

ARTICLES



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Koegler, Horst. "Das Schreiben für die Nachwelt ist mir völlig wurscht!" *Opernwelt* 2/1995 (February): 1-7. [See news story, p. 2]

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Lucchesi, Joachim. "Geschärfte Musik: Bertolt Brecht/Kurt Weill: *Die Dreigroschenoper*." *Diskussion Deutsche* 139 (October 1994): 323-28.

BOOKS



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*A Guide to the Weill-Lenya Research Center*. David Farneth, John Andrus, and Dave Stein, comp. and eds. New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, 1995. [See announcement, p. 4]

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Meyer-Rähnitz, Bernd. *Kurt-Weill-Discographie: Die Grammophon-Schallplatten (1927-1961)*. Dresden: [s.n.], 1994.

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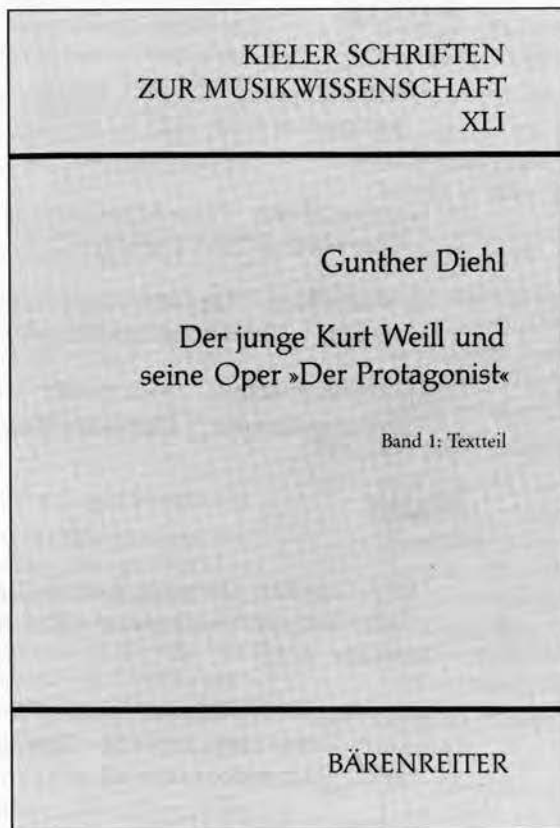


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Weill. String Quartet, op. 8 (together with String Quartet No.1 by Erwin Schulhoff and String Quartet No. 3, op. 22 by Hindemith). Brandis Quartet. Nimbus NI 5410, p1994.

Gauty, Lys. "Ces fabuleuses années trente." Includes "La fiancée du pirate" and "Le chant de Barbara" from the film *L'opéra de quat'sous*. WH Records 191 441-2.

Damia. "Damia 1928-1933." Includes "Complainte de Mackie." Chansophone 107.



**Der junge Kurt Weill und seine Oper "Der Protagonist." Exemplarische Untersuchungen zur Deutung des frühen kompositorischen Werkes.** By Gunther Diehl. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994) (Kieler Schriften zur Musikwissenschaft, Band XLI). Two volumes: 379 & 163 pages.

There are a number of composers who, though figuring prominently in contemporary musical life, are nonetheless musicologically branded by clichés. This group includes, among others, Mendelssohn, Puccini, Strauss, Reger, and Weill. The characteristic feature common to all of them is that their work is not easily reducible to the analytical-critical categories currently in scholarly vogue. The supremacy of the "autonomous art work" — usually a composition using the motivic and thematic techniques of Beethoven — still remains in place today as the fundamental assumption of "high" academic musicological discourse.

According to this discourse, it was Schoenberg — claiming the mantle of

Beethoven — who provided continuity in composition from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. In the world of music theory, Theodor Adorno gave intellectual structure to Schoenberg's cause. An important component of this structure was contempt for the public, a contempt formulated early, as demonstrated by a January 1909 interview in which the composer asserted: "The response of both the public and the critics today is ignored to such an extent by all good artistic minds that neither can in any way still set standards."

As a result of this attitude, the disruption of communication between composer and public actually became the benchmark of quality for music intended to represent Schoenberg's and Adorno's claims. Popu-

larity automatically represented identification with the "lower" levels of music production.

Kurt Weill has suffered especially under this aesthetic fallacy, one consequence of which has been for German musicology to disown him. The disapproving undertone of a musicology horrified by Broadway is tangible in reference works such as the Honegger-Massenkeil *Grosse Lexikon der Musik*. The *Lexikon* identifies Weill as an "American composer of German background" while describing Schoenberg as simply an "Austrian composer." (Note that Schoenberg went to the U.S.A. in 1933 and became an American citizen in 1940; Weill, on the other hand, did not arrive in America until 1935, becoming a citizen in 1943.) It

is all the more significant, then, that recently Weill research even in Germany has begun to call into question the tenacious aesthetic categories described above.

Gunther Diehl's dissertation, written for the University of Kiel and supported by grants from the Kurt Weill Foundation in New York, employs methodology which could serve as a model for work on this as well as other composers. The author succeeds especially in addressing with clarity issues of analysis and historical influence. He presents the results of many years of investigation in refreshingly readable prose, as well-documented as it is concise. He avoids the common dissertation pitfall of plaguing the reader with documentation of every last step in the research process.

Diehl's project grew out of concern for the lack of attention Weill's early works had garnered in the scholarly community; even *Der Protagonist*, the work whose success launched the composer's professional career, had not yet received adequate treatment. Diehl presents both a monograph on this key work and an evaluation of the status of *Der Protagonist* among all of Weill's early works. In this project he makes full use, in some cases for the first time, of all

the available musical and literary source materials, and most particularly the resources of the Weill-Lenya Research Center.

Weill scholarship has suffered to an extent from its fixation on the great music-theater pieces of the late 1920s. By this way of thinking, all works which precede *Die Dreigroschenoper* are nothing but transitory "warmup exercises," without independent artistic merit. The teleological concept which forms the basis of this evaluation – that of a biographical "development" from imperfect early work to the maturity of late work – runs parallel to the doctrine of the autonomous artwork and proves unsuitable for the comprehending the pattern of Weill's career.

Demonstrating the creative individuality of selected early works, including *Der Protagonist*, Diehl proposes that the concept of development takes on real significance for Weill studies only when it is understood as "movement away from the point of origin and permanent severance from preconceptions" (p.12). In this regard, *Der Protagonist* and the works which preceded it are "not to be seen as preparatory steps taken in the direction of later works" (p. 124), but

as independent works of art. In fact, after reading this book, one can only wonder why neither *Der Protagonist* nor many of the other early works have been recorded. Diehl succeeds admirably in piquing our curiosity about this unjustly neglected music (and that this is a thoroughly exceptional quality in a dissertation hardly needs to be emphasized).

*Der junge Kurt Weill und seine Oper "Der Protagonist"* is published in two volumes: a principal "Textteil" and a secondary collection of "Notenbeispiele und Materialien." The first two chapters of Volume One establish a context for *Der Protagonist* with respect to Weill's biography and the social and musical environment of the Weimar Republic. The central chapter, entitled simply "Die Oper," discusses the genesis and reception of the work and then proceeds with musical analyses of selected passages followed by some conclusions about compositional techniques and procedures. The first volume closes with a bibliography and list of primary source materials. Volume Two is essentially a compendium of documents, especially those relating to the analysis carried out in the principal volume.

As refreshing and stimulating for Weill research as Diehl's work is, it must be noted that his book exhibits a number of editorial shortcomings. Typographical errors are rampant, and important elements – even entire footnotes – are missing altogether. Likewise, the presentation of examples in the second volume in no way represents a high editorial standard. Many of them can be understood only by reference to Volume One. One must find the right page in the text, for instance, to even have a hint that Example 80 is taken from a piece by Busoni.

Obviously, a final, careful proofreading of Diehl's publication never took place. It is most irritating that a renowned publishing house such as Bärenreiter capitulated to the temptation of saving money through cutbacks on internal editorial service. This phenomenon, as typical as it is unfortunate, must be taken as a real sign of poverty in the very country in which the printing of books was invented.

