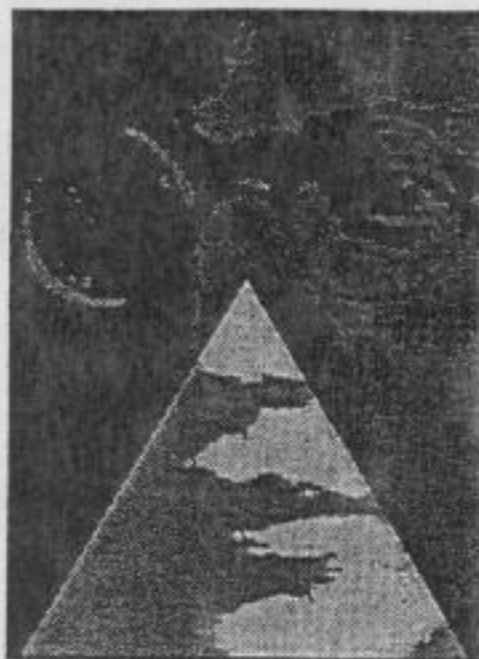


OPENING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL KURT-WEILL-CENTENNIAL-CELEBRATIONS



DER WEG DER VERHEISSUNG
[THE ETERNAL ROAD]

MUSIC BY KURT WEILL
TEXT BY FRANZ WERFEL
STAGE VERSION BY GERHARD MÜLLER

PREMIERE OF THE ORIGINAL GERMAN VERSION

INTERNATIONAL CO-PRODUCTION OF THE
OPERA CHEMNITZ, GERMANY
WITH
BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC NEW YORK,
NEW ISRAELI OPERA TEL AVIV,
OPERA CRACOW

PATRONAGE
THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF GERMANY - DR. RICHARD VON WEIZSÄCKER

MUSICAL DIRECTION JOHN MAUCERI, USA
STAGE DIRECTOR MICHAEL HEINICKE, GERMANY
STAGE- & COSTUME DESIGNER DAVID SHARIR, ISRAEL

OPENING ON JUNE 13TH 1999

FURTHER PERFORMANCES: JUNE 15TH/16TH/18TH ● NOVEMBER 17TH/18TH/20TH/21ST





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Musical Director	John Mauceri
Stage Director	Michael Heinicke
Stage and Costume	David Sharir
Dramatic Advisor	Gerhard Müller
Choir	Dieter Wefing/ Ewa Bator/ Helmut Klotz

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE CONGREGATION

Rabbi	Peter-Jürgen Schmidt
President of the Congregation	Piotr Bednarski
The Adversary	Dieter Montag
The Pious Man	Ulf Deutscher
The Estranged One	Gottfried Winter
The Estranged One' Son	Raphael Hering/ Christopher Jacob/ Georg Streuber
The Timid Soul	Andreas Möckel
The Rich Man	Egon Schulz
The Young Man	Dietrich Greve
The Alien Girl	Britta Jacobus

THE BIBLICAL PLAY

The Voice of God	Bernd-Michael Krause
Abraham	Theo Adam
Sara	Donna Morein
White Angel	Edward Randall
Dark Angel	Siegfried Lorenz
Angel of Death	Siegfried Vogel
Jacob	Piotr Bednarski
Rachel	Hélène Bernardy/Nancy Gibson
Joseph	Bernd-Michael Krause
Moses	Matteo de Monti/Thomas Mohr
Miriam	Regine Lehmann-Köbler
Aaron	Andreas Möckel
Joshua	Helmut Klotz
Boas	Dietrich Greve
Ruth/The Alien Girl	Britta Jacobus
Naomi	Donna Morein
Samuel	Theo Adam
Saul	Siegfried Vogel
Jonathan	Ulf Deutscher
David	Edward Randall
Solomo	Siegfried Lorenz
Isaiah	Piotr Bednarski
Jeremiah	Boris Statsenko
Chananjah	Egon Schulz
Pashur	Thomas Mäthger
Zedekiah	Andreas Möckel
Ebed Melech	Ulf Deutscher

Choir of the Oper Chemnitz
Choir of the Opera Kraków
The Leipzig Synagogal Choir
Robert-Schumann-Philharmonic Orchestra Chemnitz





