

Long-lost work by Weill performed at last

Recordare

Holland Festival

Michael Chanan

The lost score of Kurt Weill's *Recordare*, discovered last year in Paris by O. W. Neighbour, has just been given its premiere in St Pieterskerk, Utrecht, as part of this year's Holland Festival. It belongs to a period stylistically unfamiliar to most of Weill's present day audiences, being more or less contemporary with such works as *Frauentanz* and the Violin Concerto, and pre-dating *Royal Palace*, and the later *Der Silbersee* (which were described on this page earlier in the Festival).

Recordare is a setting in Latin of the fifth chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah. It was written in 1923, and turned down by Hermann Scherchen to whom it was offered for performance, on the grounds that it was too difficult. By this stage, Weill had begun to sketch experiments in popular-music styles, but as in his other works performed publicly at that time, such manifestations are absent from the *Recordare*.

The text functions on several levels. It speaks of an absent God; a conquered people whose "inheritance is turned to strangers"; children who bear their fathers' iniquities. Perhaps this was Weill's Jewish consciousness speaking to him of his own estranged origins; but it was surely also born of his early sense of the deluge that would destroy the flimsy Weimar republic. "Renew our days as of old" says the penultimate sentence of the text, which however ends pessimistically: "But thou

hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wrath against us."

Written for four-part unaccompanied chorus with additional children's voices, it includes a strongly formed polyphonic passage which clearly acknowledges Bach—a tradition Weill inherited through his teacher Busoni. It is at the brilliant climax of this passage that the children's voices make their first entry in unison, later splitting up, after two solo voices have been heard, into two and then three parts. The writing is often highly chromatic, manifesting its basic tonality only in the latter half.

The temper of the more familiar Weill can be felt especially in the last two sections, a *maestoso* punctuated by the children's voices, and a chorale, where triadic harmonies are deftly and subtly handled, anticipating the more challenging, demonic uses to which he later put this particular musical form. Many people might find this rich and flowing score more satisfying than Weill's later, more angular music, so much of which depends on dramatic irony for effect. But there is already irony here, too, in the use of the Bach style and an evasive tonality, to set such lines as "the young men have ceased from their music" and "Renew our days as of old".

Clearly it is a difficult piece, but it was carefully and extensively prepared by the NCRV Vocal Ensemble under its conductor, Marinus Voorberg, with the "Cantasona" children's choir from Boxtel. Indeed the children, somewhat favoured by the church acoustics, made a very strong impression, sounding at times very much as Britten has since taught us children can sound.

THEATRES

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