photo: Katharina John

This production's discovery is Anneke Schwabe, no doubt an ideal choice for the role of Lilian Holiday. Schwabe is equally convincing as an over-ambitious officer of the Salvation Army, a God-fearing ingénue, and a passionate lover, and she shifts smoothly and effortlessly between the different aspects of her character. She has a crystal-clear soprano, but when necessary, she cuts loose powerfully enough to knock "the damn pipe out of your mouth." It was great to see Peter Franke and Kai Maertens again as the Salvation Army Major and Jimmy Dexter, as they evoked fond memories of their portrayals of Tiger Brown and Münzmatthias in the 2004 *Dreigroschenoper*. Such reminders of that production make the failings of the current production all the more noticeable: whereas a strong cast headed by Ulrich Tukur and Eva Matthes led that production to success, Lohmeyer and Winkler cannot cover for this staging's weaknesses. The constant snow effects that are supposed to indicate winter can be written off as "snows of yesteryear." The opening curtain's design has already given us plenty of Christmas images. When it goes up, we can stare happily at a decorated Christmas tree, and, needless to say, a police officer dressed as Santa must be pushed up the chimney after the Lady in Gray has disposed of him. (Even before the curtain goes up, a mindless director's "idea" has her dispatch a Santa in a similar manner on the proscenium.) The raunchy atmosphere of Bill's beer hall is indicated—wink, wink, nudge, nudge—by a number of bras and panties hanging above the bar. Faced with such asinine props and scenery, I was tempted to close my eyes more than once. The sophomoric jokes of a cross-dressing detective (Mario Ramos) didn't encourage me to keep them open, either. Perhaps the co-directors, Jérôme Savary and Ulrich Waller, wanted to take two hours to show us what they imagined the 1929 production of *Happy End* may have looked like. Unfortunately, they missed the opportunity to compare our current financial crisis with that of 1929, surely an occasion for some intelligent fun and added spice. Instead they followed a wrong-headed notion of "historic performance practice," offering a museum piece for Reeperbahn tourists, who probably would have done better in one of the city's three houses where Broadway musicals play. I only hope that we don't have to wait another forty years in this city for *Happy End* to get an opportunity to show that it's about more than great music—it's about excellent satire, too.

Christian Kuhnt
Hamburg

Performances

Johnny Johnson

Schlosstheater Celle

Premiere: 12 September 2008

The ensemble. Photo: Jochen Quast

The Schlosstheater, Germany's oldest theater in continuous use, provides an intimate atmosphere. A projection on the scrim reads: "Johnny Johnson by Paul Green, with music by Kurt Weill," and it feels a bit like a movie theater in your own living room. The audience settles in for a pleasant evening. When the outstanding eleven-piece orchestra led by Ulrich Jokiel plays the first bars of music, many in attendance apparently consider it background music for the start of a film, and it takes a while for the murmurs to die down.

As the play unfolds, we get a clear sense of director Kalle Kubik's vision. By retaining the play's comedic aspects and the protagonist's altruistic attitude, his staging recalls Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful* or Charlie Chaplin's portrayal of the peace-loving commoner in *The Great Dictator*. He has cut several passages in order to emphasize more intimate scenes, but he also manages to bring forty-two characters from the play's indefinitely large cast onstage. The ensemble shows great flexibility, as most of the actors handle three roles with ease.

Many reviewers of the first production in 1936 noted unflatteringly that the members of the Group Theatre were much better actors than singers. The same holds true in Celle (although Christine Richter is outstanding as a smoky-voiced Lili Marlene-type). But Weill and Green never wanted trained singers for this work, in which, according to Green, the singing would emerge from the language's inherent melodic quality. *Johnny Johnson* was not supposed to be a musical but a "play with music," akin to the *Threepenny Opera*.

