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THE FAR SIDE By GARY LARSON



In the early days, living in their squalid apartment, all three shared dreams of success. In the end, however, Bob the Spoon and Ernie the Fork wound up in an old silverware drawer and only Mac went on to fame and fortune.

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- RECORDINGS**
- Egy Fursca Lany*. Kishonti Ildiko. Qualiton SLPM 16711. [Broadway songs, in Hungarian. Includes "Tangoballade."]
- Live Rock: mit Brecht/Weill Songs und Balladen*. Zebra. Amiga 8 56 245. [Issued by VEB Deutsche Schallplatten, Berlin DDR]
- Musik zwischen den Kriegen: Eine Berliner Dokumentation*. Thorofon/Capella DTHK 341. [Includes "Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen."]



The final scene from the San Francisco City Summer Opera production of *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. David Parr, director; Judy Hubbard and Norman Wong, conductors.

REVIEWS

Kurt Weill Festival. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, New York, 17, 20, 26, 28, 30 Sep- tember 1987

In the thirty-seven years since Kurt Weill's death, there have been numerous revivals and reassessments of his music, complete with bursts of recording activity and new opera productions. Yet, the full picture of this composer's varied output only began to emerge over the last couple of decades, and it is still coming more clearly into focus, thanks to the pioneering scholarship of musicologists like David Drew and Kim Kowalke, and the efforts of a growing number of performers who have become convinced that Weill deserves a place of honor in the pantheon of 20th-century composers.

During the last two weeks in September, the Hebrew Arts School presented a Kurt Weill Festival — apparently the first organized cluster of events devoted to this composer in the United States — at the school's intimate Merkin Concert Hall. Actually, the series could have taken place at one of the city's larger venues, for not only were the concerts sold out, but upon arriving at the hall, one encountered an unusual number of people hoping to buy last-minute tickets. The concerts focused largely on Weill's lesser known works, including chamber pieces, choral music, vocal settings and chamber orchestra scores (several of these premieres), along with a touch of the theater music. There was also a day-long symposium on the connections between Weill (and his music) and the Jewish musical tradition.

Adding to this festive mood, either by design or by coincidence, was the publication of David Drew's long-awaited *Kurt Weill: A Handbook* — a volume that served as a wonderfully informative companion to the concerts themselves. Indeed, the peripherals seemed just about as thoroughly attended to as the performances. In Merkin's lobby one could buy not only Drew's book, hot off the press, but several other volumes from the growing Weill-related library, and numerous LPs, cassettes, and CDs of his music. For those not in the market for any of these things, the program books proved suitable souvenirs, printed as they were under a cover bearing a youngish portrait of the composer, with a page of his musical manuscript superimposed, and his signature at the bottom, and including notes by Drew plus complete texts and translations of the vocal works.

The main thing the festival conveyed was the breadth, variety, and freshness of Weill's output, qualities that probably

should not surprise anyone now, yet which are reinforced whenever one of Weill's works is heard for the first time. Beyond that, those who attended all of the concerts could trace certain stylistic threads through the composer's early work. One of these musical fingerprints that turned up in various guises was his penchant for closely harmonized, accompanimental figuration (usually in the winds, where this trademark seems most vivid and effective), often in either sharply jabbing dotted rhythms, or in syncopation, and generally at brisk tempos. A related gesture involves syncopated bursts of wind chords harmonized with touches of dissonance, and voiced in a way that gives them an unmistakable edge. Appropriately enough, these distinctive effects burst forth most vividly in the festival's opening and closing works — one of them, *Bastille Music*, a recent addition to the canon, and the other, *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, a familiar staple.



The first concert, (17 September) which featured the St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra, led by David Atherton, was far and away the most uplifting. The six-movement *Bastille Music* suite, arranged by David Drew from the thirty-nine pages of music Weill supplied for a 1927 production of Strindberg's *Gustav III*, had its American premiere, and provided a fine glimpse of the style that led, not long after, to the peak of his European theater style. Scored for violin, percussion, piano, accordion, trombone, and pairs of piccolos, clarinets, horns, and trumpets, it spoke in very much the same accent that comes through the scoring of *Mahagonny* and *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Yet, one could also glean something of the music's function. The "Street Music," for instance, is

a spirited, lightly jazzy piece that juxtaposed easygoing melodic material with the kind of sardonic accompaniment I described above. The "Elegy," by contrast, boasts a melody through which a French musical accent peeks; and in the Finale, we get a stock marching figure, transformed into something considerably more captivating by Weill's unusual approach to harmony and voicing.

Offsetting the exuberant *Bastille Music* was a meditative group of Walt Whitman settings, dating from 1942 and 1947. In these trenchant songs, Weill conveys the swirl of wartime emotions as eloquently in the picturesque piano part as in the vocal lines. The changes of mood in "Come up from the Fields, Father," for instance, respond to the text with a sensitivity that is both eerie and powerful, yet which actually create a kind of suspense that one would not feel when reading the text alone. A similar effect emerges in "Oh Captain, My Captain," as the rumbling thirty-second notes and dotted figures in the left hand of the piano part point up the contradictions in Whitman's text: the ship is safely back in its home port, the crew victorious, and the people on the shore are jubilant; but the captain lies dead on the deck. The baritone William Parker, with the pianist William Huckaby, brought these songs compellingly to life.

The String Quartet, Op. 8 (1923) offered yet another side of Weill — the young composer reaching for (and occasionally grasping) a style of his own, while reacting to the imposing influences of past composers. In the opening pages, one had a fleeting sense of Haydn as a model, if only because of the way Weill gave the first violin a soloistic line, set against a rhythmically unified and clearly accompanimental grouping of the other three strings. Structure quickly evaporates though, and later in the movement — long after the instruments have found a more democratic relationship — there are faint echoes of Dvořák. Later, in the closing *Choralphantasy* movement, there are glances back at Bach, particularly in the cello line's soloistic snippets. In truth, this is not top-drawer Weill (or even top-drawer early Weill); but on one hearing I am not inclined to be as harsh on it as Drew, who, in his *Handbook*, calls it "an exception and an anomaly," and "the flimsiest score Weill had written since the Suite in E for orchestra" of 1918.

Whatever one's impressions of the Quartet, the American Premiere of selections from Weill's incidental music for *Marie Galante* (1934), to which the second half of the first concert was devoted, was a real treat. Of particular interest were the vocal selections ("Les Filles de

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Bordeaux," "Le Roi D'Aquitaine," "Le Train du Ciel," "Le Grand Lustucru," and "J'attends un navire" — the last of which was heard twice more during the festival, in quite a different guise), sung delightfully and stylishly by the soprano Faith Esham. But the instrumental music certainly had its points of interest too, one being an echo of the "Moritat" in the saxophone part of the Introduction (as well as borrowings from *Happy End*). Unique to this performance, though, was the Tango, rendered in virtuoso and, it seems, rather freewheeling improvisatory style by the accordionist William Schimmel. Schimmel may have departed from the text by a goodly measure, but his performance brought down the house; and given the paucity of opportunities the accordionist must have to display so dazzling a technique, who could begrudge him his moment in the sun?

In the second concert, (20 September) Richard Westenburg's Musica Sacra Chorus focused on sacred choral and vocal works, most of which seemed pale and uneven by Weill's standards. His *Kiddush* (1946), for instance, is an odd concoction of cantorial gestures, Gershwin-esque harmony, bold chromaticism, and dashes of Hollywood glitter that bring a puzzled smile to the listener's face, but which render the work, in this reviewer's opinion, inappropriate for use in any synagogue not located on Sunset Boulevard. His two Hebrew folk-song settings, contributions to *Folksongs for the New Palestine* (1938), are well-crafted but undistinguished. His settings of Biblical themes for *The Eternal Road* (a 1937 Max Reinhardt production to aid victims of Nazi oppression) were more characteristic, and at times quite beautiful. In "Miriams Lied," for instance, there are some nicely chromatic settings for women's chorus, while Miriam's lines are gently melancholy. And "Solomon's Lobeshymne" is set with striking intensity, while "Der Tanz um das goldene Kalb" sets the frivolous (and errant) rejoicing of the text in a rollicking way that recalls a little of Weill's earlier theater style.