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translated by John Andrus



Weill at the premiere of *Der Protagonist* in 1926.



# Bertolt Brecht



Journals  
1934-1955

**Bertolt Brecht Journals 1934-55.** Translated by Hugh Rorrison. Edited by John Willett. (New York: Routledge, 1993). 556 pages.

It is one of the more notable anomalies of the Brecht-into-English translation industry that it has taken twenty years for this volume to appear. True, these journals are not as marketable as the early diaries: for an audience more interested in personal details, the journals lack the earlier work's combination of suspense and black comedy in its account of the young Brecht's love affairs. What they do offer, on the other hand, is intellectual stimulation. Many of the entries are as provocative as anything he wrote, containing ruthlessly candid assessments of his own works and those of others and full of unexpected insights and throw-away judgments inviting both consideration and disagreement.

With the exception of a few gaps – most importantly one comprising nearly the entire year 1946 – the journals proper begin in 1938 and run until 1955. The editors have chosen, correctly, to lead into the body of actual journal entries with some excerpts from the “Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen” dating from the years between 1934 and 1938. These establish a crucial component of Brecht's thought, his approach to writing, including his dialectics, the juxtaposition of contrasting elements,

even the journals' arrangement. Then there are those things he himself describes as “the spur of contradiction” and his “love of clarity,” which comes “from the unclear way I think.”

One of the virtues of the journals is the way the writer's views on politics, literature, personal relations, and art as commodity are all presented in an unmediated manner. Brecht's responses at the moment, though never so spontaneous that they lack shape and point, are set down in a freer, sometimes more paradoxical form than their later reworkings into an essay or article. More often than not, this leads to a clearer understanding of the writer's attitudes concerning topics such as Hollywood, empathy, epic theater, and questions of performance than that offered by essays or notes couched in more theoretical terms or structured more systematically.

By way of a particular example, many of the issues at the center of the debate about the function and nature of theater and the theatrical experience in the *Messingkauf Dialogues* are present here in more relaxed and blunter form. Brecht differentiates between “theater for the scientific age”

(which he advocates), and its debasement into “scientific theater” (which he opposes). He continually returns to questions of illusion, epic theater, and escapism: “Max Gorelik . . . makes the mistake of putting too much functionalism into epic theater... He sails manfully into the theater of illusion, and would make headway, but for the fact that the only institution he knows which dispenses with illusion is scientific.” What is more, Brecht makes it clear that he is *not* against entertainment or escapism in the theater but the diluted form they assume in America: “the problem is not that it is nothing but entertainment, but that it is very weak, casual, inconsequential entertainment. Escapism, but only enough to take you as far as the elevator, an aphrodisiac, but only enough for a flirtation, etc.”

Frequently, the entries startle the reader with sharp insights accompanied by unexpected corollaries or conclusions. Just as often, one finds brief comments exhibiting humor and more than a grain of truth, as in: “a well-meaning producer recommended to Kortner that if he wanted to help somebody up there in the studio he should not describe him as ‘brilliant’ but as a ‘swell guy, easy to work with.’” Moreover, given the comparative rarity of positive comments either about his own work or that of friends and colleagues, it is worth noting the positive aside on Weill at the time of a visit in June 1943: “his judgment in dramatic matters is good.” This is high praise indeed, coming from Brecht, especially coupled with the immediate subsequent drafting of a new scene in response to the composer's reservations.

As is the case with the English edition of the *Poems*, John Willett's notes, though they draw on the German edition, are both fuller and more informative than their model. The translation is fluent and mostly idiomatic, apart from an occasional oddity. For example, it must be puzzling for readers to learn, from an entry on Strindberg's essay on the one-act play, that Brecht contemplates constructing “an alienation technique for depicting states,” moves on to link “actions involving states and princes,” before finally returning to “descriptions of states.” A look at the original German is required to clear up this confusion: one use of the word “state” refers to a state of mind or situation while the other refers to a realm. Minor glitches aside, this volume should occupy a place beside *Brecht on Theater* as an indispensable source work for understanding the development of the playwright-poet's views on art, politics, and the theater.

MICHAEL MORLEY  
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Percy Grainger devised the term "elastic scoring," and by implication the concept "elastic music," for works that can exist in a multiplicity of different instrumentations. In our own time we might speak of "elastic musicology," meaning a discipline whose categories expand as freely as commercial (and musico-political) interests dictate. It is easy to understand the publisher's need to subsume every volume within a series. All the same, the appearance of a title such as Bryan Gilliam's in a series called "Cambridge Studies in Performance Practice," in succession to books on Mozart and plainsong, might well raise a few eyebrows. Certainly essays such as Christopher Hailey's on music and radio in Weimar Germany and Stephen Hinton's study of the *Lehrstück*, fascinating though they are, have little to do with performance practice as it is commonly understood. In his preface Gilliam tries hard to make a unity out of his various contributions, suggesting performance as the "interconnecting thread." But the book resists any such easy categorization; its liveliest contributions are those that are only marginally related to the central topic.

Dutiful contributions first. Pamela Porter's essay on "German Musicology and Early Music Performance, 1918-1933," is impressively researched but lacks critical edge. If this is a chapter from her 1991 dissertation (conscientiously footnoted on page 198, note 64), it constitutes a strong argument for reworking doctoral material thoroughly before publication. Scarcely more compelling, but stolidly true to the publisher's intentions, is Robert Hill's "'Overcoming Romanticism': On the Modernization of Twentieth-Century Performance Practice," an awesome assemblage of secondary sources which says little not said already (and with considerably more vigor) by Richard Taruskin. Another dull piece is the contribution by the series editor, Peter Williams, on "The idea of *Bewegung* in the German Organ Reform Movement of the 1920s." I cannot imagine this being of the slightest interest to anyone who is not an organist. Although the author eventually broadens the scope of his essay to suggest parallels with the rise of National Socialism — an effort for which Gilliam tries to rally support (while recognizing the essay's narrow focus) — the discussion remains obstinately bound to the organ loft, like an improvisation that fails to take off. Williams's essay is all the more of a disappointment coming after his General Preface to the volume, which combines much wisdom with his usual characteristically sharp *aperçus*.

The three best essays are also those that are likely to be of most interest to readers of this Newsletter. Bryan Gilliam's "Stage and Screen: Kurt Weill and Operatic Reform in the 1920s" is an attempt to outline the influence of the silent cinema on Weill's early operatic projects. This is an intriguing topic which could take the author far beyond the twelve pages at his disposal. As it is, discussion of the three works in question — *Der Protagonist*, with its two pantomime episodes, *Royal Palace*, and the *Mahagonny Songspiel* — is frustratingly brief, offering not much more than a synopsis of the first and running aground in the description of the second on an unsurprising, Dahlhausian "paradox":

on the one hand, film can be viewed as a realistic medium, able to break the illusion of theater. On the other hand, film is ultimately nothing but illusion, a series of two-dimensional still images on celluloid. This paradox, we recall, was the source of Schoenberg's criticism, which was that in film "one not only sees truth and reality, rather also every appearance . . . that presents itself in a fantastic way as reality.

The reference to Schoenberg would have had more force if the word *Schein* had been translated as "illusion" rather than "appearance." (It is one of the oddities of this volume, by the way, that almost all quotations are given in both translation *and* the original, a practice that swells the endnotes to sixty pages in what would otherwise be a rather slim volume. The inclusion of citations in the original and translated forms is more defensible when the sources are Boethius or Quantz than when they are modern ones; this was surely a case where series policy could have been relaxed. Another oddity is the practice of referring to the *Mahagonny Songspiel*, and not the opera, as *Mahagonny*, though it is usually clear which of the two is meant.) I was sorry to see



**Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic.** Edited by Bryan Gilliam. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 220 pages.

Gilliam, distinguished Straussian that he is, lapsing into received opinion on the later Strauss, having commended *Intermezzo* but regretting that at sixty he was "unable to jettison the Wagnerian apparatus that had served him so well in the past." What about *Die schweigsame Frau*? This was a "more substantial" achievement, surely, than the Hindemith and Krenek Gilliam goes on to praise.