THEATER CHEMNITZ

DER WEG DER VERHEISSUNG

General information

On June 13th 1999, celebrations for the Kurt Weill Centenary 2000 will open with the German-language premiere of Weill's opera „Der Weg der Verheissung“. An international co-production headed by Chemnitz Municipal Theaters as the opera's initiators has been awarded the license to produce „Der Weg der Verheissung“ for the first time since its 1937 New York premiere. The Free State of Saxony and the city of Chemnitz will be hosting the opening of „Kurt Weill Year“ commemorating the composer born on March 2nd 1900. The New York „Kurt Weill Foundation for Music“ based in Weill's adopted country has taken the centennial as an opportunity for launching a comprehensive revival of Weill's extensive theater works.

The idea for the opera, which portrays the history of the Jews, was first conceived in New York. Meyer Weisgal, the Jewish-American producer, initiated a collaboration between three artists who began working on the project in Berlin in 1934. Max Reinhardt, renowned manager-director of the Deutsche Theater, composer Kurt Weill and dramatist Franz Werfel planned to create an opera based on Werfel's play about the Thora. However, the Jewish artists were forced to interrupt their work as they went into exile, and three years elapsed before they could resume it in New York. „Der Weg der Verheissung“ opened at Manhattan Opera House on January 4th 1937, and although it was performed under quite dramatic circumstances, the premiere (produced in English by Max Reinhardt) was highly praised. However, the substantial budget supplied by Meyer Weisgal, later president of the Chaim Weizman Institute, was quickly consumed by the opera's huge cast and monumental scenery created by renowned stage designer Norman Bel Geddes - not to mention a burst water main that caused great damage during rehearsals. Thus, despite its overwhelming success, the opera permanently disappeared from the stage.

Therefore „Der Weg der Verheissung“ has also never been produced in the original German version based on the drama by Franz Werfel.

There are many reasons - musical, artistic and historical - for reviving this great and important composition at the end of the millennium. Set in a synagogue, „Der Weg der Verheissung“ describes the visions of a Rabbi who reads and re-enacts scenes from the Thora to encourage Jewish refugees and to ultimately prepare them for their future in the Diaspora. Biblical figures from the Old Testament appear in the opera's four parts: The Patriarchs / Moses / Kings / The Prophets. Thus the plot's framework is closely interconnected with Bible history; both themes culminate on a hopeful note for the journey into exile.

At the time of the premiere, the expatriate Jewish authors already sensed that terrible things were happening in their native country; reality, however, was to exceed even their worst suspicions.

The European American Music Co./USA granted us the license for „Der Weg der Verheissung“ under certain conditions to ensure a high international impact.

For this reason, close international collaboration is an essential and contractually defined requirement - a condition that matched our intentions as applicants.

The „Kurt Weill Foundation for Music“ corroborated the team of artistic directors as well as the casting of major parts; it has also expressed its special appreciation of the close collaboration between Israeli and American artists.

Chemnitz Opera director Michael Heinicke was commissioned with the opera's production, while the acclaimed American Weill expert GMD John Mauceri will be its musical director. David Sharir, the Israeli artist and stage designer, will create the scenery. After studying original documents and Max Reinhardt's script at the New York Weill Foundation for Music, Gerhard Müller, the Berlin dramatic advisor (until recently chief dramatic advisor at Leipzig Gewandhaus) has devised a version for an approximately four-hour performance of the even longer original libretto.



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While local singers and actors from the Chemnitz Ensemble can be casted in most of the almost thirty solo parts, several of the major roles will be performed by internationally acclaimed singers: Peter-Jürgen Schmidt will appear as Rabbi, Theo Adam as Abraham/Samuel, Matteo de Monti / Thomas Mohr as Moses, Siegfried Vogel as Saul/The Angel of Death and Siegfried Lorenz as the Dark Angel. Baritone Boris Statsenko, who is currently engaged at Chemnitz Opera, will perform as Jeremiah and Helmut Klotz, director of the Leipzig Synagogal Choir, as Joshua. Berlin actor Dieter Montag will appear in the lead role of The Adversary. The Cracow Opera and Leipzig Synagogal choirs will sing the part of the Jewish congregation, supported by the Chemnitz Municipal Opera Choir and the Chemnitz Opera back-up choir.