I also found *Ofrah's Lieder* (1916) an appealing song cycle, and although the temptation is there, I am not sure how necessary it is to make an allowance for the fact that Weill was only sixteen when he wrote it. Beverley Hoch, a soprano, sang these settings of Jehuda Halevi poems sweetly, to John Van Buskirk's expert accompaniment. Her contributions to the *Eternal Road* excerpts were also notable, as were those by the baritone Paul Rowe. I wonder, though, why Rowe was not used for the cantorial solo part in the *Kiddush*, instead of David

Ronis, whose tenor was too light for the work (the score of which does call for a baritone).

The choral program's real center of gravity was the *Recordare* (1923), a powerful, harmonically hard-edged a cappella setting of a section from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, of which a very persuasive recording, featuring the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, has been issued by Nonesuch. Musica Sacra was at its finest here, but the Boys Choir of Harlem was not thoroughly rehearsed, and its contribution was not always as solidly on pitch as it should have been. The concert was prefaced by a pair of charming turn-of-the-century prayer settings (in German and Hebrew) by the composer's father, Albert Weill.

A talented twenty-four-year-old German theater singer, Ute Lemper, presented a midnight recital of Weill's German, French, and English theater songs (26 September). That was a strange evening. Lemper's accompanist, Jürgen Knieper, supplied deftly turned piano reductions of the theater songs with the same finesse one would expect to hear in, say, a Schubert recital. But Lemper doesn't sing that way. At her best, she is an attractive and communicative singer, who clearly feels strongly about the music on her program (much of which she has also recorded). She can sing softly and sensitively, and with palpable excitement. But she too frequently lapses into a kind of Sprech-shouting overdrive, derived, no doubt, from emulating aspects of Lenya's style without paying full attention to its application. The effect, as such, isn't necessarily bad, and towards the start of the concert it seemed quite effective, particularly in the German songs. Yet, when it turns up in virtually every song, it quickly grows both predictable and tiresome. There were other problems, too. One was an arrangement of the Prologue from *Die sieben Todsünden* that scarcely did the work justice. Another was between-songs material. Most of her introductions began with either "After that..." or, "ten years later, Weill wrote..." One of her decade leaps brought her seven years beyond Weill's death.

Ms. Lemper reprised five songs from her cabaret evening at the end of the fourth concert, "A Tribute to Lotte Lenya" (28 September). An easygoing, celebratory evening devoted to Weill's more popular side, the program featured touching and often witty performances and reminiscences by several of Lenya's and Weill's associates. Kitty Carlisle Hart, for instance, recalled the rehearsals for the work on which her husband, Moss Hart, collaborated with Kurt Weill, *Lady in the Dark*. Alvin Epstein

and Blythe Danner sang (and danced) a few solo songs and duets. Earl Wrightson sang excerpts from *Firebrand of Florence* and *Love Life*. Jo Sullivan, accompanied by a jazz quartet led by the pianist Colin Romoff, recalled the 1954 Theater de Lys production of *The Threepenny Opera*, and sang a few selections from it. And in one section of non-Weill material, composer John Kander and lyricist Fred Ebb offered very entertaining renditions of some of the songs they wrote for Lenya in *Cabaret*.

Fascinating, too, were the film clips interspersed throughout the program — among them, the jail scene from the 1931 *Die Dreigroschenoper* film, and most revealingly, excerpts from a PBS interview with Schuyler Chapin, who served as the evening's master of ceremonies. In the interview, Lenya amusingly recounted her first meetings with Weill, and the insistence of her second husband, George Davis, that she return to the stage and devote herself to reviving Weill's early theater music.

The St. Luke's Ensemble returned for the festival's finale (30 September), under Julius Rudel's baton, and the focus shifted back to Weill's concert music. In the Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra (1924), Weill flirted openly with atonality, but even so, his lyrical impulse ultimately dominates. The performance was rough and tumble at first, sloppy wind ensemble and a harsh violin tone being the principal maladies, but by the end of the first movement the problems disappeared, and the violinist Naoko Tanaka settled into a rich, lyrical reading. The program's centerpieces were vocal works, sung by Franz Mazura, whose resonant bass was ideal for the program's two Brecht settings — the grim *Vom Tod im Wald* and the licentious "Song of Mandelay" from *Happy End*. As a mid-program encore, Mr. Mazura added "Das Lied von den braunen Inseln," accompanied deftly by Mr. Rudel at the piano. To close the concert, Mr. Rudel led the St. Luke's players in a spirited, highly charged performance of *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik* — a perfect way to end this fascinating series, and certainly one of its high points.

ALLAN KOZINN
New York

Die sieben Todsünden.

Milva, André Previn, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 23 June 1987

Die sieben Todsünden.

Julia Migenes, Michael Tilson Thomas, London Symphony Orchestra, Barbican Centre, London, 2 July 1987.

It promised to be a happy coincidence: coming hard on the heels of the excellent Camden Festival production of *Der Silbersee* in March were two very different concert performances in London of Weill's first work-in-exile, *Die sieben Todsünden*. If, in the earlier work, Weill's expanded language — an enlarged harmonic vocabulary, an extended yet tautly-drawn construction that makes considerable demands on both the singers and full orchestra — is not always well served by Kaiser's overly elaborate play, the setting of Brecht's acerbic, ironic texts in the *Sins* surely inspired one of Weill's most inventive, concise, and dramatically expressive scores. Drawing on the same large palette as *Der Silbersee* to paint a canvas depicting human decadence and greed, the 35-minute "spectacle in nine scenes," through-composed and at times symphonic in its formal-harmonic conception, is a far cry from the Berliner band ambience of *Die Dreigroschenoper* or *Happy End*.

Clearly, *Die sieben Todsünden* does not demand a cabaret-style approach, and yet many interpretations seem to labor under exactly this misapprehension, not least these two unsatisfactory readings by Milva and Julia Migenes. Anyone familiar with Milva's Weill (she has recorded the *Sins* for Metronome records) will have found few surprises in the five performances she gave at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of André Previn's Selection Festival. With her shock of red hair, spray-on, low-cut, sequined dress, and raucous, forward delivery, she gave a no-holds-barred rendition of little subtlety or shading but one of undeniable presence. Not only do Weill and Brecht take a back seat, but the male quartet, positioned to one side, are left to fight it out in an unequal struggle with the brass complement. Idiomatic, no; but this is unquestionably an irrepressible piece of Milva theater.

By contrast, Julia Migenes gave a curiously lackluster performance at the Barbican Centre in the London Symphony Orchestra's Gershwin Festival conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. Like Milva, Migenes opted to use the posthumous, transposed arrangement for low voice by Wilhelm Brückner-Rüggeberg — a surprising choice since Weill's original lines, no more than mezzo-soprano, are well within her range. One could only surmise, to judge from certain mannerisms, that she has been too much influenced by the "chanteuse" tradition of performing Weill pioneered by Lenya late in life. On this evidence, Migenes has neither the voice, even with the distorted assistance of a microphone, nor the personality to pull it off. (Significantly, Lenya, who of course was not a trained singer, sings the work throughout in the famous CBS recording made in 1956, even if, on occasion, she strains the natural limitations of her voice.)

Fortunately, there were compensations to be enjoyed in the singing of the male quartet, notably from Robert Tear, who sailed above the orchestra in the tenor's marvelous melisma in "Hab-sucht" (Covetousness) with glorious, ringing tones. Less happy was the variable and sometimes poorly balanced ensemble from the LSO under a lukewarm Tilson Thomas, who one sensed had failed to get under the skin of the piece. All the more dismaying, therefore, to learn that the same team has recorded this work, presumably as yet another version in the low voice, "wrong"-key, transposition.

A final note about language. If performers choose to sing to an English-speaking audience in German, as in both cases here, then programs must provide translations of complete texts. An incomplete synopsis contributed to the mystified reception at the Barbican, while at the Queen Elizabeth Hall the reproduction of just four songs plus Prologue and Epilogue — namely those principal numbers sung by Milva — coupled incredibly with a program note lending credence to this putative reduction, was at once baffling and incompetent. No matter. As Milva made her dramatic entrance, the lights went down, making the reading of any texts superfluous.