Kim H. Kowalke's chapter on Weill performance, "Singing Brecht versus Brecht Singing," is a typical mixture of that author's erudition, lively presentation, and good sense. Although many of the points are familiar from his other writings, the book is worth buying for the sake of his closing image alone: "There [in the privacy of Brecht's Augsburg apartment] . . . with the audience of a few friends, he liked to conduct — without an orchestra or singers but otherwise fully equipped with a baton, a music stand, and a well-worn Partitur of *Tristan and Isolde*."

Probably the most valuable essay in the volume, however, is J. Bradford Robinson's "Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany." Tracing a "shimmy figure" back from Weill and Krenek to its origins, not in authentic (i.e., African-American) jazz, but in indigenous German dance music, Robinson uncovers a wealth of useful information. It is fascinating to read, for example, that Berg derived most of his knowledge of jazz not from direct experience of the actual music (though he may have met Weill, it seems, as early as 1926) but from a reading of Alfred Baresel's *Jazz-Buch* (1925). Berg's annotations in Baresel's book, some of which Robinson reproduces, are interesting to a degree; and it is salutary to learn that the "jazz" episodes in *Lulu* and *Der Wein* may have been conceived without the first-hand knowledge of Weill that many of us had assumed for years.

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**Street Scene.** Ludwigshafen. Theater im Pfalzbau. Francesca Zambello, director, James Holmes, conductor. Premiere 17 December 1994.

*The performances in Ludwigshafen marked the European premiere of a co-production of the Houston Grand Opera, Theater im Pfalzbau, and Theater des Westens in Berlin. A review of the production's opening in Houston in January 1994 appeared in Volume 12.1 of the Newsletter. Some excerpts from the international press reaction to the opening in Berlin are reprinted on page 13 of this issue.*

"No country's musical life appears to be entirely mature until its composers succeed in creating an indigenous operatic theater."

*Aaron Copland, 1941.*

Although an immigrant to the United States, Kurt Weill identified uncompromisingly with his new homeland. From the time he arrived in the U.S.A. he dreamed of the possibilities of "American Opera." His dream was fulfilled in 1947 with *Street Scene*. It is no cause for wonder that Weill realized his aspirations within the framework of the commercial Broadway theater. From the beginning of his career he stated in no uncertain terms his desire to address himself to a wide public while upholding high artistic standards. The emergence of a more ambitious and sophisticated form of the musical – and one which incorporated expressly American themes – on Broadway in the 1940s provided fertile ground for such noble ideals.

The very term Weill applied intermittently to *Street Scene*, "Broadway Opera," exhibits a melting pot aspect (as does the concept, say, of "symphonic jazz") in its resolution of apparent contradictions. That proverbial melting pot, as reflected in the microcosm of a New York tenement, is the dramatic and musical theme of *Street Scene*. Here, as in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, is a work built upon the idea of the American metropolis. Whereas the fictional Mahagonny, both alluring and repulsive, radiates the dangerous fascination of the exotic, the choice of subject matter in *Street Scene* has an autobiographical component. The sacrifices of emigration transform the exotic metropolis, giving it an unexpected quality: that of home. *Street*

*Scene* may offer less in the way of the familiar "sting" of Weill's collaborations with Brecht, because Elmer Rice's realistic play and libretto deliver no direct social criticism. Taking the place of such qualities, however, are new ones, among them humor and forgiveness.

The parody of national clichés in the "Ice Cream Sextet," for example, is a felicitous high point in a work full of human longing. Weill reserves his most "authentic" style for the moments when his characters express just those longings elevated above the mundane and everyday, as in Mrs. Maurant's aria "Somehow I never could believe." This opulent music refers, without irony, to opera and operetta styles of the nineteenth century. It gives the impression of Weill, having escaped the influence of Brecht, releasing an immense, accumulated trove of uninhibited music making.

The elevated emotions of grand opera drive the four principal characters of *Street Scene*. Around these cluster, like tiles in a mosaic, many subplots and secondary characters, the latter speaking in various distinct accents and accompanied by equally diverse styles of music. Here Weill demonstrates his mastery of a number of different national idioms. The brashest Broadway numbers (such as "Moon-faced, Starry-Eyed") are reserved for marginal characters who otherwise have nothing to do with the dramatic action. In fact, a central challenge in staging the work is to coordinate yet individualize so many loosely connected characters.

The most unifying element of the piece is the tenement itself, the metaphor for the melting pot. The façade of this building dominates Adrienne Lobel's set design for the Houston-Ludwigshafen-Berlin *Street Scene*. Realistically detailed, it completely dominates the stage, a mute and unmoving character looming over and unifying the varied destinies that play out before it.

Francesca Zambello's direction, following completely the principle of realism inherent in the work, succeeds in breathing life into the characters. Intelligent casting contributes favorably to the individualization of each. The entire ensemble acts and sings convincingly, with principals (in the

cast I saw) Ashley Putnam and Marc Embree as Anna and Frank Maurant, and Kip Wilborn as Sam Kaplan, deserving special note. Teri Hansen presents just the right youthful appearance and voice as Rose Maurant, and Anthony Mee had a besetting charm as Lippo Fiorentino.

Humorous and endearing details abound, as when the two indulgent fathers act in counterpoint to the sarcastic "lullaby" of the nannies. The production's marked devotion to its individual characters delivers the moral of the play without ever moralizing: it is possible for people to find practical, livable compromises despite differences between them.

The same precision and spontaneity that is exhibited on stage prevails in the clear and buoyant musical interpretation by the Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz under the direction of James Holmes. Holmes negotiates all the different stylistic strata in the piece with equal conviction and this sureness prevents any rifts from opening up between musical terrains. His interpretation also demonstrates that, as rich in allusion as Weill's music is, it speaks directly whether or not one recognizes each specific point of reference.

On the night of the premiere performance in Ludwigshafen, the public responded with spontaneous enthusiasm, almost as if in a movie theater. It was certainly no disadvantage that the work was performed in the original English version. The majority of the audience did not seem to need the German supertitles. (In fact, much spoken English was audible during the intermission.) Given the veritable tidal wave of musicals presently breaking over Germany, this may be just the right time for a warm welcome to Weill's American oeuvre, be it "American opera" or otherwise. Judging from the applause following the virtuoso dance number "Moon-faced, starry-eyed" (Anita Vidovic and Danny Costello choreographed by Denny Berry) there is plenty of room for even more Broadway here.

**GISELA SCHUBERT**  
Frankfurt am Main  
*translated by John Andrus*

Has the authenticity movement finally caught up to the twentieth century? After the Nikolaus Harnoncourt and John Eliot Gardiner *Merry Widows* and Gardiner's *Die sieben Todsünden*, the world seemed ready for an authentic *Dreigroschenoper* of 1928 vintage. Ready or not, this is the task that the Frankfurt Schauspiel has set for itself. At least as far as the music is concerned, they have succeeded marvelously.

On the other hand, Hans Hollmann's production, designed by Yvonne Lötz and Simone Plate, is run-of-the-mill: not bad, but hardly very original either. It would appear that the director could not make up his mind whether to emphasize the social-critical content of the play or its operetta *frisson*. As a result, the production looks somewhat distant and aloof. (The generous supply of coffins as all-purpose furniture does not succeed in making it any more relevant.) Add to this a sort of punkish Macheath (Friedrich-Karl Praetorius), so short on sex and charm that the leading Frankfurt newspaper withheld his name, and one suspects that this is the sort of production that was already forgotten by the time the audience left the theater.

