The Chazzan's Son: Kurt Weill
Musical Social-Activist & Citizen of the World

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Kurt Weill's story is one where he began his life as part of a religious family, and in his late teen years left Judaism for the world of secular music; ultimately in the course of his short 50 years of life, he returned to his faith. My personal story is linked with his through my father's family. My father was born in Munich in 1931; his family was exceedingly lucky to have escaped in 1932, having had a very early view into what Hitler was planning. They lived only a few blocks from Hitler in Munich in the years when he rose to power. The Bachs of Munich were blessed with the outsider's perspective of my American grandmother Florence Rosenfeld Bach who had been raised in Hartford, CT, but had moved to Munich to start a family with my grandfather Edmund. Like Weill, my father came to America, ultimately to escape persecution and, along with his family, sought a secular life, becoming a successful businessman and an accomplished pianist specializing in the American Songbook. I picked up where my dad left off, beginning with a love of Berlin, Rodgers, Fields, Bernstein, Weill and other Jewish American composers. After 40 years of secular life and secular music, I entered Cantorial School and the world of sacred Jewish music. This thesis represents my own kind of "return" to the secular, but with a revitalized understanding of just how linked--how filled with meaningful surprises, and not at all mutually exclusive--the circles of the secular and the sacred are.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout the millennia, no matter the city, country or continent, Jewish collective history is repeatedly filled with creative responses to the surrounding foreign cultures in which the Jewish people have found themselves. By default, living as a Jew has meant integrating multiple national, ethnic and religious identities. Musically, this has translated into a broad spectrum of artistic developments over time--early on for example, we saw the integration of rhythmical Arabic melodies with Hebrew poetry, and later in the mid-1800s the setting of Jewish liturgy to German style popular folk-tunes. Artists who have absorbed and synthesized their art have offered the larger world a rich stable of culture--music that mirrors both their assimilated and original experience.

In the modern era, Jews blend their Jewishness with a given National arena in which Jews live, and the specific details of Jewish identity transform across time and place. Thus, they create unique artistic expressions. Yet, there is something familiar in the heart of the Jewish spirit--in the sounds, stories and ethics--that remains, even when religiosity is no longer a daily common bond. In commenting on this seemingly innate Jewish capability, honed over the centuries in different locations throughout the world, Moritz Heimann (1868-1925), chief editor of the S. Fischer Publishing house, which was founded in 1886 with the precise mission of advancing new, modern ideas and concepts while simultaneously safeguarding classical texts said, "It is not unnatural for a body to have an orbit with two centers. Several comets do it and so do many planets."[1] The key factor for those of us studying these "orbits" retrospectively is to look at them side by side, in their totality. This paper explores what Jewish identity has meant in the life of a particular Jewish-German

[1] *Jews in Berlin*, ed. Andreas Nachama, Julius H. Schoeps and Hermann Simon, trans. Michael S. Cullen and Allison Brown (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, Berlin, 2002), 120.

composer, and how Jewish themes, values, ideals, characteristics and musical motifs manifest themselves in his creative expression over time, influenced by different religious and secular influences, or orbits.

The vehicle for this study is an exploration of the life and music of Kurt Weill (1900-1950) and his father, Chazzan Albert Weill (1873-1950). Father and son Weill share a commonality: each offers a different vignette of modernity through their artistic contributions which helped shape their new modern worlds---in Dessau, Berlin and America. Their creative work contains a level of Judaic awareness that reflects the creators' Jewish identity and journey at different points in their respective lives. No matter the locale, different forms of Jewishness are expressed in each of their work and yield a corpus of music infused with Jewish essence. Whether latent or conscious, the specifics--the minor keys and expressive devices, the themes of social justice, hopefulness, and other matters that speak to our humanity--are equally relevant to the whole fertile Jewish spirit that unites their work.

In fact, the "Jewish experience"[2] is actually the common characteristic in forming Jewish identity in music. By the very nature of what identity is, we are discussing a dynamic, something that is not "…static but…multiple and fluid"[3] and that encompasses many dimensions. Musicologist Klara Morizc points to a collection of essays in her work on Jewish identity in the 20th Century where it is noted that existing as a Jew at any given point in history means to live with a hybrid set of identities, rather than with one sole label. Of course, any particular set of identities carries with it it's own collective experience and particular psyche. Again, specific musical traits like march rhythms and melodic lines that fluctuate between major and minor are not necessarily at issue here, as these features also appear in the work of non-Jewish composers. Rather, music that reflects

[2] Klara Moricz, *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianism in Twentieth-Century Music* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2008), 2.
[3] Ibid.

Jewishness has a certain quality or soul that reflects less the individual composer and more "…the total historical experience of the community, physical and spiritual to which the artist belongs, whether he identifies with it consciously or not."[4] For each artist who encounters his own version of modernity, and even for those who have been eager to completely leave their Jewish identity behind, there can still be found a Jewish reference in their music.

Modernity for Jews can be seen as having the impulse to assimilate and give rise to different expressions of Jewishness. Historians, musicologists and other academics seem to agree that there are three basic, yet conflicting, types of Jewish identity that run through history. As a father-son pair, Albert and Kurt Weill share in these elements. These are: 1) living actively as traditional Jews 2) engaging in traditional life but with some innovation and 3) favoring a more socially and politically-oriented agenda such that one's Judaism is no longer a core organizing factor in their lives.[5] Looking through the lens of these categories provides insight into the new world that immigrants faced, as well as the character of the old world that was left behind.

In the same vein, author Jonathan Sarna identifies three very different genres of immigrant Jew in America in the early 1900s--"the learned and pious Jew… who…tried to transplant their Eastern European practices and institutions to the new world…the hustler [who] came to America to earn his fortune–in Yiddish 'the shvister' who worried less about Judaism than about themselves…[and]…the free-thinking radical"[6], who had a hardened political ideology even back in Europe, having been raised under tyrannical regimes in the old country. This last category

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[4] Ibid., 1.

[5] Musicologist Irene Heskes is one that has termed these categories as "…[a] born into and living within its [Judaism's] orbit, [b] a badge thrust upon one by outsiders and worn in various ways, and [c] a personal cause taken up and integrated onto one's life." *Passport to Jewish Music* (p. 264).

[6] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 158.

abandoned Judaism and "…advocated far-reaching social, political, and economic changes and promised to transform all aspects of life for the better."[7]

Sarna acknowledges that most immigrants had a mixture of each of these three categories. While focused on modern American Judaism in the context of the United States, Sarna's categorization is relevant to European modernization and provides a bridge back to progressive Jewish life in Europe in the 1800s, which will be the topic of Chapter 2 in this paper, entitled "Berlin". Sarna's descriptions are also a framework in which to explore the sociological and musical picture that emerged as immigrants faced their new lives, primarily in America (but also pertinent in modern Europe), which is the subject of Chapters 2 through 5. Sarna points out that each person was attempting to find the "…balance between their ancient faith, their economic aspirations, and their utopian ideologies–a half way covenant between tradition and change."[8]

By way of these categories, we have a specific lens through which we can track musical change and Jewish identity in the 19th and into the 20th Century. This paper examines the generational accomplishments and innovations of a family of musicians. Their creative ingenuity was encased in a certain unconscious reflection of their shared common history. Chazzan Weill was part of the continuum of music synagogue innovation in Jewish-Germany while his son Kurt's pacifist nature fueled the political agenda he was passionate about, inspiring his compositions both while in Europe and America, many of which center around political suppression and daring to live for freedom. In Europe, his work was more abstract and expressionistic, while in America Weill wrote for Broadway and also composed large pageantry pieces, one of which was performed by 400 Cantors and Rabbis at Madison Square Garden in 1943 to protest the Holocaust.

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 159.

We return to the three categories of immigrant Jew that Jonathan Sarna suggests, and note that Chazzan Weill and his son Kurt share nuances of all three in the modern manifestations of their lives and music. While the two men could not have been more different, to quote musicologist Klara Moricz whose work on Russian Jewish music directly applies here, "…there is something that unites the music of…Jewish composers, however dissimilar their styles and methods."[9] This is certainly the case for Albert and Kurt Weill.

A strong Jewish spirit and experience is the common denominator that unites generation to generation of Jewish musicians, whether in the religious or secular worlds, no matter the style of music. By examining encounters with modernity of a family of Jewish musicians in the late 19th century and the century that followed, in this paper, I will provide a particular study of the meaning of change as marked by family generations as a rich dimension by which to examine the pace of societal, religious and musical change in the 19th and 20th centuries. Other students and scholars have shown the pure strength of their belief in the existence of an ineffable sense of Jewish spirit that both unites and pervades the music of Jewish composers from different styles, genres and backgrounds throughout our history. As one who shares in the conviction that there is a Jewishly pervasive link that exists throughout generations of our music, no matter the variances through different phases of history, it is my intention to go further into this topic, first by gaining an understanding of the early years of Kurt Weill, and then studying his specific modern encounter and where it crosses with his Jewish awareness.

By looking at the Weill family at its specific historical junctures, I will examine the impact of living with multiple identities--national, ethnic, religious--both on the composers themselves as well as via their musical legacy. I hope that through a study of the composers' lives, locales, and music

[9] Moricz, 5.

to discover how their Jewish past infused their sense of personal and musical identity and how they negotiated their own identities and conflicts in their modern lives. Ultimately I will address how specific composers connected the inherent contradictions of their country's particular musical nationalism with the unabated strength of their Jewish heritage. As a complement to this, I will also consider the affect that their work had on the modern cultures in which they lived. By looking first at the musical, intellectual and cultural foundations that Chazzan Weill set up for his son, my study will include an examination of the different degrees to which his background influenced his life and music, the musical links we can find to their past and how this father-son pair is a vignette of the modern experience to which they belong.

Chapter 2

In the last quarter of the 19th Century and first part of the 20th Century (1900-1914), Berlin is an example of a holistic Jewish society that embodies growth and its own enlivened musical story. What makes Berlin particularly intriguing is that it was the prime example of a Western city where Jews were quickly getting up to speed with German culture, succeeding for the most part. Almost as rapidly as they rose, they faced rapid anti-semitism. Therefore, it serves in this paper as a fitting community through which to discuss 1) degrees of secular influence upon Berlin's Jewish community, and 2) how Jewish influence and identity was retained musically and sociologically as modern life continued to evolve in this religiously, culturally and ideologically complex non-Jewish city. In a discussion of how to analyze and interpret what makes Jewish music, author Alexander Ringer turns away from content, context and specific material and focuses on intonation, or in other words a quality that reflects "not merely the individual psyche but the total historical experience of the community, physical and spiritual, to which the artist belongs, whether he identifies with it consciously or not."[23]

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the Jewishness Ringer refers to, which is at our communal historical core in Berlin. This can be reached through studying the social, religious and cultural dynamics that modern Western European Jews experienced in Berlin during this historical period that bridged the old with the new, the religious with the secular.

Berlin, Germany is a representative setting--a model locale--for new Jewish conversations with modern life that were rapidly occurring throughout Western Europe at this time. Studying Berlin puts in context some of the issues of modernity and adaptation that Chazzanim, Synagogue

[23] Moricz, 1.

musicians and some secular composers encountered in the mid- to late-19th century. Finally, an examination of Berlin will also set the precise geographical location which, in chapters 3 through 5 of this paper, I will more closely investigate, vis-à-vis the lives and music of Chazzan Albert Weill (Dessau) and his son, Kurt Weill (Dessau, Berlin and America).

To begin, day-to-day life in Jewish Berlin in the second half of the 19th century occurred in a culture in which Jews, for the most part, could live in cooperation with the non-Jews surrounding them. In these bright, promising decades, Berlin became a European-Jewish metropolis where Jews played an integral role in the fabric of Berlin society. In fact, much of the culture of Berlin--opera, classical music, theater, and literature—was an arena that was strongly influenced by Jewish culture. We will look at specific examples shortly.

A century earlier, the European Enlightenment led to Emancipation, with major developments in the acculturation of Jews in Europe. For the first time in Jewish European history, Jews could take part in non-Jewish society without having to either hide their Judaism or face renouncement of their faith. A bi-product of Jewish assimilation was this: as Jews were accepted into the mainstream culture of Germany, or for that matter any country in which they were living freely, they took on some of the national characteristics of the specific society they had entered. This of course has been a historical element throughout the whole course of Jewish life in the diaspora, but in this period in Berlin, many have noted that Jews became even more German than the Germans. In order to understand the context of the mid-1800s onward in Western Europe, one must view a brief snapshot of an even earlier period.

Early Berlin: Late 1600s –Mid-1800's

To underline the radical shift that was occuring for the Jews in Berlin in achieving unprecedented steps toward liberty and equality, we briefly look back to 1671; during this year, Jews were given refuge to settle in Berlin (as well as Brandenberg) by the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm. What is most important to note is that prior to this time, Jewish life and activity such as synagogue building, was banned in Berlin. In the years that followed, the opportunity for Jewish existance in Berlin developed and grew, albeit slowly. Jumping forward almost a century to 1750, of the 113,000 people living in Berlin, a minute portion--2,190--were Jews.[24] More than half were in the lower-middle class and it was only about 60 members of the total Jewish population that were wealthy enough to settle in Berlin proper, which was becoming known as a very well-to-do, albeit small, Jewish community.

By 1770, however, Jews began to gain more influence in Berlin, as they took on positions in the manufacturing and banking industries and gained increasing influence in the Berlin Judicial system. By 1786, many--although certainly not all--of the restrictions against Jews had been abolished. At the turn of the century, by 1803, about half of the founding members of the Berlin Stock Exchange were Jewish. The growth of Jewish Berlin mirrored the growth of the burgeoning city of Berlin. By the first years of the 19th Century, Jews were on the map, as it were.

Interestingly, it was the Enlightenment of the late 1700s, the major event in European history, that made it possible for Jews to achieve liberty and equality and find opportunities to grow, prosper and acculturate in flourishing European society—yet Enlightenment also presented Jewish society with its greatest challenge. While the prospect of full European citizenship provided exciting opportunities for economic success in fields like banking, selling and textile-manufacturing, that very citizenship challenged what it meant to be Jewish. As noted above, both Progressive and

[24] Andreas Nachama, Julius H. Schoeps and Hermann Simon, *Jews in Berlin*, ed., Michael S. Cullen and Allison Brown, trans. (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, Berlin, 2002), 36.

Orthodox Jews became identified Nationally as Germans; many, in the words of David Ellenson, lived a "hyphenated identity"[25]. Most however stayed true to their traditional Judaism at home, where tradition usually won out. Judaism was for the most part a private affair in Berlin at this time, and many felt that the traditional religion of Judaism needed to be reformed before Jews could successfully enter a world with equal rights for all.

A new kind of religious and National fusion necessitated a new kind of religious adaptation. As the shape of German-Jewish life began to tilt away from the Jewish sacred calendar and more toward the secular, many Jews began to make changes and innovations to their Jewish practice that would allow them to live Jewishly, but as Jewish-German citizens. Of course not all Jews could embrace the duality of this experience, but there were many that could—and the seedlings of Reform Judaism began to grow.

This early phase of Reform Judaism, not surprisingly, was a threat to the Jewish establishment. Yet, enlightened Jewish leaders like Moses Mendelssohn (born, 1729 in Dessau) who had been engaged in this particular conversation with modernity since the late 18th century, held their ground, remaining committed to an amended Judaism that could anchor Jews in a strong spiritual and communal life, but embedded in the larger German secular society. In his famous book *Jerusalem* written in 1783, Moses Mendelssohn spoke to Jews (as well as non-Jews), encouraging them to "Adopt the mores and the constitution of the land in which you have settled, but keep the faith of your fathers…."[26] There were still many that were opposed, and Mendelssohn held his ground as a leader in the Jewish Enlightenment (the *Haskala*) who promoted the reorganization and adaptation of religious law, for purposes of Reason and Rationality.

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[25] David Ellenson, "German Jewish Orthodoxy: Tradition in the Context of Culture," in *The Uses of Tradition*, 5-22 (New York, NY: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 22.

[26] Nachama, Schoeps and Simon, 45.

In the years linking the 18 th and 19th centuries, there was a fair amount of resistance to the traditional Jewish structures and laws that had always been at the core of the Jewishly separate way of life, *Halakhah*. For some who could no longer adhere to traditional Judaism in its entirety there would need to be a substitute structure to provide governance on Jewish public, private and civil life. This was problematic as throughout history *Halakhah* had "…provided the dispersed Nation of Israel with a common religious framework ensuring commonality and continuity…"[27] A key question became, what communal framework, would a changing Judaism revolve around in the first 20 years of the 19th Century and beyond?

In an increasingly secularized society, the answer to this question would come in the form of replacement institutions that provided Jewish kinship in Berlin over the course of the next century. These included the public arts like theater opera and music, volunteer organizations and associations, and even a remodeled version of Jewish family life; each of these would greatly impact the Jewish communal psyche, both at this point in time and into the future. In order to examine these micro changes, one must note the seismic shifts that were occurring on the societal and religious landscape of German-Jewish life: Jews no longer needed to apply for "protection" from the state of Germany; Jews were now serving in the German military; and the distinction between Jewish residents and those who were "foreign" in Berlin had been eliminated. In terms of religion, many Jews realized that they would need to change their own ways of being Jewish in order to come to terms with the German, non-Jewish culture around them. And so, to begin, we see the development and adaptation of Jewish Religious services--a true melding of both the more German Nationalistic and traditional tribal features of Judaism.

