

## Books

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### *Kurt Weill on Stage: From Berlin to Broadway*

Foster Hirsch

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. 403 pp.  
ISBN: 0-375-40375-2

Books about Kurt Weill tend to fall into one of two categories. Classically trained musicians, musicologists, and music historians emphasize Weill's European years, his pre-World War I upbringing, his studies with Busoni, his collaborations with major German poet-playwrights, his politically and aesthetically challenging approaches to opera, symphony, ballet, and song forms. For these writers, Weill's American years always have the quality of a letdown; even their struggles to show that the larger Broadway works make "operatic" sense tend to have a slightly defensive tone. The alternative breed of writer on Weill comes to him from an interest in theater or in popular music. With these writers, it's Europe that gets glossed over. Apart from the character of Brecht and the Berlin successes of *Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*, the first half of Weill's career is only a set of empty cue words on the path to the composer's Broadway triumphs and his posthumous adoption as a pop-rock icon. For this latter group, Georg Kaiser and Otto Klemperer are merely busy-work for the fact checkers; Ira Gershwin and Mary Martin are guiding stars.

Foster Hirsch, author of *Kurt Weill on Stage*, comes unashamedly from the second category. A writer on film and theater whose last book was an excellent biography of the Shubert brothers titled *The Boys from Syracuse*, he knows and openly adores old-style musical comedy. The all-too-familiar subtitle of his book, "From Berlin to Broadway," immediately conveys his view of the arc of Kurt Weill's career. Fortunately, Hirsch has virtues that are uncommon in his mode of journalistic biography. His love for his subject is that of a serious-minded aficionado, not a blithering fan. Concerned to understand Weill's work as a whole, he keeps an open mind when crossing the spiritual Berlin Wall that so many have helped to erect between Weill's Broadway musicals and his German operas.

In addition, though unscholarly (at times even slapdash), Hirsch is an astonishingly thorough researcher in the materials that interest him. His work, as its title implies, is meant to chronicle the stage history of Weill's compositions, but the dry documentary evidence from which theater historians usually reconstruct such events has only limited appeal for Hirsch—all the more since he has to come at the German texts secondhand, through translation. Instead, his fascination is with the personal and the visual. The guiding stars of his volume are neither Klemperer and Carola Neher nor Kazan and Gertrude Lawrence, but personal interviews and photographs (though he is almost equally happy with intimate letters and memoirs). The book is less a biography than a banquet of testimonies to Weill's effect on those he knew.

The result, if you already know a good deal about Weill, is a mixed blessing, but a blessing nonetheless. You may, like me, find Hirsch's overall narrative familiar, and many of his specific assertions dubious; his writing is full of tiny inaccuracies and imprecisions

of detail. At the same time, the more you think you know about Weill, the more you are likely to stumble over genuine surprises, straight from the mouths of those who were there. In addition to the eyewitnesses Hirsch was able to interview himself, he has rescued from the archives a series of interviews taped by the music critic Alan Rich for a radio series on Weill in the late 1970s, plus summaries of several interviews made in the mid-1950s for a projected Weill biography by Lenya's second husband, George Davis. Like other recent scholars, he has had access to Weill's letters to his parents and his publishers (of which the Weill Foundation is helping to prepare an edition), as well as to many of those Weill received from his various collaborators. What Hirsch omits or confuses in terms of hard fact, he makes up for by unerringly choosing voices that evoke the spirit of a given moment more strongly than cold data ever could.

His astute assiduity extends to the numerous photographs with which the book is salted. Two large tomes from Overlook Press (*Lenya the Legend* and *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents*) have already given Weill his share of space on intellectual coffee tables, but you may wish that Hirsch, whose visual sense far outpaces his verbal clarity, had junked his narrative and instead produced a volume of interview excerpts and images—he has so many fresh ones to offer. From the enchanting photo of Weill with the two Angèles on the set of *Der Zar's* first production, to the shot of Paula Laurence and the women's chorus singing the title song of *One Touch of Venus* (perfectly illustrating nearby grumbles from S. J. Perelman about the show's tacky costume designs), the volume is a feast for the eye-minded.

There are of course dangers in relying on what people say, especially long after the fact. Memories fade, or get tailored to suit the recollector's pleasure; interviewers may mishear, mistranscribe, or misinterpret. Hirsch also engages, troublingly, in a kind of second-hand musicological analysis—the composer Herschel Garfein is thanked for his assistance in this area—that makes his narrative voice veer wildly between the authoritative and the superficial. (He would have done better to let Garfein, like the eyewitnesses, speak for himself.)

But the complaint is partly a captious one. Though I wish Hirsch had created a book containing only the freshest and most informative elements of this one, the half a loaf he proffers is baked of such tasty ingredients that you gladly brush away the surrounding sawdust. There is no danger of anyone being permanently misled about Weill by Hirsch's work: His evenhandedness and his focus on highly individual voices have seen to that. Readers well up on Weill will find many new sidelights; those who know nothing of him will get a lively overall impression. And the intelligent in that latter group, stimulated by Hirsch's vivid picture, will be too busy exploring further to adopt any of his minor misapprehensions.

Michael Feingold  
New York City

## Books

### *Somewhere for Me: A Biography of Richard Rodgers*

Meryle Secrest

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. 457 pp.

ISBN: 0-375-40164-4

### *The Richard Rodgers Reader*

Edited by Geoffrey Block

New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. 356 pp.

ISBN: 0-19-513954-2

In the film *Words and Music*, “an all-star musical extravaganza based on the careers of Rodgers and Hart,” Mickey Rooney plays a desperate, high-strung Lorenz Hart (his homosexuality goes unmentioned), who is juxtaposed with Tom Drake (Rodgers) and Janet Leigh (Dorothy Rodgers), a couple without qualities: eternally young, flawless in body and mind, and incredibly boring. When the film opened in 1948, Rodgers and his second partner, Oscar Hammerstein II, were already well on their way to becoming an institution and therefore objects of idealization. In her preface to a new (1995) edition of Rodgers’ autobiography, *Musical Stages*, his oldest daughter Mary revises her father’s public image, which was heavily influenced by his music: “There’s a kind of marvelous, rich, emotional quality to what my father wrote that didn’t often manifest itself in his personality. . . . When you come right down to it, my father was an extremely complicated man and deeply unhappy much of the time” (p. vii). Thus she indicates the fundamental biographical difficulty of relating “life” and “work.” Because artistic output and the creative person behind it are not the same, creators of the most beautiful art often appear rather unpleasant in real life (as Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy).

In his 1998 biography, William G. Hyland discreetly touches on Rodgers’ problematic personality, but the overall thrust of his matter-of-fact book is a description of his artistic career. Not so Meryle Secrest. In *Somewhere for Me*, she depicts Richard Rodgers the human being. Her main biographical interest is “a subject’s secret life, his struggles, his dreams, disappointments, loves and hates. . . . a true story that no one knows” (p. xi). The book’s title and most of the chapter headings are taken from lyrics and employed suggestively. Thus the chapter “Little Girl Blue” contains a long passage with childhood memories of Rodgers’ two daughters. According to Secrest, the daughters suggested this new biography, and their memories, complemented by reports from other family members, made their way into the book. Archival material such as letters and scrapbooks served as additional sources. Dorothy Rodgers, the composer’s wife for over fifty years, receives ample attention. For those passages Secrest used writings and oral history material which Dorothy Rodgers had left behind.