This was not actually the case, though, and the credit goes entirely to the collaboration of HK Gruber and the Frankfurt Ensemble Modern. It is only fitting that they be placed as they are, in the center of the stage (on what looks like a sort of circular black pyramid). H(ans) K(arl) Gruber, a composer, conductor, singer,

and double-bassist who hails from Vienna, is an old hand at Weill: one need only recall his electrifying CD *Berlin im Licht* and his vivid remembrances of Lenya in the recent Hessischer Rundfunk film directed by Barrie Gavin. For this production he went back to the original score of 1928 published by Universal Edition in 1972 in an edition by Karl Heinz Füssl. Strange to say, the use of this authoritative source is the exception rather than the rule in *Dreigroschenoper* performances all over the world. The vast majority of these use more or less mutilated versions of the score, usually coupled with an effort to "jazz it up" — a practice, by the way, about which Weill complained from the time the first recordings began to appear. Gruber has also restored Lucy's aria, "Eifersucht! Wut, Liebe und Furcht zugleich," which was cut before the origi-

nal opening night because the actress proved unable to sing it. This may make little dramaturgical sense now, but what a marvelous piece it is! (Christopher Shaw, in an essay in issue 8.2 of this *Newsletter* called it Weill's "Tombeau de Mozart.") In Frankfurt, performing to piano accompaniment only, Dorothee Hartinger as Lucy played it as a giant parody of Florence Foster Jenkins, much to the audience's delight.

Instead of the seven musicians which Mackeben led at the premiere, Gruber uses thirteen players for the twenty-three instruments. He indicates that only once has he intervened in Weill's instrumentation: by adding trombones to the final chorale (in the original band the trombone player also covered the double-bass parts). The two other alterations are transpositions — both down one octave — of "Seeräuberjenny" and of Mrs. Peachum's "Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit," necessary to accommodate the vocal limitations of the actresses. But even those adjustments do not prevent the music from coming over with enormous panache. One is always aware that this is music of a composer with a symphonic background rather than music by a defector from Birdland.

Gruber's insistence that one of the prerequisites of the production was his acceptance of actors from the regular ensemble of the Frankfurt Schauspielhaus — which, in contrast to the Frankfurt Opera, is no longer in the front rank of German playhouses — sounds a little suspicious. In any case, he is roaming all over Germany in search of appropriate performers for the planned CD recording and seems to be pretty sure that he will find them, even if it may take some time.



The principals of the Frankfurt Schauspielhaus production of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Photo: Mara Eggert.

HORST KOEGLER  
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## PERFORMANCES

**Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.** Düsseldorf. Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Kurt Horres, director, Walter E. Gugerbauer, music director. Premiere 9 October 1994.

**Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.** Chemnitz. Städtische Theater, Steffen Piontek, director, Alexander von Brück, music director. Premiere 1 October 1994.

Two concurrent productions of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in Chemnitz and Düsseldorf offer radically different interpretations of the Weill-Brecht opera. These two realizations subliminally reflect the current status of the process that is bringing together the two halves of a previously divided Germany. One is even tempted to suggest a sort of cultural exchange by which each theater would present guest performances of the other's production. It would be instructive for the Düsseldorfers to become familiar with the spiritual condition of their Saxonian fellows, while it would be a good lesson for those in Chemnitz to acquaint themselves with the aesthetic standards of the Rheinland's metropolis. Such an exchange could serve as a worthwhile alternative to all the griping and groaning about the supposed differences between West and East Germany.

### *Mahagonny* as Auto-da-fé

In the Düsseldorf *Mahagonny*, director Kurt Horres has mounted a production which may be taken as a benchmark for artistic quality. He succeeds in reducing the piece to its fundamental elements of music, text, and space, exercising a masterful control over what might be called the "art of leaving things out."

Stripped of clichéd images, *Mahagonny* plays out literally in black and white. Scenic designer Andreas Reinhardt masterfully demonstrates just how alive the color black can be. A white curtain, in classic Brecht style, hangs half-closed, reducing by half the yawning black stage portal. (Likewise characteristic of the epic theater is the announcement of scene and situation via loudspeaker.) The costumes are tailored from black material, though the monochromatic scenery is elegantly enriched by the range of pink, and salmon, and red

corsages worn by the Girls of Mahagonny. The "Fressen, Lieben, Boxen, Saufen" episode is played out around a boxing ring built on a movable wagon. The ring functions as a supplementary performing space, like a mobile stage upon a stage, with the battery of lighting equipment surrounding it playing both functional and decorative roles.

Horres is blessed with outstanding personnel, from the principals to the chorus members to the instrumentalists in the pit. The dramatic mezzo-soprano Trudeliene Schmidt is the very embodiment of the Widow Begbick. And bass Hermann Becht is supremely good as Trinity Moses. Only

rarely does one encounter in German opera houses a chorus equal in discipline and musicianship to the one rehearsed by Rudolf Staude for this production. The musical precision of the male choir is particularly remarkable. Further, the chorus never gives the impression of a monolithic collective. Instead, each individual appears as a very singular, even freakish type.

The Düsseldorf Symphony, under Walter E. Gugerbauer, performs at a high level. Gugerbauer provides support for the various voices on stage in carefully measured doses. For the most part, the accompaniment remains discreetly in the background. In purely instrumental passages, though, the orchestra shows its own musical personality, performing the music loosely and, when necessary, with the best big band sound.

Horres's presentation of the opera's final climactic scenes can be read as a gloss on the auto-da-fé of the medieval Inquisition: the condemnation of heretics to death by burning at the stake. Jim, having committed the cardinal sin of having no money, is brought before a tribunal. In the role of public prosecutor, Trinity Moses represents a corrupt state run amok. The production closes with the symbol of that state, the phrase "*Du Darfst*" (everything is allowed) burning in the background of a gradually darkening stage. This stigma warns of the dissolution of Mahagonny into nothingness.



Begbick (Trudeliene Schmidt) and Dreieinigkeitsmoses (Hermann Becht) tend to their getaway car in the Deutsche Oper am Rhein production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. Photo: Eduard Straub.



### *Mahagonny* as Nostalgic East German Passion Play

Director Steffen Piontek in Chemnitz takes the piece in a decidedly different direction from Horres's Düsseldorf production, ambitiously offering *Mahagonny* as a three-way allegory. He aims for a realization of the piece that references both recent German history and the Christian Passion and presents these allegories by means of yet a third major conceit: the stage and auditorium in Chemnitz are furnished with the trappings of a 1970s-era television studio.

The epic announcements of scene and situation that are broadcast via loudspeaker in Düsseldorf are presented in Chemnitz as TV news reports, read by First German Television's news moderator Ulrich Wickert and the former chief commentator of East German television, Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler. When the two moderators are not "on," the monitors show evocative pictures from everyday German life. Unfortunately, the TV screens act as applause killers. Once the videos are set in motion at the beginning of an act, they run on without pause. Any spontaneous demonstration of approval by the audience quickly dies as the action on the monitors pushes inexorably forward.

Solely from a visual perspective, the Chemnitz *Mahagonny* might be considered modern in that it renounces most of the characteristics called for in the Brechtian performance tradition. What comes across in that tradition's place, unfortunately, is interpretive indecision. There is an intellectual and optical overload here, with enough raw material for three separate productions. The orgy of decoration provided by Johannes Haufe's stage design includes a huge Lenin monument, a multi-story structure that recalls a puppet-house, and an evocation of The Wall consisting of stacked packing crates. The "Fressen-Lieben-Boxen-Saufen" scene is enacted in surroundings, furnished with what looks like polished white marble, reminiscent of the architectural pretention of the newly built Chemnitz opera house. It seems as if the director and his design team did not trust the stage-worthiness of the opera on its own merits. Someone should have taken decisive action on behalf of one dramaturgical position or another and made whatever changes or deletions were necessary in that position's favor.

Even more regrettably, the overabundance of visual stimulation is not matched in the musical sphere by the orchestra. Alexander von Brück directs the Robert Schumann Philharmonic knowledgeably



Paul Ackerman (Richard Berkeley-Steele) as the "good man of the DDR" in the Chemnitz production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. Photo: Dieter Wuschanski.

and with technical precision, but with no flexibility of tempo. The ensemble sounds listless and dull. Far too rare are the sparks from Weill's elegant ease in handling the stylistic devices of 1920s entertainment music.

The Chemnitz production might seem to suggest that the founding of the city of nets relates in some way to the metamorphosis from Karl-Marx-Stadt to Chemnitz, whereby the original name of the city was restored after having been supplanted by a politically motivated one. This impression presents itself through both characterization and imagery. For instance, the gangster trio's getaway car is a Mercedes Benz with the Düsseldorf license number "D-ÜS 600."

