

Kurt Weill - Die Dreigroschenoper (Mauceri) [1990]



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Dreigroschenfinale (Original Version) René Kollo (Tenor) - Macheath Helga Dernesch
(Mezzo Soprano) – Frau Peachum Wolfgang Reichmann (Spoken Vocals) - Brown Susanne
Tremper (Soprano) - Lucy Rolf Boysen (Bass) - Ausrufen Mario Adorf (Voice) - Peachum Ute
Lemper (Soprano) – Polly RIAS Kammerchor RIAS Berlin Sinfonietta John Mauceri -
conductor

For more than 30 years the CBS Dreigroschenoper under Wilhelm Brückner-Rüggeberg, with Lotte Lenya in the role of Jenny, has towered head and shoulders above any rival. That supremacy faces its sternest challenge in this new release, which boasts such assets as John Mauceri's authoritative conducting and a leading role for the young musical theatre singer Ute Lemper, whose solo recital so excited me a year ago (Decca 425 204-2DNL, 3/89).

Mauceri's presence makes itself felt immediately in the clarity of instrumental detail and the bounciness of the dance rhythms. Lemper, too, is soon well in evidence in a splendidly shaped

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"Barbara-Song". There is also a superbly rounded Mrs Peachum in Helga Dernes, whose "Ballad of Sexual Dependency" is a tour-de-force—albeit sadly shorn of its third verse. It is followed by an absolutely irresistible "ZuhälterBallade", in which the innocently spun out melody serves to accompany some wickedly expressive handling of the text by Rene Kollo as Macheath, and by the husky Milva (another impressive singing actress) as the whore Jenny. Kollo is no less impressive in his handling of Macheath's Epitaph, again tellingly accompanied by Mauceri.

Yet the challenges that a new Dreigroschenoper has to face are indeed formidable ones. Much has been said of the distorted ideas we have of Weill's music due to its subjection over the years to, firstly, Brecht's alienation style (encouraging the familiar 'snarl-and-shout' type of delivery) and, secondly, the lowering of vocal line to suit Lotte Lenya's changing vocal powers. The response of this recording is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, Mauceri has gone back to Weill's original manuscript material, has reconsidered tempos, and has ensured, for instance, that Macheath's music is properly sung by an operatic tenor. On the other hand, Jenny's music is sung by a performer for whom—as for Lenya—downward transpositions have to be made.

Perhaps my reaction is equally ambivalent. On the one hand, I wonder whether Kollo, with his light tenor, sounds at all like a gangster, and whether the new recording quite catches the seediness I associate with the work. On the other, I wonder whether, in the interest of hearing the music sung at closer to the original pitch, Ute Lemper might more appropriately have been cast as Jenny. It should be added that this is in no way to decry the splendid Milva. It does, though, seem to highlight a lack of assurance about the casting that the problem of which of them should sing "Pirate Jenny" is resolved by giving it to both. Polly sings it in Act 1, Jenny in Act 2—a most curious arrangement.

Ultimately the old CBS recording retains a special magic of its own that makes it foolish to pretend to its devotees that this new recording should replace it. On the other hand, there can scarcely be any doubt that it is to this new version that the uncommitted should be directed. For all the remarkably good quality of the CBS recording, the clearer Decca digital sound is obviously superior. Likewise, the singing on the new version is undeniably of a higher standard, whilst no less appropriate in terms of Weill's requirement for singing actors. In orchestral playing, too, there is a clear advantage, no less than in John Mauceri's imaginative conducting. In the "Zuhälterballade", above all, these characteristics come together to give this new recording a quite haunting quality. -- Gramophone [3/1990]

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