[27] Howard M. Sachar, "The Jew in the Modern World," in *A History of the Jews in the Modern World*, 155-174 (New York, New York: Knopf, 2005). 159

Starting in the years just before 1820, figures like David Friedlander (1750-1834) dreamt of a common culture where Jews and non-Jews would reach an understanding based on rationality as well as faith. He believed that the best way to be accepted was to begin with changes and reforms to traditional liturgy, thereby removing the challenges that certain Jewish rituals brought to assimilation. Key preachers and liturgists of the time like Leopold Zunz (1794-1886) attempted reforms only to have infighting with traditionalists ensue.

Therefore the synagogue was a setting in which evolving Jewish life occurred, especially in synagogue music. To provide a broader arc and sense of musical continuum into which the Cantors and composers in this study were placed historically, we begin by understanding that there was a clear threat to the aesthetics and soul of authentic Jewish music (consisting of mystical chanting, an underpinning of traditional Jewish humming, niggunim, etc.) juxtaposed by the clean, harmonic, decorous aesthetics of Western European music in the early 1800s which was strongly influenced, for example, by the style of J.S. Bach. The aesthetics of pre-modern Jewish worship in the early phase of the Reform movement in Germany "…were measured against the modern standards of the non-Jewish world, [and] they were found wanting"[28] One must stop and wonder: could it be that the loss of the specific sounds that historically expressed what lived in the Jewish heart and soul was the price to be paid for Jewish parity and freedom? Or perhaps the reality was that in a European culture where religion has time-and-again been played out in music (ie Bach's Mass, Verdi Requiem, et al), the ear naturally begins to attune itself to the sounds that are indigenous to home? I believe that in Germany a combination of both occurred. As the old Jewish musical aesthetic was quickly phased out in favor of non-Jewish standards that the modern German ear was becoming

[28] Lawrence A. Walton, Janet R. Hoffman, *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience* (Notre Dame: Univeristy of Notre Dame, 1992), 59.

accustomed to, Jewish musicians and composers sublimated their traditional sounds such that their music evoked a different kind of well-manicured etiquette and a specific kind of homophonic ease that was found in the music of German composers.

Specifically, in 1809 in Westphalia and then in Seesen (1810) Israel Jacobson (1768-1828) introduced changes to synagogue music that were based on Protestant religious services, including prayers in the German language used in choir and hymns. Further, rather than chanting Torah, it was read, and Jewish texts were sung to musical settings by non-Jewish composers. Jacobson moved to Berlin in 1815 and continued to hold reform Services at which point Jacob Herz Beer (1769-1825), father of composer Jakob Meyerbeer (to be mentioned shortly) also led Reform services in the style mentioned above. These advances were met with opposition until 1817 when the first systematic reforms, made by the *New Israelite Temple Association,* incorporated some of the aesthetic changes made by even earlier reformers. In addition to a sense of exacting decorum, German Classical Reform modifications included:

> …emphasis on the Saturday morning service (with implied neglect of the thrice daily prayers of the weekdays); an abbreviated liturgy and the inclusion of prayers in German; choral and organ music, the abolition of the "oriental" cantillation traditionally employed in the reading of the weekly Torah portion; and sermons in German on edificatory themes as opposed to the traditional homily (*d'rashah*)….the inclusion of German prayers and omission or modification of traditional prayers for the coming of the personal Messiah and "national" prayers that expressed the Jews' longing to be redeemed from Exile and to be restored to their ancestral homeland in Zion.[29]

[29] Sachar, 157

As these innovations were instituted, even in what would become Orthodox synagogues, most of the official Jewish community in-fighting on these issues would ultimately center less around questions of aesthetics and *minhag* (these were ultimately considered more as behavioral issues than anything else), but more on larger core questions such as the coming of the Messiah and notion of "return" to Zion. Both of these latter topics seemed irreconcilable with life in Germany; at that juncture in history, for those who were fast becoming Reform German Jews, they seemed less interested in the "magic" of *Moshiach*'s return and more involved in belonging to their new nation.

As the 1800s continued, in Reform synagogue services, German chorale singing in Protestant high-church Style was adopted, including a choir that mixed men and women as well as a regularly used organ. Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890, who was appointed Vienna's chief Cantor in 1826) and Lewis Lewandowski (1821-1894, who in 1840 became choirmaster of the Berlin synagogue) entered the scene and made their respective contributions to religious musical life. Of Sulzer's music, A.Z. Idelsohn has said, "His [Sulzer's] nature, like that of most of the Central European partially assimilated Jews, retained a German-Catholic attitude, with a gloomy subconscious leaning toward ideals and inheritance that they called Judaism."[30] Idelsohn has commented that Sulzer's work had more the tone of borrowing from imitations of Jewish music rather than directly accessing Jewish music at its core. Lewandowski took subsequent steps toward progress, and according to Idelsohn, understood that Sulzer's innovations brought a Catholic church sound that stopped the flow of emotion that was once associated with Judaism, and placed distance between the Chazzan and the congregation such that their participation in services stopped. To solve this problem, Lewandowski introduced German folk-songs to help stir the congregation's involvement in services. While well-received in most communities, according to Idelsohn, this shift had the effect of bringing a layer of

[30] A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 259.

German sentimentalism to Jewish synagogue communities which triggered further Jewish assimilation. However, Lewandowski also brought back a sense of Jewish modal singing with recitatives that provided chanting—in the appropriate nusach--for the whole year's cycle of modern Jewish ritual and prayer. As Idelsohn notes, more than any other synagogue composer of this period, Lewandoski was an artist who danced with modernity, creating and adjusting to new modern forms, while paying homage to the old.

Openings to the Secular World

By the mid-1800s, with a loosening of the traditional religious structures within the Berlin Jewish community just described, as well as growing economic success, the status of Jews had radically changed and life in mainstream German culture was for the most part flowing. In response to this progression of Jews' new standing as "true" Germans, the traditionalists mobilized and formalized "Orthodoxy" as a movement. Leaders like Samson Raphael Hirsch, who founded the Neo-Orthodoxy movement, held that *halakhic* Judaism need not be totally unresponsive to the "spirit of the times….*Torah im dererkh eretz* was his slogan: Torah, Jewish law, should be accommodated to *derekh eretz*, the general norms of the non-Jewish world."[31] This of course gave an opening for more and more Jews to pursue education in the secular world, to shed some of the customs and modes of dress that had held them in more traditional positions and to begin to assume some of the rituals and customs of the new, more modern world. For Hirsch and his followers, the major difference was that there was an insistence on utilizing Hebrew as the only language to be used for liturgy and prayer, as this was the way that "while appreciating modern secular culture, the Jews had to maintain their apartness and distinctiveness as the servants of God and the guardians of

[31] Sachar, 159.

Torah."[32] Hirsch and his followers held on to the core of Judaism's separate way of life as best they could. But not so for the reformers.

By the 2nd half of the 19th century, older traditions had shifted into a more modern Jewish practice for many. The population of Berlin Jews was growing; between the years of 1871 and 1910, the Jewish population dramatically increased–by four times–giving Jews 10% ownership of the entire Berlin population.[33] Not only had religious practice reformed but Jews had undergone a set of changing and expanding social behaviors, as their numbers grew, not the least of which was marrying out of Judaism.

However, in this time when Jewish Faith and tradition lost its power to regulate the daily religious lives of people, most Jews did not abandon Judaism as historian Marion Kaplan points out in an article on redefining Judaism in the early years of Imperial Germany. Rather, there was a fair amount of Jewish diversity in people's lives and in many cases it was preserved through a combination of Faith and Secularism. Kaplan looks at a number of characteristics and values that permeated Jewish life in a 30 year period (1860-1890)–including in Berlin. She focuses on a few factors, which we see come into play in the lives and music of the composers of popular song both in Europe and in America; a brief review of these will provide a strong sense of how Jewish Berliners adapted to modern life and set their new contexts for preserving Judaism.

To begin, urbanity (vs. rural life) and the issue of location played a large role in one's connection to Judaism. Those in the city sought a kind of anonymous cover, often losing their connection to synagogue life, while those in rural areas stayed in close connection with the Jewish calendar. While the number of synagogues (many of which included religious schools) in Berlin grew in this period,

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[32] Ibid.,150.

[33] Anthony Read and David Fisher, *Berlin Rising: Biography of a City* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 121.

the actuality was that synagogue attendance was decreasing in these years. Values and beliefs, however, were not so easily measurable. Actually, the measuring devices used to evaluate change in these years–like family life, education, the Arts, and Jewish Associations--were symptoms of the changes themselves; these are worth elucidating as they give a sociological picture of the modern lives people actually led in Berlin.

The family became a kind of substitute structure for Jewish life and was crucial in maintaining a sense of Judaism, both in and out of the home. Food, of course was a vital part of family life, and while some gave up *kashrut*, many retained it as a way of paying deference to the older generations. Jewish family life in Berlin often included "the nanny and the Christmas tree" dynamic, whereby the family sense of loyalty extended to Christian nannies and accordingly, inclusion of a Christmas tree in the house (as servants were like family, many of whom remained loyal in the Nazi years that soon would follow). These themes are of interest in this study as many are echoed in the songs of the composers this study encompasses.

In addition, education as "an entrée into middle-class respectability"[34] in itself became a secular version of religion and "synonymous with Jewishness"[35]. The notion of *Bildung*–the cultivation of an aesthetic as well as moral sensibility [seen]…in the unfolding of multiple talents and qualities within the personality"[36]–has become a kind of religion unto itself. The very Jewish notion of learning through interaction and dialogue blended with a love of secular literature, art and music, as well as theater and opera, served to create a new version of modern Jewish life. There were a number of Jewish writers in this era who were well-known and increasingly popular at the center of

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[34] Marion Kaplan, "Redefining Judaism in Imperial Germany," *Jewish Social Studies, New Series* (Indiana Univeristy Press) 9, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 1-33. p. 11.
[35] Ibid.
[36] *Becoming German, Remaining Jewish*, Vol. 2, in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: Emancipation and Acculturation, 1780-1871*, ed. Michael A. Meyer, 199-250 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), 200.

Bildung in Berlin; they borrowed from the messages and teachings of earlier writers like Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) known for his sense of religious tolerance and sound ethical stance, as well as Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) who had a "strong humanitarian vision…[and] enthusiasm for freedom and human dignity …idealism and high-minded morality"[37] would last well beyond their life-spans and would infuse into modern Jewish sensibility into the next century.

By the mid-1800s, Jews had become well-established--as creators, producers and audience members--in Berlin's mainstream public arts community, including theater, opera and music. Over the next decades, the growth of these art forms flourished and Jewish involvement would increase incrementally. By way of example, there were at least 33 theaters in Berlin in the first decade of the 20th century[38]. Cabaret had arrived in Berlin at around the turn of the century and of course the caustic individual style of writers, performers and composers of this genre developed in and has been synonymous with Berlin ever since, with composers like Kurt Weill at the helm.

Classical music and opera were also thriving throughout the 19th century. Jewish composers like Jakob Meyerbeer (1791-1863) reached enormous international acclaim; his grand and dramatic operas, for example, expressed the content of his work over the sensuality of the sound and "for decades he was the most renowned operatic composer in Europe."[39] Jews' quest for integration and emancipation was continuing via acculturation. While Jews had not reached the higher echelons of German society throughout the middle decades of the 1800s, via their involvement in the arts– through which they remained aligned with Jewish morals and values--they had reached a high degree of secular influence and had become indisputably German.

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[37] Ibid., 202.
[38] Read and Fisher, 152
[39] *Becoming German, Remaining Jewish*, Vol. 2, in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: Emancipation and Acculturation, 1780-1871*, ed. Michael A. Meyer, 199-250 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997). (247)

Jewish volunteer organizations also served to extend the impact of family and Jewish identity, as well as German-ness. By the end of the 1800s in Germany--locally, regionally and nationally--there were over 5,000 Jewish Associations spanning a variety of areas and interests that blossomed in Germany and held many tens of thousands of Jewish members, offering not only hospitality but also a focus around Jewish topics, causes and activities. *The Bar Kochba Sports Club* for example, founded in 1898 for and by Jews interested in sports and gymnastics, fought extensively about the leanings of their club particularly around the notion of its being a Zionist organization. Ultimately, members decided to unite around the idea that their club "would make the 'care of the national Jewish idea' a fundamental tenet…..they were united in thinking that Jewry was based on a common heritage and history, but not exclusively on the basis of a common religion, 'although it has a peculiar character of spirit and should and has maintained its feeling of togetherness up to the present day.'"[40] A preference for community and the collective Jewish spirit pervaded the Jewish-German experience.

Kaplan also points to charity–the mitzvah of *Tzedakah*–and how it led to a Jewish trend in institution-building, as Berlin was becoming the major center for German Jewish life. Jewish institutional life, fueled by a sense of welfare, charity and *tikkun olam*--as well as philanthropy--saw the development and growth of many welfare organizations and activities which also translated to a concern for and solidarity with Judaism.

Compared to the previous part of the century, the last 30 years of the 19th century through 1914 (at the outbreak of World War I), was a time of relative peace, and intellectual and economic development. Modernism was developing, fostered by the creation of a legal system that was structured around liberal ideas as well as flourishing market-oriented industrial Capitalism. In most

[40] Nachama, Schoeps and Simon, 120.

areas, Jews held "…their own intimate culture within German society" [41] and integrated into social and professional life in Berlin as "Berliners", assuming, for example, legal positions in civil society that were equal to others.

Social Unrest and the Disintegration of The Golden Age of Berlin

However, as Berlin's growth was exploding, a number of related stresses and pressures made for a good deal of political and social unrest. Germany was on the cusp of international controversies in these years, and the German military was beginning to grow increasingly strong and dangerously proud. It should also be noted, that there was a quality of "'illiberalism' that permeated society" in this period (1871-1917) when the German Reich was just beginning to gather its power-base. This was a time of "civil immaturity"[42] where outdated values of compliance and pandering to the authorities were in play. While some were dreaming about the possibility of opera and theater for the masses, others were growing more aggressive and enthusiastic about flexing Germany's new muscles in war. Nerves became tense at this time as military leaders argued that "…war was a biological necessity, and a convenient way of getting rid of the weak."[43] This translated to a bubbling up of small injustices for the lower and middle classes in contrast to a noble class that enjoyed privileged treatment.

This class system certainly affected the Jews and throughout certain areas of Germany the rights and freedoms for Jews were in play less and less in the realities of daily life. For example, in some areas of Prussia, a Jew couldn't become a high-ranking military officer or hold a tenured professorship. Jewish teachers were restricted to teaching subjects like math and the natural

[41] Ibid., 117.
[42] Ibid., 90.
[43] Read and Fisher, 156.

sciences, as Germans were reticent to entrust Jewish teachers to teaching young Germans subjects like history and politics for fear that they would miss the essence of the German "spirit" in these arenas.

The dynamics of Secularism and the rationalistic ideology that infused this time-period touched both the Christian and Jewish worlds with a sense of paranoia, duplicity and great anxiety. The whole nation had fallen from its once prosperous times. Social and political conditions changed and radically deteriorated for Berliners, and for Berlin Jews. This period brought a slew of problems to the Jews of Berlin, not the least of which was a labor shortage in Germany, and the flood of Eastern European Jews who needed both employment and protection. There was also a resurgence of anti-semitic sentiment, with Jews as the scapegoats for the Nation's problems. The *Judenzaehlung* (counting of the Jews), among other developments, was only the tip of the ice-burg in terms of the short amount of time it took for Berlin Jews to realize that old prejudices had resurfaced and that dreams of commonality with the rest of Christian Germany were gone. Jews felt foreign, singled-out, registered and pushed to the side. According to Ernst Simon's records of Jews post-*Judenzaehlung*, "With one terrible blow we realized that there was once again a deep gulf between us and the Germans, a gulf that we had considered long gone."[44]

World War I (1914-18) was underway and the crumbling status of Berlin Jews was a reality. German-born American historian of German history Fritz Stern (born 1926) has pointed to one of the central problems of the period: the secularization of modern Germany, and the German intellectuals who could simply not handle the duality of sacred and secular life. [At this time], as Nietzche wrote, "God is dead. And we have killed Him."[45] In the early decades of the 20th century, numerous modern Jews felt that in their modern lives there was an absence of Faith, which had

[44] Nachama, Schoeps and Simon, 133.
[45] Ibid., 90.

devastatingly negative consequences. Many who had turned away from Jewish Faith yearned for a return to their roots and their God. A revitalized interest in Judaism--a resurgence—ensued and included the areas of Jewish religion and science, the relationship between Yiddish and German, as well as in the problematic experience and relationship--politically, socially and economically--of the *Ostjuden* (Eastern European Jewish immigrants). Those from Eastern Europe reminded the German Jews, literally, of the ghetto that they too once came from–-a different world ago—and this hit painfully close to home during the years of World War 1.