It can hardly be the intention of the director to denounce all those who, sick and tired of the East, have gone to live in the West before and since the opening of the Wall. In case this impression prevails, though, it is important to point out that the people who fled Karl-Marx-Stadt were ordinary citizens and not wanted criminals like Begbick, Willy, and Trinity Moses.

The intended analogy to the Christian Passion is quite overt. From the time Paul Ackermann (Jimmy Mahoney in the original, the Chemnitz production uses the character names of the Berlin version of the piece) decrees the statute of "Du darfst" (in an interesting twist on throwing money changers out of the temple) the character begins his metamorphosis into Christ. A

change in wigs with each scene allows for the growth of Paul's hair toward the traditional image of Jesus. Similarly, the staging of the "Fressen-Lieben-Boxen-Saufen" episode suggests the iconography of Michelangelo's *Last Supper*, complete with (a penitent?) Jenny (read Maria Magdalena) washing the feet of her beloved. Wieland Müller's Sparbüchsenheinz, if not musically rewarding, is at least a dramatically convincing Judas figure, taking leave from his master with a kiss. The parallelisms continue down to a trio of electric chairs as a modern Golgotha and Paul's final words: "Give me a glass of water!"

The two allegories come together to some extent in the demonstration following the execution, with a memorial to Paul as the good man of the DDR. The people unfurl a huge flag in the German national colors. Presented legibly in the three horizontal stripes of black, red, and gold are the words "Fressen," "Ficken," and "Fernsehen." At just this moment, the videos on the TV monitors begin to run backwards, with the constant inserted subtitle "BRD Fernsehen." These pictures prove themselves to be a denunciation, reminding the viewer that the same hand that points an accusing finger still has three other fingers pointing back at the accuser himself.

**KRAFT-EIKE WREDE**  
Berlin

*translated by Edward Harsh*

## PERFORMANCES

**Die Dreigroschenoper.** London. Donmar Warehouse, Phyllida Lloyd, director, Gary Yershon, conductor. Premiere 8 December 1994.

It is always dangerous to parody something which is itself already a satire. The weakness of this latest London *Threepenny Opera* is simply that: two layers of jokes. Brecht's adaptation of *The Beggar's Opera* required its audience to be aware of both the eighteenth-century original piece and of the 1920s' fashion for Handelian opera. In that light, Weill's music is partly a good-humored joke at the expense of opera singers and their mannerisms in performance. The new London *Threepenny* places on top of the Brecht-Weill layer Phyllida Lloyd's staging, which makes use of an adaptation of Robert David MacDonald's translation and new lyrics by Jeremy Sams to set the story in the future (to be exact: London at the time of the coronation of King William V, the eldest son of the Prince and Princess of Wales, in the year 2001). Funded as it is by the London *Evening Standard*, the production places stacks of "newspapers" in the theater lobby, each paper featuring a photograph of Tom Hollander as Mack and the big headline "Police close in on Mack the Knife." The evening becomes a maze of in-jokes about current problems in London: drugs, unemployment, homelessness, divorce, government and police scandals, etc.

There is a further irony: the theater in which this production is played, the Donmar Warehouse, has for more than a decade played a repertory of music theater, dance, and drama with an "alternative" slant. Although it acts like a fringe theater, its location in the heart of the Covent Garden area

helps it attract a well-heeled West End audience (this being reflected in its ticket prices). A year or so ago the theater scored a big success with a revival of Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* – of all the Weill-influenced shows, the one with the widest middle-of-the-road audience appeal. It is not hard to imagine the management thinking that, following on such a success, they might please the same crowds with the real thing.

All of this works up to a point. At both performances I attended I heard people commenting, "Oh, is *this* what it comes from?" (meaning "Mack the Knife") or "It's not exactly what I was expecting!" Brecht would have had a hearty laugh. Weill would not have been so amused. Just six musicians cover all the instruments while dressing up and playing small parts in the action as well. The playing, consequently, is pretty coarse. I am sure this is the intention, to try and achieve the effect of a poor theater doing its best, which is indeed in the spirit of the piece. That is not quite how it comes across, however.

The three acts are played as two, with the intermission coming just after Jenny's betrayal. In place of the street singer, it is Jenny who sings "Mack the Knife," which has been moved to the close of the first half. For the play to make its full impact it needs to be played in three acts, so that the finales can make their point. Nonetheless, if a two-act version is a necessity, this solution is quite a good one. Tara Hugo, as Jenny, is the most accomplished vocalist of the evening. She is

herself a composer and has sung in recitals of her own material and that of other contemporary composers. Sharon Small is required to play Polly with a fierce crew-cut hairdo and with no charm. (If the character seems tough and knowing from the start, where is the alienation effect?) Natasha Bain proves a very strong Lucy, so the decision not to let her sing her aria seems perverse.

As Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, Tom Mannion and Beverly Klein convincingly portray outraged, "righteous" indignation. Simon Dormandy is a sickeningly smooth Tiger Brown, whose interest in Mack seems to be in the same vein as that of Polly's and Lucy's, unquenched lust. What holds the evening, though, is Tom Hollander's riveting Mack, a glinting-eyed picture of sadistic evil, repellent and attractive at the same time, and thus totally convincing. His singing hails from the sandpaper school, but within the musical context of this production it does not seem out of place.

Vicki Mortimer's designs make brilliant use of several dozen video monitors, used to relay Brecht's between-scenes slogans as if broadcast by a live news service. And Mack goes to the gallows in a hideous electric-chair-in-a-box as part of a futuristic television spectator show.

I would not wish to see the Donmar style of production become the norm for *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The piece is best handled with a lighter, more affectionately satiric touch. Still, for this theater, in this winter, the style succeeded. (By the way, the priest brought in to marry Mackie and Polly was a woman.)

PATRICK O'CONNOR  
London



A pair of couples from the Donmar Warehouse *Threepenny Opera*. Above: Mr. and Mrs. Peachum (Tom Mannion and Beverley Klein). Right: Jenny (Tara Hugo) and Macheath (Tom Hollander). Photos: Mark Douet.







Marie Myrberg as Venus in Malmö. Photo: Anders Mattsson.

**One Touch of Venus.** Malmö. Malmö Musikteater. Lars Rudolfsson, director, Michael Adelson, conductor. Premiere 21 October 1994.

It should come as no surprise that Swedish audiences know little about Kurt Weill's American works. *One Touch of Venus* was last seen on a Swedish stage in 1947; *Knickerbocker Holiday* was produced once in Gothenburg in 1949 under the name of *På Manhattan*; and all evidence indicates that neither *Lady in the Dark* nor *Street Scene* nor *Lost in the Stars* has ever appeared in any form. Sweden knows only the composer who collaborated with Bertolt Brecht on pieces with a political message; pieces such as *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*.

But *One Touch of Venus* is quite different. Here one encounters a Kurt Weill inspired by the best that the American musical world of the 1940s had to offer, who took the essence of that world to heart. No doubt there are those who come away from this new Swedish production disappointed, or at least confused, by the piece. But one who visits Malmö expecting to meet the European Weill has merely trapped him- or herself with labels.

*One Touch of Venus*, Weill's fourth American stage work and his biggest commercial success, turns out to offer a wonderful evening of beautiful music that hints at just a shade of Gershwin. The plot is not complex: A guy about to become engaged tries

his engagement ring on a statue of Venus. The statue suddenly comes alive and falls in love with him. The man tries hard to resist, but finally gives in while his fiancée disappears as traceless as the Phantom of the Opera! Looking for moral uplift? Better look elsewhere. Still, the piece manages to exude romance. And humor. And charm.

Malmö director Lars Rudolfsson has captured the spirit of the Forties. His tasteful and sensitive direction makes no attempt to seduce the audience with big gestures. No such gestures are needed. The piece holds its own, even throughout its three-hour running time. That those three hours are not just a test of endurance is due to an excellent Swedish translation by Sven Hugo Persson. Comprehension of the dialogue and sung text is absolutely essential if one is to appreciate a musical of this type, and the audience in Malmö palpably grasped the humor of the piece through Persson's work.

