

DLA Research Hypotheses

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Kurt Weill: Violin Concerto

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I. Introduction

Kurt Weill's virtually unknown *Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra*¹ – originally dedicated to Hungarian violin virtuoso József Szigeti – was premiered in 1925 in Paris. Little is known about the immediate success of the concerto that rocketed the young composer to a steep trajectory toward international recognition, subsequently attracting the admiration of contemporary critics.

This composition published by Universal Edition was undoubtedly the first step on the impressive yet surprisingly quick journey leading to the sweeping success of the *Threepenny Opera* (1928), which earned sudden fame both for Weill, and his librettist Bertold Brecht. Despite the international recognition of its time, the *Violin Concerto* never have become part of the core violin repertoire. Not only that Weill's *Violin Concerto* remained virtually unknown amongst concert-violinists with the exception of a small group of musicologists Weill's masterpiece disappeared from the sight for decades. My research focuses mainly on discovering the root cause of this phenomena from multiple perspectives. My thesis discusses in detail the cultural and geopolitical circumstances in which the *Violin Concerto* was born and the whirlwind of change accompanied the current affairs at its' time. In the quest of understanding the almost complete negligence of the piece from the repertoire, I examine in detail the specific musical and technical challenges of Weills' writing for the violin as well as his unique style and approach to instrumentation.

Thus far the only extensive research available on the early compositions of Kurt Weill, especially works written before the *Threepenny Opera*, are largely attributed to musicologists Kim H. Kowalke, Elmar Juchem and Andreas Eichhorn and were sponsored by the Kurt Weill Foundation New York. Although their research discusses many of Weill's early compositions including the *Violin Concerto*, no paper has been published in this extent focusing on this single piece in its entirety.

¹ Further referred as *Violin Concerto*.

Moreover in music literature written in Hungarian no work has ever dealt with Weill's early works for the concert stage, let alone the *Violin Concerto* despite of its significance in the composer's oeuvre, and the music history of the twentieth century.

II. Literature, Sources

My structural analysis of the *Violin Concerto* is based on the critical edition of Universal Edition (2010). Further more, I have been able to juxtapose the original manuscript score with later editions. This original manuscript was provided by the Kurt Weill Foundation, which they have generously given access to for the duration of my research in New York City. My secondary source was the first printed edition, the reduction for violin and the piano owned by violinist Stefan Frenkel who was undoubtedly the *Violin Concerto's* foremost performer. Further sources included the 1965 printed score by Universal Edition.

When discussing the cultural and historical background of the *Violin Concerto* only German and English literature were at disposal, the lack of Hungarian studies on Weill and his early works was not surprising. The libraries of the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna and Graz were of great resources and my physical research largely took place in these institutions. Additionally, the writings of Kim H. Kowalke *Kurt Weill in Europe*, and *A New Orpheus*, edited by Nils Grosch, *Kurt Weill Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, and David Farneth, Elmar Juchem, David Stein publication of *Kurt Weill, Ein Leben in Bildern und Dokumenten* served also as the most important sources of inspiration.

The priceless collection of the Kurt Weill Foundation supported the research part identifying the circumstances of the *Violin Concerto's* origin and creation, just like the interviews conducted with Dave Stein the head of the Kurt Weill Foundation in New York and with Dr. Michael Haas senior researcher of the Exil Arte Center for Banned Music in Vienna.

Musical interpretations were closely examined through three of the utmost important recordings of the *Violin Concerto*, including the very first 1955 recording by violinist Anahid Ajemian followed by the 1964 studio recording by conductor Hermann Scherchen with Róbert Gerle as soloist and lastly violinist Kolja Blacher's and conductor Claudio Abbado's live performance recording from 1990. These three interpretations were used for answering questions pertaining to the historically correct and authentic interpretations of the work.

III. Methodology

My Thesis is structured in three different parts each of which are further divided into subsequent chapters. The first part discusses the origins of the work in the context of history and the composer's biography with its direct and indirect factors influencing the creation of the *Violin Concerto*. These pivotal factors are fundamental in understanding Weill's creative time in Berlin and the sources of his musical inspiration coming from his living environment.

The second part focuses on the detailed analysis of the *Violin Concerto*. My analysis is conducted from the sole perspective of the soloist highlighting various aspect of the work. These include structural analysis, inflexion points of harmony and rhythm, and instrumentation. Furthermore I examine the unique sets of scales and modes used by Weill throughout the piece along with the resemblance of different styles and musical quotations.

The research limits itself to the perspective of a concert-violinist. I find that more often character, emotional charge and sensory experiences are key to the deeper understanding of Weill's intentions, much more than the sole perspective of a thorough theoretical analysis. The latter would go far beyond my own competence as a performer, hence the boundaries of

this thesis as well.

In the third chapter I examine three recordings based on three completely different musical concepts in the quest for the most authentic approach to interpretation. These not only differ significantly in its character and recording techniques but also in their approach to tempo, articulation, and musical dramaturgy. Further more I have listed and detailed all published recordings and known concert performances of Weill's *Violin Concerto* relying on the resources of the Weill-Lenya Research Center, the registry of Universal Editions Vienna and my own additional research.

IV. Conclusions, Results

Despite of my previous research and fascination of the masterpieces of exiled, banned, silenced and often murdered composers of the twentieth century and the various concert performances and recordings thereof, discovering Kurt Weill's *Violin Concerto* opened up whole new horizons. While searching for new concert programs for my repertoire for the Musikverein in Vienna I found Weill's *Violin Concerto*. The rare discovery provided me with the greatest inspiration to discover more about this unique masterpiece and the quest to try to better understand its complexity through this DLA thesis.

The lack of Hungarian documentation and research of Weill's Music both in his early years and specifically on the *Violin Concerto* hopefully gives the opportunity for my thesis to become an inspiration and a resource of future research. I also hope that more and more soloists and concert organisers will recognise that despite its technical complexities and unique musical approach Weill's *Violin Concerto* will get the recognition it deserves and earn it's place on the regular repertoire of concert halls.

V. Documentation of activities closely related to the subject of research

March 14-17th 2020 (Rehearsals for the performance, which later got cancelled due to the Covid Pandemic)

Wiener Musikverein, Brahms Saal

Kurt Weill: Violin Concerto op.12

Anna Rothschild Ensemble Wien

Orsolya Korcsolán - violin

February 18th 2022 Performance

Kulturgarage Wien

Kurt Weill: Violin Concerto op.12

Wiener Symphoniker

Orsolya Korcsolán - violin

April 12-18th 2022 research

Kurt Weill Foundation New York

Weill-Lenya Research Center New York

Library of the The Juilliard School New York