According to the contract, the Chemnitz Opera is to give 12 performances by the end of 2000. However, the license for the Chemnitz production also stipulates an international impact that exceeds the flurry of visiting Weill experts expected in June. To this end, the Philosophical Department of the University of Chemnitz will be hosting an international colloquium on the revival of Weill's compositions.

Six performances have already been scheduled in New York, where Weill made his last home. New York greatly influenced Weill's late compositions, and he lived there until his death on March 4th 1950. The Brooklyn Academy of Music has planned these guest performances in February/March 2000 for the New York celebrations commemorating Weill's birthday.

The opera's Tel Aviv premiere will take place in April 2000 at the New Israeli Opera. The Chemnitz solo ensemble and the Chemnitz and Cracow choirs will unite with the Tel Aviv Opera Choir for the seven scheduled performances.

Following the planned collaboration with the Polish Cracow Opera, possibilities are being considered for performances at the „Festival Kraków 2000“ when Cracow will be the European Culture Capital. The Free State of Saxony will send the opera to Hannover as its official contribution to EXPO 2000, where performances will take place as a part of the German Pavillion's presentation at Hannover Opera.

The Chemnitz production of Weill's opera hopes to prove that it deserves to be included in the repertoires of operas around the world.

We feel deeply pleased and honored that Mr. Richard von Weizsäcker has reconfirmed his patronage of the opera in a recent lecture. After meeting in person with the project's initiators, Weizsäcker said he would follow the production with special interest. He will attend the premiere as the honorary guest of the city of Chemnitz.



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DER WEG DER VERHEISSUNG

Notes on the opera and its history

„Der Weg der Verheissung“ by Franz Werfel and Kurt Weill is a large-scale operatic work that portrays characteristic scenes from the Old Testament; biblical stories from Abraham to the Prophets are thematically linked with the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany. Franz Werfel and Kurt Weill composed the opera between 1934 and 1936, and it opened on January 4th 1937 in Max Reinhardt's production with Lotte Lenya in one of the lead roles. The opera's profits failed to outweigh its enormous expenses and was never again produced either on stage or in concert halls. The score was believed to be lost and was only recently recovered by the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music in New York.

German theaters showed little interest in the opera even though its original version is in German. Their indifference had far-reaching consequences, withholding from the public one of the most gripping works of antifascist resistance and a score Weill regarded as his most important. „Der Weg der Verheissung“ is on a par with other great achievements of German exile art such as Arnold Schönberg's „Moses and Aaron“ and „A Survivor of Warsaw“, Lion Feuchtwanger's „Der Jüdische Krieg“, Thomas Mann's „Joseph and His Brothers“, Bertolt Brecht's „Mother Courage“ and „Life of Gallilei“, Hanns Eisler's „German Symphony“ or Paul Dessau's „German Miserere“.

Synopsis

Prelude. In a synagogue a Jewish congregation assembles to meet its destiny at a time of terror persecution (although direct allusions to Nazi Germany are avoided, the historical setting makes the connection obvious.)

The Jewish worshippers put all their faith in the Rabbi who conjures up great images of battles and resistance from the Old Testament.

Part I. The Patriarchs. First the Rabbi reads the stories of Abraham and Isaac, of Rachel, Jakob and Joseph and his brothers. In the course of the reading the actors begin to act out the stories led by the Rabbi's voice which resembles the Evangelist's recitatives in Bach's Passions.

Part II. Moses. The scene portrays the Jews' captivity in Egypt, the golden calf-idol, Moses proclaiming the Ten Commandments, the journey through the desert and Moses' death.

Part III. Kings. This part is centered around the stories of Saul, Jonathan and David and the building of a temple by Solomon. The biblical scenarios are steadily interrupted by the parishioners' sympathetic comments, thus merging together the biblical and topical plots.

Part IV Prophets. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah appear to reprimand the Jews for their willingness to succumb to foreign rule. They remind them that they are a Chosen People and must resist repression at any cost. The Jews' growing misery and desperation under persecution and the prophets' radical speeches represent the opera's dramatic climax. The tension breaks when a messenger announces that the parish is to be banished from the city. A large procession begins to form, led by Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah, with the Rabbi and his congregation following at the end. The choir intones Psalm 126 to Weill's solemn melody: „When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream: How we laughed and sang for joy.“



Kurt Weill's score for this play distinguishes itself from his earlier work through its great gravity; it is monumental and at the same time contemplative.