It all makes one yearn for Evelyn Lear's spirited performance at the 1968 Promenade Concerts under Sir Colin Davis — in English and in the original keys. Now there's a singer!

PAUL MEECHAM
London

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.

Opernhaus, Theater Dortmund, Premiere: 11 April 1987.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.

Grosses Haus, Städtische Bühnen Münster, Premiere: 27 June 1987.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.

Städtische Bühnen Hagen, Premiere: 5 July 1987.

I have been attending performances of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (and reviewing them) since the first post-war production in Darmstadt, when I was still in school. It is my view that the opera's final scene poses special challenges and problems: I recall that at Darmstadt, for example, this scene was made to represent an apotheosis rather than a fall of Mahagonny. Later, in 1962, I witnessed an unforgettable performance in Heidelberg under the direction of Hans Neugebauer and with Marie Daveluy and Natalie Hinsch-Gröndahl. Although I am no longer a professional critic, I still seek an ideal *Mahagonny*. In terms of numbers of productions, if not in terms of quality, things are looking bright. For instance, although an admittedly rare example, consider the three nearly simultaneous premieres in the Westphalian cities of Dortmund, Münster, and Hagen. Though these towns are geographically close (all within eighty kilometers of one another), their *Mahagonny* productions were far removed from one another ideologically.

Having worked with the Dortmund theater, I perhaps should not say anything bad about this quasi-operatic *Mahagonny* (staged in the opera house); however, I can not find much good to say about it, either. This staging did promise to be successful, if for the wrong reasons: as the critic Holger Notze observed recently, this *Mahagonny* sacrifices "the wit and bite of Brecht and Weill" to "an opera public that wants to be amused and a stage direction which only too willingly obliges." Dortmund displayed some lavish scenery and a lot of stage business for the soloists and chorus. An enormous curtain, decorated with a painting of a city in ruins and a bird's head (after Max Ernst), was dropped — sometimes in the middle of a number — in order to facili-

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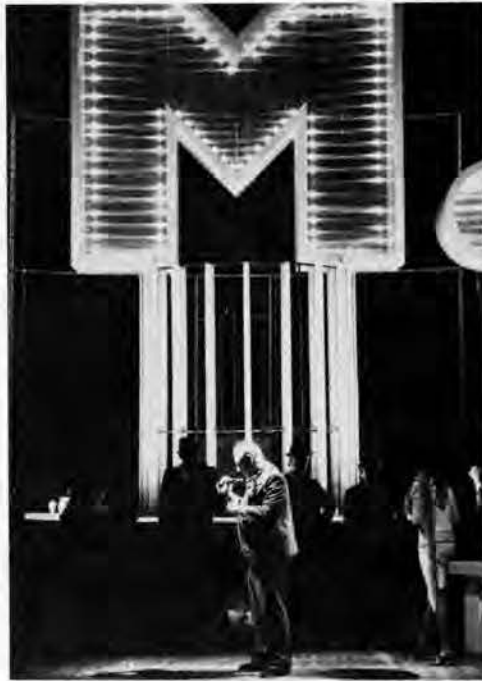
tate scene changes. This proved quite a distraction except in those cases when the action took place in front of the curtain or in the auditorium itself, as in the entrance of the lovingly characterized whores. During the finale, the cast was arranged along the stage in a sort of *Fidelio*-like apotheosis, standing perfectly still and joined by terrorists in stocking masks, a few carrying Geiger counters, apparently finding no radiation on the stage or anywhere else. The orchestra played deafeningly loud, so that most of the time one could not hear the singers, although they were singing rather loudly.

The "Crane Duet" followed the "Mandelay Song," in Act II, and the "Benares Song" was cut. Jimmy passed through his trial as though he had been sedated; reaching the electric chair, he asked Begbick and company if they had any respect for God. He was answered with a rendition of "Gott in Mahagonny," before his on-stage execution.

In Münster, things were much the same except for a greater number of cuts. Intermission came only after the second part of the Hurricane (Number 12); a large curtain, badly painted and washed out, sliced the action like the blade of a guillotine. Here the scenery was far less impressive. This shabbiness was apparently intended: a theater for the poor. The singers performed on a runway in front of the orchestra. None of the singers possessed "big" voices, but they blended well with the orchestra. For someone who had just finished his studies, Keith Mikelson came through quite valiantly, and Marina Edelhagen offered a restrained and attractive Jenny, capable of generating great tension. Hilmar Vehse, an old theater professional, presented an overwhelmingly obsequious Fatty the Bookkeeper — and thank goodness, because he had to stand up to Karl Schreiber, whose Trinity Moses is unparalleled hereabouts.

To me, the strike at the finale has always lacked terseness; in a dramatic sense it seems agonized. Director Frank-Bernd Gottschalk, aided by conductor Hiroshi Kodama's tempi and fervor, found a convincing solution for the finale: to the strains of Weill's frightening funeral march, the ensemble performed a great tango of death, a dance — of the ignorant and unteachable — set not on a volcano but in the twilight of Pompeii-Mahagonny.

In the Hagen premiere production Brecht's final scene, faithfully and carefully presented, again struck me as problematic. In all scenes, Kurt Reginbogin took Brecht at his word and avoided all superficial effects. For example, in the



Jimmy Mahoney (Keith Mikelson) pours himself a drink at the whiskey bar in the first act of the Münster production *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*.

bordello scenes Reginbogin did not attempt to create a specifically bordello-like atmosphere: the reactions of the men took focus, and to greater dramatic effect than the profusion of bare breasts exhibited in Dortmund's production. Still, there was no lack of details (the horseshoe in Trinity Moses' boxing glove), nor entirely new concepts, such as the staging of the "Virgin's Prayer" scene, which was depicted as a concert attended only by the men of Mahagonny, and among them Jimmy, as the only one who did not react with romantic stupefaction. As the song played, Jimmy moved to one side and eventually walked away, whereupon Begbick and then the women stormed onto the stage. Thus, something about the character of Jimmy and of Mahagonny was revealed even before the hurricane.

In a similar manner, many dramatic aspects were brought into focus and pared down to their essences. Reginbogin avoided any sort of visible intrusion, such as entrances through the auditorium. The distinct yet never pictorial, almost "neo-Bayreuthian" scenery supported this approach: a sloping turntable built into a raked stage facilitated the use of multiple sets and changes. No curtains were needed, and, wisely, there was no attempt to make the scenes "flow" into each other. Even so, some of the transitions took too much time, but this might have improved in subsequent performances.

The work itself became more evident, but so did its flaws, contradictions, and offenses. And Brecht's implicit yet potent philosophy persists even in such a sober interpretation, one which consequently avoided allusions to the twenties or the eighties in favor of a parable-like "timelessness." One could almost describe it as "abstract," i.e., the opposite of the "pseudo-symbolic stylization."

Reginbogin was ably supported by the set designer (Gerard Howland), the costume designer (Gabriele Jaenecke), and an unusually inspired ensemble. Hannes Brock was very good as Jimmy, Carolyn Smith-Meyer excellent as Jenny. Will Humburg conducted sensitively and contributed thoughtful remarks to the program notes, carefully assembled by Marion Grundmann. Humburg justified the cuts he had made (the "Crane Duet" and "Benares Song"), and he used the "operatic" version of "Ach, bedenken Sie, Herr Jacob Schmidt." Rather than permitting the scenes to flow seamlessly from one to another, Humburg recognized a need for abrupt and, conversely, slow fade-out endings; thus, no great dramatic form emerged, but rather an uncomfortable suggestion of one. Humburg also respected Weill's tempo and dynamic markings, realizing that observing a slow tempo marking and a *piano* notation could contribute to an alienation effect in which the mortifying and repellent nature of the situation became more clear. Humburg's adherence to this sensibility did indeed bring much to the production: in the "Alabama Song," the girls come not to have fun, not to play games with their customers, but to keep body and soul together, however wretchedly. Similarly, the entrance of the men (Number 4) became pure slapstick, corresponding to Walter Benjamin's essay on *Mahagonny* (which was printed in Klaus-Edgar Wichmann's program notes for the Münster production).

