

New Music Concerts

presents

Degenerate Music



Sunday October 31, 1999 • Premiere Dance Theatre

7:15 pm Illuminating Introduction — 8:00 pm Concert



In May of 1938 an exhibition of "degenerate music" (*Entartete Musik*) was held in Düsseldorf. Modeled after the display of confiscated paintings organized by Josef Goebbels in Munich the previous year, it consisted of a series of listening stations offering recorded samples of music. Various categories of creative degeneracy were identified, among them the unhealthy influence of Negro Jazz that had contaminated the works of Kurt Weill and Ernst Krenek; the "cultural Bolshevism" implicit in the abstractionist tendencies of Stravinsky and Hindemith; and especially, the atonal music of "The Jew Arnold Schoenberg" and his followers.



Arnold Schoenberg (1875–1951)

was born in Vienna 125 years ago on December 13th, and died in Los Angeles at the age of 77, at 13 minutes before midnight on December 13, 1951. In 1923, after seven years of creative silence, he published his *Five Pieces for Piano, Op. 23*, in which he demonstrated a method of musical composition that, he exulted, would "guarantee the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years." This new approach came to be known as the "serial procedure".

In 1925 Schoenberg and his family moved to Berlin, where he assumed the late Ferruccio Busoni's position at the Prussian State Academy. In May of 1933 Schoenberg was dismissed from his post at the Prussian Academy. He fled with his family to France, where he reaffirmed his Judaism at a Paris synagogue before sailing for New York in the fall. Though Schoenberg would not live to savor it, his serial method would become a central preoccupation of contemporary music throughout the 1950s and 60s. In France in the late 1940s Messiaen and Boulez would find, in the music of his disciple Anton Webern, the inspiration to extend the serial treatment of pitch to include rhythm, dynamics and registers, while in America Milton Babbitt and others would apply the rigorous principles of mathematical set theory to the numerology of the serial procedure and establish the study of these methods as an academic requirement for every young composition student on the continent.



Paul Hindemith (1895–1963)

Considered the most eminent German composer of his generation, was also a distinguished theorist, teacher, author and performer. He was concertmaster of the Opera orchestra in his native Frankfurt (1915–23), violist of the Amar Quartet (1922–29), and an accomplished pianist and clarinetist. He was also deeply involved with organizing and operating important contemporary music festivals in Donaueschingen, Berlin, and elsewhere.

His reputation as a composer first blossomed in 1921 with the Stuttgart premieres of the first two in a trilogy of somewhat salacious one-act operas, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* and *Das Nusch-Nuschi Tanze*. According to Michael Krater, in *The Twisted Muse*, Hindemith "had made deadly enemies in the Nazi camp before 1933, significantly not for musical but for ideological reasons. The initial source of this opposition was Hitler himself, who allegedly had seen the soprano Laura in Hindemith's opera *Neues von Tage*, in a flesh-coloured body suit, sitting in a bathtub on a Berlin stage in 1929, and was "disgusted." When in 1935 Nazi authorities suppressed further performances of Hindemith's music (citing his "musical opportunism" and "Cultural Bolshevism"), he took a leave of absence from his post at the Berlin State Music School to accept an assignment to supervise the organization of music conservatories in Turkey. In 1937 he made his first concert tour to America, where he would eventually become a professor of music theory at Yale University in 1940. He became an American citizen in 1946. In 1953 he returned to Europe to accept a position in Zurich.

Hindemith's *Sonata for Flute and Piano* was composed in 1936 and was due to receive its premiere in Berlin that year, but when Gustav Scheck and his accompanist, Walter Giesecking, arrived at the concert hall, they found it was locked. Once again, a concert had been forbidden.



The Viennese-born **Ernst Krenek** (1900–1991) began his studies with the eminent Austrian composer Hans Schreker at the age of 16, later following Schreker to the Academy of

Music in Berlin, where he would meet Busoni, Erdmann and Scherchen. At first Krenek shared his teacher's disdain for the popular elements of music; however, as Krenek began to incorporate jazz elements within an atonal context the two become estranged. In 1923 Krenek concluded his studies and traveled to Switzerland and France. In the course of these travels his exposure to the neoclassical movement as exemplified in the works of Stravinsky convinced him of the need to make his music more accessible to a wider public. His experiences working in the opera houses of Kassel and Wiesbaden led to the composition of his opera, *Jonny spielt auf* (1925–26), described by its composer as "a return to the tonal idiom, to the cantilenas of Puccini, seasoning the whole with the condiments of jazz." It was a tremendous success, receiving performances in over 100 cities and translations into 18 languages.

The royalties from *Jonny* enabled a return to his native Vienna, where he would come into close contact with Berg and Webern; Schoenberg himself had little interest in meeting Krenek, as Krenek had publicly criticized him in the past. Krenek's musical style at this point was becoming increasingly romantic, and he was susceptible to yet another stylistic turn. In 1930 he wrote two song cycles incorporating serial techniques, and began work on the opera *Karl V*. This was a work of some political significance, as it sought to glorify the Catholic faith of its protagonist. Rehearsals were under way in 1934 at the Vienna State Opera when they were abruptly canceled; Krenek would later be charged, as was Hindemith, with the crime of "Cultural Bolshevism."