Another essential for a work like this is a strong principal cast. Marie Myrberg makes an enchanting Venus. In marked contrast to her headline-grabbing Polly in last season's *Dreigroschenoper*, Myrberg's Venus displays a soft sincerity that is as ingratiating as it is erotically charged. The decision to import Philip Zandén from Den-

mark to play Rodney Hatch – Zandén's first American musical theater role – was a good one. No Swedish actor could have played the part so well. Zandén may be no Sinatra, but he is an expressive actor and his comic talents add much to the production.

Other notable cast members are Loa Falkman, as the art collector Whitelaw Savory and Marianne Mörck as his secretary. Falkman is a rock: a convincing actor with a powerful singing voice rivaled by few in Sweden. Mörck knows how to deliver a frosty line, whether in dialogue or song, and does not miss an opportunity to do so.

As fine as the cast is, it is the production as a whole that impresses most. Much of the credit does go to director Rudolfsson, but he is blessed with fine collaborators. Lotta Lagerström's choreography is very appealing and the lighting design by Anders Rosenqvist complements Styrbjörn Engström's simple but efficient stage setting. Recognition also goes to costume designer Görel Engstrand. Conductor Michael Adelson deftly handles the impressive Malmö Theater Orchestra.

After the performance one feels like Venus, who for a few hours was a guest in the real world. Malmö works the other way around, with each audience member a stranger him- or herself in a realm somewhere between imagination and reality. It is an agreeable experience.

**TONY KAPLAN**  
Malmö, Sweden



## PERFORMANCES

**All-Weill Concert.** Frankfurt. Alte Oper. Ensemble Modern, HK Gruber, conductor. 11 October 1994. (Also presented 9 October at Schauspielhaus am Gendarmenmarkt, Berlin).

With its exemplary 1990 CD recording *Berlin im Licht*, the Ensemble Modern revealed itself to be a committed and effective champion of the music of Kurt Weill. With these concerts in Berlin and Frankfurt – like the CD under the direction of the well-known composer, conductor, and singer HK Gruber – the Ensemble offered a live sampling of its excellent interpretations. In person, Gruber's vitality communicates itself even more immediately than on recording, both in his articulate enunciation of the song texts and in his sensitive collaboration with the young members of the ensemble. Sparks flew from the very start of the concert, with Weill's music in all its various facets profiting at every moment.

The program got off to a fresh and provocative start with the "Berlin im Licht-Song," composed in September 1928. (As it turned out, nearly two and a half hours later, the concert also closed with the song as a second encore.) The Ensemble played like the perfect jazz band, with a polished sound and precise rhythm, and with Gruber's enthusiastic declamation of the text ("Na wat denn, Na wat denn? Was is det für 'ne Stadt denn?") complimenting that character well. This little piece served as a sort of motto for the whole evening. Cursory listening leads one to think that the piece actually is what it sounds like: jazz. (Just as one could easily believe that the Ensemble Modern really is a jazz band.) With his compositional use of 1920s dance band idioms, Weill seems to be composing entertainment music. But the aloofness which characterizes the compositional result cleverly betrays the music as much more than that.

The little piece gave the musicians an opportunity to show off their professionalism to its best advantage. Gruber, in the dual role of vocalist and conductor, lent to his voice a cabaret-like undertone, while his hands did double duty, half modulating the delivery of text and half conducting the ensemble.

The performance of the second piece on the program, the Violin Concerto, exemplified the sort of fine interpretation that confirms Weill's compositional consistency from one work to another. The Ensemble could not have made the musical contours any clearer, with the increasing tension at the approach to climaxes always dispensed in precise dosages. Somewhat less pleas-

ing was soloist Freya Kirby's tone, which was overly restrained in the first movement as well as suffering from too narrow vibrato.

In the tripartite middle movement of the Concerto, Gruber made the most of Weill's orchestration refinement, as in the "Notturmo" section where the xylophone is the dominant sound color and the violin and contrabass illuminate each other in extended duet passages. (Throughout the concert, the participating instruments were arranged in a half-circle, allowing real insight into details of instrumentation.) Though performed at a very fast tempo, the final movement never seemed hurried. The shimmering, even impressionistic woodwind figures in the middle part of the movement were allowed to unfold beautifully.

The Violin Concerto stood at the center of gravity for the program. Structural elements and formal correspondences that played a subordinate role in some of the evening's other pieces were here treated with emphasis, their audibility stressed. It was as if the music and compositional posture of the Violin Concerto remained present as a subtext throughout the whole evening.

The *Suite panaméenne* followed in immediate contrast, with its miniature, aphoristic movement structure. Again, the Ensemble presented the (often amusing) details of instrumentation with exquisite clarity and craft. Weill's music manages in this piece a delicate balance, never once crossing the razor-thin line between stylish representation and banal pastiche. It is not the musical materials that are the focus here, but their compositional realization.

The middle portion of the program was dominated by Gruber's original singing voice and its remarkable adaptability to each respective stylistic necessity. In the ballad for bass and ten winds, *Vom Tod im Wald* – composed immediately after the *Mahagonny Songspiel* in 1927, though stylistically quite a thing unto itself – Gruber emphasized the coloring of the vernacular, rolling his "r" especially strongly, for instance. The gloomy atmosphere benefited from the style of his text recitation and the quality of his voice, both of which recalled the Brechtian ideal.

Although friendly acquaintances throughout their lives, Kurt Weill and the

great Erwin Piscator collaborated but once, during the 1920s. Only fragments survive of Weill's score from this project, entitled *Konjunktur*: specifically, mechanistic work-rhythms to accompany interludes in Piscator's documentary film and the *Muschellied*, which was calculated to be a hit. Here, Gruber was completely in his element. He masterfully projected each word and powered the ensemble to a high-energy reading, each strophe of the song closing with the ensemble shouting: "Shell! Shell! Shell!" The young musicians barely stayed in their chairs, their tempestuous enthusiasm rising up to the rafters.

In the two songs from *Johnny Johnson*, Weill's first work for the American theater, a completely different tone prevailed. Both "Captain Valentine's Song" and the "Cowboy-Song" are authentic illustrations of Weill's compositional posture: that is, they cite the tango gesture without being actual tangos. The exaggeration Gruber allowed himself in celebration of the first piece's tango-like quality was both measured and necessary. His breathy voice and nearly caricatured interpretation did not come off as frivolous; quite the contrary, since this style of performance corresponds to the composer's intention.

The concert came to a furious close with a performance of *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. The piece held a special radiant power, set up as it was to be the destination point of the whole concert. The sonic images and compositional postures of the previous pieces seemed to linger on in it. (In this context the apparent intimacy of the suite gained a rough and even perverse quality.) As in the rest of the program, the musicians presented each character and musical gesture with careful attention to detail. One can tell that Gruber and the Ensemble Modern enjoy this "music with a bite." Between the individual movements the conductor straightened his arms out in front of him, his finger fidgeting like a juggler before the most thrilling number.

This evening overall was a sort of catalogue of the composer's work. It is just such exemplary performances that will have the most lasting and positive effect on behalf of Kurt Weill's oeuvre as a whole.

GUNTHER DIEHL  
Wiesbaden

translated by Edward Harsh



**Die sieben Todsünden.** Anne Sofie von Otter, mezzo-soprano; NDR-Sinfonieorchester, John Eliot Gardiner, conductor; with James Sims and Karl-Heinz Lampe (tenors), Christfried Biebrach (baritone), and Frederick Martin (bass). Deutsche Grammophon DG 439 894 GH. (Disc also includes performances of "Buddy on the Nightshift," "Nannas Lied," "Je ne t'aime pas," "Schickelgruber," and "Der Abschiedsbrief," as well as songs from *Happy End*, *Lady in the Dark*, and *One Touch of Venus*.)



**Die sieben Todsünden.** Angelina Réaux, soprano; New York Philharmonic, Kurt Masur, conductor; with Hugo Munday and Mark Bleeke (tenors), Peter Becker (baritone), and Wilbur Pauley (bass). Teldec 4509-95029-2. (Disc also includes a performance of Alban Berg's *Lulu Suite*.)