The first act starts out as an entertaining comedy. Johnny doesn't know what hits him when his fellow-citizens transform their peace slogans to war cries in the blink of an eye. Ronald Schober's Johnny has many nuances: affably naïve but with an impressive sincerity. Werner Schuster plays the mayor dressed as Uncle Sam and ridicules his character's waffling. This image ties in nicely with the Schlosstheater's poster for this production, which was modeled on the famous 1917 recruitment poster, "I Want YOU for U.S. Army." (The staging avoids any kind of direct allusion to the present, but phrases such as "Now we all are patriots" are played to remind us of present-day politicians or laws like the PATRIOT Act.) Grandpa Joe's slam-bang entrance, guns blazing, makes it clear to even the slowest member of the audience that this is no cozy living-room entertainment after all. Bert Franzke makes the most of this rewarding role. He brings out the character's depth when he prefers the pacifist Johnny ("patriotism" notwithstanding) over the war- and girl-crazy businessman Anguish (really repellent: Daniel Brockhaus) as a groom for his granddaughter Minny Belle. Sara Wortmann makes an excellent counterpart for Schober. Her Minny cannot wait to start "keeping the home fires burning": she imagines Johnny in the trenches while he is still sitting right next to her and feeling very dubious about the war.

The vocal highlight of the first act comes from Andreas Werth as Captain Valentine, who exudes a smarmy charm à la *Fawlty Towers* in "Captain Valentine's Song." (He is just as convincing as the emcee before the curtain.) At last he grabs the army doctor for a tango, one of the evening's highlights, even though the brass and reeds get a little carried away during that number, disrupting an otherwise good balance between orchestra and singers.

For Act Two Cristina Wachendorff's set changes from brightly lit, bucolic small-town America to war's hell: dark trenches, palpable desperation and horror of the soldiers, and uneasy silences suddenly shattered by grenades going off. Original World War I footage showing soldiers in muddy dugouts introduces this new set, a brief but highly effective detail. Another cinematic borrowing takes place behind the scrim—a close-range battle is staged entirely in slow motion. Act Two does not turn into pure tragedy, though (as Green had conceived it with his three-act structure: comedy, tragedy, satire), because the "Tea Song" provides comic relief, enriched by members of the chorus playing the spoons; they also do some knee-bends of the Last-Night-at-the-Proms type (choreographed by Petra Beutel). Another grotesque highlight is the Allied generals' golf game, during which each one tries to one-up the last in projecting casualties during the next offensive.

Kubik stages Act Three as a satire of asylums, with garish colors and distorted perspectives. Both patients and staff consist of outlandish characters, especially Hartmut Fischer as a crazy doctor with a finger-in-the-socket hairstyle. Franzke returns as the epitome of the caricature of a doctor, and he brings the house down with his mugging. A sedated Johnny talks and moves slowly, but his mind is still clear. What is not clear is whether he will be able to leave the institution; shady dealings between Anguish and the Doctor suggest that he will not—against the doctor's better judgment—be released soon.

A few of the songs' stanzas are sung in refreshingly unaccented English, so the audience gets a little flavor of the original. The lively applause at the end confirmed that the Celle team had done more than a few things right.

Florian Hobert
Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hannover

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Edinburgh International Festival

8 August 2008

For the opening concert of the 2008 Edinburgh International Festival, the second of his tenure, Director Jonathan Mills chose Kurt Weill's and Bertolt Brecht's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, performed in Michael Feingold's English translation.

Mahagonny, fundamentally a parable, is set in a United States as unreal as that of Kafka's *Amerika*. No one would believe that there could be an American city founded in a desolate place and devoted to unbridled pleasure—where drinking, gambling, whoring, and worship of the almighty dollar is unconstrained, where what happens there stays there—unless, of course, one has visited Las Vegas recently.

Nowadays, Brecht's attack on the evils of capitalism (where the ultimate crime is not having money) probably does not have the impact on audiences he would desire. We are much more likely to concentrate on Weill's considerable musical achievement: an opera that weaves together ballads, cabaret, jazz, and classical elements into a musical unity. That musical achievement came across perfectly in a concert performance despite, or perhaps because of, the absence of theatrical trappings. Hannah Gordon's clear and succinct narration couldn't really compensate for the lack of movement, scenery, props, and projections. More significantly, performing the work in English translation effectively eliminates the *Verfremdung* that would result from singing the work in the original German for a predominantly English-speaking audience. For example, the "Alabama Song," originally an English island in a sea of German, becomes just one more number, thereby losing the distancing effect that Brecht had in mind. Even when the work was first produced, Brecht found his political proselytizing softened by Weill's musical success; performing in English blunts the *Lehrstück* effect even more.

Fortunately, the musical elements were in good hands. With a strong cast and energetic conducting, the nuances of the score shone through. The conductor was HK Gruber, an excellent choice. A cabaret artist as well as a distinguished composer and conductor, he displayed an obvious sympathy with Weill's score, coaxing a wealth of detail from the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and enthusiastic singing from both the men of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus and from the women of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, who portrayed the girls of Mahagonny. They seemed to have great fun flirting with the men of the chorus as they strolled—or actually sashayed—in before the start of the concert.