On either side of this sad abyss, one can see the remarkable duality that characterized Jewish life in Berlin in what would come next: the Weimar Years (1919-1932). On the one hand we can track the development and astonishing achievements of Jews, Judaism and Jewish life which barely existed 200 years prior, simply by looking at the Golden 20's in Berlin--gold in large part due to the contributions of Jews. To understand the depth of accomplishment of Jewish Berlin, one needs only to cite the cumulative richness of Max Reinhardt's stage productions, the music of Arnold Schoenberg, the paintings of Max Liebermann, Franz Kafka's visits from Prague, as well as Marc Chagall from Russia, S.Y. Agnon from Galicia and Palestine, and Chajim Nachman Bialik from the Ukranian part of the Russian Empire.

The growth of synagogues in Berlin continued late into the year 1930; this growth of course stood on the shoulders of the early Reformers mentioned in this chapter. Even though there was substantial conflict in Germany within the Jewish population around liberal vs. traditional issues, the spirit of compromise usually won. Further, what was considered "Jewish music" shifted--from Synagogue music to concert music. In fact, one could often find very extensive cultural programming in Synagogue concert halls at this time. These featured concerts of young Jewish composers from the US, evenings of Yiddish and Hebrew

Lieder, and Yiddish Theater music. Many concerts also featured music for choir, sung by Jews who, now emancipated, were eager to be a part of the new secular choral movement, modeled on similar organizations that had recently become popular in Christian Europe. The stunning growth of secular choral singing in these decades in Europe was due to a number of factors: increased leisure time, the emergence of a powerful middle class both Jewish and Christian, the opportunity for education, *bildung* and an interest in the music of popular composers of the previous century and current day—G. F. Handel, Joseph Haydn, Johann Strauss, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. Repertoire was similar to that of non-Jewish choirs, sung either in the vernacular or translated into Yiddish.

In addition, Jews in Berlin had prominent roles not only in culture but also in politics and the social fabric of Berlin. It is almost an understatement to say that Berlin was a powerful German-Jewish nexus--such that by the end of the years of the Weimar Republic, one out of every third Jew living in Germany was in Berlin.[46]

With almost every door open to Jews in Berlin in these stunning decades, it is so difficult to look at the polar opposite of thriving Golden Age Berlin, to find anti-Semitism and Jewish demise caused by waves of anxiety and concern, and ultimately the systematic destruction of Jews and Jewish institutions. One wonders what could have happened in Berlin had the phenomenally rapid pace of change for German-Jewry in the 19th Century and in the first quarter of the 20th not been interrupted by the lowest of the lows—1933 and the lead up to World War II (1939-1945).

With this rich and difficult history in mind, we turn to two specific musical trailblazers--Kurt Weill and his father a few decades before him--who would face their respective modernities, letting their particular historical circumstances serve as charged catalysts for the creation of their musical

[46] Ibid., 139.

expression. The contributions of these artists are lasting and highly significant, for the act of creating their canon of music helped shape their particular new worlds. Kurt Weill, as will be discussed in the following chapters, was someone who broke the musical mold by creating his own style of secular music; his style of music was greatly influenced by the world that surrounded him, both as entertainment and in its capacity to illuminate the human condition. While he lived most of his life in the secular arena, his German-Jewish childhood and upbringing played powerfully in his work.

For most of us in the modern world, the Secular is our main navigational device, and Judaism is integrated in a secondary fashion. For Kurt Weill it was exactly the opposite. So much of his adult life and his musical career is integrally linked to his Jewish childhood in Dessau--60 miles Southwest of Berlin--and infused in his musical compositions. We see this in the Jewish values that are inherent in the choice of texts he set to music, in his innate sense of being the outsider in the German "insider's" world, in his need to bring to light paths to redemption, and in his love for the high caliber literature, poetry and text that filled his Jewish childhood. In different eras of his life, Weill brought an array of innovation to the way he wrote; in this, albeit in very different circumstances, his father was his model as a composer. Throughout Kurt Weill's musical career, although he led a completely secular life, he participated in and manifested in his work expression of several different cultures and identities, which communicate a constant dialectic between the secular and sacred. To understand how it was that Kurt Weill contributed his own very powerful and original musical expression to the world, we must understand more about the world into which he was born. We turn next to a study of his father, Chazzan Albert Weill, his early family life and his German-Jewish roots.

Chapter 3

Father & Son. Chazzan Albert Weill & the Early Years of Kurt Weill

In Milan Kundera's collection of essays on modernism, *Testaments Betrayed*, the Czech Republic's most prominent living writer asks, "Over what period of time can we consider a man identical to himself." One could well ask this question of hybridic styles that define Kurt Weill throughout his 35-year composing career. Kurt Weill's life and music, at its core, is made up of mixtures; a borrowing of different styles and a sense of fusion, often for example employing jazz, rhythmic dance music and the sounds of German classical music within a single song, all the while making these sounds his very own. The defining element in his work are that he never fails to identify his music as "Weill", and he does so with his clear sense of expressive purpose.

Kurt Weill had a mission--to respond to each dramatic moment with the appropriate sound or musical form, as will be addressed in this chapter and in the ones that follow. His specific gift was a musical imagination and intellect that set him free to prioritize his vast set of musical impulses to create for dramatic effect. Therein lies his consistency and the source of the talent and skill that pervaded the through-line of his 50 year life-span, the last 35 of which he spent as a composer. It is only our modern need to eagerly define, label and categorize musical styles and genres that attempts to place Kurt Weill in a particular stylistic box, but our need has very little correlation with the unbelievable brilliance of Kurt Weill, and his chameleon-like musical capabilities. In response to Kundera's question as it pertains to Kurt Weill the composer, I believe that whether he was in Berlin or America, Kurt Weill had an ability to maintain himself as a consistent artist as he met the needs of the present, transforming over time from an aesthetic artist to an artist driven by social activism, all

the while incorporating themes from his past. Looking holistically at his body of work, through his approach he had an ability to transcend the particular time periods within which he wrote.

Numerous Weill authorities have noted that this "Multiplicity is a unifying characteristic in his music"[47]. This dynamic is also an over-arching dimension in his life, revolving around his sense of nationalism and religion, both broad themes and a common denominator, seen clearly in his politically-oriented artistic collaborations in Germany and his subsequent work in America. Weill's abilities to cross boundaries enabled him to be heard--wherever he was.

As stated above, his viscerally astute ability to find the right sound for the density of the message, in a manner that enabled him to make the sounds that he picked up along the way his very integrated, genuine own, was his exceptional trademark. Each of his compositions represented its own solution to formal issues. For example, in looking at his works from a rich 10-year segment of his composing career (1924-1934), we find the following: a one-act opera with two scenes in pantomime, a one-act opera with ballet and film, a ballet with singing, an operetta in two acts, a song play in three parts, a three act musical tragedy, and the list goes on. While he used a variety of styles including, jazz, spoken song, lyric melodies, rhythmic dance idioms, perhaps the theme that runs through his whole body of work is this: the predominant role of music to determine dramatic structure (vs. the opposite, a dependence on dramatic and literary structure).

I surmise that Kurt Weill was able to be the effective hybridist-composer he was--awakening the minds and hearts of his listeners and audience members often through his inclusion of the "other"–in large part because he knew precisely where he came from as a German-Jewish man. His formative childhood years provided a solid identity and strong musical and cultural beginning.

[47] David Farneth, *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents*, ed. with Elmar Juchem and Dave Stein (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2000). xii.

In this chapter, we will establish a foundation for examining the Jewish influences that carried through Kurt Weill's later years. We will examine the early influences of his cultural environment, including the deep Jewish family heritage that he inherited and the role played by his father in his development. These factors are inextricably linked to who Kurt Weill was, as well as the lens through which he viewed the world, as his own brand of musical-social activist. Finally we will investigate the early blue prints in Kurt Weill's life for breaking with tradition and innovating—which contributed to his becoming one of the world's most unanimously original and historic trailblazers in the worlds of opera and musical theater, hailed for his unfailing ability to embrace differences and dichotomies.

Chazzan Albert Weill

Kurt Weil's father Chazzan Albert Weill was a constant presence in his childhood, and while we have little evidence of his father's direct influence over Kurt and very meager correspondence between the two of them, from what we know about his family as well as the period in which he grew up, there is no doubt that his early family and musical surroundings had great influence on the rest of his life. Though ultimately he left the religious sphere of his father's world--centered around family, synagogue life and the formal study of music—an examination of Kurt Weill's life and music must begin with an investigation of the world into which he was born.

Kurt Weill was the third of four children of Cantor Albert Weill and his wife Emma. At the peak of his career, Chazzan Weill was the Cantor of a Dessau synagogue whose family, one of the oldest Jewish families in Dessau, traced strong Rabbinical roots in Baden back to the 13th century. The reason his family can be traced 600 years back is due to the fact that there were so many Rabbis and

scholars in his ancestry, and they actually passed written information from one generation to the other–via Rabbinic writings, letters, cemetery artifacts and family trees.

The Weill family's lineage extends back through Rabbis and Talmudic scholars in Southern Germany, Alsace, Lorraine, Prague, Austria and Poland. There are a number of notable and famous figures in the lineage, including Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg (1215-1293), the major Talmudist and poet, whose teachings were codified by his student the very important "the Rosh". Other family members included Rabbi Jacob Weil, remembered as a peace-keeper and humanist (very much like Kurt four centuries later), whose book *Ohel Yisrael*, printed in 1523 in Venice, contains a number of *Reponsa* as well as an appendix on Jewish rules for slaughtering which have been viewed as an authoritative source on this topic by much later Rabbis. In addition to its Rabbinic lineage, the Weill family also has two composers and conductors who lived in the 15th and 16th generations of the family--Sijmen de Weille and son, Bernardus Adrianus Sijmen de Weille, respectively.

In addition to this rich Rabbinic history, the Dessau-based, Orthodox Weill family also stems from a deep-rooted German-Jewish liberal tradition. At about the same time as in Berlin, Jews had been admitted as citizens of Dessau in 1672, and as mentioned in Chapter 2, an important figure in the European Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn was born in Dessau in 1729. In a sense, Mendelssohn paved the way for what would develop as part of the Reform movement in Dessau. For example, in 1818, a short booklet by Eliazar Lieberman, one of the first German-Jewish reformists (the first incidentally to endorse synagogue organ-playing by non-Jews) was published and distributed in Dessau for the purpose of explaining how reform custom would square with traditional *minhagim*. Further, Mendelssohn's close friend Gotthold Lessing found in Mendelssohn his muse and associated the naming of his play, *Nathan the Wise*, an impassioned appeal for religious tolerance and acceptance, with his friend Mendelssohn. So, we see in Dessau from these

points on, a strong representation of a progressive Jewish presence and cultural positioning in Germany and greater Europe—which makes great sense as we consider the influence that such a liberal atmosphere must have had on the Weill family.

Dessau also had a collection of prominent leaders. In 1871, Prince Wilhelm of Prussia was crowned German Emperor, and he chose Moritz Cohn, a Jewish private banker, as his Chief Financier. While for the most part, Jewish life in Dessau was developing on par with Berlin, not all was constant—and the presence of the Jewish Baron Moritz von Cohn was ultimately seen as a threat by the Dukes in the area.

However, by 1903, a series of events had helped to turn the tides in a positive way for the Jewish population. When the new Duke Frederick II took the throne that year, at which time the Jewish population was growing, there was also a "new stability… manifested in the Rabbinate: Dr. Isidor Walter, who became the Rabbi of the city and of all Anhalt in 1900…";[48] this stability would remain for the next 30 years. At this time, the daughter of Baron Cohn, who had married into a very wealthy German-Jewish family, became the Baroness and was the chief Jewish supporter in Dessau and she arranged for funding to build a new Reform synagogue in Dessau.

The growth of Dessau at this time was symbolized in the magnificence of the grand Romanesque-style synagogue. The building process began in 1906 and by 1908, it was sufficiently complete to be used. Stylistically, with its grand dome and strong architectural structure, it was as if the synagogue was built for carrying on into the future, as if it would last forever (sadly it was destroyed in 1938 on *Kristallnacht*). There was a large community center built in an adjunct building, and this helped meet the needs of the growing Jewish population, which mirrored the growth of the general population. At this time, Dessau had become almost a mini-Berlin with a large

[48] Ronald Sanders, *Days Grow Short: The Life and Music of Kurt Weill* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980). 9.

town Hall, an Opera Center and a sizable amount of industrial activity centered around the manufacturing of building materials. It was an exciting time to be at the center of Jewish city life, and in her memoirs, Emma Weill remembers:

> Our apartment was next to the huge synagogue—a present to the Jewish community from the Baroness von Cohn-Oppenheim—in a big building used for all social activities. It was there that dear Kurt was able to spend his happy and diligent young years. All of the interesting people who gathered around our family participated in Kurt's development…[49]

Chazzan Albert Weill, who led an Orthodox Jewish life, would ultimately serve as Cantor at the Reform Dessau Synagogue. Born in 1867 in Kippenheim in the Grand Duchy of Baden he and Emma Ackerman married in 1897 when he was 30 and she was 25. The Ackerman family also hailed from a long line of Rabbis and Cantors. Emma's brother Rabbi Aaron Ackerman was a relatively prominent Rabbi in Brandenburg who in addition had published his own volume of Synagogue music.[50] While there would seem to be a fair amount of family synchronicity in the area of Jewish music, it was actually more a source of family strain as Ackerman was far more a traditionalist than Albert, with a disdain for innovations like choral singing and organ in synagogue music, which would become a hallmark of his Chazzan brother-in-law.

As noted above, ultimately, the Weill family would live in the Synagogue's adjacent community house in 1908. Before this, they lived in the Jewish section of Dessau. It should be noted that Dessau did not have a Jewish "ghetto" *per se*; it was, rather an area under the watch and shield of the Dukes, who continued to be among the most progressive for their time and locale.

At the dedication of the synagogue in 1908, Chazzan Weill's family attended, including the eight-year-old Kurt. The Duke and Ducal Highness and their extended Ducal family were there, and

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[49] Farneth, 8.

[50] Note: name of this volume and further information does not seem to be available.

along with Rabbi Walter stood Cantor Albert Weill who led much of the service. According to Weill biographer Ronald Sanders, Chazzan Weill "led the first part of the service singing responsively with the [men's] chorus [which] had been expanded"[51] beyond the usual singers for this occasion, organ and "a choir of wind instruments from the Ducal Court Chapel [which] gave added weight and sacred force to the singing and the cantillation."[52] This would be the first of many grand celebrations and pageantries that young Kurt Weill would take in; only later in life would he understand the aesthetic impact that this sense of spectacle and ceremony would have on his ability to deliver his message to the masses.

Earlier in Albert's career, about 15 years before he was installed as the Cantor in Dessau, when he was a 26–year-old Cantor in Eichstatt in Bavaria in 1893, Albert published he own Cantorial chants for male Cantor and Men's Chorus, *Kol Avraham: Synagogen-Gesange fur Cantor und Mannerchor ("The Voice of Abraham: Synagogue Songs for Cantor and Male Chorus.").* These were used and enjoyed in his synagogue and are very much in Sulzer's neat four-part style writing. According to the *Forward* of the 18-page volume of Chazzan Weill's chants, his responsive settings of Psalm 118 in particular, were meant to "assist the formation of a progressive and valuable public worship" and he wrote them in order to contribute to the "tangible scarcity of suitable compositions for Hebraic male chorus".[53] Chazzan Weill, like many of the Cantors in Germany before him, was actively engaged in modernizing Jewish musical liturgy.

Chazzan Weill's chants were written in typical German and Central European style, much in the style of Sulzer and Lewandowski. Take, for example his setting of *Ein Keloheinu* (see Appendix Musical Example 1), which follows standard voice-leading and harmonization of the period,

[51] Sanders, 11.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Albert Weill, "Synagogen Gesange fur Cantor und Mannerchor," *Forward* (Frankfurt Um Main: A. J. Hoffman Verlag, 1893).

mirroring what Bach had established a century earlier. However, in the Cantor's solo line, this final selection of Chazzan Weill's 18-page work becomes modal. More specifically, the piece begins in B-flat Major and on its second page moves to E-flat Major, and then back to B-flat Major, where it becomes fugue-like. Here Weill is following the pattern of J.S. Bach, who typically wrote fugues for the finale section of a musical piece. A Bach fugue follows a certain form and Weill's *Ein Keloheinu* is a shortened fugue, or rather, a fugue exposition without the full expression of the fugue form. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the piece comes earlier on, where there is a diminished v chord leading to a vi chord in the 8th measure of the piece. The diminished chord is typically seen in German music of this era, and while this small detour adds a flavor very much of the period, it also perhaps is a foreshadowing a favored musical move that we will see later in some of the jazz coloration in Kurt Weill's writing for the theater.

Other than the synagogue chants, the only other piece of published music by Cantor Weill is an undated *Motette*, published by M.W Kaufmann in Leipzig, and written for Cantor and Choir in four parts. While not from Jewish liturgy, the title and opening words are "*Der Ewige gebe Dir seinen Segen*" (translated, *God will give his blessing*), it is certainly meant to be performed in a sacred setting, and is a piece about peace. In terms of its style, the Cantorial line is quite melodic, albeit simple, and it is written for the most part in homophonic choral style, with only slight deviations.