As explained by Benjamin, and as stipulated in the piano-vocal score, the number "God in Mahagonny" takes place after Jimmy's execution. In one of the few directorial liberties of this production, Jimmy was neither electrocuted nor hanged but — as in Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* — strangled by the citizens of Mahagonny. Even with this basically effective idea, the motives of those who bring about Mahagonny's downfall remained unclear. Neither was the nature of the city of Mahagonny — supposedly the central "character" of the piece — ever made clear. Also, Alaska, the "grossen Städten," Havana, and Benares (even by its omission), too, remained mere references, indistinct, if exotic bits of filler.

For thirty years I have wished to see an ideal production of *Mahagonny*, however, now I feel that it may never be fulfilled. Perhaps the score and libretto contain more than can ever be executed adequately on the dramatic stage. Still, this writer continues to chase after a complete realization of *Mahagonny*.

JOSEF HEINZELMANN
Mainz

One Touch of Venus.

Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, Connecticut, April-July 1987

Every city should have a Goodspeed Opera House, a theater in which one can feel "the pounding feet" as well as see the actors' faces and hear the music and lyrics clearly — without amplification. The acoustics and intimate nature of the Goodspeed Opera House added a touch of charm to the recent production of *One Touch of Venus*.

The sly, sophisticated wit of S. J. Perelman (book) and Odgen Nash (book & lyrics) still sparkles, although more as vintage wine than as nouvelle cuisine. One winces, though with pleasure, when Savory Whitelaw, the effete millionaire and self-styled art connoisseur, remarks after waking from a drunken sleep, "all my teeth have little sweaters on," or, in the song, "How Much I Love You," Rodney Hatch, Venus' erstwhile suitor, sings, "As a dachshund abhors revolving doors, that's how much you are loved by me."

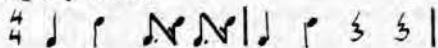
The Goodspeed production succeeded as a wistful reminder of a period in Broadway's history when sophistication (the upper-class, American kind) had a foothold on the American stage. But more than that, the score by Kurt Weill, with the immediacy of expression and freshness that marks his artistry, injected a spirit into the show that allowed the production to rise above the status of being merely a revival. In particular, the performance and allure of Lynnette Perry as Venus made the whole experience even more enjoyable.

As is often the case in his Broadway scores, Weill borrowed from himself. The male vocal quartet, "The Trouble With Women," is a re-working of "In der Jugend gold'nem Schimmer" from *Happy End*. Perhaps more surprising is the striking similarity between Venus' ethereal entrance and exit music and Anna's leitmotiv in *Die sieben Todsünden*. Although one might fault Weill for succumbing to topicality and sentimentality in such songs as "Way Out West in New Jersey" and "Westwind," most of the rest



Venus (Lynnette Perry) brought to life from a 2,000-year statuesque repose by Rodney Hatch (Michael Piontek) in the Goodspeed Opera House production of *One Touch of Venus*. Photo by Diane Sobolewski.

of the score, which includes "Speak Low," "That's Him," "Foolish Heart," and the ballet, "Venus in Ozone Heights," reflects Weill at his American best. Moreover, it was a revelation to hear "Speak Low" in what I assume to be its original arrangement. The supporting rhythm of



provided an odd accompaniment to the sustained vocal line — seemingly awkward, but curiously exotic.

The music was performed with verve and with an emphasis on intelligibility by the cast of twenty, choreographed smartly by Rodney Griffin and ably supported by an orchestra led by Lynn Crigler at the piano. Michael Piontek, as Rodney Hatch, the male lead, was the picture of "tenor-ic" innocence, and, along with Richard Sabellico as Whitelaw Savory, Dale O'Brien as Taxi Black, and Nick Corley as Stanley, handled the gentlemanly vocal duties capably. In the performance I attended, Freyda Thomas snapped, crackled, and popped as Savory Whitelaw's female sidekick and nemesis, Molly. But the delight of the show was Lynnette Perry as Venus. She floated through the performance with regal ease and grace, yet also projected an earthly charm when needed, as in her saucy rendition — sung while lounging on a divan, naturally — of "That's Him."

The entire production was directed with a loving eye toward authenticity by Ben Levit and produced by Goodspeed's Executive Director Michael P. Price. One hopes that Messrs. Price, Levit, and Crigler will look at other American works by Kurt Weill, such as *Love Life*, *Lady in the Dark*, *Lost in the Stars*, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, or even *Johnny Johnson*, with an eye toward production. A theater company with Goodspeed's resources and capabilities could hardly do better than to present a selection of these works over a period of a few seasons.

GARY S. FAGIN
New York

Die Dreigroschenoper, Happy End, Lost in the Stars. Princeton Festival, Princeton, New Jersey, 10-13 June 1987.

Three works with music by Kurt Weill received concert performances during the Princeton Festival, 10-13 June: a double bill of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Happy End*, and *Lost in the Stars*. Princeton University's newly renovated Richardson Auditorium provided an attractive setting for the cast of talented young singers under the spirited guidance of Victor Symonette.

Lost in the Stars (11 June) was staged, and narrated movingly, by Alan Anderson (son of Maxwell Anderson, the book's author). With a minimum of telling gestures, the singers recreated their characters. Coleman Hawkins brought commanding physical stature and a rich baritone to the part of Stephen but did not muster sufficient intensity in his acting. Tenor Barrington Coleman, on the other hand, stood out as leader of the chorus, conveying strong emotion with his voice alone.

Mezzo-soprano Cheryl Freeman beautifully projected the part of Linda, especially in her big number, "Who'll Buy," and soprano Ivette Vanterpool was a touching Irina. Special mention should be made of young Clinton Chinyelu Inghram who acted and sang his turn in "Big Mole" to the evident delight of the audience.

Even in as skillful a staging as this one, a concert version of *Lost in the Stars* lacks the drama that action and dialogue can supply in a fully-staged production. Nothing static, however, was felt when the first notes of the overture to *Die Dreigroschenoper* (heard 12 June) rose out of the pit. Musical and dramatic action fuse in this ever-fresh work.

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Outstanding was soprano Stephanie Myszak, who alternated between the roles of Polly and Jenny. She changed not only costumes but also histrionic and vocal personalities most affectingly. Theodore Schorske sang well as Mr. Peachum but did not seem entirely comfortable portraying the smarmy character. Mr. Coleman's Macheath was fine, as was Barbara Leifer's Mrs. Peachum.

The same cast capably performed the music of *Happy End*, but it really requires a fully staged performance to infuse some theatrical life into this farcical piece. Matthew Cowles, as narrator for *Happy End* as well as for *Die Dreigroschenoper*, pushed rather hard to convince his audience and evidently had not made himself fully conversant with his microphone.

The poise and skill of the young cast assembled by Mr. Symonette for these performances were remarkable. The conductor had coached them during a brief rehearsal period both in their music and in German. These performances marked the first time that the pit was used in the renovated hall, and Mr. Symonette managed to overcome most of the acoustical problems that evidently still need to be solved. His orchestra of freelance instrumentalists contributed nobly to a musically most satisfying Princeton Festival.

FRANK LEWIN
Princeton, New Jersey

Die Dreigroschenoper. Theater des Westens, Berlin, May-July 1987.

Two adjectives describe last summer's revival of *Die Dreigroschenoper* at the Theater des Westens in West Berlin: brilliant and flawed. Günter Krämer, bringing his Bremen Ensemble to the city where the play with music premiered almost sixty years ago, startled his audience with four fundamental innovations. Instead of conventional stage settings, he erected a precipitous iron staircase, running the height and breadth of the entire stage. The actors ran, walked, danced or cavorted up and down, clustered and dissolved their groupings, chased or were chased, and occasionally declaimed from the upper reaches of the stage. Highly imaginative — if somewhat reminiscent of Piscator — Krämer's innovation worked brilliantly. I have never seen a *Dreigroschenoper* which developed greater fluidity and dynamism: scenes flowed into one another at a speed that left the audience gasping along with the performers.