Based on these sources, Secrest places the complicated relationships in Rodgers’ life—with his wife, his daughters, and Lorenz Hart—the discontinuities, and contradictions in the center of her portrait. She depicts a clever, amusing, and sharp-witted man who at the same time could be austere and distant. Hidden behind a disciplined and controlled surface is a delicate and emotional personality, a man who, plagued by anxieties and phobias, draws his ener-

gy from constant work for the musical theater. As an experienced biographer, Secrest treats her subject with sympathy, empathy, and respect. At times she crosses the line into sensationalism, but the book avoids an atmosphere of gossip and ridiculous suggestions which made Joan Peyser’s George Gershwin biography (1993) so off-putting.

*Somewhere for Me* is a popular biography geared toward the aficionado, not the scholar. Musical matters are merely touched upon, and Secrest mostly relies on secondary literature. When dealing with Rodgers’ musicals, she doesn’t go beyond the well-known; instead, she falls back on anecdotes or memories (i.e., quotations from memoirs) from people involved in the productions. The representation of relations between life and work, especially difficult in the realm of popular art, is inadequate. For instance, Secrest comments on the song “Blue Room”: “. . . the depth of the feeling, its direct, unguarded quality, was a demonstration, if such was needed, that the emotions Rodgers had learned to hide during his stoical childhood had found their logical outlet” (p. 78). This is too banal to be convincing.

Kurt Weill and Richard Rodgers may have had more in common than they would have cared to admit. Both liked to experiment, both tried to tighten the elements of a musical in their Broadway works, both used the Broadway musical as a basis for development of a new art form which made both composers think in terms of American opera (Rodgers, however, did not see himself as a serious composer). The fact that Weill saw Rodgers as a rival who had to be defeated is documented in a letter from Weill to Lenya. Rodgers, on the other hand, seems to have ignored Weill altogether. In his 1961 essay, “Opera and Broadway,” Rodgers expressed his belief that the musical had achieved the level of art by means of more serious themes and complex forms, and could call itself “without apology or self-consciousness American opera.” Strangely, he lists Weill’s *Knickerbocker Holiday* and *Lady in the Dark* as examples of musicals with “unusual themes”; *Street Scene*, however, the obvious Weill work for such a list, goes unmentioned.

This most revealing essay is reprinted in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*. Editor Geoffrey Block has assembled a number of different texts, such as excerpts from biographies of Rodgers or autobiographies of his collaborators, reviews, press clippings, letters, and excerpts from historical and analytical works. Some of the texts which Secrest cites in her biography are printed here in full. Block groups his material chronologically according to creative periods: “Rodgers and Hart, 1919–1943”; “Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943–1960”; “Rodgers after Hammerstein, 1960–1979.” A fourth section follows, “The Composer Speaks,” containing texts by Rodgers from the years 1939–1971. This section ends with a highlight: thirty pages of “Reminiscences of Richard Rodgers.” These excerpts from interviews with Rodgers in the years 1967–68 appear here for the first time in print. Within the individual sections, Block arranges the material according to themes (his criteria are explained in the Introduction). He further tightens the connections with knowledgeable introductions to each section, in which he summarizes the most important aspects of various texts and provides additional information, for instance about possible models in classical music of the “Bali Ha’i” motif (p. 163). Both the arrangement of the documents and the commentary provide a multifaceted picture of Rodgers, his work, and his times, without ever seeming arbitrary.

## Books

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### *Jazz and the Germans: Essays on the Influence of “Hot” American Idioms on 20th-Century German Music*

Edited by Michael J. Budds

Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002. 213 pp.  
ISBN: 1-57647-072-5

“More recently,” Frank Tirro informs us in the volume under review, “there has been a groundswell of research on ragtime, hot dance music, and early jazz in Germany.” And so there has: Bernd Hoffmann has sifted through Germany’s radio guides for every jazz item broadcast during the twenties; Heribert Schröder has leafed through every issue of *Der Artist*, Weimar Germany’s trade journal for dance musicians, to produce a definition of early German jazz; Hansfried Sieben has unearthed and published countless early record catalogues, allowing us to trace the growth and output of the German recording industry; the tireless Rainer E. Lotz has edited the memoirs of an American jazz musician who took part in no fewer than 17,000 German studio recordings between 1924 and 1939; and Klaus Krüger’s *Fox auf 78*, a magazine for fans of German inter-war dance music, has been publishing microscopically detailed bio-discographies of Germany’s early dance-band musicians for sixteen years. These studies, mainly the work of fastidious amateur scholars, have provided a firmer basis than ever before for writing a reception history of Germany’s “Jazz Age.”

Unhappily, none of this material is reflected in Michael J. Budds’s volume, a collection of papers delivered at a conference in 1995. Instead, we are too often referred to Horst Lange (*Jazz in Deutschland: Die deutsche Jazz-Chronik 1900-1960*, 1966), Albrecht Dümmling (“Symbol des Fortschritts, der Dekadenz und der Unterdrückung,” 1977), Chris Goddard (*Jazz Away from Home*, 1979), and Susan C. Cook (*Opera for a New Republic*, 1988). These secondary sources, as estimable as they were in their day, are no longer at the cutting edge of the field and, if read uncritically, can only propagate misconceptions. It is dispiriting to be informed yet again that the recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band were widely available in Germany from 1923, when in fact a close reading of their catalogue numbers reveals that all but one were pressed after World War II. Must we really be told that Armstrong’s Hot Fives and Hot Sevens were influential in spreading jazz throughout Germany when in fact, of 12,500 jazz titles broadcast in the Weimar Republic, not one was by Armstrong? Too often one has the feeling that the authors are valiantly hacking away at dense undergrowth when smooth roads are available a few steps away.

Yet there are gems to be discovered. Alan Lareau, in an impressively researched essay, is surely right to situate Krenek’s *Jonny spielt auf* in the world of German cabaret and musical revue rather than puzzling over the nonexistence of direct American influences. Exploring early sheet music, shellac recordings, manuscripts, and contemporary iconography, Lareau uncovers a wealth of interesting ties between Krenek’s *Jonny* and Germany’s popular song industry and *variété*. Even if his reinterpretation of the opera as a critical

exposé of jazz culture ultimately fails to convince, this article alone is worth the price of the volume. Kathryn Smith Bowers offers an affectionate eulogy to the composer-educator Mátyás Seiber, head of the world’s first jazz department at an institute of higher education (the Hoch’sche Konservatorium in Frankfurt). Although the information on Seiber’s brief but fascinating German career is fairly well known, she devotes ample space to his writings and compositions to present, for the first time, a fully rounded portrait. All that is missing, perhaps, is a recognition that Seiber never understood the nature of triplet swing and tried quixotically to explain it in terms of dizzyingly complex layers of duple-meter subdivisions. (Small wonder that he ultimately threw up his hands and turned to Balkan polymeters.) David Snowball brilliantly summarizes the reasoning and historical background behind the Nazis’ preoccupation with music, offering many eye-opening facts in the process (although overlooking Hitler’s obsession with his favorite composer, Bruckner). But the article comes to an end too soon to tie in persuasively with the subject of jazz. One would not know, from reading his article, that German culture underwent a “swing craze” in the late 1930s (it was then that most of Armstrong’s Hot Fives and Hot Sevens were released in Germany) or that improvised Dixieland jazz, as opposed to commercial swing music, became a vehicle of antifascist protest during the Third Reich—a story movingly retold in the memoirs of the concentration camp inmate Günter Dischler.

Weill’s *Royal Palace* is singled out for special attention in this volume. However, Dane Heuchemer’s study relies too heavily on secondary sources (Drew, Cook, and Sanders) to offer an independent view of this enigmatic piece. He misses the fact that tango rhythms accompany the heroine from her first appearance, overlooks Weill’s use of a klaxon horn (a quintessential jazz instrument in Weimar Germany), and misunderstands the symbolic nature of the tango, which, proscribed by the Vatican in 1917, was not “degrading” but emblematic of eroticism *per se* for composers of the twenties. When the varied reiteration of the heroine’s name is referred to as a “muddle” rather than an incantatory backdrop to her final deification, we realize that the author is out of sympathy with surrealism.