It is interesting to note the progression that choir played in Chazzan Weill's work. While strong traditionalists like Albert's brother Aaron found the idea of using choir abhorrent, in 1893, 13 years before he arrived in Dessau, Chazzan Weill wrote for a Men's chorus, rather than mixed. Again referring to the *Forward* of his published chants, Albert Weill gives his reasons for not writing for mixed chorus, the Reform fashion at this point. First, he felt that adding women to the mix would make it difficult to have a full chorus at all rehearsals, because women would not be able to break

away from the home and family as easily as men, and second, a unisex men's chorus would not offend people who are Orthodox and traditional in terms of the laws surrounding *kol isha*, woman's voice. The bottom line was that Chazzan Weill was still a semi-traditionalist and felt more comfortable with an all men's chorus. However, a decade and a half later, at his own Installation, it is interesting to note that his choir in Dessau was, like many in early 20th Century Reform German synagogues, a mixed choir with men's and women's voices. His Cantorate was expansive and at the appropriate times, clearly open to innovation.

By the time Cantor Weill took up his post in Dessau, the tradition of Cantors Sulzer and Lewandowski had been well-established and the new sound, built on the Protestant sounds mentioned earlier--very much in synch with the German-Christian style--were universally heard in Reform synagogues.

Leaving judgments about the musical style of Chazzan Weill's compositions aside, what is clear was that as a composer, Albert was part of the shift in creating music for the synagogue that was in dialogue with the German-Christian world around him. Like Sulzer and Lewandowski, he too was stepping away from traditional Eastern European sounds and actively dancing with modern life, breaking with Orthodox tradition, as he both absorbed and imitated the musical culture around him—as heard in his Synagogue chants for Cantor and Chorus.

From Kurt's early perspective, perhaps most relevantly, in his father he had a musical model for becoming a composer of published music and stretching far beyond the role of talented pianist. He also saw early examples of what hybridity in music might look like, as his father broke with musical tradition and incorporated the secular sounds around him. While stylistically, Kurt's sensibilities veered far away from those of his father's from a young age, Kurt saw in his father a musician

whose life and music stretched and grew as he negotiated the intertwining of various strains of his cultural and religious identities.

Family Life and the Early Years of Kurt Weill

Kurt's early childhood years were spent living in the apartment connected to the synagogue. Family life was enjoyable and carefree, almost surprisingly for a "German Bourgeois household of the early 1900s, especially that of an ecclesiastic."[54] Albert was very artistic and had a relaxed Bohemian quality that he'd absorbed from his own mother. He ran the household very much guided by "open affection and a grateful sense of security"[55] and at the same time lived observantly as an Orthodox Jew. Even in liberal, Reform-style Dessau, he tended to stick with the strictness of his own childhood, the values of which he felt were consistent with his role as public clergyman, schoolteacher and representative of Judaism as a Religion. That being said, "[His] Cantorial solemnity was compromised by a slight playfulness in his smile….there was a charm, even a softness, at the center of his dignified look…" [56] He, like his son, was a man who was comfortable with contrasting and often conflicting styles. Most importantly for Kurt and his siblings, Albert loved his family and he let them know it.

Albert's own sense of trust and faith in his religion was enhanced by the notion that he was carrying on the intellectualism and the Judaism of his family tree. Reminiscent of the Rabbi's bereavement as his son emerged into the modern world of entertainment seen in the film *The Jazz Singer*, Albert too would experience great loss when Kurt "under the pernicious spell of Berlin in the

[54] Sanders, 19.
[55] Ibid., 5.
[56] Ibid., 11.

1920s, later drifted further and further away from the family religion to marry eventually outside the faith."[57]

Kurt was the third of three boys; the fourth child was a daughter. They were very close in age. All of the boys showed an interest in music, particularly piano. By the age of 10 Kurt was hungrily composing at the piano, and by 11 he took his first try at Operatic composition, based on a play by Karl Theodor Korner. (Very little of these early Weill works exist, unfortunately.) Even though his son was prolific by the age of 15, Chazzan Weill wanted his third son to study medicine. Kurt was such a force of nature, an exceptionally gifted musician at a very young age, that even Kurt's siblings pleaded with their father to let their brother study music. In a diary entry of Emma Weill, she remembers Kurt's brother Hanns coming to his parents saying, "Nathan will become a great doctor, and I will become a successful businessman. We will see Kurt through this."[58]

The family enjoyed being together. They loved to walk together in the parks of Dessau. Albert and Emma were outwardly sensitive and "deeply involved in their feelings toward each other"[59] and the children sensed this. There was an air of humor in the family and of Albert's not taking himself too seriously, which the children understood. Kurt and his siblings lived within a family where love and humanity was a wonderful characteristic of their home life.

At home, Albert was always rehearsing chants and played through hymns for upcoming services. Emma was an artist of sorts: she played some piano as well and was a poet who had a few samples of her work set and published as synagogue music. As a student of music, according to correspondence between Kurt, his siblings and friends, the very young Kurt was able to absorb the various musical influences around him. These included not only what he heard at home, but of

[57] Ibid., 5.
[58] Farneth, 8.
[59] Ibid., 9.

course the non-Jewish European composers of the time, such as Anton Bruckner, Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, Gustav Mahler and Felix Mendelsohnn-Bartholdy, whose music would be played at the Ducal Court near his family's apartment and which the young Kurt would study with his various teachers. In terms of instruction, his father was his first music teacher. He was taught by his dad to sing in his synagogue choir and he also spent large amounts of time in his younger years practicing the synagogue organ.

Shifting to Kurt's religious upbringing, we know that at the religious school, which was Kurt's primary school, he studied Hebrew, Jewish law and Synagogue rituals, as well as music with his father through the age of 10. The reality was that he became the least pious and observant of all his siblings.[60]

The synagogue gave Kurt his first, very early experiences of what the overlapping of visual, dramatic and musical elements could offer when they were well-expressed for a higher purpose. This appealed early-on to Kurt's visceral theatricality. Weill biographer Ronald Taylor notes that for Kurt, "His experience of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the synagogue service during the years spent in his parents' home, heightened his susceptibility to the power of drama."[61] A *Gesamtkunstwerk* (translated as total work of art or synthesis of the arts) is a comprehensive artwork and all-embracing art form, which makes use of all or many art forms or strives to do so; it is interesting that the term has come to be associated with the aesthetic ideals of Richard Wagner, one of the composers for whom Weill, in his youth, had great admiration and respect (see more further on in this chapter). For Kurt, the environment of the synagogue which encased rituals—prayers, choreography, the spoken word, chanting by the Chazzan's solo voice in combination with mixed choirs, rich

[60] Sanders, 9.
[61] Ronald Taylor, *Composer in a Divided World* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1991). 8.

harmonies, occasional Eastern sounds, et al.--created an intense, instinctual and theatrical experience. The notion and power of *Gesamtkunstwerk* would stay with him as a blue-print and sensibility that he would follow him in his creative life. In addition, "…the Hebrew melodies that surrounded him in childhood and youth, like the culture they expressed, remained a latent, inalienable power in his experience and his memory". [62] The products of these combined effects define a great part of Kurt Weill's hybridic style, and will be examined in more depth shortly.

Kurt Weill and the Theater

By the time Kurt was early in his early teens, the theater had clearly become the love of his life and the framework within which he chose to create his compositions,. He used the powerful combination of drama, music and spectacle that he had absorbed in his early years of Synagogue life. In 1900, Kurt's birth year, a local Dessau newspaper described the cultural scene, which was closely connected to the Duke's Court in Dessau, just across the way from the Weill family home, as such:

> The history of the theatrical and musical life of Dessau is inextricably bound up with that of the princely house of Anhalt'…[and] the Ducal Court Theater, Dessau's shrine of both opera and drama, stood directly across the Kavalierstrasse from the palace of the ruling family that had built it…[63].

As a little boy, it was as if he was outside of a fishbowl he so badly wanted to enter, as Kurt remembered watching the Duke drive out of his palace to attend rehearsals every day between 10 and 11 am. Soon enough, the very young Kurt would become an insider in world of professional theater and opera.

[62] Ibid., 7.
[63] Ibid., 15.

By the time Kurt was 12 in 1912, through his work in the Synagogue, word had gotten out that a gifted pianist was in the Ducal Court area, and he was invited to participate tangentially in the musical life of the Court--as a pianist for social events and as rehearsal pianist for opera singers at the Court Theater. He also gave piano lessons to the Duke's daughter. Perhaps most influential for the young composer, the Duke gave Kurt and his brothers free access to all programming at the Court Theaters. By the time he was 15, he was regularly employed in the theater as a musician, accompanist and sometimes musical director, and most importantly gained deep exposure to the theater's inner-workings and the art of stagecraft.

In the life of the son of a Cantor, direct exposure to this new dimension of dramatic theater, which he would develop and expand upon throughout the rest of his career, served as a critical beginning to a life in the theater. Later in his teens, Kurt Weill would serve in Dessau as a coach and chorus master, and shortly after as *Kappelmeister* (choir master) of a small municipal theater in Ludenscheld, 200 miles west of Dessau. During these years in his late teens, having received so much practical experience in the disciplines mentioned above and also as a dialect coach, conductor, orchestrator and incidental music composer, he had gathered much of the work experience that would give him a solid start and serve him well as a theatrical composer in his own right

In the first two decades of his life, while Kurt received a great deal of love, permission and encouragement from his mother, from his father he received a menu of important early influences, in addition to those in the musical arena mentioned earlier. First, his father was a kind of back-board to react against; as Kurt was not overly-impressed or inspired with his father's plain and mild musical style, he most certainly steered away from that particular style. In being able to attend opera and theater, Kurt recalled in later years that specifically, as a boy he loved the music and drama of Wagner's operas and their own sense of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (of course, as an adult, he despised

Wagner for his Anti-Semitism). Wagner's lush, chromatic, sensual style, for example, was far from the taste palette of Albert Weill's unison prayer settings. As Kurt gained personal and musical autonomy, his correspondence with teachers and family members shows that he consciously decided to lean away from his father's style and into his own. Kurt Weill gave himself permission to go in his independent direction.

While Kurt's commitment to the life of the soul found in the theater was already deep in formation, it is important to note that part of his hallmark style was his choice of literature and text for his librettos; for these, he sought only the most sophisticated collaborators who shared with him the same love and sensibility for the elevated written word and more advanced questions about life. Without a doubt, this dedication to the high quality written word stems from exposure to his mother's aptitude as a poet as well as his father's dedication to literature. Kurt knew most of the works of European literature and philosophy in his father's extensive library. In a discussion of the influence of books and writing on Kurt, Kurt's sister Ruth recalls that whenever they walked and talked "Kurt used to discuss with me all the great problems of the world and big questions about God, the universe, the stars and why people existed" [64]

As noted earlier, Kurt's exposure to music and dramatic ceremony made a primal impression on him in his childhood. This was certainly the case at his father's Installation but also, for example, at the Ducal Court. Throughout his late teen years he attended Jewish festivals, and his imagination was fueled. We will see shortly that this had a great influence on some of his large works of Pageantry, particularly related to the artistic war he waged against the Holocaust, as his own Jewish consciousness declared itself over the decades.

[64] Farneth, 8.

While not observant, as he grew into his late teens, Kurt Weill identified as Jewish in a very deep way. From his late teens years, there is a telling anecdote about how after a piano lesson with the great Albert Bing, who wanted him to practice four-voiced Bach chorales written in different clefs, he received a pile of these pieces, which were clearly written for the Christian church, along with a directive to practice the new skill of clef reading. Kurt Weill was not happy with these assignments. In his diary entry from April 17, 1917, Kurt wrote to his brother commenting that these assignments hurt him at his core, saying, "in every lesson [with Bing] I have to play these [pieces]…but only if my Jewish heart won't be offended by the 'Ecclesiastes chorales'"[65] From my reading of these letters, it seems that in Kurt's heart, he was and would always be a Jew, even as Jewish and European music and culture melded around and within him.

Kurt Weill's early years gave him a strong religious orientation based on Jewish knowledge and practice. Not only was his daily life centered around the synagogue, but he studied piano with the Dessau synagogue's organist. By the time he was 15 he had written his own setting of *Mi Addir* and a four-part chorale for his sister Ruth's religious school confirmation.

At 16, the age which he himself considered to be the beginning of his composing career, he wrote a cycle of five songs, *Ofrahs Lieder*, based on a text by the famous 12th century Jewish poet Yehuda Halevi. He wrote these pieces for a synagogue concert in Dessau and knowing that this would be the setting, chose to set Jewish poetry to music. Although HaLevi is best known for his religiously-themed poetry, Weill was attracted to the more secular, erotic poetry of Ofrah, rather than the sacred. In his book *Kurt Weill und das Judentum* (*Kurt Weill and Judaism*), author Christian Kuhnt characterizes these early songs as follows:

[65] Ibid., 11.

> Ofrah's Songs are a symbiosis of elements of Jewish and German culture. The connection between German song of the Richard Strauss school and the poetry of Judah HaLevi, which encompasses themes of longing and love, accomplishes in the secular realm what many German Jews saw as an ideal vision of the future: namely the mutual flowering of Jewish and German tradition, without the disavowal of one or the other."[66]

From a very young age, the exceedingly talented young composer was already thriving successfully in the different worlds in which he participated--that of the Synagogue, the Ducal Court, and the theater.

Interestingly, a century later, we can look back and clearly hear not only from where Weill found his influence—Mendelssohn, Strauss, Schubert and Wagner—but also specific elements of Weill's life-long style which were so present at such a young age. As pianist Stephen Blier writes about the pieces:

> Musically speaking, the sweetness of Mendelssohn and Schubert co-exist with the grandeur of Strauss and Wagner in these short songs, combining moments of transparent lyricism with heroic climaxes. Weill used the voice in a full-throated traditional way – he certainly knew how to launch an effective high note. In addition to evoking tinges of Romanticism, Ofrah's Lieder offers glimmers into the jazzy style that Weill eventually became famous for embodying as a composer for the American musical theater.[67]

From the age of 18 onward, Kurt Weill's musical life turned almost completely toward the theater, while his musical studies continued with the spectrum of opera, conducting, and mastering piano classicists like Brahms and Chopin. The mid-part of Weill's life, which prematurely ended at age 50 in 1950, takes place in secular modern Europe and then in America. In these years, we will

[66] Christian Kuhnt, *Kurt Weill und das Judentum* (Pfau, 2002). 20.
[67] From an interview during the premier of the piece at the 1987 *Kurt Weill Festival.*

see that although he is outside of the synagogue for the most part, his Jewishness lives very much inside him and emerges in a multitude of powerful ways.

In sum, Chazzan Albert Weill provided his son with a very strong sense of Jewish identity as well as a musical background against which the younger Weill could rebel. The synthesis of these factors of course ultimately helped Kurt Weill pave his own very unique path as a composer. Kurt Weill's music reflected an expansion of his Jewish-German identity as well as connection to the different worlds of which he was a part.

In the next chapter, we will look at the ways in which the influence of Kurt Weill's Judaism remained with him over the course of his life--as an integral inspiration, source of meaning and internal motivator—evidenced in an array of forms in his multi-phased career. As seen in this chapter, while his early years were rooted in Judaism, he also spent much of his teen and young adult life in the non-Jewish world. With his strong foundation in Jewish life as a child, the young Weill also gained an ability to pick up and understand the national and political issues around him—without overly fusing or joining with those non-Jewish elements. This exposure and the "outsider"'s distance he maintained, gave him many advantages, including a variety of viewpoints, and an understanding of a broad palette of musical styles, hybrid genres--opera, theater, plays, chamber music, etc.--and diverse cultures.

With his childhood as a defining base, Weill gained the ability to combine the power of his synagogue roots and the various external influences in his life to create secular messages for the epic and musical theater that were in large part informed by an awareness, acknowledgement of and empathy for "the other"; in his music, this search transfers Jewish values into his modern music taking form in rich and complex ways. In fact, the variety of musical styles appearing in Weill's

oeuvre has been the catalyst for a fair amount of misunderstanding and criticism about Weill, which is worth exploring as a way of defining and affirming who he was and what were his gifts.

Chapter 4

Kurt Weill in Germany & in Exile

Today it is commonplace to speak of two Kurt Weills. Prominent scholars in the fields of music and theater have gently and at times fervently critiqued Weill for leading a split life,[68] inferring that he intentionally dropped (Weill 1949) his avant-guarde European composer persona and aesthetic, to become someone else in America—someone less interested in instructing through his art and more involved with attracting commercial success. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In actuality Weill was a citizen of the world, and most of his works-–from early on through the end of his life—share a number of unifying aesthetic characteristics that allowed his music to be heard and to resonate in many different environments. Weill had an innate need to expose man's inhumanity, and no matter the place in which he was writing and the style of music to which people were accustomed, he found the compositional techniques that allowed his message to emerge. His works suggest ways of actively creating a better future, often through an explication of negative examples of oppression. The ways in which he executed this grand ideal contributed to the greatness of his work universally, and are explained in the following paragraphs and then in more detail, throughout the remainder of this chapter and Chapter 5.