For once, a subtle shift of locale and historical setting, in the past an invitation to theatrical disaster in the case of

Weill and Brecht, also worked well, if not as consistently as the stage setting. Krämer hit upon an explosive opening for the play: Berlin policemen of the late 1920s, evoking the period of the play's genesis, broke up a bloody streetfight between Communists and Nazis. Berlin was also brought to mind through the consistently "homey" dialect of Macheath (Martin Reinke) and the repellent pre-Nazi get-up of a pig-tailed Lucy (Angelica Mann). The incongruous interlinkage of London and Berlin succeeded in suggesting a timeless validity of theme and thesis of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, underscored by Weill's iridescent music. But the device worked less well when Krämer inserted Brecht's (or other lyricists') verses of a much later date, as he did in the "Salomon-Song;" they jarred as much as the anachronistic shiny plastic raincoat flauntingly worn by Jenny (Ingrid Jarens).

Withal I wish the other two innovations had been as successful! As if to add temporal terseness to the spatial compactness of the set, Krämer snipped lines from the book and whipped through the play without intermissions. However, the finales to each act, representing Weill's and Brecht's moral dicta, lose much of their impact if they are followed by other stage action. In *Die Dreigroschenoper* the intermissions, intended as pauses for reflection, are truly integral to the work, all the more essential here as a foil to Krämer's rapid pacing.

Finally, there was the wrong-headed idea of "doubling" the role of Jenny and the street singer. There is precedence for this. One night, during the long run of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Theatre de Lys, in New York, Lenya likewise doubled, when Tige Andrews, the street singer of that production, had taken ill. She earned thunderous applause for her rendition of "The Ballad of Mack the Knife." "But," she told me, "I'll never do that again! It denatures [*verfälscht*] the play." Indeed, it does. The effect of a play-within-a-play, suggested by the introductory "*Moritat*," with its intended alienation effect, is dissipated by allotting the song to one of the principal characters.

Weill and Brecht also argued that their songs should be sung by singing actors, and not by acting singers. Some of the performers, especially Mrs. Peachum (Grete Wurm), with a voice that monotonously barked forth imprecations, embodied neither. I left the theater with some sadness that a brilliantly conceived production resulted in a very good performance instead of the great one it might have been.

GUY STERN
Wayne State University

Die Dreigroschenoper.

József Attila Színház, Budapest,
Premiere: 27 March 1987; József városi Színház, Budapest, Premiere: 20 February 1987; Kisfaludy Színház, Győr, Premiere: 6 March 1987.

There have been three new productions of *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*Koldusopera*) staged in Hungary during the spring of 1987. Having seen all three, I believe none of them lives up to Weill's original intentions, and this is mostly because of the poor singing ability of the actors (with four or five notable exceptions). In Hungary, *Die Dreigroschenoper* is still regarded as "Brecht's play," and, therefore, directors show little concern for the music.

At József Attila Színház in Budapest, a revolving stage was used for the scene changes. The orchestra played more or less correctly, but only one actress sang well: Eva Szabó, as Mrs. Peachum. A remarkable and effective idea was realized immediately before the end of the play: on the final chorus of the "Drittes Dreigroschenfinale," a group of old and impoverished people joined the cast, coming on stage in their street clothes, carrying bags and lunchboxes.

At Józsefvárosi Színház, also in Budapest, the role of Jenny, played by Ildikó Pécsi, assumed the primary focus. In this version, Jenny became the narrator of the play and appropriated some of the songs of the other characters. Priest Kimball wore a cross on his chest and a rabbi's cap on his head. This obvious attempt at humor was ridiculous and tasteless. One of the gang members, Walter, was transformed into a comical, homosexual stereotype. Pécsi sang well, as did Péter Beregi as Macheath, and Attila Tyll as Mr. Peachum displayed strong acting.

While there was not a "best" among these productions, there certainly was a "worst," and that distinction goes to the production by the Kisfaludy Színház in the town of Győr. The theater is modern and the stage is one of the largest in Hungary. The performance, however, did not match in scale. The orchestra played wrong notes and exhibited a poor ensemble. Further, the actors lacked both presence and conviction; their singing scarcely existed. Combined with the disadvantage of the immense stage and the evident ineptness of director Ferenc Sik, the result yielded a colorless and boring interpretation.

Hence, the inventive and provocative music of Kurt Weill still awaits proper treatment in Hungary.

MIKLÓS GALLA
Budapest



Ferruccio Busoni: Selected Letters. Translated and edited by Antony Beaumont. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Following upon his study of Ferruccio Busoni's music (*Busoni the Composer*; see review in Volume 3, Number 2), Antony Beaumont has now presented a handsomely produced and clearly organized collection of Busoni letters spanning over fifty years from 1872 to 1924. This selection provides the English-speaking reader the most wide-ranging view of Busoni since the 1938 translation of the composer's letters to his wife. Here, as there, Busoni emerges as a man of provocative contradictions: a grand virtuoso who preferred the salon to the concert hall, a creature of the nineteenth-century and a prophet of the twentieth who might well have felt more at home in the eighteenth, a legendary figure of great charm and physical presence and yet so very private, so devoted to his family and friends, and of such innate reserve and moral integrity that for all his celebrity he led a life eschewing sensation and bordering upon austerity.

There is variety and substance in these letters and Beaumont's translations do justice to Busoni's gifts as a stylist with a propensity for word play, literary allusions, and the *bon mot*. The letters touch upon virtually all of Busoni's major interests and professional activities, including reports about his concert career and the ambivalence with which he regarded performing and teaching, insights into his editing and compositional work, observations about his travels, and reflections upon the dilemma the First World War created for this Italian/German cosmopolitan. Perhaps of most immediate interest are the com-

poser's comments on the musical culture of his time and the personalities with whom he came into contact. Typical of his keen insights is his judgment of Kurt Weill, set forth in a letter to Philipp Jarnach of 7 October 1923:

I don't know Weill's *Frauentanz*. Considering his reserved vein and painstaking efforts, this youngster's productivity is surprising. He has any amount of "ideas," — as you say — but they are concealed or inferred, so that only "the likes of us" can discover and admire them. He — Weill — does not seem to be conscious of when he has arrived at the right place; instead, he passes over it as if over sand and rocks between which beautiful, individual flowers grow, which he neither tramples on nor plucks, and over which he does not linger. His wealth is great, his selectivity at present inactive. One envies him and would like to help. But he will come to the right thing of his own accord! The eternal question: is he still developing, or has he already reached his peak?

Beaumont has subjected the letters to some abridgement and omitted opening and closing greetings in order to eliminate repetition and matters of purely ephemeral interest. However, such formal gestures and seemingly extraneous information are an inextricable part of letter writing and are often no less necessary to a satisfactory whole than cadential formulae are to music. Beaumont may have employed such space-saving editorial practices in order to distill the essence of Busoni's considerable epistolary talents, but he has thereby diminished the letters' immediacy as personal documents. We are not told, for instance, where Busoni uses the formal or familiar form of address, and Beaumont's annotations, though generally informative, provide little context for the individual exchanges. In choosing to omit the letters to Busoni, Beaumont is following a time-honored custom of presenting a "great man" in a kind of lonely vacuum. One wonders whether this peculiarly nineteenth-century attitude does justice to a man so partial to the civilized discourse of the eighteenth. The dimension lost by such a one-sided approach is all the more apparent in the appendix in which Beaumont presents the whole of the Busoni-Schoenberg correspondence, as well as selected letters to Schoenberg's Viennese publisher, Emil Hertzka. This is no doubt the jewel of the collection, and even though Schoenberg is the principal topic of conversation, one receives, through this interaction, a clearer sense of Busoni the man than in all the preceding pages. And how much greater must

that interaction have been with those correspondents, who, unlike Schoenberg, repaid Busoni's investment with interest. It would be unfortunate if the appearance of this volume closed the door to the publication of the integral correspondences with such major personalities or close friends as Volkmar Andreae, Edward Dent, Hugo Leichtentritt, Philipp Jarnach, Egon Petri, Henry Petri, or Gisella Selden-Goth. Such reservations aside, Beaumont's edition is an invaluable cornerstone for future Busoni scholarship and a timely contribution to our continuing reassessment of early twentieth-century music history.

CHRISTOPHER HAILEY
New Haven



Caspar Neher: Brecht's Designer. By John Willett. London and New York: Methuen, 1986. [141 p.]