Krenek emigrated to America on the eve of the Nazi occupation of Austria in 1938 and began a new career as a teacher, eventually settling in California. From 1950 onwards he returned to Europe annually to conduct his works and oversee the production of his operas, both for the stage and for television. He continued to compose prolifically in the serial method, gradually extending his technique to incorporate the use of open forms, controlled improvisation, and elements of electronic music.



Born in Leipzig and raised in Vienna, **Hanns Eisler's** (1898–1962) first formal musical studies took place at the New Vienna Conservatory, following three years of service in a Hungarian regiment during the First World War. At the age of 21 he was accepted by Schoenberg as a private student, and studied with him (and occasionally Webern) for five years. In 1925 he moved to Berlin to take up a teaching position at a private conservatory

Throughout his student years in Vienna Eisler had been deeply engaged with the activities of the German worker's movement. He eventually became convinced that the elitist tenets of new music in general and the serial method in particular were inherently hostile to the greater goal of serving and changing society for the better. Eisler turned his attention to writing a series of choral works on socialist texts and began composing the first of many marching-songs (the most famous of which is the *Solidaritätslied*) that would become anthems for left-wing groups throughout Europe.

In 1930 Eisler began the first of several theatrical collaborations with Bertold Brecht, conceived in the clearly diatonic style of the *Massenlieder* — songs for the masses. He also made two trips to the Soviet Union at this time. Hitler's accession to power in 1933 brought about the immediate suspension of all activities of the German worker's movement and forced Eisler into exile. He traveled throughout Europe and America, never settling down in one place for long, until an invitation from the New School for Social Research offered him a secure position in New York in 1937.



Kurt Weill (1900–1950) was born into a musical family; his father Albert was chief Kantor of the Dessau synagogue from 1899 to 1919 and was a composer of liturgical music.

The younger Weill first studied with his father's colleague, Albert Bing, and after three years with him he was sent to study with Humperdinck at Berlin in 1918. Weill did not enjoy his time there, however, and returned to Dessau the following year, where he worked for a time as an assistant to Knappertsbusch and Bing at the Hofoper. In 1920 his friend Hermann Scherchen encouraged Weill to return to Berlin to join Busoni's master classes at the Prussian Academy; Busoni took an exceptional interest in Weill, assigning him additional studies in counterpoint with his assistant Philip Jarnach. Weill studied there for three years, receiving several prestigious premieres, including two performances by the Berlin Philharmonic. Soon after the conclusion of his studies he met the playwright Georg Kaiser, and together they launched first work for the stage, the opera *Der Protagonist* (1926). Henceforth Weill would devote the bulk of his energies to the theatre.

Though Weill would eventually compose some thirty works for the stage, his best known efforts remain his early collaborations with Bertold Brecht: *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1927–29). The premiere in Leipzig of *Mahagonny* in 1930 was received in the context of the economic catastrophe that had beset Germany the previous year, and was disrupted by Nazi henchmen. A campaign was launched to undermine future performances of his works in Germany's state-subsidized theatres. Encouraged by the warm reception his music had received in France, Weill moved to Paris in March of 1934 following Hitler's accession to power. His experiences there proved rather disappointing however.

Franz Werfel and Max Reinhardt's plans to present a stage spectacle recounting the history of the Jewish people, *The Eternal Road*, brought Weill to New York in 1935. Weill prospered in his new home; it was said that he never spoke another word of German thereafter. He adapted quickly to his new surroundings, achieving notable success in Broadway theatres with such musicals as *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938), *Lady in the Dark* (1940), *Street Scene* (1947) and *Lost in the Stars* (1949).



Though **Karl Amadeus Hartmann** (1905–1963) is best remembered today for having continued the Austro-German symphonic tradition through his series of eight symphonies composed between 1936 and

1964, he himself characterized his early works as as a blend of "Futurism, Dada, jazz, and other currents in a carefree manner" — all 'decadent' influences in Nazi eyes. Hartmann's response to the dozen years of the Third Reich was unique and courageous: he forbade any further performances of his music in his native land, placing himself into a condition of internal exile. Though he continued to encourage and receive a few meager performances abroad, without the financial help of his father-in-law and a sympathetic doctor who kept him from being drafted into the Wehrmacht he would not have survived the Nazi regime.

Following his early musical studies at the Academy in his native Munich (1924–27), the greatest influence in Hartmann's career became his close association with Hermann Scherchen, the preeminent conductor of contemporary music, founder of the new music magazine *Melos*, and a man vilified by the Nazis in 1933 as "a darling of Marxists and Jews." It was Scherchen who helped him conceive the anti-fascist chamber opera *Des Simplicius Simplicissimus Jugend* (1934–35/1956–57); Scherchen also premiered the symphonic poem, *Miserere*, at the 1935 ISCM festival in Prague; the score bears a dedication to "friends, who had to die in the hundreds" and the date "Dachau 1933/34." Though Hartmann also took some intensive lessons with Anton Webern in 1942, he did not employ serial methods in his own works. In 1944 conditions had become so grave that he took the precaution of burying his compositions in an air-tight container in the Bavarian Alps. At the end of the war Hartmann established the Musica Viva concert series in Munich; he remained artistic director of this organization (devoted to the performance of contemporary music) until his death in 1963. The activities of Musica Viva were imitated elsewhere in Germany and abroad, establishing a pattern of organized festivals, holiday study courses, and critical journals that still flourishes in Europe today.