Rounding out the volume are a pair of interesting memoirs from trumpeter Carlo Bohländer and composer Heinz Werner Zimmermann, both representing German jazz in the second half of the century, a subject which is otherwise, despite the volume’s title, barely discussed. Yet the editor is right to focus the material on the inter-war years, when jazz was a dominant issue in German culture rather than a coloristic adjunct. One only wishes for signs of a stronger editorial hand: when we see *Neue Sachlichkeit* translated as “New Practicality,” the words “brummt ein Niggerchor” taken as evidence of social protest (with *brummt* rendered as “groans” instead of “drones”), Weill calling for a strange instrument labeled a *Histrommel* [recte: *Holztrommel* (wood block)], and a certain Viennese publishing house identified as Universal Editions, we know we are in for trouble.

J. Bradford Robinson  
Hoya, Germany

## Performances

### *Street Scene*

*Aspen Music Festival*

13–17 August 2002

Stanley Green in *Broadway Musicals Show By Show* (Hal Leonard Books, 1985) describes *Street Scene* as “the most operatic of all the Broadway productions with music by Kurt Weill, . . . something of a white Northern counterpart to *Porgy and Bess*.” Subtitled “An American Opera” but initially aimed at a Broadway audience, the show was the one Weill seems to have been most proud of—a work of quality that he felt would ultimately gain mass appeal. In the short run, he was perhaps overly optimistic. Even with its vernacular elements and self-conscious and colorful ethnic diversity, *Street Scene* comprises more than the normal dose of sober reality for a Broadway show, not to mention political commentary, a certain amount of incongruously heavy music matched to some light lyrics, an oppressive setting in a working class New York neighborhood, and a finale that ends nearly half an hour after the death of the tragic prima donna.

Such realism had been fashionable for awhile in Depression-era New York, but the wartime optimism and sentimentality of *Oklahoma!* or its post-war variant in *Brigadoon* (which opened only weeks after *Street Scene*) is largely absent from this show. It was only to be expected—with an unfulfilled love interest and such profuse display of orchestral and vocal detail—that the piece, while well-made, would be unlikely to outlast less profound and more fawning vehicles. While it enjoyed fewer performances (only 148 in its initial production) than either *Lady in the Dark* or *One Touch of Venus*, its staying power has been more and more demonstrated over the years. *Street Scene* won a place in the New York City Opera repertory in 1959, and it has been revived fairly often by college and professional companies, both in and outside the U.S.

The Aspen Music Festival’s powerful production fully demonstrated the operatic scope and dramatic depth so characteristic of Weill’s work at its best. The impeccable orchestration, brilliantly realized under the

Daniel Buchanan (Samuel Lowry) sings “When a Woman Has a Baby.”  
Photo: Alex Irvin



practiced baton of Julius Rudel, drove the entire performance, and the student singers’ achievements were impressive indeed. Anna Maurant was movingly presented by Yali-Marie Williams, who possesses a rich, honeyed voice and creates an effective dramatic presence. Her first-act aria, which serves as something of a leading theme for the whole show (“Somehow I Never Could Believe,” reprised with different words by Sam Kaplan in the second act) was up to the highest professional standards. Frank Maurant was also feelingly performed by Randall Levin. The darkness inherent in Elmer Rice’s characterization of Frank, enhanced by Weill’s bass vocal writing, is easy to overplay. But restraint on Levin’s part and excellent stage direction from Edward Berkeley yielded a rounded and sympathetic portrayal, which added precisely the right amount of pathos to the finale, when the wounded Frank is hauled off to jail as he bids good-bye to his daughter.

Most of the supporting roles were handled with aplomb by the youthful cast. There were relatively few weak spots. Polished musical and dramatic characterizations were submitted by the trio of gossip wives (played by Jessica Medoff as Mrs. Fiorentino, Marsha L. Miller as Mrs. Olsen, and Katherine Calcamuggio as the especially waspish Mrs. Jones). A triumphant Ice Cream Sextet, led by Rolando-Michael Sanz as Lippo Fiorentino, was a highlight of the first act. The idealistic young couple Rose (Alison Trainer) and Sam (Andrew Lepri Meyer) were well-matched and consistently lent dramatic strength to the production. Trainer’s voice is sweet and supple, but unfortunately at times both she and Meyer were covered by the orchestra. Meyer also appeared to be somewhat stiff (first-night jitters or overplayed callowness?, it wasn’t quite clear which). His somewhat strained

tenor, it can be hoped, will mellow with age and experience.

*Street Scene*, as much as any work of its time, seems to call for discussion of its disparate parts: Puccinian harmonies, Wagnerian climaxes, spoken dialogue, sung narrative, inserted bits of Broadway via the blues, catchy upbeat tunes like “Wrapped in a Ribbon,” and a jitterbug number. This cast, not surprisingly given its background, seemed to be most comfortable with the full-fledged operatic segments. Henry Davis’s (James Turner) blues, “I Got a Marble and a Star,” was a bit shaky. The snappy song-and-dance duet, “Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed,” never quite got over the footlights. This number could have been a showstopper, but was disappointingly underchoreographed, lacking in vigor and precision.

Excellent character work was turned in by expectant father Daniel Buchanan (Samuel Lowry), the catty nursemaids played by Hanan Alattar and Abby Powell, Officer Murphy (Randall Scarlata), Jennie Hildebrand (Kerry Hart), Mr. Jones (Corey Crider), Harry Easter (Matthew Hayward), and the band of children led by Ben Landmesser as Willie Maurant. The ensembles and choruses were never less than superb, and the stage movement was handled with great skill on the impressively detailed set designed by John Kasarda.

Such a high level of execution demonstrates the nobility and emotional scope of Rice, Hughes and Weill’s work. The audience left fully convinced that this piece will survive and flourish, if it is regularly treated with the same respect, thoughtfulness, and dedication as was shown by these Aspen artists. I loved this production.

Thomas L. Riis  
University of Colorado at Boulder

## Performances

### Street Scene

#### Theater Aachen

Premiere: 28 September 2002  
(18 performances)

Eight years after Houston-Ludwigshafen-Berlin's glorious co-production, the new staging of *Street Scene* in Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) marked a return to German *Stadttheater* normality. Opening the 2002–03 season at the Municipal Theater, it was clamorously received by the local first-nighters, with almost every single number applauded while final ovations went on for a quarter of an hour. If there had been an applause-meter, its two peaks would have registered after Stefanie Verkerk's and Andreas Joost's tempestuous "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed" romp, choreographed by Martin Schurr, and in the second act after the grotesquely overdone "Lullaby" ("Sleep, baby, sleep . . ."), performed by Marlene Wick and Petra Weltroth in bloodthirsty cabaret style.

To a seasoned *Street Scene* watcher like myself (I go back to the European premiere in Dusseldorf in 1955), the Aachen production came as a timely reminder of the incredible fecundity of Weill's unique score, so melodiously enticing, so rhythmically gripping, so tightly constructed and so delicately orchestrated—in fact throughout its two-and-a-half-hour duration so intoxicating with its élan vital, that it cost me considerable restraint to sit still

in my tightly corseted Aachen orchestra seat.