First, Kurt Weill was drawn to humanistic and moral themes, around which most of his works revolve. His works often take their form as political commentaries that have a way of creating conversations either of or about deep solitude and struggle. Weill had a mode of instructing without preaching, and believed that his role as artist was to illuminate paths to redemption, while at the

[68] T.W. Adorno says in his obituary that Kurt Weill's overall body of work lacks "consistent unity expected of a genuine composer". Cited in: Kim H. Kowalke, "Kurt Weill, Modernism, and Popular Culture: Offentlichkeit als Stil (Public as Style) ," *Modernism/Modernity* (The Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press) 2, no. 1 (1995): 29.

same time creating entertainment value. For Weill, this drive came out of his strong social and moral consciousness, which no doubt came from his family's religious background. In Weill's own words, "I seem to react very strongly to the suffering of underprivileged people, of the oppressed, the persecuted. When my music involves human suffering, it is for better or worse, pure Weill.[69]

Next, by always being in service to the text, his musical treatments reflected what was needed. For Weill, structure is always determined by content. Most often this meant developing a displaced sense of voice which gave the author's voice neither the quality of an insider nor outsider; he did this in a number of ways, sometimes using hybrid musical genres within the same chorus of a song, or often by creating a kind of detached musical style whereby those singing, be it in monologue or dialogue, do so in an isolated manner. In addition, Weill was very intentional about choosing musical structure. Commenting on what for him is at the center of creating a musical or operetta, Kurt Weill said the following in December of 1946:

> The most important job to be done….is to decide on a definite form for the show and to be consistent in carrying through this form…we're [Weill and his collaborator at the time] always aware of the danger of falling into the conventional musical-comedy pattern of dialogue-number-dialogue-number. That's why we decided to have numbers grow out of action…to avoid the break between spoken word and sung word. It is obvious now that whenever we stick to this formula we have a great show; and whenever we go away from it we confuse our audience…it is no accident that the emotional parts are the high spots…because we have achieved a complete blending of words and music and action.[70]

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[69] Kurt Weill, interview by Boris Goldovsky, "Intermission Feature during broadcast of Metropolitan Opera performance of Manon Lescaut," *Opera News on the Air*, Kurt Weill Foundation (December 10, 1949).

[70] Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, *Street Scene: A Sourcebook*, ed. Edward Harsh, and Kim Kowalke, Joanna Lee (New York, NY: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, 1994).

He didn't quite put his finger on it himself, but he knew what he had to do to create his own style of prophetic writing, in order to educate and instill thought and renewal in his listeners.

Just as Kurt's early years contained a combination of Jewish and German musical identities, which were merged by his father and those around him, Kurt too was a composer that did not compartmentalize. A full blending was always his aim. His creativity was rooted in his character which included his intertwined German and Jewish identities—and for him merging musical styles in the context of a clear dramatic structure was a kind of default position to which he consistently returned.

Finally, Kurt's many innate personal gifts and skills which were developed in the first 18 years of his life--intellectual savvy, great emotional sensitivity and as a highly developed musician and orchestrator--enabled him to craft his art such that his messages would ring out and be heard in numerous new formats and in unrelated surroundings and locations. Because he was so highly trained by virtuoso teachers, and had a deep trove of practical compositional and musical directorship experience to draw on from his earlier years at the Ducal Court and in the surrounding theaters, he had an ability to collaborate with his lyricists and librettists that was unparalleled.

Finally, and most importantly, his early childhood years offered him a version of religiosity that stayed with him, most certainly at different levels in different points of his life. While some of his compositions like *The Eternal Road* and the works that he wrote later in his life in connection with Palestine had a Jewish modal inspiration, most of his works share an element of the ideals of social justice reflected in the Bible as well as an active questioning of the possibility for change, which mirrors our human role to perform in the same image as that of God. To say that Weill was a modern day Messiah would be an exaggeration, but there was an element of redemption-seeking that

appears consistently throughout Weill's body of work, as there was for many of Weill's liberal Jewish colleagues, certainly in the early part of the 20th century.

With the above themes and dynamics of Weill's artistry in mind, we turn now to more of a chronological look at Weill's work in Europe, and how these characteristics are at play within the details of some of his compositions. Interestingly, while much of Kurt Weill's life work involves a search for his place in non-Jewish Germany, even in these early years, one can see particular moments in his career which ultimately will point him back in the direction of his Jewish roots.

Kurt Weill: Pre-1925

In Weill's very early years, as noted previously, while in primary school until he was nine in 1909, he took two to three hours a week of Jewish instruction where he studied rituals, Hebrew language and mitzvhot. He then moved on to the Herzogliche Friedrichs-Oberreal Schule for middle school where his life was distinctly German. He studied German language, literature, art and music and joined the German equivalent of the Boy Scouts. In Kurt's words, "we were being prepared to serve the Emperor and the army."[71] At the same time, while other boys played sports after school, Kurt ran home to practice the synagogue organ. His life—both full and full of contrast--was being played out on a split screen.

As noted in the previous chapter, his earliest musical works center around the synagogue--a setting of *Mi Addir* (1913) and a *Prayer Song (Lobgesang Gebet in 1915)* a 4-part chorale for his sister's Confirmation. Always attracted to the highest quality text, his first truly substantial piece was a song-cycle—*Ofrahs Lieder*--based on the love poetry of Yehuda HaLevi, the great medieval Spanish-Hebrew poet, in German translation. The songs are a hybrid of elements of Jewish and

[71] Farneth, 10.

German culture, encompassing the themes of longing and love and capturing what many German Jews saw as an ideal vision of the future: the combining of German and Jewish culture, without the renunciation of one or the other.

For Kurt, however, there was a kind of personal religious renunciation in the works. By the age of 12 in 1912 he showed a clear interest in non-Synagogue music, and as the world headed toward WWI, young Kurt was heading in a more secular direction. He spent his time in the world of the Stage--opera and theater. He also wrote a fair number of orchestral works which were characterized by an attraction to atonality which we hear in his two early symphonies, his children's ballad *Die Zaubernacht*, in many works for chamber orchestra--including a concerto for violin and wind orchestra, a string quartet and a cello sonata--and many other pieces for orchestra and voice.

Composition went on to be his focus musically in the early years and while he composed more liturgical music, in this arena he was told that he should write in a simple style. His personal letters to family members indicate that a "simple" style brought up images of his father's compositions and that he had no interest in taking on 4-part chorale writing as a mode of expression. Further, he had no interest in changing his style to please external critics and teachers. In a letter to his brother in 1917 he wrote, "I've written a very good fugue for four voices. Of course it was too modern, too chromatic, for Mr. Kohler [his teacher], but he could not discover any mistakes and admitted, 'there's some very good musical stuff in there.' I took that as a good sign."[72] Weill was in tune with what worked for him and recognized in his teacher's critique that he was off to an auspicious beginning that he would not compromise.

In that regard, he was keenly aware both of what he was <u>not</u> drawn to, as well as the material that moved and inspired him. When he was 17, almost two decades before *The Eternal Road* was

[72] Ibid., 11.

produced--with Libretto by Franz Werfel--he read the humanistic poetry of Werfel and wondered if Werfel was actually Jewish, expressing an interest in setting his poetry to music. In a letter to his brother Hanns, he said that a piece based on these poems "might become [his] first 'philosophical composition…."[73] While *The Eternal Road*, produced in 1934-5 in Chemnitz, Germany and then in 1937 in NYC, was the first of a number of collaborations with Werfel that would follow, it had become evident quite early that Weill leaned toward texts and librettists where the work would ask big, philosophical and existential questions, reminiscent of family conversations he had had as a child.

In his late teens, he convinced his father to let him study with Albert Bing, a Jewish musician, composer and conductor who had newly arrived in Dessau from Berlin. Kurt flourished with Bing as teacher--he studied conducting, orchestration and score-reading. Bing was also employed as Kappelmeister at The Court Theater, a nice synergy for Weill who was also working there. It should be noted that by the age of 18 he continued in-depth studies and was also studying organ, theory, improvisation and counterpoint with Bing and others, as well as composition with Englebert Humperdink. Musically, in these years, his skills grew exponentially. Kurt was fascinated, and almost obsessed with, the notion of fusion of different styles of music, which we see in his first major public compositions (including *Der Protagonist*, see more next page)**.** In this score, which experts call the climax of his early development, the musical language has an interplay between the non-triadic and harmonic, and in a way where somehow he does express triads, but only as cadences. Kim Kowalke has called it "…an assimilation of the linear polyphony, non-tonal materials, pervasive chromaticism, and constructive devices"[74]. Kurt had experimented with this creative

[73] Ibid., 13.
[74] Kim Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univeristy Microfilms International, 1979), 263

language in his earlier orchestral works, almost in the way an artist would first do a pencil sketch, as an outline for what was to come later.

It seems that, in part, this obsession with different styles was a reaction against the style of music dramas of the 1800s, which he felt were unnatural and had a false pathos. In Kim Kowalke and Weill's words, "[He] eschew[ed] music that 'depicted floating atmosphere' or "expressed nervously exaggerated sentiments…and asserted that music must furnish a commentary for the incidents on stage."[75] Weill felt strongly that these values had to be clear in chamber and orchestral music, as well as in theater and opera. His mixed choice of style, form and genre created a musical fabric and produced heightened expression, which in turn enabled a refined experience of a true emotion, which for Weill was the experience of the human condition.

As a deeply emotional and sensitive artist, it is not surprising that early in his life, Weill considered himself a pacifist. In these early years, his sense of social activism was established, no doubt due to the Jewish values instilled by his family, and he wrote a set of anti-war choruses for his Dessau school choir to sing. At home, by the age of 17, he could be found reading in his father's library the great European Naturalistic writers and poets--Emile Zola, Hermann Bang and Albert Brachvogel–and hoping for the end of the war.. His brother Hanns had been drafted to fight in 1917 and later that year Kurt wrote to his brother quoting the opera *Hansel and Gretel* saying that he "still believed that 'when the need is greatest, God will hold out his hand'".[76] While Kurt was in no way interested in institutional religious Judaism for himself, it is safe to say that in Weill's case, internally the son of the Cantor felt his faith and a sense of God's love in a deep way.

Weill left for Berlin in 1918 to study music in more depth. His most important connection was with Ferruccio Busoni, who accepted him as only one of five students in his composition master

[75] Ibid., 98.
[76] Farneth, 14.

class. In these years, his classical compositions were performed throughout Berlin, including at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra; Busoni recommended him to the recording label Universal Edition (Vienna) and he signed his first publishing contract with them in April 1924. In the early part of these years (1918-1921), he was simultaneously working as a choral conductor in Synagogues, which for him served a support-job function. By 1924 he was also on the broader musical map, having been named chief Berlin Music Correspondent for the weekly journal *Der Deutsche Rundfunkhe*, in which he wrote about his own music and that of his contemporaries.

In early 1924, he met Expressionist playwright George Kaiser, through whom he would meet Lotte Lenye, his future wife, sometimes muse and eventual protector of his work. Kaiser and Weill shared a fruitful writing collaboration and their works were performed in Dresden, Frankfurt, Hanover, Leipzig, in Austria as well as in Russia. Their most important work is a one-act opera, *Der Protagonist*, based on an earlier play of Kaiser's.

Kurt Weill in Berlin: Art for Social Change

Der Protagonist was written in 1925 (premiered in Berlin,1928) and well represents Kurt's early years, when he explored a range of styles, all the while asking a big universal question, in this case about the search for identity. The strong, dramatic text of *Der Protagonist*—which focuses on the protagonist whose problem is that he cannot discern between reality and fantasy--gave Weill a powerful complement to respond to with his music, in this case free-tonal and expressionistic, featuring two orchestras and heavily influenced by Stravinsky, who was writing at the same time. In fact, some musicologists have used Stravinsky's "pole of attraction"—that composer's explanation of the subordination of tonality to the overall functionality in music—to try to understand Weill's itinerant harmonic creations in the 1923-25 period. In Stravinsky's words, at this time, they were

"…confronted with a new logic of music"[77] and Kurt Weill was part of this expansion out of the world of tonality of the 1800s which he found so insipid, which in the case of *Der Protagonist* was a perfect fit for his abilities to match music, psychological character and dramatic action.

Some have suggested that *Der Protagonist* was autobiographical for Weill, who like the protagonist, had leapt into the making of his art to try to create meaning out of the current Post-war reality in Germany. As the audience traveled through the tragedy of the play's mime-hero, reviews mention that people were often left gasping. The episodic opera was considered light-hearted and somewhat farcical but was layered with prickly accents in the brand-name voice for which Weill would eventually become known. These disparate styles created a sense in the opera that things are not exactly what they seem, which mirrored the predicament of the Protagonist himself.

According to the *Kurt Weill Foundation*, the opera is the symbolic pinnacle of the first half of his composing life, with the drama of the action and visuals playing an almost submissive role to what the music and its form warranted, but at the same time with all artistic elements—music, drama, visuals--working hand-in-hand. At the time the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* in Berlin said of the work, "This one-acter restores our faith in the future of opera…with its grand dramatic sweep it is pure theater, theater at its most vivid."[78] Most importantly, the success of this opera both laid the foundation for Weill's reputation as an important operatic composer, but also led to other invitations to collaborate on additional works of opera and to have his work appear at music festivals.

One such invitation was to work with the left-wing, socially critical Bertholdt Brecht on a short songspiel called *Mahagonny Songspiel*—six distinct poems each composed to music with its own specific identity, and linked together with interludes by the orchestra—to be performed in Baden-

[77] Kim Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univeristy Microfilms International, 1979), 261.
[78] Taylor, 90.

Baden. The piece is a kind of bemoaning of the decrepit state of Germany in the early 20th century and the complete dearth of social consciousness that brought on its demise. Weill was so attracted to this topic as he related it to the decline in communal ethics and responsibility that Jews had experienced and understood as their own throughout history; one might wonder if for him, there was a parallel to the communal themes of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem that fill Jewish history and liturgy. In the case of *Mahagonny* however, the opera concludes in complete chaos, and does not bring on hope or redemption, a mirroring of the state of Germany which seemed to be beyond repair.

This collaboration on *Mahagonny* is notable because it forged Weill's connection with Brecht, but more so, because its creation also marked a kind of climax in the development of Weill's musical language which at this point was no longer experimentation, but very much his own established style. The three most important innovations that came out of this piece were: 1) orchestrations that were very precise and suited to the music-drama which featured three violins, two clarinets, two trumpets, saxophone, trombone, piano and percussion, 2) the fact that each song was self-contained and 3) that each was evocative of a popular, cabaret song of the day. This collaboration was hugely successful; what appeared as a songspiel in March of 1927 went on to be produced as a full-scale opera two years later.

The full-scale expanded opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny,* created a vivid picture of the determination, desperation, and debauchery of life in Weimar Germany at the time. Without question, Kurt Weill's calling to merge his musical talents with a more social and political agenda came to fruition here in what is perhaps his best-known full-composed through-length operatic work (on par with the social satire *The Threepenny Opera* which represented sleazy, angry Berlin in Pre-Hitler days).

Professionally, the Brecht-Weill team was *beshert*. When Weill had previously reviewed Brecht for his music publication and described one of Brecht's originally composed dramas (for which he wrote both text and music) as "'perhaps the most original and powerful drama of modern time,'"[79] no one could have known just how much the two men shared aesthetically vis-à-vis their respective artistic *raison-d'etre*.

At the time they met, Brecht was studying Karl Marx and had attached himself to Marx's belief that the world needed a specific kind of drama and literature that could reveal all that needed to be changed politically and morally. He believed that man must understand what he is objectively witnessing—ie the piece of theater or literature--rather than engaging empirically and becoming emotionally and psychologically entangled in it. Brecht's particular style centered around the effect of *alienation*: "a rationalistic means of breaking down the empathetic process by which the actor identifies with his role and the audience identifies with the actor".[80] This effect, combined with his cynical, rough, sometimes almost savage and violent approach, which some have referred to as "savage pacifism,"[81] lent his plays the ability to reject the culture of post WWI Germany in a gross and base manner. Through a kind of disaffection, the audience's grasp of his message rang loud and clear.

For Weill, there was an artistic synchronicity with Brecht that was clear from the beginning. Much of Brecht's poetry had an internal sense of musicality of its own, which Weill keyed right into; as well, Weill shared Brecht's passion for seeking to create art for social change. As a person, however, Brecht (whose father was Catholic and mother was Protestant) could not have been more different than Weill. He was hedonistic and

[79] Ibid., 105
[80] Ibid., 102.
[81] Ibid., 101.

narcissistic. In the artistic decision-making aspect of the Brecht-Weill collaboration, Brecht always insisted, unabashedly, on financially weighting contracts and agreements in his own favor in an almost authoritarian way. This was an omen of things to come for the pair.

As noted above, it seems that for Weill as a Jewish composer, there was an additional layer on top of the German national one at play. In this dangerous time in European history when Jews were quickly becoming outcasts, Weill rejected the notion of becoming powerless, and his Jewish awareness went into high gear, declaring itself as consciousness that would be heard in Germany. This was not uncommon for Jewish artists in Germany in these years. In fact Weill joined with many others--such as Schoenberg and Bloch--who attempted to reverse complacency, merging their liberal values with National European interests. For these artists, who had temporarily forsaken the faith of their parents and grandparents in the process of their German assimilation, this new brand of protest through artistic action became a revitalizing element of the German-Jewish experience. For Brecht the Savage Pacifist and Weill the Universal Pacifist, their collaboration on *Mahagonny* was a powerful way to begin.

The opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* which premiered on March 9, 1930, is told as a lyrical parody and satire that fused an untamed music-hall style and opera—in neo-classical, neo-Verdian as well as a more constantly tonal style. This was different from Weill's earlier works which sharply juxtaposed tonal and non-tonal free-style. Each song is a specific response to the intellectual framework of the poem, and the jarringly mixed style of the music became a metaphor for the moral confusion of the Weimar Republic. Even the name Mahagonny itself is a fabricated nonsense word which sounds somewhat foreign but oddly realistic, like an old piece of dead wood; as Brecht watched what

was happening to German society as Nazis filled its streets, he seemed to have had the idea that Mahagonny was a parallel for Germany—the kind of Germany he would never want to live in. In fact, the premiere performance of the opera was interrupted by Nazi demonstrations and further performances were held under strict police control. Weill had become a political target and the Nazis considered his messages of communism and socialism contemptuous.

The opera is based on six poems by Brecht--part in German and part in an odd kind of faux-pidgeon English--which create a "satirical love-hate vision of an immoral capitalist America that both attracted and repelled [Brecht]."[82] The poems focused on a journey toward Mahagonny or "Paradise City" which represented a kind of prototypical inured bourgeois class, populated by a rough, seedy group of four alcoholics and two prostitutes. The poems portray scenes where men and women travel to Mahagonny to become free and wealthy and on the journey their lives become an endless string of whoring, fighting, poker games and whiskey bars. Each of the poems is like an individual photograph and are sewn together as a libretto, with music from beginning to end. The power of the work is in the emotional world of each of the songs. In Brecht's own words, he warned, "This whole Mahagonny exists only because everything is so bad, because there is no serenity, no harmony, and nothing to hold on to."[83] This den of baseness and iniquity represented a world with which most of German society could relate to as a kind of "capitalist Gehenna"[84].

The desired effect was for the show to be in dialogue with itself, where the audience joined in as a kind of moral arbiter. Musically, Weill accomplished this by creating a tonal

[82] Taylor, 106.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 107.

plan for the entire opera which concludes Act I and Act III in the key of B, and puts Act II, where everything is permitted and for the moment people are spared from natural disaster, in the concluding key of B-flat. He uses this method through the entire opera in order to relax and then build tension, and also to build a thematic fabric that brings all three acts together. He also uses certain keys to bring in thematic material--for example the key of B is used to embody unending needs for sex by the girls in the opera, and which also accompany a man on the way to a brothel, and likewise is featured in the song "Alabama Song." In this way there are internal musical/thematic relationships within the opera that are strategically recalled.

Specifically, in "Alabama Song" (see Appendix Musical Example 2), written in ABABA form (the last A section has a small alteration at its end) he used remote and jarring sounds in juxtaposition with a more proscribed tone or style, which thematically brought out the two different layers of society that Germany had become. As the two women Bessie and Jenny sing, rummaging through the sordid imaginary place called Mahagonny in search of a "whiskey bar", they begin the A section grunting out a simple repeated three-note phrase that has a percussive, quick accompaniment that creates a vitriolic emotion. The bass line of the accompaniment features open 5ths which move up and down by a half step, going from C to C# every 4 to 6 measures. German composers such as Russian-born Lazar Weiner and Frederick Picket followed this style. The subtle tension of the piece comes from the inner voices moving over this changing bass line, and provides the effect of the world crashing in on itself. In the B section of the piece, subtleties happen in the inner voices, featuring a move from B-natural to B-flat which continues to be repeated. The B section in essence continues the repeated open 5^{ths} in the bass line that were heard in the A section, but the

rhythm has changed to include two sets of two eighth-notes followed by a quarter note per measure, which underscore the flowing melody above with a dance-hall like accompaniment. This creates an overall effect that has much less bite to it than what was heard in the A section, but nonetheless jarring.

Weill's writing follows the art song style which is similar to the lieder that Franz Schubert and Robert Schuman wrote approximately a century earlier in Austria and Germany. We hear in Weill's work that he is developing his own style of establishing, contrasting and developing a vocal piece, not in a classically harmonic way, but instead by using more static harmonies with subtle shifts that create a tension, with ongoing motion that pushes through the thick accompaniment linking the sections of the piece. In "Moon of Alabama" in the A section lyrics, the singers implore whomever it is that is listening to "show us the way to the next whiskey bar…[and] the next little Dollar"; they have lost hope and are looking for a quick fix that might offer them a momentary high or a flash of something that makes them feel good—alcohol or money. The juxtaposition of what occurs in the contrasting B section is in fact alienating, as the tune turns into a kind of lyrical love song, filled with tension in the accompaniment, where the singers bid good-bye to what used to be good, with an almost inebriated croon of "Oh Moon of Alabama, we now must say good-bye. We lost our good old mama [ie security and a sense of stability], and must have whiskey, oh you know why." These lyrics, set in the structure of two separate yet related musical sections, create a kind of shock effect, which paralleled the hard, cold reality of what was happening in the real world.

The critic Herbert Flesicher said of *Mahagonny*, "The songs are in essence one continuous lamentation, one continuous attack….they are language, philosophy, life in

sound."[85] Weill found his real voice and the power of his gifts in this song style -- the power to let music become the language of the German community. The communal and historical experience of Germany was reflected in Mahagonny, complete with anger, pain and disbelief manifested by the creation of this imaginary place, called Mahagonny. In T.W. Adorno's words:

> The surrealistic intentions of *Mahagonny* are borne out by the music, which, from the first note to the last, is dedicated to the shock which the sudden representation of the disintegrated bourgeois world engenders… This music, pieced together from triads and off-notes with the steady beat of old music hall songs, which we hardly recognize any more but are nonetheless remembered like an heirloom, is hammered and glued together with the fetid mucilage of a soggy potpourri of operas.[86]

The music of *Mahagonny* created a startling, awakening effect that somehow bridged past to present and developed into a conscious core that became the show's artistic glue. The poems were rooted in a dedicated social consciousness, so the work in its entirety took on a quality of addressing the Nation. It is interesting to note in light of Kurt Weill's Jewish background, that just as in Jewish music where there are communal laments and fervent prayers built into liturgy and ritual, so too in this secular musical style, the listener-participant is given the opportunity to go through a physical and spiritual common experience.

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[85] Ibid., 108.

[86] *Der Scheinwerfer,* translated by Jamie Owen Daniel. Publication date unavailable. Found in article by Kim H. Kowalke, "Kurt Weill, Modernism, and Popular Culture: Offentlichkeit als Stil (Public as Style) ," *Modernism/Modernity* (The Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press) 2, no. 1 (1995): 27-69.

Again, Weill was very intentional about instructing German society through song about the moral wilderness into which it had found itself. In his own words, in a letter in his label, Universal, in 1930 discussing the opera, he said,

> You will see that with our changes (which are now final) it is quite explicit and clear that *Mahaonny* is nothing other than Sodom and Gomorrah. We show clearly that anarchy leads to crime and crime to ruin. You can't get any more moral.[87]

Weill's interest was in creating accessible art that would bring a larger audience into the theater, to experience the aesthetic of music that could be changed and adapted for its own specific mission for shared community experience, not unlike the joining of music and text that he had experienced in synagogue life (versus Brecht, who was committed to the idea of social change through art *per se)*. Overall, Weill was living and creating his work in this politically charged environment, not necessarily as a form of political avowal, but more as a avant-guarde means of impacting audiences such that they would be both entertained, and in some way moved and instructed by their own consciousness.

Weill and his work were considered poisonous to German society; Nazi sympathizers tried to discredit him and ban his works from state-subsidized theaters. His association with communist Brecht, whose personal and professional misbehavior had become increasingly difficult for Weill to tolerate, did not help and by summer 1930, both frustrated with each other, they parted ways. As it turned out, Brecht knew himself what it was to be a poisonous character, and had a damaging effect on Kurt Weill. He was a masterful contract negotiator, but Weill was not. Kurt Weill, therefore, had been severely unsupported and under-represented in his business dealings with Brecht, and as a

[87] Farneth, 109.

result lost much of the profits and proceeds from their collaboration that should have come to him over the course of his life. But Weill persevered.

In this period of great change for Jews in Germany, a seismic shift had also been brewing internally for Weill, regarding his relationship to Judaism. From 1918-1924, while studying and working in Berlin, Weill had felt very disconnected from religion and Jewish community; but by the dawning of 1925 and in the years that followed he admitted that he felt much closer to the religion of his childhood and had an awareness that he was experiencing his own kind of awakening and *t'shuvah* regarding Judaism. This was not uncommon in this period, as other musicians such as Ernst Bloch and Arnold Schoenberg have described a similar rebirth in Judaism at the exact same time in history, each of course in his own specific way returning to the ethical ideals rooted in the Torah as a vehicle of educating the world—Jewish and otherwise—on the experience of suffering.

In a letter to his mother, commenting on his difficulty taking part in Berlin Jewish society, Weill wrote:

> The other Jews (both the assimilated ones and the Zionists), are impossible anyway. So that leaves only the third road [meaning <u>not</u> via Jewish practice and <u>not</u> through Jewish society]: To find the way back to one's childhood faith very gradually in the course of one's own human development. This takes a long time and leads through many detours—but it's the crowning of every major achievement—because the one great truth must be something very simple.[88]

[88] Farneth, 40.

In the coming years, Weill would in fact make his way through many detours and ultimately find his own very original way to merge his loyalty to Judaism and his response to concerns of German culture and its evolving politics.

By 1933, Weill knew that he could no longer stay in Germany. On the surface, his decision to go into exile in Paris was due less to the fact that he was a Jew, and more because, it seemed, that he was not willing or able to compromise the kind of socially and politically expressive work he needed to create. He was in no way interested in stripping his work of the political essence that was at its core, and it is very possible that this is what saved him and Lotte Lenye, who by then was his wife. However, I believe that at the time of his exile there was an element of personally understanding what it was to in fact be a stranger in a strange land, and this would influence almost every piece of music he would create moving forward. Like Shoenberg who experienced this strong desire to educate through propaganda, Weill began a campaign to do more work outside of Germany, and on March 21, 1933—only10 days before the first boycott on Jewish shops was put in place—he fled to Paris by car.

In Paris, once again he worked with Brecht, but just for a brief time. After that, he moved to London where he completed his Symphony no. 2, his last purely orchestral work, which premiered both in Amsterdam and New York by Bruno Walter. What is perhaps most important about these years is that once he left Berlin, he made a point of only working on theater that was not state-subsidized because he both wanted his product to be authentically needed and in his own words, to "serve as a means to moral or political impact on an audience expecting to be pleased and entertained as well as edified."[89] In other words, he wanted his work to be indispensable and for his message to have a kind of lasting permanence.

[89] Ibid., 59.

In 1933, Weill was ready to find a new approach to address the notion of national fulfillment; simultaneously, he was undergoing a kind of personal renewal, in which he found himself ready to re-address his Jewish identity in a deeper way. Perhaps the best example of Weill's desire to create personally meaningful work with an enduring impact, and with a very Jewish core, took form in his collaboration with Franz Werfel and Max Reinhardt on *The Eternal Road,* with which we begin in the next chapter, which focuses on his life and work in America.

Chapter 5

Kurt Weill in America

The Eternal Road

While up until this point in 1934, Jewish themes had not held prominent positions in his musical career, Weill's sense of devotion to his faith had been rekindled and had been brewing for almost a decade. This re-sparking of his Jewish roots included an interest in the principles of Zionism which was newly blossoming in these years. Combined with the anti-semitism taking place in Germany, these experiences generated a restored feeling of commitment toward the Jewish people and Weill's own personal history. Given an opportunity to collaborate with Werfel, the poet whose philosophical words he had wondered about as a child, on a unique blend of biblical drama, music and pageantry--in service to a message about the ideals of Judaism--Kurt Weill was ready.

The impetus behind the actual creation of *The Eternal Road* was American philanthropist Meyer W. Weisgal, also a son of a cantor, who had immigrated to the United States from Poland. A fervent Zionist, it was Weisgal who had the vision to bring Weill together with Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), one of the most renowned German stage directors who also had success in Hollywood. To this creative mix, he had the vision to also include Franz Werfel (1890-1945), the German poet and writer who had written a number of works on religion and was living in Austria at the time.

The Eternal Road is based on a play of Werfel's which describes a Jewish congregation at the point of exile. While waiting to be driven out of Palestine, the congregation waits in their synagogue, where their Rabbi reads passages from Torah, each segueing into a current historical enactment. At the end of the drama, the congregants are in fact expelled from their

city, and in the process of taking to their version of The Road, their faith, like that of our ancestors over time, is restored.

While the creators were on to something in 1933--the year Hitler came to power--when the initial conversations about collaboration began, of course, they had no idea what would actually occur five years later with the outbreak of WWII. Written in the liminal time-period between the waning of Jewish hope in Germany and the actual outbreak of the war, of course, the creators could not have fathomed that the Jews would not in fact live a life where they were free to assimilate. This makes the play all the more powerful and the ending more problematic. Weill and his collaborators wrote *The Eternal Road* with a conclusion that proposed a symbolic Babylonian Exile, (which they viewed quite positively as a time of difficulty followed by great achievement for the Jewish people). The somewhat naive ending of the piece is particularly difficult to deal with--and has since been re-written--as it had the congregation taking to the symbolic road, like their ancestors before them, singing *Psalm 126*, with the words, "When the Lord turned against the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream," Of course, in the modern days of 1933-34, the writers looked at Exodus and attempted to create a parallel of exile to America that so many were trying to enter at the time. Immigration in those years was extremely restrictive, as it was into Palestine as well. At this point in history, a time marked by disloyalty and treachery of the Germans, there was no possible way to know what would actually happen to Jews in Europe.

That being said, the piece embraces a number of universal and Jewish topical themes that are distinctly hopeful and actionable. First, the three creators attempted to integrate modern history with the Bible as a way of reinforcing the idea that Torah is a living, instructive text—perhaps a kind of rallying point for the Jews to gather around when they found

themselves on the precipice of yet another potential Exodus from Europe. At this time in modernity when Christianity was the mainstream religion (as through most of history), *The Eternal Road* gave Jews an opportunity to turn back to text, as we always have, for help in times of need.

In the music, Weill wrote in a distinctly Jewish way that up until this point he had not. His mission was to incorporate as much Jewish chant as he could into the piece, particularly into the synagogue scenes. He delved into his memory and began a writing process which he described as follows:

> Setting to work in the fall of 1934 I proceeded to put down all the Hebraic melodies I had learned from childhood on. I had an abundance of material. With about 200 songs, which I had written in several days' memory seeking, I began work at the *Biblioteque Nationale* to trace their sources as far as possible. Many I had discovered had been written in the 18th and 19th centuries, some borrowed from the most surprising sources—from opera, 'hit songs' of the times, street tunes, concert music, symphonies. This I dismissed, retaining only the traditional music. With that as my guide, I attempted to recreate music that would communicate naturally and inevitably the stories of the Old Testament.[90]

Given Weill's romance with text, and an opportunity to visit his childhood, this in-depth investigation was no surprise. Weill was not alone in this endeavor to revisit and redefine what Judaism meant in his life and work; another composer such as Ernst Bloch called by Alexander Ringer "the Jewish secular dialectician" was actively engaged in creating and

[90] Kurt Weill, "Score for the Eternal Road," *The New York Times*, December 27, 1936.

defining the secular Jewish artist's Jewish sense of the world, by finding a keen juxtaposition between the secular and sacred, in Bloch's case writing in a distinctly Jewish spirit.

In *The Eternal Road*, we see many examples of Weill's Jewishness emerge. To begin, the music of the role of the Rabbi is filled with recitatives that are inspired by the melodies of cantillation. In addition to these sounds of Jewish Synagogue music, Weill incorporates *Ahava Rabah* and other Jewish modes, intertwining them throughout the Oratorio and juxtaposing them with more contemporary sounds, like neo-Baroque, musical theater and Hollywood film score genres. Like similar religious works in the Christian category (*The Eternal Road* has often been compared To Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*) *The Eternal Road* finds a certain place in history where once again music expresses a given composer's notion of what religiosity is in an effort to explain the ineffable. Putting this into a wider Jewish context, other composers—also in an effort to define their own modern religious identities—did similar work, for example Ernst Bloch and his *Sacred Service* and Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* and *A Survivor from Warsaw*. Each of these works is marked in its given time period as a religiously motivated musical passion play that might provide a sense of hope for the future in an atmosphere of great national despair.

Turning back to *The Eternal Road*, what emerged was essentially Weill. As was his consistent pattern by this point, he was writing for the audience he so desperately wanted to reach. The resulting work is a cross-over piece that really cannot be categorized. Weill has written that his intention in writing this staged oratorio—combining aria, song, dance, chorus, orchestra and spoken passages—was in fact to create the kind of epic theater that had become synonymous with his name. The piece would focus on the actions of a People, not

so much on their emotional motivations or psychological states. The purpose of the music, therefore is not to comment on the plot, but rather to work hand in hand with the text so that the piece—filled with hybrids of the necessary styles--becomes a unified organism, surrendering to that which is artistically necessary.