In 1733, Bach wrote a cantata, *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege*, for the moral edification of an eleven-year-old prince: Hercules stands at the crossroads, trying to decide between the paths of Pleasure and of Virtue. He chooses Virtue, to music of such virtuous character that Bach re-used it in the *Christmas Oratorio*.

Exactly 200 years later, Weill and Brecht wrote a *ballet chanté*, *Die sieben Todsünden*, which revokes the Bach cantata: Anna is forced to choose between Pleasure (sleeping with the man she loves, eating fattening food) and Virtue (earning enough money — by cabaret-dancing, movie-making, and prostitution — to build a home for her family in Louisiana). She too chooses Virtue; but Brecht implies that every choice of Virtue is the wrong choice. Each of the Deadly Sins is healthy and generous: Sloth leads Anna to fall asleep in the middle of a plot to extort money; Anger leads Anna to horse-whip a Hollywood star who was beating an animal. Through failure to insist on sinning, Anna is damned. The ballet is a kind of re-enactment in hell — by a dancing mime (Anna II) and a singing narrator (Anna I) — of the mechanism by which Conscience, the bad angel wearing the bright halo, corrupts Mankind.

This transvaluation wasn't original with Brecht. In 1793 Blake wrote that Christ broke every one of the Ten Commandments; in 1887 Nietzsche claimed that Christian self-denial was simply a perversion of the natural human desire to inflict pain; in 1920 Kafka noted that human virtues — love, justice, self-sacrifice — are only much-eneebled vices. But Brecht did develop original, effective theatrical devices for dramatizing choice on stage. Indeed, from about 1927 to 1933, almost every piece published under Brecht's name carefully presented the alternative consequences of acquiescence in or rejection of a social system. In *Die sieben Todsünden*, Brecht found a brilliant way of presenting a protagonist who *simultaneously* says "Yes" and "No," by giving two versions of the same Anna, the severe narrator and the self-indulgent dancer.

Kurt Weill, on the other hand, labored to unmake those very distinctions between yes-saying and no-saying that Brecht had so carefully constructed. The natural musical style for asserting the Ten Commandments is the chorale; the natural musical style for self-indulgence is the jazz dance, the bordello tango. These two styles are so continually counterpointed in Weill's music as to be inseparable. For Weill, unlike Brecht, Pleasure and Duty are so profoundly mixed that no real choice between them is possible. Brecht screams, "Choose!" Weill insinuates, "You can't."

In this theater of choices, performers also need to choose, and the two recent



## RECORDINGS

recordings on Deutsche Grammophon and Teldec, respectively (both in the original soprano key), nicely illustrate opposing choices. *Die sieben Todsünden* is Brecht's closest approach to highbrow art. It is a ballet (a genre Brecht detested), and what is more, it is a ballet to be accompanied by Lieder (Brecht usually preferred the less arty English word "song"). Von Otter is, of course, a professional Lieder singer, with a rich, accurate, perfectly trained voice. She provides possibly the best-sung, most tasteful Weill recording ever made. Though she occasionally rips out a few red-hot-mama licks, this is obvious slumming — not quite a case of Flagstad singing "I got rhythm" in a Valkyrie helmet, but close. This is cool, narrative singing, and arguably the ideal approach to Brecht's theater, if not to Weill's. In 1931, Brecht complimented Peter

Lorre, acting the role of a man condemned to death at a trial, for speaking his lines objectively, as if he were reading a statement for the defense prepared long ago. Von Otter has this same preterite, lecture-like quality. In the late twentieth-century tradition of Lieder, the singer is a kind of continuous illumination-device for momentary intensification of a text, not of a character: Fischer-Dieskau, for example, will audibly shiver on the word "cold," even if the ostensible character lives in summery Rome. The contribution of Brecht to the habits of Lieder singers is a topic worth exploring.

Réaux, by contrast, gives us not narrative but *drama*, abrupt and immediate. She makes more of Anna II's few interjected lines than any singer I have heard, from the babyish inflections of the Prologue to a wonderfully half-questioning reading of "Ja, Anna" in the ballet's last line — *this* Anna is far from certain she's right in acquiescing to the family's demands for money. The four male singers (members of the vocal group Hudson Shad as the Family) are frighteningly vivid. Whereas on the Gardiner recording the male quartet seems recollected in the pallor of old memory, here it constitutes a vast, intricate wheedle-machine from which Anna can't hope to escape. At one point in "Avarice," the tenor sings "Wenn die eine Hand nimmt, Muss die andere geben." Weill's music here quotes from *Der Silbersee* (the corresponding text of which might be translated: "It won't be forgiven, it won't be forgotten") and catches the implacability, the masked

fierceness of the Family. (This Family is the musical equivalent of a clenched fist, a barbershop quartet turned into the *turba* of a modern Passion; the Family's house, erected piecemeal on stage, is clearly to be Anna's prison, paid for with Anna's own money.) Masur's conducting is equally incisive and dramatic. There are a few passages where he lingers too long on first beats, perhaps deliberately to coarsen the parody of the Johann Strauss style, but Masur agrees wholly with the present-tense, operatic style of Réaux. And the Philharmonic is, as always, a great Dschassband.

Alas, Réaux's voice is not equal to her imagination. Her registers are so poorly knitted that she sometimes sounds as if she were singing duets with herself (I mean entirely within the role of Anna I). There is an unfortunate passage at the beginning of *Pride* where she sounds like the Witch in *Hänsel und Gretel* — not quite the right kind of evil for Anna I. Kafka's last story, *Josefine, die Sängerin* (1924), describes a singing mouse, who becomes the champion of the race of mice simply because her voice is so wretched and quavery that it symbolizes the whole precious, precarious quality of mouse life. Réaux's voice is not wretched; her interpretation approaches in places the realm of Lenya, where the singer becomes Everywoman through the sheer pathos of her vocal vulnerability.

Masur and Réaux, then, offer an old-fashioned theatrical experience, in which the singer identifies herself with her character and invites the audience to empathize with her. Von Otter and Gardiner offer Brechtian *Verfremdung*, in which the audience is invited to calculate the consequences of action, to laugh at a character's tears. The translation that should have been offered with the Masur recording (but was not) is that of Auden and Kallman, a genial, polished effort that insists on dramatic plausibility, and smoothes away the asperities and bizarrenesses of Brecht's text. For example, in "Gluttony," when the Family tries to seduce Anna to lose weight *now* with the promise of future overeating ("Hörnchen! Schnitzel! Spargel! Hühnchen!"), their translation offers: "Crabmeat! Porkchops! Sweet corn! Chicken!" Auden and Kallman knew what Louisiana rustics really eat, but they destroyed the air of unreality and uneasiness that comes from imagining a Louisiana where the yokels relish croissants and as-

paragus. Puccini's *Manon* dies of thirst in a desert near New Orleans; Brecht's Louisiana is part of the same country — a strange country, a country of great distances, where von Otter is much at home.

I prefer von Otter (though I am so fond of attractive voices that I even like Roswaenge as the Ballad Singer in the old recording of *Dreigroschenoper*). I would urge every Weillophile to hear von Otter's and also Gisela May's *Die sieben Todsünden*. Despite its use of the inauthentic Brückner-Rüggeberg arrangement for low voice, the May recording (Berlin Classics BC 2069-2; see the photo below), conducted coldly and excitingly by Herbert Kegel, remains necessary. The German language confesses something of its primal character by having a word (*reizend*) that means both "charming" and "irritating." Brecht is the most *reizend* of dramatists and May is the most *reizend* singer imaginable. When, at the end of "Envy," Anna I terrifies Anna II with a vision of the Last Judgment ("Zitternd im Nichtsvorverschlossenem Tor" — "Trembling in the void, in front of the locked gate"), May sings in a perfectly controlled delirium of hatred for human pleasure. This passage — looking back to the "mortuary tarantella" in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927), and forward to the hammering verdict "Ins Nichts mit ihm" at the end of the Dessau-Brecht *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* (1951) (when the shades of the dead condemn the emperor [and the Führer] to hell) — is remarkable in any performance. But May must be heard to be believed: her voice becomes like one of those trumpets sticking out of the rear of an insect-man in a painting by Bosch.