Caspar Neher's stage designs for Bertolt Brecht's productions of "epic theater" abandoned scenic practices predicated on extravagant visual effects and illusions common to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Continental stage. Instead, Neher created a structural landscape which visually accentuated harmonious or dissonant tensions between the epic actor and the theatrical objects of epic theater production. Rather than creating architectural perspectives of skillful scenic replication, Neher introduced a vital visual relationship which originated from the life of a specific Brechtian character. In *Schriften zum Theater* Brecht commented that Neher's scenic landscapes were imprinted with

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the "fingerprints" of people inhabiting those environments; his landscapes were created from tangible objects which demonstrated the social behavior of characters in the play.

John Willett's study of Caspar Neher's scenic work for Brecht, curiously subtitled "Brecht's Designer," offers the reader an introduction to the collaborator responsible for shaping Brecht's epic vision. Published on the occasion of the 1986 exhibition of Neher's work organized by the Arts Council of Great Britain, Willett's book includes over seventy black and white reproductions of sketches and photographs which illustrate Neher's contributions to Brecht's production style. Most notably, Willett selected reproductions of Neher/Brecht collaborations which testify to his claim that "Brecht's influence was...not merely stimulating but conducive to Neher's own particular genius." By comparing actual production photographs to Neher's sketches for the same dramatic moment, Willett provides evidence of Neher's directorial instinct at visualizing the dramatic juxtapositions among actor, text, and object. Of particular interest are reproductions of those designs for the productions which Brecht acted as *Regisseur*: with Erich Engel on the November 1949 Berliner Ensemble production of *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* and with Oskar Homolka on the February 1926 production of *Baal* at the I. tsches Theater. Neher's sketches for these productions clearly indicate that his role as designer was not merely to create decor but to interpret visually the action of the play for Brecht.

Unfortunately, reproductions of the February 1931 production of *Mann ist Mann* at the Berlin Staatstheater (Brecht again co-directed with Erich Engel) are missing from the volume, even though Willett recognizes that it was this production which "most strikingly" helped Brecht to visualize the action of the play's episodes; in its place are found reproductions of the 1926 Darmstadt and 1928 Berlin Volksbühne productions. Willett also neglects to include any production sketches of the March 1924 production of *Leben Eduards des Zweiten von England* at the Munich Kammerspiele, although he does provide an illustration for the published text of *Leben Eduards*, demonstrating how Neher's designs affected the stagings.

Willett cannot avoid linking Neher's work to the politics of an era which forced a break in the collaboration with Brecht. Since Neher elected to continue practicing his art under the Nazi regime, Willett questions the extent to which the aesthetic of the artist accommodated the propagandistic conservatism of a political regime which used artists and their

products for political purposes. Undoubtedly for artists such as Neher the integrity of one's own system of aesthetics comes into question, but Willett allows the artist's work to speak for itself rather than speculating on his struggle of conscience. The production sketches of Neher's designs for *Coriolanus*, rendered before, during, and after the fall of the Third Reich, clearly demonstrate the suffocating effect tyranny has upon the artist. Yet, if Willett's concern is with how historical events shaped Neher's artistic vision, this deserves a more thorough investigation than the several pages of his introduction.

Willett includes several articles by Neher and Brecht, but many of these essays are undocumented, frustrating the reader who wishes to investigate their sources. Those interested solely in Neher's designs will be disappointed by the limited and exclusive selection of black and white reproductions. There are also a number of disturbing misstatements and unsubstantiated claims: *Seven Deadly Sins* is dismissed as an "essentially minor work" (p. 21); Willett seems unaware of and fails to explore the very close ties between Weill and Neher after the 1931 production of *Mahagonny* in Berlin; he dismisses *A Kingdom for a Cow* as a "relatively trivial theater work" without any indication of familiarity with *Der Kuhhandel* (p. 22); he avoids fully crediting Elisabeth Hauptmann for the "book" of *Happy End* (p. 51). The 16-page "Neher Chronicle" contains surprising errors: April 13, 1933: "*The Threepenny Opera* opens at the Empire Theatre, New York, with Lenya and Louis Armstrong; Spring 1933: Constant Lambert conducts *The Seven Deadly Sins* in London." Most perplexing, however, is the restriction of Willett's interest in Neher to his work for Brecht, which comprises rather a limited view of the contributions and importance of this influential designer.

TOM BLOOM
University of Michigan, Flint

The Singer's Musical Theatre Anthology.

In five volumes: Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano/Alto, Tenor, Baritone/Bass, Duets. Winona, MN: Hal Leonard, 1986.

This collection represents an important attempt to provide for the popular musical theater of our century what the standard operatic anthologies have provided for opera: famous vocal solos and duets, exactly as they appear in complete piano-vocal scores, conveniently excerpted for study and performance. I

know of only one previous effort along these lines (*Broadway Repertoire*, edited by Gregory Boals, New York: Chappell, 1979) — a publication that, despite some interesting alternative choices, comes nowhere near this one in terms of comprehensiveness.

Editor Richard Walters has managed to include approximately 40 songs in each of the four solo volumes (the fifth contains 21 duets), encompassing selections by Kern, Loewe, Porter, Rodgers, Sondheim, Weill, and many others. Walters' choices will satisfy those vocalists in need of a source for their obligatory standards — a bass or baritone looking for "If Ever I Would Leave You," "Soliloquy," "The Impossible Dream," "Ol' Man River," and "Some Enchanted Evening" will find them all — and they include a few well-chosen rarities as well. All are presented substantially as they appear in the standard published vocal scores (which means that the numbers from *Show Boat* and most of those by Rodgers and Hart appear in later, revised editions).

However, Walters' claims that these are "authentic" versions and that this collection represents both a "performing" and a "critical" edition need to be taken with some caution (Walters hedges a bit, saying that "in many ways" one "could" view this edition as such, as if aware of the problem but unwilling to relinquish the claim). Composers of American musicals have usually written their songs for voice and piano, knowing that an orchestrator will transform it into the setting that will be used in the show. Until 1950 or so, published vocal scores tended to be based on the composer's piano score, not so very different from what would appear in the separate sheet-music edition (though the latter would be reduced to a single refrain, transposed into a medium range and with the melody invariably present in the piano part). The following years saw the evolution of the published piano-vocal score into an annotated orchestral reduction usable by a conductor, a practice which has prevailed ever since (except in the most recent Sondheim scores, which have returned — regrettably, to my mind — to the older practice). What, then, is most authentic? The composer's initial manuscript? The song as performed in the show? The orchestral score? A piano reduction of that score? The sheet music? The concept of a critical edition is hard to apply to music created for such a fluid performance tradition. My point is that such claims would be better left unmade and the anthology offered — and accepted — for what it is: a convenient and inexpensive way to acquire a selection of solo repertoire in piano-vocal arrangements not otherwise separately

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available (consider that each of these volumes costs considerably less than one vocal score at current prices).

About half of the selections duplicate the relevant pages of the original piano-vocal score sources; those that required editing to remove choral or purely instrumental passages, to supply endings where none existed, or to remove small-note orchestral cues have been newly printed (relatively few of the editorial changes are documented, by the way). All indications of instrumentation have been deleted, leaving the accompaniment to stand as purely pianistic writing — with varying success depending on goals and skill of the original transcriber. Some of the earlier scores, which include the melody in the piano as a matter of course, will still need some thoughtful editing from a pianist, as may the more fanciful of the orchestral reductions.

The assignment of the four solo volumes according to the classical vocal ranges has been carried out about as well as could be expected, considering the applicability of these nebulous categories to show-writing. In particular, even songs that we associate with a “soprano” or “tenor” timbre will generally remain within the operatic mezzo or baritone compass (of the composers represented in this collection, only Gershwin in *Porgy and Bess* and Weill in *Street Scene* truly exploit the possibilities of the higher voices). The classic, indeed the only, analysis of these vocal practices remains Conrad L. Osborne’s “The Broadway Voice” in *High Fidelity* (January and February 1979), to which I direct readers interested in this important yet little-understood matter; for the present, suffice to say that a singer will want to consult both volumes relevant to his or her voice.