And especially so because Aachen's new *Generalmusikdirektor*, the still youngish Marcus R. Bosch, who was unknown to me and who made his local debut on this occasion, kept the performance sizzling with unrelenting high-octane energy. How lovingly he chiseled Weill's instrumental flights of fancy, how dreamily he evoked the various moodscapes of the score (so reminiscent of Mahler in their nocturnal excursions), how avalanchingly he built the big ensembles. And if he did not always avoid overwhelming the singers on the stage with the volume of his energized musicians in the pit, he could be easily forgiven for the galvanizing power he injected into the performance. I wish I could have stayed for his first subscription concert a couple of days later, for which he paired Weill's *Die sieben Todsünden* (featuring Anna Maria Kaufmann from Munich—one of our brightest hopes among up-and-coming sopranos) with Mahler's 1st Symphony. Bosch is definitely a conductor to watch!

I cannot say the same for Bruno Klimek, the director, whose production communicated little of the work's particular New York flavor. Maybe that had to do with *Street Scene* being given entirely in the workable German translation by Lys Symonette. While I am generally in favor of performances in German theaters (addressing German middle-class subscription audiences) given in German, I must admit that in this particular case, with its constant shifts between spoken dialogue and sung numbers, the result was a flattening out of all the work's enlivening range of vernacular idioms. Klimek's only device for suggesting the sultry heat was to have the actors fan themselves and wipe their necks

with handkerchiefs through the whole show. Otherwise he seemed content to arrange decorative groups, while the singers merely faced the audience and performed their songs, hardly moving from their spots. There was no attempt to flesh out individual characters or to distinguish them from one another, even in

the case of ethnic types like the Kaplans or Lippo Fiorentino. Just the usual clichés, with the singers and the choristers (nicely coached by Bernhard Moncado) never hiding their operatic upbringing. Thomas Armster's set looked like a barren rooftop among Manhattan skyscrapers; all entrances had to be made via staircases from below. I found the production singularly dispiriting and lame—but the local papers were definitely of a different opinion (and the audience clearly was, too). Perhaps Klimek should be granted a scholarship to study under Francesca Zambello as her production assistant.

Aachen handled the huge cast of about three dozen soloists' roles impressively, relying entirely—or so it seemed, for there was not one singer listed as guest—on its local stock. Lisa Graf, otherwise Aachen's much admired *Figaro* countess or *Onegin* Tatyana, contributed an Anna Murrant of lustrous voice and deeply involved projection, with Gavin Taylor as her boor of a husband, a singer of distinctly Heldenbariton character. As their daughter Rose, Gundula Peyer won all our hearts through her crystal-clear soprano outpourings—her duet with Michel Ende's sympathetic Sam Kaplan, definitely the local audience's favorite tenor (though I cannot really imagine him in the bread-and-butter Italian repertory, for which his voice seems too constrained), became one of the musical highlights of the evening. I recall from previous performances at German theaters comparable to Aachen many instances where the minor characters—Abraham Kaplan (Willy Schnell), Lippo Fiorentino (Ruben Erazo), Henry Davis (Johannes Piorek), Harry Easter (Klaus Reiher) and Steve Sankey (Jan Doroszko)—were portrayed more vividly. But then it is a common observation at our German opera houses that while the ensembles are more and more internationally recruited (with singers from the Far East quickly gaining ground) their performances get more and more globalized, that is, neutralized. That this alarming tendency was nonetheless swept aside in Aachen through the sheer panache of the music says a lot about the high protein content of Weill's prodigious score.

**Horst Koegler**  
Stuttgart



The ensemble swelters. Photo: Frank Heller

#### Upcoming Performances:

3, 14, 26 Nov.; 8, 13, 26 Dec.; 18, 31 Jan.; 9 Feb.

## Performances

### *Die Dreigroschenoper*

Stratford Festival of Canada

18 May – 2 November 2002  
(75 performances)

The production of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Stratford Festival of Canada, directed by Stephen Ouimette, is pedestrian, uninventive, and unfunny. Apart from the satisfying sounds coming from the orchestra pit (under the control of Don Horsburgh), these remarks would suffice to describe the production as a whole, were it not that it provides an instructive example of why so many productions of this work fail dismally to justify its reputation. It is now generally assumed that the reasons are intrinsic to *The Threepenny Opera*, having to do with outdated politics and dotty theory, summed up in the words of one Toronto critic: “Limited appeal is to be expected when Marxism and audience alienation are part of your stock-in-trade.”

Like a run-down house in a once-fashionable but outmoded neighborhood, *The Threepenny Opera* is seen as full of potential, but needing much improvement. The answer at Stratford, and nearly everywhere else, is to subject this unique, messy, biting, cheeky hybrid to a process you could call genrefication. Weill and Brecht’s collaboration is renovated to become more up-market (fulfilling the audience’s expectation raised by high ticket prices), subscribing through the Broadway Clause to the tenets of the genre currently known as “music theater.” Stratford makes the classification clear in its program: along with *My Fair Lady*, *The Threepenny Opera* is a “summer musical.” Any work so genrefied has a number of clearly recognizable semiotic indicators.

The first essential is that the performers be thoroughly body-miked. Not only does this prove that the theater can afford the latest expensive technology, but it allows actors with inadequate or non-existent voices to be heard—deafeningly—by all. Tom McCamus, Stratford’s Macheath, has, I would guess, the natural vocal range for Sarastro and seems to deliver most of his solos two octaves lower than written. This



Polly (Diana Coatsworth), Macheath behind bars (Tom McCamus), and Lucy (Blythe Wilson).

Photo: V. Tony Hauser

makes for some peculiar sounds in ensemble numbers, such as the farewell duet with Polly or the “Tango Ballad.” But because this voice can’t handle Mackie’s operatic tenor outburst in the finale—“gerettet!” (“retrievèd!”)—McCamus lip-syncs to another singer, whose contribution is unashamedly acknowledged in the program. This virtual performance might have been profitably applied to all Macheath’s singing.

Body mikes pose other dangerous temptations for performers. Effects once possible only in an echoing bathroom are suddenly available to all. In the Stratford production few of the performers can resist the temptation to belt out every number as if competing with Barbra Streisand, with the result that Weill’s delicate, considerate orchestrations, created with singing actors in mind, are frequently drowned by the amplified din. The mike is the death of *pianissimo*.

In Blitzstein’s version, used at Stratford, the “Barbara Song” is allocated to Lucy Brown (Blythe Wilson) who for some reason is dressed all in black as a sort of Victorian dominatrix, complete with whip. Wilson begins loudly and with each repeat of the chorus becomes louder still, to climax with Ethel Merman-proportion belting. Here again, we can see further telling “music theater” characteristics in action. As the singing becomes louder, the vibrato (signifying sincerity) becomes more pronounced (the result of strain). First the articulation and then the meaning of the

words is engulfed by noise and wobble, and finally an overpowering but generalized emotion covers all. What seems to matter in the end is that the singer shows through her enormous straining effort how much she is prepared to sacrifice for our sake (we have paid premium prices), by being willing to tear her passions and her vocal cords to tatters. She has, as they say, “made the song her own.” It is about *her*. Not Barbara, but Barbra.

Naturally enough such belting sets up a competitive atmosphere, not least because the audience responds as programmed with loud applause. So for reasons that have nothing to do with meaning, or with the show, everyone in the cast seems to be vociferously angry with everyone else as they strive to establish their authority through volume in the series of “numbers.” The amplification also has consequences for the spoken dialogue, which is generally treated as something that links the musical numbers, a necessary interruption to get on with the plot. Thus, as in *opéra comique*, the spoken words are delivered in the stilted, elevated manner considered appropriate for a musical.