DANIEL ALBRIGHT  
University of Rochester



The CD booklet cover of the recording of *Die sieben Todsünden* featuring Gisela May, conductor Herbert Kegel and the Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra.



## SELECTED PERFORMANCES

### ARGENTINA

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Buenos Aires. La Scala de San Telmo, Marcelo Lombardero. 5, 12, 19, 20 November 1994.

*Der Jasager*, Buenos Aires. Teatro Colón. 20 October 1994.

### AUSTRIA

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Klagenfurt. Stadttheater, Werner Prinz, dir. 6 October 1994.

Jeunesse Festival. [See box this page]

### CANADA

*Happy End*, Victoria, British Columbia. Phoenix Theatre. 1-3 December 1994.

*Die sieben Todsünden*, Montreal. Montreal Symphony Orchestra, Angelina Réaux, Charles Dutoit. 14 May 1995.

### FRANCE

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Paris. Bastille Opera. Premiere: 14 October 1995.

*Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments*, Metz. Arsenal, Ensemble InterContemporain. 7 March 1995.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Nancy. Theatre de la Manufacture. In repertory until June 1996.

*Der Jasager*, Oueux. Opéra de Poche - Théâtre Pitoëff. Premiere: 28 January 1995.

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, Nancy. Orchestre de Melun-Denant. 10 February 1995.

### GERMANY

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Lübeck. Bühnen der Hansestadt. 3 March 1995.

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Weimar. Nationaltheater. 26 February 1995.

*Berliner Requiem, Vom Tod im Wald*, Dessau (Kurt-Weill-Fest). Marienkirche. 7 March 1995.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Berlin. Deutsches Theater und Kammerspiele. May 1995.

*Frauentanz*, Potsdam. Schloßtheater im Neuen Palais, Brandenburgische Philharmonie. 1 December 1994.

"Fürchtet Euch nicht", ballet with songs from *Happy End*, *Die sieben Todsünden*, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Wuppertal. Wuppertaler Bühnen. 14 January 1995.

*Der Jasager*, Stuttgart. Kammermusiktheater, Staatstheater und Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst. 3, 6, 7, 9 December 1994, 18-23 January 1995.

*Die sieben Todsünden*, Berlin. Komische Oper. 12 January 1995.

*Die sieben Todsünden*, Cottbus. Staatstheater Cottbus Ballet. 11 March 1995.

*Die sieben Todsünden, Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, Leipzig. MDR-Sinfonieorchester, Ute Lemper, John Mauceri. 30 September, 1 October 1995.

*Suite in E*, Dessau (Kurt-Weill-Fest). Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie. 12 March 1995.

*Symphony No. 2*, Dessau (Kurt-Weill-Fest). Anhaltisches Theater. 2 March 1995.

### GREECE

*Symphony No. 2*, Thessaloniki. Dimitria Festival. 1 October 1994.

### ITALY

Pantomime from *Der Protagonist, Vom Tod im Wald*, Sassari, Sardinia. Cooperative Teatro e/o Musica. 5-10 October 1994.

### NETHERLANDS

*Der neue Orpheus*, Amsterdam. Concertgebouw Orchestra, Grote Zaal. 11 March 1995.

### PORTUGAL

*Street Scene*, Lisbon. Teatro Nacional de São Carlos, John Mauceri, cond. 27, 29, 31 May, 2 June 1995.

### SLOVAKIA

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Kosice. Staatstheater. 31 March 1995.

### SPAIN

*Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments*, Madrid. Centro Cultural de la Ville, Banda Sinfonica Musical de Madrid. 11 December 1994.

### SWEDEN

*Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments*, Stockholm. Stockholms Spåvågar Musikår. 17 February 1995.

### SWITZERLAND

*Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments, Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, (Berio arrangements of "Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit," "Le Grand Lustucru," "Surabaya Johnny," Aarau. Aarauer Kammersolisten. 21 October 1994.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Zürich. Schauspielhaus. 4 March 1995.

*Marie Galante*, Lugano. Radio Svizzera. 20 February 1995.

### UNITED KINGDOM

*Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments*, London. Dukes Hall, Royal Academy of Music Orchestra. 15 November 1994.

*Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments*, London. St. James Church. 1 February 1995.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Glasgow, Scotland. Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama. 6 February 1995.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, London. Donmar Warehouse. 8 December 1994 - 18 March 1995.

*Happy End*, Portsmouth. New Theatre Royal. 8-10 December 1994.

*Love Life*, London. "Discover the Lost Musicals" series, Barbican Centre. 15, 22, 29 October, 5 November 1995.

### UNITED STATES

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, New York. Metropolitan Opera. 25, 29 November, 2, 6, 9 December 1995. (Broadcast on 9 December 1995 at 1:30 p.m. over the Texaco-Metropolitan Opera International Radio Network.)

*Bastille Music*, Oberlin, Ohio. Oberlin Conservatory Orchestra. 10 March 1995.

*Berliner Requiem, Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen, Mahagonny Songspiel, Können einem toten Mann nicht helfen*, Bloomington, Indiana. Indiana University. 2 February 1995.

*Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments*, Albuquerque, New Mexico. University of New Mexico. 21 February 1995.

*Down in the Valley*, Kansas City, Missouri. Lyric Opera. 16, 18, 20, 22, 24 September 1995.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, Cambridge, Massachusetts. American Repertory Theatre. 17 May - 23 July 1995.

*Suite from Die Dreigroschenoper*, Richardson, Texas. University of Texas. 16 December 1994.

*Die sieben Todsünden*, Boston, Massachusetts. Boston Symphony Orchestra, Ute Lemper, John Mauceri. 6-8, 11 April 1995.

*Die sieben Todsünden*, New York. Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, Marianne Faithfull, Dennis Russell Davies. 7-8 April 1995.

*Street Scene*, Boulder, Colorado. University of Colorado. 20-23 April 1995.

*Street Scene*, Chicago, Illinois. Opera San Benedetto. 13-21 May 1995.

"There Once Was a Girl Named Jenny": A Celebration with the Music of Kurt Weill, Rochester, New York. Eastman Opera Theatre, Richard Pearlman, director, Kim Kowalke, conductor. 13, 15 April 1995.

*Vom Tod im Wald*, New York City. St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra. 10 November 1994.

*Vom Tod im Wald*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Carnegie Mellon University. 8 October 1994.

Songs, Naples, Florida. Ute Lemper and Bruno Fontaine. 8 November 1994.

"Zircus Weill" Choreography, Seattle, Washington. Pacific Northwest Ballet. 21-25 February 1995.

### SPECIAL SECTION

#### Jeunesse Festival, Vienna, Austria, Musikalische Jugend Österreichs

(See news story on p. 2)

*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Cologne Radio Orchestra, Jan Latham-König. 5 October 1995.

Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments. Vienna Virtuosos, Dmitriy Sitkovetsky. 14 October 1995.

*Four Walt Whitman Songs*, selections from *Street Scene*, "Stay Well" from *Lost in the Stars*. North German Radio Orchestra (Hamburg), Peter Keusch, Roberta Alexander, Damon Evans. 24 October 1995.

*Johnny Johnson*. Wiener Taschenoper. 16 October 1995.

*Kleine Dreigroschenmusik, Berlin im Licht, Öl-Musik, Suite panaméenne*. Ensemble Modern, Nali Gruber, Ueli Wiget. 17 October 1995.

*Der Lindberghflug*. Cologne Radio Orchestra, Jan Latham-König, Heinz Zednik, Gottfried Hornik. 3 October 1995.

*Der neue Orpheus*. Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Dennis Russell Davies, Françoise Pollet, Ernst Kovacic. 29 September 1995.

*New York Suite*, arranged by M. Gould. Slovenian Philharmonic, Marko Letonja, Angelina Réaux. 10 October 1995.

*Die sieben Todsünden*. Klangforum, Ingo Metzmacher, Angelina Réaux. 1 October 1995.

*String Quartet, Op. 8*. Arcus-Ensemble. 20 October 1995.

*Symphony No. 1*. North German Radio Orchestra (Hamburg), Vladimir Fedoseyev. 23 October 1995.

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