Without giving up his distinctive style, Weill draws on the tradition of the oratorio from Handel to Mendelssohn as well as on early-20th-century Italian opera from Rossini's „Moses“ to Verdi's „Nabucco“. He quotes numerous original Jewish melodies in an impressive tribute to synagogal music and Judeo-European folklore. Contrary to Werfel's and Reinhardt's intentions, who expected no more than a few song-like musical interludes in the Three-Penny-Opera style, Weill created a largely through-composed symphonic piece which, while drawing on the „Seven Mortal Sins“ of 1933, also represents a departure in his artistic career. „Der Weg der Verheissung“ is a lengthy popular opera full of impressive belcanto gestures, imposing choirs and a grandiose march as a musical symbol of the Jewish people's historical journey. There is not a trace of Weill's satirical, provocative compositions for Brecht's lyrics; however, the epic and symbolic elements of Brechtian theater are more developed. In the US, Kurt Weill declared his complete break with Germany which he equated with the fascist dictatorship. Even so, his score for „Der Weg der Verheissung“ is a sort of compendium of Judeo-German culture and its assimilation. He created the antithesis of the „degenerate art“ the Nazis despised, bearing witness - perhaps for the last time - to a grand cultural epoche destroyed by fascism before the war and the genocide to follow.

The staging of Weill's opera involved huge obstacles which seemed to point ironically to the reality and historical meaning of the biblical narrative. The idea for the piece was originally Meyer Weisgal's, who would later become president of the Chaim Weizman Institute. In 1933, Weisgal was the personal assistant of Chaim Weizman, the president of the Zionist World Congress. On Weisgal's initiative, Franz Werfel, Kurt Weill and Max Reinhardt met at the latter's estate Schloß Leopoldskron near Salzburg in the summer of 1934. Schloß Leopoldskron lay directly above Hitler's „Berghof“ in Berchtesgaden, so the artists were, so to speak, creating an antifascist drama directly in the face of the enemy.

Weill and Werfel worked with great intensity, and in 1935 preparations began for the premiere which took place on January 4th 1937. Although it involved great difficulties and personal sacrifices, Weisgal managed to raise the money for the opera; he also found an appropriate venue, the Manhattan Opera House in New York.

230 actors and supernumeraries as well as a choir of 100 singers performed in the New York premiere. Kurt Weill's wife Lotte Lenya played the role of Miriam, one of the opera's sixty solo parts. Reinhardt developed the opera's monumental power directing mass scenes unprecedented in America and creating a deeply moving Passion play out of the individual biblical episodes. Past and present merged into a parable of humanity and a tribute to the Jewish people.

The topicality of Weill's work is obvious: it is an historical testimony whose importance in the present is heightened by Werfel's lyrics and Weill's music. It encompasses both the zenith and the nadir of Judeo-German culture, whereas its character and origin are also a part of modern American culture. It is rooted in the democratic and antifascist conception of history which until today has not become common knowledge, as shown in the discord over recent American publications on the Holocaust. The opera's production, therefore, is not an act of piety but a necessity.



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Remarks on the opera's conception

The opera incorporates an external and internal narrative. The first is simple: A Jewish congregation persecuted by the Nazis takes refuge in a synagogue, resigned to meet a fate of terror and death. As the Jews anxiously wait for night to fall, the Rabbi tells them great stories from the Old Testament, for the synagogue is a place of learning. At daybreak the dictator's command is proclaimed: All Jews are to leave the town at penalty of death. They leave town. The other plot is more intricate because it includes the transition from the related to the actual: What begins as mere remembrance in the Rabbi's narrative - Abraham's promise, Jacob's dreams, Joseph's reconciliation - in the end coincides with topical events. The destruction of Solomon's temple and the destruction of the synagogue are identical (as are Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers and the Nazi troops), and the biblical pagans merge into modern-day Jews, the opera's actual protagonists. The biblical narrative is the story of their purification. It ends with their departure from the city, but at this point they are no longer the same. Instead of frightened and apathetic victims, their would-be murderers find a determined and dauntless community. Led by the Rabbi and a 13-year-old boy, they withdraw from the scene with resolute miens, leaving a speechless mob behind in the rubble.