Musicals, of course, must have dancing. Since *The Threepenny Opera* provides few opportunities, Ouimette interpolates them in suitable numbers, such as Peachum’s “Useless Song,” where Peter Donaldson (one of the few to attempt a subtle performance) does a soft-shoe shuffle while the chorus accompanies him with a tap-dance number, manipulating the prop shoes of the beggars. Macheath’s “Ballad of the Easy Life” is “conducted” by many disembodied white gloves, perhaps to distract us from trying to decipher the singer’s incomprehensible words.

Nothing much can be said about the text and its interpretation because “music theater” of this type is clearly about form and not content. Vibrato means sincerity; belting, passion; effort, honesty. Costumes are colorful, sets atmospheric, and music sets the mood. Here and there the subversive potential of *Threepenny Opera* is hinted at, and gets an immediate response. Macheath’s “What is a picklock to stocks and bonds? What is the robbing of a bank to the founding of a bank?” got an enthusiastic round of post-Enron applause. It was the only moment of real meaning which this otherwise vacuous performance might have explored further.

## Music

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### *The Firebrand of Florence*

Kurt Weill Edition, Series I, Volume 18  
 Edited by Joel Galand

New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; Miami: European-American Music Corp., 2002  
 ISBN: 0-913574-62-7

In the spring of 1944, Kurt Weill embarked on a fresh exploration of “the enormous territory” between opera (which in a 1936 article he had declared “completely isolated from drama”) and musical comedy (“a handful of topical events surrounding a group of hit songs,” according to the same article). He had recently completed *One Touch of Venus* (1943, with S. J. Perelman and Ogden Nash), a commercial success as close to the latter type as anything he ever wrote. Now the search drew him toward “my first Broadway Opera,” imagined as “an entirely new combination of first-class writing, music, singing, and acting.” Weill’s hopes for such a blend steered him toward operetta, where drama could be built through long sections of continuous music. Ready to tackle something whose international flavor might appeal outside the United States, he also liked the idea of a story set in the European past. His attraction, however, was not to the sentimental strain of operetta established on Broadway by the likes of Friml and Stothart’s *Rose-Marie* (1924) or Romberg’s *The New Moon* (1928). Rather, its roots lay in the musical plays of Gilbert and Sullivan, and, more directly, of Offenbach. Satire in these older works addressed the social mores of their day. For one Offenbach contemporary, texts by his librettist Meilhac deftly and agreeably captured “the manners and ways, the tics, catchwords and turns of speech of the frivolous and elegant society of the Second Empire and early Third Republic.” The same thing, writes Joel Galand, editor of *The Firebrand of Florence*, “could scarcely be said about the French aristocrats in *The New Moon* (1928).” But Weill began his new project with an awareness of operetta’s capacity for drama, emotional warmth, and topical bite.

The route to the right vehicle proved a bit bumpy. But once the decision was made to adapt Edwin Justus Mayer’s play *The Firebrand* (1924), Weill pronounced himself pleased with his collaborators. Mayer, a journalist turned playwright, struck him as “a first-class writer” as well as “an awfully nice guy—and so talented.” The lyricist, the famous Ira Gershwin, had already worked with Weill on *Lady in the Dark* (1941), a groundbreaking achievement. “He loves to do things that nobody else does,” the composer had learned, and that only he “has the technique” to pull off. As for the producer, Weill in early 1944 was describing his relationship with Max Gordon as “a real love story,” an affinity that “looks like a long marriage,” adding in a letter to Gershwin, “I never want another producer for a show.”

The honeymoon phase ended quickly, however, and geography was partly to blame. From Broadway, Weill and Gordon urged Mayer and Gershwin, both in Hollywood, to relocate to New York until the show was written, but they declined to move. Mayer’s assignment on a film with director Ernst Lubitsch dragged on long

past its original deadline, and Gershwin assumed his characteristic laggard’s pose. (As Galand puts it, Gershwin wrote Weill in March 1944 that he was, “‘in no rush to rush into anything,’ citing correspondence, taxes, dentist appointments, and poker as prior commitments.”) In the end, Weill traveled to Hollywood, where he found his collaborators short on the creative fire that burned in his own belly. On July 20, 1944, after several weeks in California, he wrote Lotte Lenya: “I must say that so far I have done about 95% of the work on the show. Last night again I had a long session with two tired old men, but I was so full of ideas and energy that they just had to come along.” This comment, perhaps exaggerated by frustration at the team’s slow progress toward a looming deadline, points to two key facts. The first is that the composer took an active part in shaping the story he would set to music. The second is the existence of the comment itself. When Weill made his temporary move to California in June, his wife and confidante Lenya stayed in New York, not joining him in Beverly Hills until September. During their separation, Weill wrote Lenya no fewer than thirty-one letters, and they have much to say about the show’s genesis. Indeed, says Galand, these letters supply more detailed information on the day-to-day “working relationship between the composer and his collaborators” than we have for any other work by Weill.

Weill returned to New York in October and finished the score in December, having started in late November to orchestrate it. Rehearsals began in late January, and in the press of time, Ted Royal, a professional arranger and Weill’s assistant, was brought in to finish the orchestration under the composer’s guidance. A Boston tryout run opened on February 23. It lasted three weeks and sparked a number of revisions. Finally, the show opened in New York’s Alvin Theater on March 22. Reviews, though mixed, were not strongly negative, but receipts declined after a brisk beginning, and on April 28, 1945, Max Gordon closed the show after only forty-three performances. Thus, a major production by an illustrious creative team failed resoundingly. (“That’s the theater,” Weill mused philosophically not long before the closing. “It wouldn’t be so much fun if it weren’t so dangerous.”) With few recordings, no hit songs among its sheet-music issues, and no more performances until the composer’s centenary year of 2000, *The Firebrand of Florence* merits Galand’s label as “one of Weill’s most obscure works.”

What went wrong? Thanks to the critical edition prepared for the Kurt Weill Edition by Professor Galand, who teaches music theory at the University of Rochester, musicians and scholars may now ponder that question. They are likely to do so with a sense of regret that grows as the veil of obscurity is lifted. For Galand’s excellent, deeply researched introductory essay reveals how, for all its strengths—and critic Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune*, for one, proclaimed the *Firebrand* an “eminently satisfying” alternative to Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* (1943), which was then sweeping all before it on the Broadway stage—Weill’s hoped-for “new combination of first-class writing, music, singing, and acting” turned into “one of the great missed opportunities” of his career.

On the writing front, Mayer’s story, set in the city of Florence in 1535 and featuring sculptor Benvenuto Cellini as its hero, lost the edge that had made it an onstage hit two decades earlier. In *The Firebrand* (1924), Mayer had portrayed Cellini as a dashing but callous womanizer, contradicting not only “the sentimental conventions of period swashbucklers” but “the entire Romantic concept of genius.” In *The Firebrand of Florence*, however, Cellini is more like a conventional romantic hero who, in the end, can face the future

only with his favorite model, the beautiful Angela, at his side. Several scenarios were contemplated for the show's last scene. In one that Weill favored, Cellini, unbound by the claims of normal human decency, is acquitted after an extended Florentine trial scene and then abandons Angela. Max Gordon's insistence on a final production number in the French royal court at Fontainebleau prevailed, however, and *Firebrand* ends there with a standard romantic pairing-off.

