

## Scottish Group Meeting

3 November 2018

David Bleiman gave an entertaining and well researched presentation entitled *The Boys in the Backroom: Weimar in Exile* dealing with the impact of the Nazi takeover on musicians. It was illustrated by recordings by artists including Richard Tauber, Mischa Spoliansky, Marlene Dietrich, Ernst Busch, Kurt Weill, Lotte Lenya and the Comedian Harmonists, illustrating their particular paths in exile and through exile.

We heard Tauber, accompanied on piano by Spoliansky, with one of the German folk songs they recorded for Odeon in 1926 and which were issued in a six disc album called *Das Deutsche Volkslied*. As David said, what could be more German than that? At that time, most German Jews identified strongly with Germany, many had fought for Germany in the First World War and they played an important part in the cultural life of the Weimar Republic. Tauber had an international hit with *Ich Küsse Ihre Hand, Madame*, so when he was attacked by Nazi brownshirts in 1933 he was able to continue his career first in Austria and then in Britain. By the late 1920s Spoliansky was composing highly successful musical reviews for the Berlin stage and we heard *L'Heure Bleue* sung by Margo Lion. He also left Germany in 1933 and stayed in Britain for the rest of his life, composing a number of film scores. We heard *Congo Lullaby* sung by Paul Robeson from the film 'Sanders of the River'.

Not every artist who decided to leave Germany was Jewish. Marlene Dietrich was by 1933 probably the top female film star and popular singer in Germany but chose to emigrate, abhorring the Nazis and preferring to work with Jewish composers and friends. We heard *Blonde Women* from the film 'The Blue Angel' and *The Boys in the Backroom* from the 1939 film 'Destry Rides Again' (both composed by the Jewish composer Friedrich Holländer).

David also traced the paths of composer Hans Eisler and the singer Ernst Busch, not Jewish but a lifelong Communist. Both fled Germany in 1933, Eisler eventually going the USA and Busch joining the International Brigade in Spain in 1937 where he recorded a number of solidarity songs. We heard *Lied der Moorsoldaten* (The Peat Bog Soldiers) and *Lied der Einheitsfront* (Song of the United Front), the latter a Brecht/Eisler composition. Both Busch and Eisler returned to (East) Germany after the war.

Kurt Weill was a major artist in 1920s Berlin, collaborating with Brecht on 'The Threepenny Opera' in 1928 and 'Mahagonny' in 1930 and we heard one of the tunes from the second opera sung by Weill's wife Lotte Lenya. By 1935, Weill was in the USA where he had success with a number of musicals. David played the very evocative *September Song* from the show 'Knickerbocker Holiday' sung by Walter Huston.

David finished with three records by Germany's internationally successful vocal harmony group the Comedian Harmonists. Half of the group were Jewish and, because they were enormously popular, continued to record and perform after the Nazi takeover. However, the Jewish members were banned in 1935 and both sections reformed with additional members. The exile group continued to record in Europe and eventually Britain. The last item in the presentation was the *Dwarf's Yodel Song*, one of the last recordings of the exile group made in London in 1938.

**Ken Jobling**