The Weill excerpts are as follows: four songs from *The Threepenny Opera* (Blitzstein adaptation); “Surabaya Johnny” from *Happy End* (Feingold translation); two from *Knickerbocker Holiday*; four from *Lady in the Dark*; one from *Love Life* (“This is the Life,” a pleasant surprise); three from *Street Scene*; and four from *Lost in the Stars*. Although the enthusiast will always wish for more, these represent a respectable proportion (more than one tenth) of the total items included. Further, Weill shares with only one other writer in the collection, the Gershwin of *Porgy and Bess* (all right, include Andrew Lloyd Webber too if you want), the distinction of being his



Burgess Meredith poses with *Johnny Johnson*. Photo by Robert McCann

Kurt Weill: *Johnny Johnson*. Studio cast with chorus and orchestra, Samuel Matlowky, conductor. PolyGram 831 384-1 (record), 831 384-4 (cassette), 831 384-2 (CD).

Questioned about his role in the struggle for world peace, songwriter Irving Caesar replied: “I think it should be the lifelong concern of every human being.” No fictional character ever embodied that point of view more completely than the hero of *Johnny Johnson*, Paul Green’s satirical “story of a common man” — the first American theater piece with music by Kurt Weill.

John Johnson was the most common name among the 4,700,000 who enlisted in World War I. In the play, Johnny is a small-town pacifist (and professional tombstone carver!) who joins the army in

own orchestrator. Even so, the piano-vocal arrangements of Weill’s songs do not, for the most part, reflect the composer’s own accompaniments.

The series has generally been well produced (some minor typographical errors have slipped through, and my copy of the baritone/bass book had sixteen pages missing). All volumes provide brief historical information about each of the shows, with Stanley Green acknowledged as a contributor for this reprinted material. These paragraphs, though

1917 because he believes in the sentiment of “a war to end war.” After sparing a German sniper and surviving a wound, he invades the headquarters of the Allied High Command, armed with a tank of laughing gas, and nearly succeeds in preventing a gruesome battle. As a reward for his “peace mania,” he is arrested and sent home to spend nearly twenty years in an asylum, from which he emerges to find a crazed world once again arming for war.

The script, a North Carolinian’s counterpart to Hasek’s *The Good Soldier Schweyk*, is self-consciously allegorical: simplistic, frequently implausible, yet rich in comic and tragic ironies. Its structure is unusual; as a rule, each of the twenty-one songs is sung by a different character — including eerie warnings from the Statue of Liberty. Green’s song lyrics, though scarred by flawed rhymes and odd turns of phrase, are often as haunting as Weill’s music.

And what music! In 1936 the pungency of Weill’s Berlin style had not left him: *Johnny Johnson* is full of characteristically ingratiating melodies and acrid harmonies, a blend the *New York American* aptly described as “slyly parodying, cruelly insinuating, curiously corrosive.” Weill’s musical language had been expanded, yet streamlined, during his year in America; and he produced a masterpiece that stands between *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* and *Lost in the Stars*.

Johnny Johnson might have shared the fate of *Firebrand of Florence* — a fossil dimly remembered but never resurrected — if Edward Cole had not produced a record of extended excerpts in 1956 (MGM E3447). This album, well-known among Weill enthusiasts, refuses to stay buried. In 1966, the performance was reissued on the short-lived Heliodor label, primarily in a synthetic-stereo edition (HS 25024). Now, thanks to the

accurate, seem less than ideally helpful in the present context: specifics about the characters giving rise to each song would probably benefit a performer more than background on the original production, which is usually easy to find elsewhere. But these minor problems, like those mentioned earlier, do not diminish the value of this anthology and the overall success with which it has been carried out.

JON ALAN CONRAD
University of Delaware

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personal interest of producer Larry L. Lash, it has resurfaced on PolyGram records, cassettes, and compact discs, all in unadulterated mono. (Dare we hope for more Weill reissues, particularly the MGM recording of *Der Jasager*?)

The new issue is handsomely produced, with original-cast pictures and ample program notes (though somewhat less ample in the cassette edition). The cover is a cleverly "aged" photo of the soldier-hero passing Miss Liberty on his way to war. Unfortunately, the instrumentalists and some cast members are still uncredited, and Cole is never mentioned. And Mr. Lash would seem to have no justification for basing his printed plot synopsis on the two-act version of the play, as revised by Paul Green in 1971 (the basis for an ill-fated Broadway revival, presented just once on Easter of that year).

Like MGM's earlier *Trouble in Tahiti*, the record is marred by wild fluctuations in volume level from one section of the score to the next; during ensemble numbers, everyone seems to be fifty feet from the microphone. The reissue engineer evidently made no effort to compensate for this defect in the master tape, nor for the restricted bass response. Of course, little can be done to correct the faulty balances and abrupt changes in acoustics. In other respects, the sound is clean and vivid — at least on the CD, which is exempt from pitch waver and surprisingly free of tape hiss.

Changes in technology do nothing to affect the emotional impact of the recording. Lee Strasberg's original 1936 Group Theatre production had been populated with non-singers (including Russell Collins, Phoebe Brand, Morris Carnovsky, Luther Adler, Lee J. Cobb, and Robert Lewis). Some songs were cut — no one seems quite sure how many; others were poorly sung. There was also quite a bit of double-casting (one actor in several parts). The record follows the same traditions, with a completely different, slightly more musical cast who sometimes take great liberties with the pitch and rhythm of the songs, yet produce memorably theatrical results.

For the most extreme example, take the chilling sequence, "In Times of War and Tumult." Amid the carnage, an American and a German priest voice prayers in their respective languages, each begging God for victory over the other. Rather than singing, Thomas Stewart and William Malten declaim nearly every phrase. The mayor's speech ("Over in Europe") and a drastically abridged Allied High Command scene receive the same unmusical treatment. Stewart's wife, Evelyn Lear, does sing, but her voice seems too heavy and man-

nered for that of the ingenue ("Oh, Heart of Love").

Lotte Lenya is seemingly miscast as the flirtatious French nurse. Though "Mon Ami, My Friend" is transposed down a third, she still cannot reach the higher notes; she changes the flavor by dropping an octave for the last two lines. Yet, this little song represents one of her most expressive recordings. Note the subtlety of her shift from light-hearted charm to dramatic pathos — twice — in the course of two minutes.

Jean Sanders's almost matronly contralto is appropriate for the "Song of the Goddess," and Jane Connell passably performs old Aggie's "Sewing Machine Song." Yet the solemnity of the former and the queer Schubertian beauty of the latter numbers could be heard to better advantage as part of the instrumental suite, as on Kurt Weill's "Music for the Stage," arranged by Edward Cole (four *Johnny Johnson* songs made up the heart of this collector's item, MGME 3334).

Scott Merrill, fresh from the Theatre de Lys *Threepenny Opera* production, serves up "Captain Valentine's Tango" with more emphasis on wry sex appeal than musicality. The parodistic "Cowboy Song," a perfect marriage of Weill's expanding harmonic vocabulary, is one of the album's best features, freely but agreeably interpreted by Bob Shaver. But, for strength of characterization, the one who steals the show is the actor Hiram Sherman, first as trigger-happy Grandpa Joe ("Up Chickamauga Hill") and later as the mad Dr. Mahodan ("The Psychiatry Song"). Incidentally, the asylum songs from Act III have been shuffled into the correct order for this reissue.

Samuel Matlowsky was hardly a Weill purist (later serving as conductor for the Capalbo production of *Mahagonny*), but he directs the ebb and flow with a measure of sympathy that is all the more remarkable considering his evident lack of proper rehearsals. And he retains Weill's colorful instrumentation, which calls for a theater ensemble of about a dozen musicians — including prominent parts for saxophone, banjo, guitar, and Hammond organ. Apart from Lenya's song, the original keys are preserved. Alas, none of Weill's other American scores has received such an "unretouched" recording in the past thirty years.

There are serious cuts, most notably the British soldier's "Tea Song," two of the songs cut in 1936 (the "Sergeant's Chant" and the "West-Pointer Song") and a considerable amount of instrumental music. Under the circumstances, we must be grateful for the amount of incidental music that is preserved on the

record, starting with the so-called overture — a tranquil arrangement of the "Branntweinhändler" song from *Happy End*, which Weill had also adapted for *Marie Galante* — and progressing through the disturbingly evocative battlefield sequences and the ingenious jazz-age chaos of the "Laughing Generals" scene.