Then there was the matter of the show's ambiance. In May 1944, Weill wrote Gershwin that he was imagining "an intimate operetta based on charm, humor and warmth." Gordon, though, had other ideas. The director he hired, John Murray Anderson, was a specialist in lavish revues. *The Firebrand of Florence* was performed by a cast of sixty-two, the largest of Weill's theatrical career (as was the expenditure of \$225,000, almost \$100,000 more than *Lady in the Dark* and its costly stage machinery)—proof, Galand thinks, that Gordon from the beginning "had in mind a grand song-and-dance extravaganza." As for the performers, the composer had hoped to find "good singing actors, without big names so that we can send out a second company in case of a success." That hope went unrealized, writes Galand, because Max Gordon failed to assemble "a top-flight cast for *Firebrand*; all four principals were problematic." (Since one of the four was Lenya, for whom the composer had lobbied hard, and whose portrayal of the second female lead got a chilly critical reception, Weill was partly responsible.) Cellini and Angela were played by a young baritone and soprano who never again appeared in a Broadway show; and the role of Alessandro de' Medici, Duke of Florence, was taken by a British actor willing to work for half the salary demanded by the preferred candidate.

Galand does not deny Weill's claim that "the show was killed by production." Yet he also endorses the composer's admission that, whatever the flaws of his collaborators, his own "lack of toughness" contributed to the flop. *Firebrand*, Galand writes, "suffered from a fatal wavering" as "'intimate' operetta was swamped by lavish spectacle." Weill himself proved "uncertain about which tone to adopt, vacillating time and again over the proper characterization of Cellini and the best way to end the second act." Indeed, the show's last twenty minutes "contain only reprises and potpourri ballet movements, mostly in Royal's arrangements." Galand takes this fact as evidence that "Weill's involvement decreased as the operetta approached completion." Once the composer's ideas for "a proper operetta finale" were rejected, "he largely washed his hands of the Fontainebleau production number that had been imposed upon him."

Now that Weill's operetta has been rescued from obscurity, can it be staged? Galand believes that "a revival of *Firebrand* in anything like its original form would be impossible." Yet he is far from dismissive of the score which, using "a classic operetta orchestra: no saxophones, no reed books, and a large string section," achieved its own unique sound. Moreover, he finds particular "musical inventiveness and formal breadth" in the long opening scene that Weill and Gershwin devised—Florentines gather to watch the execution of Cellini, who at the last moment avoids the hangman's noose—and the Finaletto of Act I, where an ensemble vocalizes the emotions of lovers in conflict. The work's virtues, he testifies, were brought to life in recent Vienna and London concert performances that showed "irony and wit in tone, verve in presentation, and star power in casting."

The excellence of Joel Galand's edition reflects the synchrony of (1) an abundantly generous publishing format, (2) editorial policies

tailored to fit the genre and work being edited, and (3) an editor superbly qualified for his task. The score fills more than 900 large-format pages (10.5 x 14.75 inches) in two volumes, the essay more than 40, and the *Critical Report*, published in a third, smaller volume (8.5 x 11), devotes 112 pages to the sources and how they are used in the edition. In physical production as well as intellectual effort, the Kurt Weill Edition is clearly not a cost-cutting enterprise. (On my bathroom scale, the whole package weighs in at about twenty pounds.)

Musical scholarship, privileging the composer as the central creative force in works involving music, is inclined to treat the composer's holograph score as the court of last resort in a critical edition of a musical work. Yet a Broadway show is a commercial collaboration that tends to limit the composer's artistic control. Galand's edition of *The Firebrand of Florence* breaks new scholarly ground by handling its sources with a full awareness of those limits. Broadway shows, we must remember, were collaborations not only among their authors, performers, and business personnel but also between them and the audience—as registered, for example, in the out-of-town tryout run. In the day of *The Firebrand*, shows slated for Broadway were first sent "on the road," not only to remove production and performance glitches but to test audience reaction. A show's "final" form, arrived at in dialogue with customer response, might therefore depart considerably from the composer's holograph, compiled before rehearsals began.

With that in mind, Weill Edition guidelines describe a musical theater work as a composition whose identity—at least up to a point—remains "dynamic," "mutable," and linked to "production and reception history." How is a scholar to deal with that fluidity while still preparing an edition "both critical and performable?" The answer lies in a principle that sets the editorial bar high: the editor must formulate a distinction between "the work" itself and the ways it may have been adjusted and altered for particular theatrical events. That distinction, which may itself be hard to draw, emerges from and guides the editor's use of sources to establish a boundary between the "event" and the musical work represented in the edition.

Sources for *Firebrand* are voluminous, including "sketches, drafts, [and] holograph piano-vocal scores for all of the vocal numbers, holograph piano and short scores for most of the instrumental numbers, the holograph full score with Royal's contributions, and three versions of the script." Among other performance materials are: "several marked copies of the rehearsal score and choral parts that copyists prepared from Weill's holograph piano-vocal score," a complete set of original orchestra parts, and, thanks to scholarly effort, the reconstructed rehearsal score of the show's conductor Maurice Abravanel, in which "interpolated piano versions of otherwise missing pages" may be found. Such richness is welcome, to be sure, but the question of how to use all these sources tests the scholarly skills and the artistry of the editor.

Galand's essay addresses that question and a good deal more in seven major sections: I. Editing a Broadway Operetta; II. Weill, Broadway, and Operetta in the 1940s; III. Genesis and Production (i. The Weill-Gershwin-Mayer Collaboration; ii. Casting and Production); IV. Critical Reception; V. Music and Lyrics; VI. Editorial Challenges and Solutions (i. Privileging Sources; ii. Case Studies); VII. A Future for *Firebrand*. Each of these subjects is addressed expertly and in detail, and Section V is a bonus: the editor's knowledgeable, critical, and often detailed discussion of the work itself as a dramatic entity, a theatrical presentation, and a musical composition.



Galand's discussion of editorial procedures (Section VI) is tied to the Critical Report, introducing and summarizing its thorniest sections. The explanation here of how sources are privileged brings clarity to a complicated subject. Because no one source is complete enough to be the "principal source" on which most scholarly editions are based, a hierarchy has been devised. "The holograph full score, incorporating Royal's scores as amended by Weill, has served as the privileged source for most dimensions of the edition score," Galand reports, "while the holograph vocal score has been privileged for vocal parts and text underlay." To privilege a source, he explains, is to consult that source first, and to follow what it says unless another source contradicts it. When a contradiction is found, the editor must choose, guided by the source hierarchy's extension to lower steps—i.e., for most things, the orchestra parts; for vocal parts, Abravanel's rehearsal score; for sung texts, a particular typescript of the lyrics; and for spoken texts, a particular version of the libretto.

Joel Galand's essay and editorial work inspire confidence in his artistic decision-making—a good thing, as it turns out, for Weill's doubts about the end of *Firebrand* caused him to disengage himself from the score for that portion, leaving its completion to Royal. An editor tackling this work must do more than choose among alternatives: a certain amount of reconstruction is required. The main text of this edition, Galand writes, "endeavors to transmit . . . a version of the work that could actually have been performed—in this case during the Boston run." In his reconstruction, much of the concluding dialogue is spoken over instrumental music. How closely the coordination between the two matches what was actually performed on the Colonial Theater stage in 1945 cannot be known. But in this reader's view, Galand's understanding of Weill and his milieu, his knowledge of *Firebrand* and command of its sources, and the scrupulous musicality underlying this edition make him the ideal agent for a task that dramatizes a scholarly editor's need for skill and imagination beyond the rigorous, fact-finding mentality that is fundamental to the endeavor in the first place.

Indeed, so suitable are the Weill Edition's guidelines and so well does *The Firebrand of Florence* realize the promise behind them that it is hard to imagine a better model—or at least a starting point—for show music editions of the future.