The cast, from left: Susan Bickley (Begbick), Giselle Allen (Jenny), Anthony Dean Griffey (Jimmy), conductor HK Gruber, Brindley Sherratt (Alaska Wolf Joe), Stephan Loges (Bank Account Bill). Photo: Caroline Davis

The soloists also rose to the occasion. As Trinity Moses, Alan Opie was a last-minute substitute for Willard White, but only a notice inserted in the program made that apparent, since the veteran baritone fit seamlessly into the ensemble. As for his partners in crime, Jeffrey Lloyd-Roberts's Fatty was strongly sung and characterized, and Susan Bickley offered a mellifluous Widow Begbick—nicely sung, though perhaps a somewhat harder or rougher tone would have been even more appropriate. Bill and Joe were in the capable hands of Stephan Loges and Brindley Sherratt respectively, but the palm for the portrayal of the "other Musketeers" went to the gluttonous Jack Smith of Peter Hoare, who was later resurrected as Tobby Higgins. His singing was exemplary, and his characterization effective.

Giselle Allen was a handsome Jenny, who sang with refreshingly clear tone and enunciation. An operatic singer, rather than a singing actress along the lines of Lenya, she could handle all the vocal demands of the original version of the role with ease. She tried a little too hard to present a nuanced reading of the vocal line, so that sometimes she overdid contrasts in the dynamics, rendering some phrases (as in the "Alabama Song") too quietly to have much impact. On the whole, though, her delivery was generally effective, and her singing was a pleasure.

The performance of Anthony Dean Griffey as Jim Mahoney was hard to fault. He was an expressive Jim, who came across as a rather naive and pleasant young man caught in a web of forces he didn't anticipate and barely understood—the web of the "Netzestadt." At the same time, he was thoroughly alive to the dramatic impact of both the words he was singing and the lines of the other characters. He sang with great assurance and a total command of the role, communicated by a generous, free-flowing tone and clear diction. He is surely one of the most accomplished exponents of this protagonist before the public today. A notable achievement.

The Edinburgh International Festival is one of the world's greatest performing arts events, maintaining a sixty-year tradition of offering three weeks of the finest performances in music, dance, and theater every August. This year proved to be no exception, and the choice of Weill's great contribution to the operatic canon got things off to an excellent start. Conductor, orchestra, and cast are to be congratulated on their achievement—as is Director Mills on choosing this work to launch his second year at the helm.

Luther Wade
Charlotte, N.C.

Performances

Street Scene

The Opera Group

Premiere: 4 July 2008 (Watford)

Such an enterprising co-production—a collaboration between The Opera Group (an adventurous way-off-West-End opera company), the Young Vic (one the most vibrant theatre venues in London), and the Watford Palace (one of the leading regional repertory theatres). This *Street Scene* also toured to the prestigious Buxton Festival, and each venue provided its own adult and children's choruses. There were nine performances in all; I saw the opening night at the Young Vic on July 17. Besides the fact that it took place at all, there were two particularly noteworthy aspects of this production:

First, it is some fifteen years since *Street Scene* was last seen in London. Many of the critics who attended plainly hadn't seen it before, and opened their reviews with almost surprised praise of the work's power. That may not be news to readers of this *Newsletter*, but it is nice to know that a whole new generation of commentators recognizes Weill's extraordinary achievement with his "Broadway opera."

Anna Maurrant (Elena Ferrari), Emma Jones (Charlotte Page), and George Jones (Simon Lobelson). Photo: Alastair Muir

Second, there is an oversupply of opera singers in the UK. Music academies churn them out, but there is insufficient work for them in our cash-strapped, ensemble-free mainstream companies (many go to work on the Continent). So the Opera Group was able to cast the production not just with young, but with highly experienced artists in even the smaller roles—I avoid the words "supporting roles," since each and every one pays rich rewards.

