

Constance Hauman: The Exiles Return

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New York

If Marlene Dietrich could sing "Falling in Love Again," so can anybody, but was singing the point? Dietrich's Lola Lola was an icon. As a musical instrument, her Prussian purr was not much. As the original German lyric put it, her world was love and nothing but. Nearly seven decades after "The Blue Angel," the entertainer who opens a program with Dietrich's signature tune must be a Dietrich impersonator or out of her mind.

Or Constance Hauman, a lustrous coloratura soprano of wide-ranging tastes, whose trick of scattering high E's while balancing on pointe has wrung superlatives from the least generous of critics. As the waif/sex-goddess heroine of Alban Berg's "Lulu" in Copenhagen, she made headlines on music pages all over Europe. One scene, in particular, should go down in the annals. At this point in her checkered career, Lulu is a ballerina. Spying her newspaper-tycoon lover and his socialite fiancée as she dances, she flounces offstage, not returning until he breaks off his engagement in a masochistic letter penned at Lulu's dictation—in this case on Ms. Hauman's naked body. The soprano's gleamingly sung performance may be heard on a live recording on the Chandos label. To experience it in the flesh, Americans will have to wait until next season, when the Brooklyn Academy of Music expects to import the Danish production.

This Saturday, meanwhile, at the Upper East Side citadel of émigré identity politics known as the 92nd Street Y, TV cameras will be rolling as Ms. Hauman unveils a new edition of "Exiles in Paradise," her one-woman tribute to German and *Mittel* European composers (Jews mostly, one gentile) who sat out the worst of the Third Reich as tunesmiths in Tinseltown. First mounted in 1997 at the Los Angeles County Museum in conjunction with the exhibition "Exiles and Emigrés: The Flight of Artists from Hitler," it is a performance piece backed up by research worthy of a Ph.D. but tossed off with the pizzazz of a diva.

And damned if Ms. Hauman doesn't lead with "Falling in Love Again," caressing Friedrich Hollander's tune with a sensuality of phrase and brilliance of tone that owe not a lick to Marlene. Ms. Hauman, who loves hats, does not even trot out Dietrich's silk topper. As star, producer, writer and co-director she is already wearing all the hats she can.

Integrating slides of art Hitler classified as degenerate with home movies, personal mementos and newsreels, the show conjures up the ironies of that surreal time in California when the history-altering twelve-tone theorist Arnold Schoenberg could be recognized on the street as the father of his son the tennis player.

Here the Marx Bros. were cranking out "A Night at the Opera" and "A Day at the Races," there the U.S. Immigration Service was refusing entry to shiploads of passengers whose forced eastbound voyage would land them in the death camps. Meanwhile, having made it to America, the Viennese pianist and composer Ernst Toch was teaching up a storm to sponsor all the imperiled relatives from the old country he possibly could. Sponsorship meant assuming financial responsibility. He had a list of 60, of whom he saved half.

At the same time, the Hungarian-born Emmerich Kálmán recycled for Hollywood waltzes that had made him king of Viennese operetta in the silver age between the wars. The easily assimilated Walter Jurmann, once songwriter in residence for Maurice Chevalier and Josephine Baker, ran up "San Francisco" for Jeanette MacDonald. The ex-wunderkind Erich Korngold was cranking out soundtracks. His necrophiliac opera "Die Tote Stadt" had received simultaneous world premieres in Hamburg and Cologne. Now he was winning Oscars for "Robin Hood" and "Anthony Adverse." Escapist? Frivolous? Maybe, but what else should he have done?

These men—all deceased—have become heroes to the voluble Ms. Hauman. To drop the name of any of them is to invite a staggeringly detailed account of his life and times, gleaned from her study of the period, interviews with widows and children. Yvonne Jurmann and Yvonne

Kálmán plan to attend the show, each no doubt wishing her husband's music took up a larger piece of the mosaic. Keeping them at bay must have been a job.

Happily for the rest of us, Ms. Hauman is an artist, not a promoter, and her choices of material have been guided by her instincts as a musician. The show illustrates the thesis that Hollywood's world-conquering popular culture arose from the contributions of European artists (popular and highbrow) displaced by Hitler, but the point has been absorbed into subtext. Ms. Hauman's material ranges from unabashed Viennese schmaltz and sarcastic Berlin cabaret numbers to songs from Kurt Weill's brief Paris period (indistinguishable in their billboard style from his songs before and after, but in French) and part tender, part bitter numbers by Hanns Eisler, Bertolt Brecht's collaborator after Brecht's parting of the ways with Weill. A wild gypsy fire flares up again and again, nowhere more thrillingly than in "Rosetta's Lied," a four-alarm job by the forgotten Eric Zeisl—forgotten yet immortal, thanks to his score for "Lassie, Come Home." A selection from the "Brettli-Lieder" (Cabaret Songs) of Schoenberg shows the thorny master's bouncy side. The folk wisdom of one song recalls the feathered Papageno of Mozart's "The Magic Flute" and for good reason. The text is by Emanuel Schickaneder, the opera's librettist.

Refined over two years of obsessive research, "Exiles" now features a pair of new 16mm films by Lewis Klahr, whose animated collages are favorites at international competitions. One, a witty trifle wholly '20s in spirit, imitates a swooping waltz in equally swooping pictures, some through keyholes, of Ms. Hauman tripping a light fantastic. The second—inspired by "Marietta's Lied," the arching elegy of love, death and resurrection from "Die Tote Stadt"—follows the odyssey of a clown from chaos and destruction to the land of lotus-eaters where he will never belong. At four minutes running time, it is (as a Hollywood lyricist might have put it) the cream in Ms. Hauman's coffee: a visual poem that distills experience into essences truer than history.