The "Song of the Guns" should really be sung by three voices, and Joseph Liebling's chorus is larger than that — but not much larger. Why this anemic ensemble was reduced to a few feeble solo voices for the asylum inmates' "Hymn to Peace" remains a mystery. The ragged little group is most convincing when representing a pathetic procession of wounded French soldiers. At the end of the song, we most strongly sense the record's need for a dramatic coach. "Lafayette, we are here!" cries Johnny — the newly arrived soldier — not with the "grim and stern emphasis" the script demands, but in jarringly excited and exultant tones.

Johnny Johnson is played by Burgess Meredith, a veteran of the first American production of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1933. In the recording, apart from his farewell speech to the Statue of Liberty — dreamily sincere and thoroughly naive — his principal contribution comes at the end, "Johnny's Song." After his discharge from the asylum, Johnny is disillusioned, having lost everything he ever dreamed of gaining: home, livelihood, friendship, love, and faith in a peaceful world. Against the background of a military-preparedness rally, he tries peddling handmade toys on a wintry street. Johnny's sweetheart has married his unscrupulous, prosperous rival; unrecognized, Johnny sees her and her son, who under different circumstances would have been his own. But he can not interest the boy in his wares, because he refuses to sell any toy soldiers. So he turns up his collar and sings philosophically, "we'll never lose our faith and hope and trust in all mankind."

The words of Johnny's song have been rewritten half a dozen times; for example, Edward Heyman's unauthorized lyric, designed to help popularize the tune when it was new ("To Love You and to Lose You"), and the changes introduced by Timothy Gray and Paul Green in 1971. Here, Burgess Meredith preserves the original version, rendering the number with tenderness and compassion. Listen to the loneliness in his voice when Johnny reaches the words, "As up and down I wander, My weary way and long..." In 1936, sensitive listeners wept at his song — they still do.

GLEN BECKER
New York

SELECTED PERFORMANCES

ARGENTINA

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires, Jaime Cogan, dir.; Antonio Tauriello, cond., 24, 27, 29 November, 1, 4 December 1987

AUSTRIA

Die Dreigroschenoper, Landestheater, Salzburg, K.J. Schildknecht, dir.; W. Pillinger, cond., 9, 15-18, 23-24 Sept 15, 16, 18, 20 Oct 1987

AUSTRALIA

Happy End, Perth, Western Australian Academy, 1-4 October 1987
The Seven Deadly Sins, His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, West Australian Ballet Company, Verdon Williams, cond.; Jill Perryman, sop., 3-7 July 1987

CANADA

Happy End, Margaret Greenham Theatre, Banff, 24-27 February 1987
Happy End, New Westminster, Douglas College, 20-28 November 1987

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Die Dreigroschenoper, Brno, Alois Hajda, dir., 17 April 1987

DENMARK

Das Berliner Requiem, Copenhagen, 25 June 1987
Mahagonny Songspiel, Copenhagen, 25 June 1987

ENGLAND

Das Berliner Requiem, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, John Crossley, cond., 31 October 1987
Mahagonny Songspiel, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, The London Sinfonietta, Paul Daniel, cond., 1, 3, 7, 11, 13, 15, 19, 21 August 1987
Die sieben Todsünden, Royal Festival Hall, London, Elise Ross, soprano, The London Sinfonietta, 24 January 1988
Die sieben Todsünden, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Andre Previn, cond.; Milva, 23 June 1987
Die sieben Todsünden, Barbican Hall, London, Julia Migenes, soprano; London Symphony Orchestra, Michael Tilson Thomas, cond., 2 July 1987
The Threepenny Opera, Oxford, Music on Stage, 5-9 May 1987

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Städtische Bühnen, Münster, F.B. Gottschalk, dir.; Hiroshi Kodama, cond., 27 June, 4, 10 July, 5, 8, 9, 16, 26, September 1987
Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Städtische Bühnen Hagen, Hagen, Kurt Reginbogin, dir.; Will Humburg, cond., 4, 9, July, 20, 22 September 1987
Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Musiktheater, Dortmund, Igor Follwill, dir.; Kurt Weise, cond., 11 April, 8, 12, 16 May, 26 June 1987
Das Berliner Requiem, Berlin, Berliner Liedertafel, Bobeth, cond., 1 November 1987
Die Dreigroschenoper, Landesbühne, Hannover, September 1987
Die Dreigroschenoper, Schauspielhaus, Krefeld, Max K. Hoffmann, dir.; Alex Kagan, cond., 19 September 1987
Happy End, Städtische Bühnen, Regensburg, 29 April 1988
Happy End, Staatstheater, Oldenburg, 22 May 1988
Knickerbocker Holiday, Städtische Bühnen, Münster, 4 February 1988
Kleine Dreigroschenmusik, Berlin, Berlin Philharmonic, Eric Leinsdorf, cond., 10-11 October 1987
Der Lindberghflug, Cologne, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 19-21 October 1987
Mahagonny Songspiel, Werkstattbühne, Darmstadt, 7 March 1988

Die sieben Todsünden, Staatstheater, Kassel, 8 January 1988
Rock Concert, Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, Sting, Gianni Nannini, Jack Bruce, 1 May 1987
Street Scene, Cologne, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Harald Banter, prod.; Donald Arthur, dir.; Jan Latham-Koening, cond., 3-5 May 1987
War Play, Jüdisches Gemeindehaus, Berlin, Ensemble Modern, Richard Pittman, cond., 5 September 1987

GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Concerto for violin & winds, Leipzig, DDR-Radio orchestra, M. Pommer, cond., 29 September 1987

NETHERLANDS

Das Berliner Requiem, s'Hertogenbosch, s'Hertogenbosch Mens' Chorus, FASO Wind Ensemble, 17 May 1987
Berlin to Broadway, Amsterdam, American Repertory Theater, 7-19 July 1987

NORWAY

Mahagonny Songspiel, Statens Operahøyskole, Oslo, 21-24 May 1987

SCOTLAND

The Threepenny Opera, Music Hall, Aberdeen, Aberdeen Festival Players, 8-10 October 1987

SWEDEN

Symphony no. 1, Norrkoeping, Symfoniorkestern Norrkoeping, John Carewe, cond., 5 July 1987

SWITZERLAND

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Stadttheater, Lucerne, Markus Imhof, dir.; Marcello Viotti, cond., November 1987

UNITED STATES

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, San Francisco, City College of San Francisco, Norman Wong, cond., 17-19 July 1987
Concerto for violin & winds, Waco, TX, Baylor University, 5 November 1987
Down in the Valley, Paul Mazur Theatre, New York, NY, The Blue Hill Troupe, 18-22 November 1987
Lost in the Stars, New York, NY, York Players, 18 May-4 June 1988
Lost in the Stars, Aaron Davis Hall, New York, NY, Opera Ebony, Henry Miller, dir.; Warren G. Wilson, cond., 12, 14, 22 November 1987
Mahagonny Songspiel, Cincinnati, OH, Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, John Eaton, dir., 8 January 1988
Der neue Orpheus, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY, Lucy Shelton, soprano; Brooklyn Philharmonic, Lukas Foss, cond.; Yuval Waldman, violinist, 14 January 1988
From Weill to Sondheim, Kaufman Theatre, New York, NY, Julie Wilson, 20 October-20 November 1987
The Threepenny Opera, Kresge Auditorium Little Theatre, Cambridge, MA, MIT Musical Guild, 4-6, 11-13 September 1987
Vom Tod im Wald, Waco, TX, Baylor University, 5 November 1987
Der Zar lässt sich photographieren, Philadelphia, The Academy of Vocal Arts, 25, 27, 30, 31 October 1987
Berlin to Broadway, Fairfield, CT, Fairfield University, 19-24 October 1987
Ballet, "Pudique Acide" and "Extasis," Bessie Schoenberg Theater, New York, NY, Mathilde Monnier, Jean-Francois Duroure, Joel Luecht, 1-4 October 1987

USSR

Die Dreigroschenoper, Moscow, Guest performance by Schauspielhaus Essen, FRG, 19 May 1987

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