Dick Bird's adaptable design was built around the orchestra, which at the Young Vic was, as it were, on stage, with a thrust-stage playing area in front surrounded by the audience on three sides. There were problems with balance between the orchestral underscoring and the spoken dialogue—there nearly always are—which with luck will have been sorted out in later performances. Conductor Patrick Bailey paced the drama most persuasively, and John Fulljames's production was barely noticeable—a great compliment in my book. I suspect that *Street Scene* is one of those tightly-written works, like *The Marriage of Figaro* or *Porgy and Bess*, that is virtually director-proof. Maybe there was a little too much atmospheric traffic noise (again, interfering with audibility) and the Nursemaids' duet was too cozy—this counter-attack in the class war has to be more than just a comic interlude.

The performance was dominated by Elena Ferrari's Anna Maurrant. Ms. Ferrari is a Violetta, a Fiordiligi, a Donna Anna among much else; she sang with beauty and power, and contrived a most touching characterization. Her delivery of "Somehow I Never Could Believe" had me furtively reaching for the Kleenex. Andrew Slater (Frank), a Glyndebourne Golaud, was an equally powerful antagonist, especially in his remorse. Also outstanding were the South African John Moabi, who contributed an unrecognizable double act as the Janitor and Dick McGann (I had to check the programme) and Harriet Williams, who turned Mrs. Olsen from a minor into a major role. Darren Abrahams (Mr. Buchanan), Simone Sauphanor (Mrs. Fiorentino), Kate Nelson (an enchanting Jennie Hildebrand)—all first-rate.

What minor disappointments there were concerned Sam Kaplan and Rose Maurrant. Adrian Dwyer (Sam) is widely experienced in opera but, whether due to costuming or direction, he looked too old and couldn't quite convey the character's naiveté, probity, and charm. His diction could have been much sharper. Ruby Hughes (Rose), too, was none too incisive with her words, in contrast to the rest of the company. She is still a student at the Royal College of Music, but you would never have known it from her confidence on stage, and therein lay another problem. Her comportment, her costume and, especially, her wig were not those of a poverty-stricken tenement-dweller, and she seemed too sophisticated, too knowing in her dealings with Simon Lobelson's deliciously sleazy Harry Easter. This somehow wasn't a girl who would sing "What good would the moon be?".

But despite this slight credibility gap at one of the emotional centers of the work, *Street Scene* wielded its customary power. Towards the end of a lifetime of opera-going I have no doubt that it is one of the great 20th-century operas. I mentioned above the fifteen years since it was last seen in London. Why is it not as much a repertory work as *Porgy*? I suppose it is Weill's, Rice's and Hughes's heroic courage at resisting the temptation of a happy ending. There are some operas—*Katya Kabanova* and *From the House of the Dead* spring immediately to mind—after which you feel that despite individual tragedy a world has been changed, and for the better. But all you are left with at the end of *Street Scene* is two young lives, two beautiful young lives, irretrievably ruined. A sequel in which Rose and Sam were to meet again and get together is simply inconceivable. And, as in *Peter Grimes*, we end with a rerun of the opening scene. The world hasn't changed. Was the authors' courage misplaced?

Rodney Milnes
London

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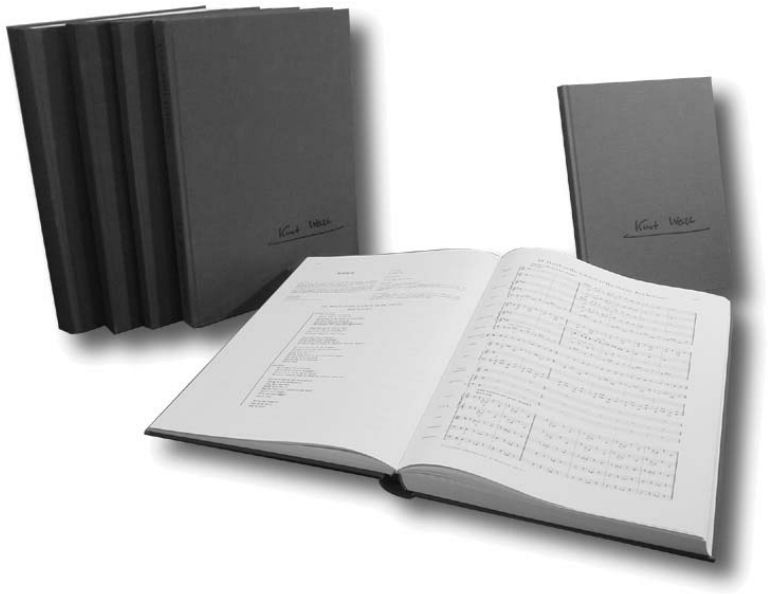

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