Take for example *The Song of Ruth*, which Weill and his collaborators wrote as an opera placed within an opera. For better of worse, this text where Ruth exclaims her loyalty to Naomi and then to God saying "May God reward me happiness or sorrow, as death alone can tear us two asunder", Weill chooses almost a Salvation Army kind of musical-theater style slow, lugubrious march. It is a plodding tune that would not necessarily be associated with the empassioned feeling that Ruth is exhibiting. One might wonder upon hearing the tune if Weill was trying to fit into a more American musical theater style with this choice, and was able to do so in the construct of this opera within an artificial "opera" setting. I do not think that this is the case. Rather, in an atmosphere where Jews had lost their grounding based on the politics of the day, this song was a rallying cry written in a contemporary style. It seems to me that Weill's choice of musical setting helps to deliver his message as widely as possible, imploring his American Jewish audience not to renounce their faith and like Ruth, to maintain their loyalty.

In the same vein, we turn to the final section of *The Eternal Road*, which is based on *Lamentations*. Weill at this point was passionately taken over by the notion of teaching about the resilience that can emerge out of the unlimited capacity of man to be heartless and cruel. This is what can be heard in the second to last scene of the opera, which begins with a conversation between the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, where we hear elements of *Eicha* trope in the wailing about the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, we realize that we have

heard the *Eicha* motif throughout the Oratorio in places where Jewish faith threatens to break. However, the sounds of *Eicha* are interwoven with a kind of blissful hymn that foreshadows the reassertion of faith that has been the defining factor of Jewish people through history, with which this opera will conclude, with words based on *Psalm 126*. Once again we see in Weill's music that he references the past, always his father's son, but incorporates in this case a kind of musical etiquette that will be in alignment with the decorum of his listeners.

The Eternal Road had a pre-audition in Paris in 1934 where it was received with mixed reactions. In 1935, Weill went to America, initially to supervise a production of *The Eternal Road*. (He became an American citizen in 1943) and ultimately the piece had its premier in New York in 1937 at The Manhattan Opera House. It was not well received and quickly became known as the most expensive theatrical flop in New York history.

One of the key, and I would argue lasting, messages of *The Eternal Road* is that it is a paen to the glory of the state of German Jewry and the German Jewish experience before the outbreak of WWII. As an expression of modernity—constructed via the best gifts of Kurt Weill—love for text, his ability to consistently employ hybrid musical genres and his passion for his faith—along with his collaborators, *The Eternal Road* reflected the artistic, moral, political and spiritual complexity of this very specific juncture in time. This was a time of success and great prospering, which cannot always be viewed as joined with the events that came with the Holocaust and then the founding of Israel.

At the time, the piece served as an important prompt about what exactly humanity is—and is not—and became a statement about the astounding capacity for man's cruelty, as well the resilience and spirit of human beings. The words of Conductor Leon Botstein, in the

concert notes for the 1987 revival of *The Eternal Road,* effectively captured the work's importance when he said:

> …what is ultimately human is not essentially political. It is not wealth or power that make life worth living, but rather the life of the mind and imagination-traditions of belief, philosophy, literature, learning, art, music, theater….[and that] the spiritual possibilities of the future always survive political disenfranchisement.[91]

In this amazing merging of art, entertainment and ethical instruction, perhaps this is where we find the lesson from which future generations can learn.

Weill was a living example of this, having survived his own German-Jewish story, guided by his personal moral compass. This, combined with an amazing ability to narrativize knowledge and experience, enabled him to make lasting points with his music. I would make a well-educated conjecture that his early years of synagogue life and his close study of pageantry, where the whole musical experience became a way of story-telling, was not unlike the art he grew to create so effectively as an adult composer. *The Eternal Road* is in fact quite reminiscent of the power of the Jewish message he encountered 37 years prior at the dedication of the new synagogue in Dessau—centered around an artistic merging of spectacle and ceremony—this time in an arena which had become his new home.

In 1987 at the revival commemorating the 50th Anniversary of *The Eternal Road,* Kurt Weill Foundation board members Guy Stern and Edward Harsh noted:

> The Eternal Road was a self-conscious effort on the part of its three authors to break the apparently impenetrable barrier between high art and popular culture. This

[91] Leon Bottstein, "http://www.americansymphony.org/concert_notes/the-eternal-road-acts-III-and-IV," *American Symphny Orchestra,* 1987, http://www.americansymphony.org (accessed November 12, 2012).

> opera/theatrical drama was designed to appeal in all its elegance and profundity to a mass audience without descending into cynical theatricality. In this sense, it contributed to a pivotal and defining debate in twentieth-century music. What kind of music constitutes the voice of modernity, and for whom should contemporary concert music be written? [92]

The effect was stirring and touching, wholly original and in no way imitative—and embued with the effect of taking the past, re-creating it and offering the lessons of our Communal Jewish history in an impactful new light.

Kurt Weill on Broadway

While *The Eternal Road* was not a commercial success, for Weill it was a kind of personal settling with his past. Having arrived and settled in America, particularly in the years after *The Eternal Road,* Kurt Weill's creative experience was characterized by a kind of redemption, such that he was ready to face America with an increased amount of hope for the future. He took pride in how he functioned in the new country with which he had fallen quickly in love, appearing in public as the well-composed, nicely coiffed émigré. Weill so desired to live as an American and leave behind the pain he had endured while in Europe that it is ironic that the German Kurt Weill is better known than the American Weil.

So how did this translate to his artistic expression? In his works for Broadway, which will be explored in more detail in this chapter, we see his fascination with the American Jazz idiom, continued interest in hybridic musical forms, as well as an interest in the notion of American folklore and history and an interest in the notion of reality of American life verses the poetry of the American

[92] Ibid.

experience—the latter of which brought to him a rich stable of book writers with whom he would form fruitful text-based collaborations.

In his first American Broadway musical, *Johnny Johnson*, which he wrote in the three-year delay it took to raise funds to finally mount *The Eternal Road*, we find a dramatic satire (with a book and libretto by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Paul Green) about a friendless pacifist who felt labeled by the greedy world, as a crazed fanatic. Without question, Weill resonated with the story as he too was that pacifist in Weimar Germany. Weill used his Germanic, almost grotesque musical sensibility as a tool to provide jabs at those who contributed to societal greed and social injustice—national leaders, industrialists, even seemingly innocuous psychiatrists—and others he deemed to be pretenders.

In addition, in typical mixed Weill-style he instinctually needed to capture what was American, "…patriotic songs of WWI, torch songs form urban night clubs, cowboy songs and college glees and love duet[s] in waltz time…"[93] In an advertising flyer for the show that quoted a recent *New York Times* review by Brooks Atkinson, the show was described as:

> …a marriage of musical comedy and picaresque story telling. They have done an extraordinary job of dramatic expression. A sincere and generally exalting attempt to put on the stage and imaginative portrait of recent history. People who believe that plays should be written about intelligent themes have something to be thankful for…[94]

[93] "Kurt (Julian) Weill." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (Wagon-Zywny).* 2001, 226.

[94] Farneth, 169.

Weill had an innate ability to write as an American native, and similar to other American composers who had immigrated to the USA like Irving Berlin, he brought the perspective of his own German-Jewish history.

He had very quickly figured out, like Irving Berlin, Rodgers & Hammerstein, and Dorothy Fields,[95] that musical theatre could be a place where Jews might come forward into modern American society in an assertive, pro-active and empowering way; in America, they could create a new life by their design, experiencing redemption, transition and quasi-religious spiritual connection in their new land. Artistically, Weill's story in America becomes one of assimilation rather than an intentional revision of his earlier aesthetic, as some of his critics have suggested. Weill was thoroughly dedicated to the musical theater at this point and in the last decade or so of his life would create music that spoke directly and simply to the heart of his American audiences, where he would stay until his pre-mature death in 1950.

As ready as Weill was to take on New York, Broadway was not ready for Weill's shift to a more expressionistic musical theater style, and the *Johnny Johnson* had a very short run. (It was later accepted by America in 1954 when it was revived by Lotte Lenye.) It is interesting to note that three years earlier, Weill-Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* also failed on Broadway for similar reasons.

By the early 1940s, Weill's tastes had begun to shift. This was in large part due to the American custom of using a full orchestra for works of musical theater. Unlike most other composers of the time, Weill wrote all of his own orchestrations. He was interested in the totality of the piece and wrote the full score, composing much of it as he viewed the day's rehearsals, including most dance numbers and incidental music. He often stayed up all night,

[95] Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univeristy Press, 2004). 27.

risking his health in order to meet production schedules. He was also known to defy union rules that proscribed the number of players orchestras could have. His orchestrations called for what he felt the drama of the piece needed; for example, *Street Scene* had 35 players while *Lost in the Stars* only 12. His artistic vision was paramount. This, combined with a new growing sense of romanticism--caused his musical palette to shift toward something calmer and softer.

Whereas with *The Eternal Road*, he had paved his own path back to Jewish identification, in writing for Broadway he became consumed with understanding the ethos of his new country. Weill attributed his own success to the following, which he wrote in a letter to one of his friends in Germany in 1949:

> I took a very positive and constructive attitude towards the American way of life and cultural possibilities in this country most of which the German intellectuals who came here at the same time were critical and doubtful. I found enormous possibilities in my special field, the musical theater."[96]

As a man who had already assimilated as a Jew in Europe, Weill knew how essential it was for him to understand his new country, such that his works would be genuinely reflective as stories of American culture and experience.

Part of his legacy, misunderstood in my opinion, is that he has been criticized for an overall loss of quality in his compositions when he came to write on Broadway, a position with which, as stated earlier I strongly disagree. While in his European avant-guarde works like *Mahagonny* and *Three-Penny Opera*, he often created an alienating affect such that the listener would likely become distanced from the emotion of the story. In this way, the listener observes the story more in the way

[96] Farneth, 262.

of a detached narrator. It is interesting that in America, to create a similar affect, he used a different, and very specialized intertextual technique. This is evident for example in *Street Scene;* in order to bring the audience into the overall fabric of the piece, he created a kind of internal symphony in the work where "words and images recur [throughout the score of a show], interact, and evolve when presented by different characters at different points in the drama, like a giant collage."[97]

For the purposes of this paper, the list of film scores he wrote and his Broadway credits are too many to mention or delve into, so we will reserve that deeper analysis for one particular show, his 1947 *Street Scene,* to be discussed shortly. But briefly, in the almost 10 shows he wrote while in America (his last was a musical adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn*, which of course could not have been more American), there appeared a few outstanding musical themes. It is important to note that Weill's musical choices were made consistently—in America as well, despite his critics' observations--for the purpose of enhancing the text and telling the story. Weill remained focused on blending text and music in order to fully express the narrative.

How did he do this, specifically, in America? To begin, Weill took essentially European sounding melodies and harmonies and through an incorporation of jazz and blues (for example in "Speak Low" (1943)), attempted to Americanize them, such that, in my opinion, American audiences could hear them through a familiar idiom. Some have noted that he was heavily influenced by light opera, including Gilbert & Sullivan and Offenbach (whose father too had been a German Cantor). These influences went to good use, for example in his gem, "September Song", filled with more traditional European Harmony, flirting between Major and Minor, and featuring a romantic bridge which resembled the best of Puccini.

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[97] Kim H. Kowalke, "Kurt Weill, Modernism, and Popular Culture: Offentlichkeit als Stil (Public as Style) ," *Modernism/Modernity* (The Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press) 2, no. 1 (1995): 27-69. p.42.

In tunes like “My Ship” (1941) (see Appendix Musical Example 3), the marking on the music is *andante espressivo*. Weill’s lyricist, Ira Gershwin, described the music as intentionally "orchestrated by Kurt to sound sweet and simple at times, mysterious and menacing at others".[98] He accomplishes this by beginning with smooth 5th related chord progressions which quickly shift to a B section where the melody moves from pentatonicism to diatonicism to chromaticism, clearly a holdover from his days with Brecht and possibly even his cantorial muscle memory. Kurt Weill, however, takes this move a step further. While in a structure that is not so far from what classical musicians of the time—like Richard Wagner and Johannes Brahms--were doing, Weill goes on a progressive detour by taking an F-sharp diminished chord, the vii/vii of ii, which nicely resolves to the ii chord, a G-7. The menacing quality that Gershwin refers to comes as he moves out of the B section and back into A-prime, where after describing the perfect fantasy captured in the symbol of “My Ship”, the lyrics state that none of the details in this fantasy would mean anything “if there’s missing just one thing”; on this particular lyric, Weill employs a E diminished chord, a sound not yet heard which suggests great fragility in that particular moment, leading back into a more stable G7 chord. Again, within an ABA’ clear structure, everything is tonally based, and the sweeping, lush melodic lines are in synch with both the harmonies and movement of the piece.

In terms of texts he was drawn to, he continued to collaborate with only the best book- and libretto-writers: Marc Blitzstein, Elmer Rice, Langston Hughes, Maxwell Anderson, and Ogden Nash. It’s notable that none of these men were typical Musical Theater writers, rather novelists and folklorists; the only exceptions to this over the course of his American career were Moss Hart, Ira Gershwin and Alan Jay Lerner. When he collaborated with these men, his music did have a decidedly different feeling, which sounded and felt much more like the

[98] Ira Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions: A Collection of Stage and Screen Lyrics...* (New York, New York: Knopf, 1959), 49.

traditional, mainstream American theater tone of composers like Richard Rogers and Irving Berlin.

However, across the board, in the textual choices Weill made for his musical collaborations, we see themes of Jewish American identity emerging. These include identification with other minorities seeking mainstream acceptance (*Street Scene, Lost in the Stars*), the dance between European socialism and the American Mainstream (*Johnny Johnson, Knickerbocker Holiday*), and Zionistic leanings in his pageantry plays (*We Will Never Die, A Flag is Born*). Specifically, we see particular American themes and ideas appearing: life in Urban America (*Street Scene*), a complete show about psychoanalysis and the use of dream sequences *a la* Rodgers & Hammerstein (*Lady in the Dark*), and shows based on American folk culture (*Down in the Valley* and *Huckleberry Finn*). Most relevant in terms of Weill's Jewish background, he showed a great leaning toward texts that had a social conscience, focusing on topics like racial prejudice and persecution (*Lost in the Stars* and *Street Scene).* Weill was unique among American theater composers in terms of his use of mixed styles, but like other writers of his time, in the words of Andrea Most, he too was involved in creating works of musical theater that "…were narratives of a desperate Jewish desire to resist essentialized (or racialized) identity through the powerful language of theatricality."[99]

Street Scene, written in 1947 is a grim tragedy set in NYC, as an American Opera with a through-composed score. As with most of his American works, Weill took artistic freedom to explore new hybrid forms of musical theater which would be a reflection of his particular dream to create, in his own words, "A special brand of musical theater that would completely

[99] Most, 10.

integrate drama and music, spoken word, song and movement."[100] This once again hearkens back to his early Dessau days. Also, at this point in his life, he would only move forward on a project if it arose from some sort of a social consciousness, which was certainly the case with *Street Scene*.

With *Street Scene*, Kurt Weill created an opera "about America, intended for America, idiomatically of America"[101] yet in form, he conceived it based on traditional European opera, synthesized with American musical theater. With a book by Elmer Rice and lyrics by Langston Hughes, the story was about the American melting pot, where outsiders like Weill himself wanted to be insiders. In the show, in an apartment on West 65th Street, working class people from assorted ethnic backgrounds, within a 24-hour period, experience "…birth, death, love, jealousy, bigotry, poverty, violence and reconciliation"[102] Textually, the idea was to take everyday language and by setting it to Weil's music, to create unsophisticated poetry out of it. The music Weill wrote for *Street Scene* reflected what was needed and in Weill's own words, he specified that:

> As soon as I began to think about the music for *Street Scene* I discovered that the play lent itself to a great variety of music, just as the streets of New York themselves embrace the music of many lands and many people. I had an opportunity to use different forms of musical expression, from popular songs to operatic arias and

[100] Kurt Weill quoted by Arnold Sundgaard, "Portrait of the Librettist as Silenced Composer," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 16 (Winter 1980): 26.
[101] Kim H. Kowalke, "Kurt Weill, Modernism, and Popular Culture: Offentlichkeit als Stil (Public as Style) ," *Modernism/Modernity* (The Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press) 2, no. 1 (1995): 27-69, p. 37.
[102] From the souvenir program of the original Broadway production, which opened on January 9, 1947 at the Adelphi Theater, running for 148 performances.

> ensembles, music of mood and dramatic music, music of young love, music of passion and death.[103]

For example in the song "Lonely House" (see Appendix Musical Example 4), we have Sam, the shy Jewish intellectual, a stranger in a strange land, isolated and singing a blues song, expressing the loneliness of a city with so many people around. The tempo marking is *l'istesso*--"softly with expression" Sam sings,

> Lonely House, Lonely me!
> Funny with so many neighbors how lonely it can be.
> Oh lonely street, lonely town!
> Funny, you can be so lonely with all these folks around."