**Richard Crawford**  
University of Michigan

## Recordings

### *This Is New*

Dee Dee Bridgewater, vocalist

*Verve 016 884-2*

We all have our favorite renditions of Weill songs by the great ladies of jazz—Ella Fitzgerald's legendary "Mack the Knife," Billie Holiday's "Speak Low," Sarah Vaughan's "September Song"—but a startling fact greets us on the opening page of the liner notes to Dee Dee Bridgewater's new, lavishly produced all-Weill CD: until now, no major jazz singer has ever recorded a full album of Weill. In many ways, Bridgewater's album (which she produced herself) has the perfect title: *This Is New*.

On the new Verve release, Bridgewater is at the height of her considerable powers, both vocally and as an interpreter of lyrics. "Making this album meant sitting down and finding the spirit of each lyric and then finding how I could communicate to an audience what the song said to me," commented Bridgewater. She comes through with flying colors.

For more than an hour, Bridgewater excels as a great communicator, caressing every vocal line and coloring each word with a rich palette. Backed by a superb, world music-influenced band assembled by drummer André Ceccarelli, she delivers eleven Weill tunes (and then some). With a voice which can modulate from straight tone into a delicate vibrato, and scat with the best of them, she seems to be channeling the best of both Vaughan and Fitzgerald.

"Lost in the Stars" is sweet and meditative, highlighted by a saxophone solo by Daniele Scannapieco. In "My Ship," Bridgewater proves she can hold her own with the great interpreters of this song, offering a delicate, bewitching rendition. A feisty, mambo version of "Alabama Song" includes an extended bit of scat singing (but one wonders why no one pointed out to her that the correct lyric is "Oh, show us the way to the next pretty boy," not "little boy"). "Speak Low" is performed as a samba, with finely spun, gossamer high notes. A funk-infused "September Song" provides a surprising approach, and "This is New" is sassy, punctuated with bongos. Bridgewater relishes every word of an up-tempo "I'm a Stranger Here Myself" and makes a meal of "The Saga of Jenny" with

shifting tempos and styles for each of the verses, and a "sock it" finish.

While there is not a weak moment on the CD, three songs stand out. This may be the most sensual "Youkali" you will ever hear, delivered in perfect French and accompanied by Juan José Mosalini on bandoneon. Here, Bridgewater employs a huskier timbre and long, elegant vocal line. Ten minutes might seem a bit long for "Bilbao Song," but after an extended flamenco introduction by Louis Winsberg on guitar and Minino Garay on percussion, Bridgewater lavishes sultry details on Michael Feingold's translation, and you wish the song would go on even longer. A ravishing rendition of "Here I'll Stay" backed by only guitar and percussion may be the most gorgeous six minutes of recorded music this year.

But don't be so quick to pop in another disc! After a minute of silence at the end of the last track, Bridgewater gives us a surprise, bubbly nightcap: a spontaneous and apparently unrehearsed "Mack the Knife," ranging from mock "little-girl" voice to overblown operatic diva. She repeatedly goes up on the words (or invents some of her own), scats, and does her imitation of a trombone in this romp of a jam session which ends with a cascade of laughter.

Bridgewater has been touring in support of the album, and her sold-out appearance on 5 May at Vienna's Konzerthaus found her in fine form—funny, charming, and dynamic. Backed by the same octet as on the album, she looked stunning and sexy in a red gown and introduced her program as featuring songs by "one of the most brilliant composers of our time." In her between-numbers patter, she revealed that none other than Chick Corea gave her the idea to sing "This is New" as a mambo. She introduced "Lost in the Stars" as having a particular "message relevant to today," and, in a mock French accent, explained that "Youkali is a place where we can go where is no Le Pen maybe," referring to the elections which took place that day in France. Bridgewater danced, camped, and vamped while her exuberant band members took solos which included improvised quotes from the theme to "Mission Impossible" in "Alabama Song" and Chopin's "Funeral March" in "The Saga of Jenny." After holding the audience rapt for two and a half hours, she announced, "That's all the Weill we've learned so far, but I think it's a good beginning." It is indeed, and we anxiously await her further exploration of Weill's magic.

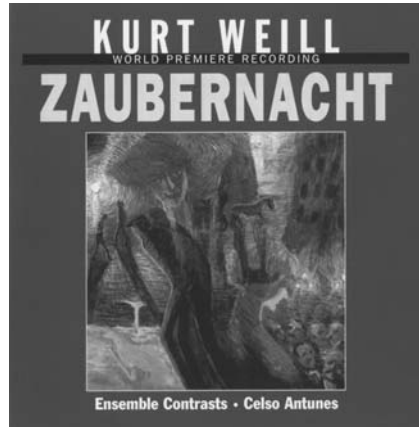
**Larry L. Lash**  
Vienna

## Recordings

### *Zaubernacht*

Ensemble Contrasts  
Celso Antunes, conductor

*Capriccio WDR 67 011*



Posthumous reconstructions of works left in a less than obviously “final” state by their creators serve as a playground for the exercise of traditional obsessions about authenticity and authority. Such re-creations excite polarized reactions: those thrilling to the one extra work from the pen of the master versus those appalled at the encroachment on the purity of the master’s true oeuvre. Meirion Bowen’s laudable new orchestration of Kurt Weill’s early composition *Zaubernacht* (1922) may bear the tacit burden of this polarization. However, the realization of his work in the form of an excellent new recording should have an agreeably demagnetizing effect.

Bowen’s orchestration is the basis for the recently released recording by Ensemble Contrasts Köln, conducted by Celso Antunes. Soprano Ingrid Schmithüsen is featured prominently on the cover as well, although the hour-long *Zaubernacht* offers only a cameo appearance for the vocalist. That turns out to be a shame in this instance. Schmithüsen sings the brief “Lied der Fee” at the opening of the work with such quiet verve that one wishes she could stick around a little longer. The instrumentalists, who hold center stage throughout, likewise impress, with solid ensemble playing and accurate intonation. They bear up well under the unblinkingly close miking favored by the recording’s producer, an approach that pays off nicely in a warm and present sound where the alternative could easily have been cold asphyxiation.

Antunes provides solid leadership, setting convincing, evocative tempos and keeping his ensemble carefully balanced. The variety of his choices in articulation add an important dimension. Though Bowen is more careful than Weill usually was to notate articulation consistently, he certainly does not overmark his score. The one general criticism that could be voiced about the interpretation involves dynamics,

which hover in a range too narrow for a work depending so heavily on pantomime.

Performance and orchestration together succeed in revealing that *Zaubernacht* was an early work only in the sense of coming early in Weill’s working life. Like other of his stage works of this period (most notably *Der Protagonist*), it confirms that he was born in at least mid-career as a theater composer. He just had to wait for his body to grow up enough for him to write it all down. *Zaubernacht* displays his almost spooky command of gesture and timing, even if the gestures involved are of a somewhat familiar, stock character.

Bowen’s work avoids orchestrational heroics, steering a more sensibly restrained course. Throughout Weill’s career, the greatness of his orchestration lay not in Respighian flash (as enjoyable as that can be) but in the more subtle realm of unflinching “rightness”: right instrument, right register, right figuration. Since flash is actually easier to simulate, Bowen’s achievement (and likewise his disciplined avoidance) is that much more to be esteemed.

Five “Notes on the Instrumentation” in the CD booklet outline generally the editorial decisions represented in this newly orchestrated version, based on Weill’s surviving piano score with instrumental cues. Two describe decisions that are so obviously straightforward and correct that they need no further comment: the doubling of the flutist on piccolo, and the choice of percussion setup. A third, regarding the addition of clarinet to the scoring suggested in David Drew’s *Kurt Weill: A Handbook*, involves a slightly larger editorial leap, but is equally defensible. Without the presence of the clarinet as a mediating (and highly flexible) presence between the registers of bassoon and flute, the strings would have borne an overly heavy duty. With the wood-

wind role reduced to a few characteristic solos, the resulting textural invariance in such an extended work would most likely try a listener’s patience.