The story is set in a synagogue. The actors of the bible narrative merely step out of the congregation, without donning costumes as they would in layman's play. They are just another part of the assembly. In the end they join the procession not as icons but as ordinary people just as strongly affected by the previous events as the others.

Angels silently accompany the biblical scenes as the hands of Jahwe, the executors of his will, as advisors, protectors, avengers and angels of death.

Unlike the European image of the Christmas angel, they resemble the Messiah's armed cherubim dressed in symbolic white, blue or red robes.

The character called „The adversary“ should be portrayed as a resolute skeptic and rationalist, as a man of deeds and not a pathetic coward. He is also the first character from the real world to cross over into the Bible narrative, first as Moses' adversary and later as an idol-seller and murderous warmonger.

The last to join the narrative is the story-telling Rabbi. Because he knows that those who wait passively for their fulfillment are doomed, he assumes the role of the Messiah before the last trek begins. Although the precarious journey could end either in death or in freedom, the Rabbi is prepared to lead his people as the real Messiah (a religious *deus ex machina* in the play) is not forthcoming.



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a play about the Holocaust?

„Der Weg der Verheissung“ is the most important translation of the Old Testament into the language of modern opera. Looking back on musical history, similar attempts may be found in Bach's Passions (regarding the New Testament) or in Haydn's Oratorios („Genesis“). In the history of the Jewish people, „Der Weg der Verheissung“ represents a unique attempt to exemplify the meaning of Judaism. This alone would justify its production; up to now, however, it has done more to prevent it because the concept is too demanding and elaborate - after all, it reflects four thousand years in the history of humankind as told in the most valuable literary tradition - the Bible.

But there is a second, more topical angle: „Der Weg der Verheissung“ is also a modern drama that portrays in gripping scenes the Jewish population's tragic history in twentieth-century Germany and Europe, a scenario that ultimately ended in the Holocaust. Although Auschwitz was still in the distant future in 1934/36, Werfel, Weill and the great director Max Reinhardt already sensed the horrors to come. The piece, then, is a prophetic work that foresees the tragic unfolding of history, but at the same time it is suffused with a Messianic belief in redemption.

Kurt Weill and Franz Werfel were both rooted in the Judeo-German middle class whose achievements shaped German and European culture. In the opera both pay tribute to their heritage while at the same time berating the Germans.

Although the narratives stem from Hebrew traditions, German is the language in which they are conveyed, and the frame plot reflects - and at times foresees - the events in Germany between 1933 and 1945.

This is what inspired the opera's authors, and it more than justifies its production today. And yet there is another reason for staging it, and that is its artistic value. And we do not say this out of piety or reverence for a well-meant effort without artistic merit. This opera is a masterpiece that has the power to deeply move an audience and encompasses a unique mixture of German and Jewish artistic traditions. Franz Werfel, a member of Rainer Maria Rilke's and Franz Kafka's poetic school in Prague and an eminent German novelist, created short, poignant stories out of the vast Biblical material; Kurt Weill's memorable and stirring music blends Jewish and German melodies and draws equally on the folk song and classical master-pieces. At the same time Weill pays tribute to his father, an erudite Jewish cantor from the central German town of Dessau.

Our objective is to produce this piece as a testimony of Judeo-German culture and a document of the Germans' culpability in the tragic history of the Jews, but also as a forward-looking appeal for reconciliation. The monstrosities of the Third Reich cannot be healed by time; they must enter people's hearts and minds. What many suffered (and many more never survived) must be conveyed through art to prevent generations to follow from experiencing the same horrors. The twentieth century did not bring forth as many great operas as the previous one. „Der Weg der Verheissung“, however, is on a par with the operas of Verdi or Puccini. Ernst Bloch, the great Jewish philosopher, spoke of Kurt Weill as the „Verdi of the man in the street“. We hope that our production will prove him right. Whoever witnesses these scenes and listens to this music will always remember them.

Gerhard Müller
Dramatic Advisor