The A section of the piece has a harmonic stasis but becomes interesting because of the repeated moving patterns in the melody soaring above. Reflecting the anonymity of city life, a chromatic ostinato figure is repeated 19 times in the bass and lends an anxious heartbeat to the song. In the melody, sometimes the 6th is flatted, and sometimes not. In contrast, in the B section, the harmonies start to change, and on the lyric "I guess there must be something I don't comprehend", on this last word as he flats the iii, the way he did the vi in the A section, so we see both a clear jazz pattern established and a heightened cry built into the lyric. The song had the effect of taking what was familiar and giving it a slightly foreign and very emotional quality. This was another technique Weill used to narrativize the story through the music.

But that was only one of the tools Weill had in his arsenal. In the show, within a span of nine songs, there were nine different styles, each very appropriately chosen for the dramatic moment. These included full-blown operatic arias, a 19th century Italian opera parody, a

[103] Kim H. Kowalke, "Kurt Weill, Modernism, and Popular Culture: Offentlichkeit als Stil (Public as Style) ," *Modernism/Modernity* (The Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press) 2, no. 1 (1995): 27-69, 40.

women's trio, a traditional Broadway charm song (*a la* Rogers & Hammerstein), a soft-shoe number, a jitterbug, a blues number, and a torch song. Interestingly, the four principals had the reserved use of the minor key, as if to tell the real human story over the hub-bub of the rest of the city's noise. And the simpler characters in the opera received simple songs (using standard musical theater forms like a 32-bar refrain of four eight-bar phrases). For almost any other composer, this kind of variety in style might seem like a display of what happens to be left over in a composer's old trunk, but for Weill, every choice was thoughtful and very intentional

Textually, he, Rice and Hughes wrote with an intertextual technique that brought this patchwork of styles together, intertwining words, thoughts, and dreams of all the characters to create a kind of musical quilt, with contributions by each character that help bring the patchwork to its whole state. For example, images incorporating the use of stars, and the moon, and dreams recur in songs sung by different characters and, in a technique that was unique on Broadway at this point, created a cumulative result that brought the audience in as narrator. This of course resulted in the "otherness", that alienating affect that he had honed so well in his work with Brecht.

Weill also had the ability to create a theme song that reappeared through the score, a technique that he had used throughout his composing career. For example he took phrases from main arias, rescored them in various parts of the opera and brought them in and out of the unified score for effects of tension, surprise, joy, as well as other dramatic effects, like creating a busy city streetscape or as in Act II, of heralding an impending murder.

This was Weill's talent, in his own words as Kim Kowalke notes, "defamiliarizing the conventional, distancing musical content from function, estranging music from its text,

allowing well-known musical icons to become particularized within the unfolding drama at hand"[104] These are forces that unite his work across borders. His powerful ability to narrativize, taken from his knowledge and experience of opera as well his early years of synagogue life, enabled him to tell a story that was not about commercialism for its own sake.

Weill knew just what he was doing and he had been doing it since 1933, if not before. In the new world, his style evolved such that he developed effective ways to reach the ears of American listeners in a mode that other composers in the American Musical Theater had not. He wrote in such a way that his audiences, if they were paying attention, were affected and left the theater in a state that was transformed from the one in which they'd entered two hours earlier.

He also wanted to regain a certain kind of originality that he felt had been lost in European opera. If his new creations wound up emerging as a sharp contrast to what he had created in Europe—then so be it. His retorts to the critics had been consistent from his earliest years and reflected his self-professed mission, to let his music grow not just out the of text, but in such an imaginative way that audiences could be pulled out of their comfort zones and reached, but in an accessible way. It does not seem to me that Weill could have been any more authentic, consistent, and true to his own voice. Understanding his originality in relation to his German-Jewish background is a rich experience, whereas attempting to label him "American" or "European" is rather futile.

[104] Ibid., 43.

Kurt Weill's Return to Jewish Identity

In a public discussion on Weill's American, German and Jewish identity at the Brooklyn Academy of Music preceding the 1987 revival of *The Eternal Road*, author and Weill expert Alexander Ringer likened Kurt Weill's experience of Judaism to that of Martin Buber who lived at approximately the same time as Weill. "Buber's stress on a modern way of life inspired by Jewish tradition held considerable appeal for a generation torn between a parochial past and a confusing present."[105] Like Buber, as an observant adult, Weill had minimal religious concerns. But, also like Buber, Weill having begun his life in the religious realm (or in Buber's lexicon, at Sinai), Weill stayed open in the course of his life to the presence of his Faith in his world. This was seen in Weill's unflagging dedication to ethics and socially progressive and active values--a kind of secular counterpart to a Jewish communal dedication to justice, rather than the rigor of observance.

Throughout Weill's life--even through "exile"--he operated on this faith which manifested in his music. While in America, he turned to an even more outwardly supportive, proud stance toward his Jewish roots. In the last five years or so of his life, there were a few decisively Jewish events of which to take note, illustrating that for Weill, as for so many German-American Jews, the process of embracing one's own Jewish identity is by no means a linear experience.

One of the ways in which Weill's Jewish self-awareness played out was in response to a request from Cantor David Putterman. Cantor David J. Putterman (1900-1979), the Cantor at Park Avenue Synagogue from 1933 until 1976, had a desire to raise the status of Synagogue music in America. As a result, he invited the best 20th Century Jewish composers over the course of a 32 year period to write for his synagogue's program "Liturgical Works by

[105] BAMdialogues, Brooklyn Academy of Music's Department of Education and Humanities, "The Eternal Road and Kurt Weill's German, Jewish and American Identity" (NYC: BAM). 93.

Contemporary Composers". There were 81 commissioned works in total from practically as many composers (some wrote more than one piece) in the more than three decades during which the commissioned pieces were written. In a recent article about the Putterman collection musicologist Gena Genova includes a footnote indicating that the series had become a standing room only event for the first two decades of its existence.[106] Among such esteemed colleagues as Leonard Bernstein, A.W. Binder, Isador Freed, Max Helfman, Darius Milhaud and Heinrich Schalit, Kurt Weill was one of the select group to receive an invitation.

Even with a very busy writing and rehearsing schedule, Weill showed his willingness right away. Perhaps he did so because he knew that this opportunity would be a fitting and holistic way to bring the various strands of his background together. Weill replied the following month to Putterman's invitation, writing on December 15, 1944:

> I am up to my neck in work on a new opera [note: it is curious that archival material I have reviewed doesn't reveal what that opera was]. Nonetheless it might happen that I get an inspiration for a liturgical piece. It might be a good idea for you to give me a few text suggestions (in Hebrew) and I will do my best to get something ready by March 30. [Putterman scribbled six possibilities on the letter, with the *Kiddush* circled and others crossed out].[107]

Weill's *Kiddush* for Cantor, chorus and organ, combining stretched Jewish triplets with blues and Broadway sounds—which he dedicated to his father Chazzan Albert Weill--was completed on March 16, 1946 and performed for the first time on May 10, 1946 with

[106] Gena Genova, "Reviewing a Cantor's Leagacy: Newly Disocvered Private Correspondence between Cantor David J. Putterman and Distinguished Composers, 1943-1970." *Musica Judaica* XIX (2009-2010): 1-42. p.3.
[107] Ibid., 19.

Putterman as soloist. On March 5, 1947, Weill sent Putterman a contract, releasing his *Kiddush* to be printed in Park Avenue Synagogue's anthology. It remains, along with Leonard Bernstein's *Hashkiveinu*, one of the most frequently performed pieces from the Putterman commissions.

A note from NYU professor Curt Sachs to Cantor Putterman placed the commissioned pieces into historical context by noting that in the Christian tradition, it has always been *de rigeur* for history to be:

> …counterbalanced by the creative contributions of all generations, in prayer and in music, lest degeneration might threaten the very essence of faith and service. The church of Rome has been adamant in preserving the Gregorian chant; but in more than a thousand years it has encouraged modern composers to offer masses, motets and hymns in the styles of their times…[we must] drop the once modern melodies that have become obsolete; and open [our] choirs to Jewish masters of today who are eager to profess Judaism in their art. Make them feel that they are needed in our midst, that they belong to us as our brethren and the heralds of our soul and our faith.[108]

While he expressed to Putterman an interest in writing more for the synagogue, it does not seem that Weill wrote additional liturgical music after his Kiddush. Weill had in a sense reconciled some of the loose end of his Jewish identity, and thankfully, Chazzan Albert Weill's son's modern version of tradition lives on quite masterfully in this setting of the *Kiddush*.

In his biography of Kurt Weill in the *Milkin Archive of Jewish Music*, Neil Levin writes that in

[108] Ibid.,18.

the last five years or so of his life, "…it would seem that the earlier universalist and pacifist Weill had become Weill the fervent Jewish nationalist."[109] His religious roots had long before been reawakened, and in America, exposed quite publicly as a prominent German-Jewish figure, Kurt Weill could not sit by idly while an atmosphere of non-support and political inaction by Roosevelt and his administration had become terrifying. Drawing on his childhood experience with the Ducal Court, Weill understood the aesthetic impact that spectacle and ceremony would have on his ability to deliver his message to the masses—and that is just what he chose to do.

Together, with playwright Ben Hecht—the writer who had produced the first graphic evidence that the Holocaust was actually occurring--and lyricist Moss Hart, a powerful creative team was formed and *We Will Never Die* was born in 1943 in the hopes of waking America up to the devastating reality of the war and to raise support for the Allied Troops. There were two performances at Madison Square Garden in 1943. This was pageantry at its most intentional, written by Hecht, composed by Weill and directed by Hart. Sub-titled *"Memorial: Dedicated to the Two Million Jewish Dead of Europe"* the event was both a celebration of Jewish accomplishment and as well a horrifying reminder of the current loss that was occurring for the Jewish people in Europe, to which America was standing by inactively. The piece was narrated by well-known mainstream cultural figures of the day like Paul Muni, Ralph Bellamy, Frank Sinatra and Edward G. Robinson, and featured a full orchestra and choir of 400 Cantors and Rabbis, as well as 50 Rabbis reciting *Kaddish* at the conclusion. Sadly, the work did not do what Weill, Hecht and Hart so fervently hoped it would. Three years later a second pageant with a strong Zionist message, "A Flag is Born", with music by Ben Hecht and direction by Luther Adler played for 15 weeks and toured to

[109] Neil Levin, *Milken Archive of Jewish Music*, http://milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/597/Kurt+Weill (accessed July 23, 2012).

five US cities. Hopes of raising continued American support via this pageant were only minimally successful.

Once the war had concluded, Weill visited Palestine to see his parents in Nahariya; he had helped settle them there, fortunately, before the outbreak of World War II. While visiting in May of 1947, he spoke on the radio and made a number of personal appearances in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, one of which was with the Palestine Orchestra and the *Habima*. While in Palestine, he met Chaim Weizmann, who called Weill only a few months later requesting that he arrange *Hatikvah* for a huge gala in Manhattan, in support of Weitzman for his 75th birthday, featuring Serge Koussevitzky conducting the *Boston Symphony Orchestra.* The musical arrangement, to this day, remains in the permanent repertoire of the BSO.

News reports described the Weizmann event as a "political rally in support of Weizmann as the first president of the proposed Jewish state in Palestine."[110] Weill described the celebratory event, fortuitously timed, in a letter he wrote to his parents in November-December of 1947, saying,

> The big event of the last few weeks was of course the "Partition" [of Palestine], and I can imagine the great excitement you must have felt during all these weeks…the fact that the great nations could get together to help a powerless minority gain its right is the first sign that we're heading toward better time. For Palestine, for Zionism, and the Jewish Agency it is a great victory, especially for Weizmann…[111]

Weill's religious impulses manifested throughout his life and his work. How fitting that, after a well-lived albeit truncated lifetime, Weill could take part in this piece of Jewish history.

Throughout his career in an era where Jewish and National identification was in a state of constant evolution, Weill remained ever true to himself, and his musical and ethical motivations. In

[110] Farneth, 252.
[111] Ibid., 253.

the worlds he inhabited, there existed a kind of revolving door of insiders and outsiders, and because Weill negotiated these boundaries by using his vast mix of musical gifts, he was able to straddle the layers of culture he crossed, stepping in and crossing back out as needed. In the end, Kurt Weill left a magnificent gift to the worlds of opera and theater, and in the spirit of life coming full-circle enthusiastically contributed to the Jewish cause through his musical gifts as a confirmed Zionist, participating in Jewish tradition in his own specific way, which was born out of the deep love he had for his parents and the German-Jewish musical heritage inherited from his dad, Chazzan Albert Weill.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

At the time of Kurt Weill's death in 1950 only a handful of colleagues and reviewers seemed to understand his enormous talent. Composer and critic Virgil Thompson wrote in one of Weill's newspaper obituaries:

> Everything he [Kurt] wrote became in one way or another historic. He was probably the most original single workman in the history of the musical theater, internationally considered during the last quarter century…every work was a new model, a new shape, a new solution of dramatic problems.[118]

(Thompson, incidentally changed his tune a year later writing in the same paper, indicting Weill as a composer who had shifted aesthetics upon arriving in America.) While Thompson seems to have put his finger on the bulls-eye of Weill's innovative brilliance, most others did not comprehend the depth of what Weill had offered the world through his music.

My opinion is that the critics did not understand Weill 60 years ago, for various reasons—including that a number of them were émigrés themselves and were projecting their own complex issues of exile on Weill. Unable to appreciate the thematic threads of deep meaning, humanity and musical drama that so beautifully ran through and united his body of work across the continents—so much of which reflects his Jewish upbringing, as detailed in this paper—at that point in history, it was easier to accuse him of selling out to the masses. Rather than looking at Weill's work with some detachment of their own, it seems they mistook the exterior stylistic veneer of Weill's work for the content of the material. Kurt Weill's critics, in an effort to try and make sense out of his work,

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[118] Virgil Thompson, "Obituary of Kurt Weill," *New York Herlad Tribute*, April 9, 1950.

were overly focused on attempting to create a linear musical story that mirrored his autobiography—and this happened at the expense of acknowledging his truest gifts.

Of course today, current thinking on Weill is quite different than it was 60 years ago and while his music may or may not be everyone's universal musical preference, there is a however a great deal of clarity and appreciation about what he contributed to the world of music and theater. Weill brought both a strong sense of who he was, a great deal of self-awareness in regard to what he was drawn to philosophically and musically and a clear sense of his values, much of which he developed as a teen-ager. As a German-Jew, he was very clear that stylistically—in large part due his strong musical foundation and childhood proximity to the Ducal Court's secular culture—he would veer away from his father's musical style and develop musical forms and a style very much his. While synthesizing so much else that his father gave him into his life's work—love for the written word, deep philosophical thinking about life's meaning and of course Jewish values—he became one of the world's great hybridists and collaborators, consistently paying heed to the predominant role of music to determine dramatic structure.

Similar to composers who were writing around the same time like Ernst Bloch and Leonard Bernstein, Weill took the choices that his German background gave him—a solid identity and knowledge of religion, as well the way he connected with his German and American nationalism through his Jewish lens, and used these to broaden the tools on his artist's palette. Whereas many artists kept the musical styles which reflected different parts of their backgrounds separate, his awareness of his German roots was always a factor in his writing—be it in America, Germany or in other European countries. As an emancipated Jew and composer who broke the musical mold regarding how he lived out his National, cultural and religious experiences, it is particularly intriguing and touching that his life ended much as it began, with an appreciation and love of his

tradition and his people. With this in mind, a question that lingers on this author's mind is what might have occurred in his ongoing Jewish identity had he not been persecuted? Perhaps in America and in his Jewish music there is a partial answer.

Whereas earlier conceptions of this thesis paper sought to identify the creative expressions of sons of Cantors on a much more technical level—via the modes and intervals of Jewish music—it has become clear that that particular method would have reduced the notion of Jewishness in music in a manner that might not have actually captured the essence of the Jewish spirit in Kurt Weill's music. We return to musicologist Klara Moricz once again who comments on this topic, saying:

> In a 1933 lecture on Jewish nationalism novelist Lion Feuchtwanger (1884-1958) compared the indefinable character of Judaism to Israel's abstract, non-representable God…the commonality of world Jewry [can be found] in 'a common spirit, a common spiritual attitude' rather than at that point in a common land or race or way of life".[119]

The fact that our common Jewish spirit has been the thread that has united us as Jews through the phases of modern Jewish life, throughout the world, is part of the Jewish definition and part of the miracle of our enduring religion. Rather than attempting to categorize identity—by parsing through measures of music in search of raised 2nds or Eastern sounding modes, or for that matter by labeling composers by nationality or by religion throughout their modern careers--it is more appropriate to our Jewish communal identity to recognize the contagious universality of that spirit, encased in a variety of forms. The music of Kurt Weill speaks so globally to the heart of humankind and transcends a need for labeling.

At the core of the Jewish spirit, there is something that has kept us alive and vibrant despite our constant struggle through persecution after persecution, particularly in modern times. This strength

[119] Moricz, 3.

appears in the musical life stories of Albert and Kurt Weill. For them, and for so many others in Europe and America, modernity was far from an all or nothing experience; when the Jewish soul and modernity overlap and cross paths, beautiful surprises emerge. To return to Buber, he described at the center of the Jewish heart a struggle—a longing for unlimitedness. It is this sense of striving for the limitless oneness of the world that can be heard in the secular music of the son of Chazzan Albert Weill. This sense of promise and hope is at the fundamental core of our Jewish heritage.

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