In the fourth note, the orchestrator explains his reliance upon the composer’s models, when available. *Quodlibet* is the primary source for these, although Weill’s characteristic self-borrowing offers assistance as well. The section marked *Etwas zögernd* is an interesting case in point. It bears out Bowen’s professed adherence to the models while demonstrating the liberties he properly takes when those models prove less appropriate than they seem. In the middle of this section lies a passage of several dozen measures lifted directly from the B Minor String Quartet. Just as suggested by the note, these bars appear identically in the new orchestration. On the other hand, the presence of the preceding and following measures in *Quodlibet* turns out to be a red herring. Therein, the forces of the orchestra allow for an equal opposition of strings against winds and brass in successive statements. Bowen wisely goes in a different direction, setting the two statements both as mixed tutti of his smaller band.

Bowen’s fifth and final note describes very briefly his actions in response to the two missing pages in Weill’s piano score. Working forward and backward respectively from either end of the gap, he is able to derive twenty-five bars from corresponding passages in *Quodlibet*. Given the fairly modest amount of missing music that can be estimated from the example of other pages of Weill’s score, only a small additional splice is necessary. Bowen chooses to add a nearly note-for-note reprise of a passage from an earlier section (*Tranquillo*). The duration and musico-dramatic weight of the complete “reconstruction” does not seem out of scale with the larger structures of which it is a part, and the interpolated passage fits harmonically into its surroundings without too jarring a disruption.

Is this reconstruction and reorchestration “authentic”? The answer depends on how one furnishes one’s playground. Better perhaps to judge the work by a more dependable standard: usefulness. By this measure, Meirion Bowen’s re-creation is to be admired. *Zaubernacht*, as represented by this new score, is ready to be realized on the working stage.

Edward Harsh  
New York City

## Recordings

### *String Quartet in B minor* *String Quartet, op. 8*

Leipziger Streichquartett

MDG 307 1071-2

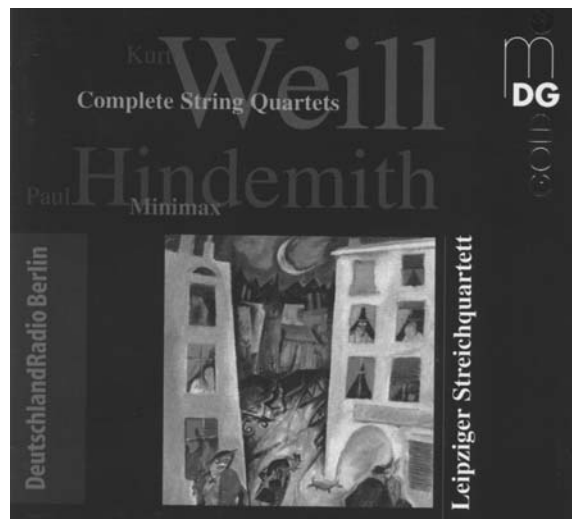
A new recording by the Leipziger Streichquartett offers some lesser-known chamber music of the early 1920s, three string quartets by two young composers, Weill's B minor (1918) and op. 8 (1923/24), and Paul Hindemith's humorous *Minimax: "Repertorium for Military Music"* (1923) which premiered at the Donaueschingen Festival in 1923, performed by the Hindemith-Amar-Quartett. While the militaristic satire *Minimax*, punning on a fire extinguisher brand and the nicknames of Max Prinz zu Fürstenberg (Maxi) and his wife Wilhelmine (Mini), already shows Hindemith as a seasoned writer of chamber music (and mass producer thereof), Weill's string quartets still have the air of discovery. Mostly composed during Weill's studies with Humperdinck at the Berlin Musikhochschule, the B minor quartet appears to be a true *Jugendwerk* much in the same way as the early Mendelssohn quartets, op. 12 and 13. Characteristic of a youthful work are an unmistakable relation to classical models, such as the allusion to Mozartean themes in the first movement, and an over-ambitious approach, the tendency to "overload" individual movements, especially the first. At the same time, though, Weill displays a surprising feel for aesthetic ambivalences of early 1920s' modernity, with references to a variety of "addressees" such as the Mahlerian idiom in the scherzo (a typical "Mahler folk sound") or the Regeresque idiom in the contemplative fugue finale (compare, for instance, the A major-6/8-Mozart *gestus* of K. 331, appearing almost verbatim, strongly suggesting Reger's *Mozart Variations*, op. 132, as a model for the first and last

movement). The B minor quartet's harmonic language, on the whole, refrains from forced late-romantic *Apotheose* despite some scattered Straussian reminiscences, instead favoring an almost post-expressionist language. This language is appropriately underscored by the transparent playing of the Leipziger Streichquartett (all the more remarkable considering the "audiophile" label's policy, which forbids "any sort of sound-modifying manipulation with reverberation, sound filters, or limiters"). The ensemble avoids a late-romantic sound orgy and focuses adequately on the dialogue between individual parts. The beginning of the third movement, *Langsam und innig* [slow and contemplative] is especially well played, for instance, with a well-balanced conversation between first violin and viola. The ensemble also succeeds in countering some of the B minor quartet's youthful clumsiness, such as the decidedly "academic" elements in the fugue finale (see, for instance, the slightly rigid *stretto* in mm. 244ff.), whose genesis is revealed in part by a postcard written from Weill to his brother Hans on 21 June 1918: "In my piano lessons I am playing extremely interesting suites by Bach, very good for the fingers. The score playing makes slow progress; now I've worked my way up to Beethoven symphonies. Following Bing's advice, my study of counterpoint will simply consist of writing a fugue as the last movement of the string quartet."

Four years later, under Busoni's tutelage, Weill composed his second and last string quartet. The work received an opus number (op. 8), which marked it as a major work, and Universal Edition published it

shortly after the premiere at the Frankfurt Chamber Music Festival for New Music in June 1923, where it was performed by the aforementioned Amar-Quartett. Responding to a suggestion from Busoni, Weill reduced the work from four to three movements, giving the work a more pronounced profile and proclaiming a big leap in the creative development of the young composer still in his early twenties. At the risk of abandoning musico-historical common sense altogether, I can't help hearing this piece, in a peculiar way, as a spiritual counterpart to Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* (1926), as "meta-personal" music, very much in the sense of Busoni's neoclassicality, something that is visibly reflected in the provenance of the movements' models. Aside from the motoric Scherzo, it is particularly the Choralphantasie which, as a "hard-working" fugal movement, embodies Busoni's historicizing aesthetic in an exemplary fashion. Respecting the work's more intense nature, when compared to the B minor quartet, the Leipziger Streichquartett takes a more gripping, edgy approach that still maintains a balance between the many rhapsodic passages within individual movements. Thus their playing reflects the tension that is built into the Choralphantasie between the "running" passage in mm. 24ff. (restless "urban music" which would have done honor to Shostakovich), and the "ethereal" *Recitativo* beginning in m. 57, which differs considerably in its compositional texture. Beyond the diversity within individual movements, the ensemble also manages to do justice to the work's underlying principle of "a one-movement piece in three movements" without sacrificing the desired tension.

All in all, this successful recording, complemented by a well-crafted booklet, can be highly recommended. It adds another piece to the puzzle of the quartet genre in the first third of the twentieth century. Furthermore, it offers a good view of Weill as a composer of instrumental music (even though the composer seems to foreshadow his later theater works with the measured opening, *Sostenuto, con molta espressione*, of the first movement, *Introduktion*, a homophonic, ritardando passage that could easily pass for a tongue-in-cheek interlude in the *Dreigroschenoper*).



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