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ATTENTION FALL PREVIEW EDITORS: FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

ERIC BENTLEY’S BRECHT-EISLER SONG BOOK
DEBUT CD FROM CELEBRATED SOPRANO KARYN LEVITT

SINGING THE MUSIC OF HANNS EISLER
TEXT BY BERTOLT BRECHT TRANSLATED BY ERIC BENTLEY

AVAILABLE FROM ROVENRECORDS OCTOBER 30, 2015

CLICK HERE TO ACCESS PHOTOS OF KARYN LEVITT, ERIC BENTLEY, & ARTWORK FOR THE NEW CD “ERIC BENTLEY’S BRECHT-EISLER SONGBOOK.”

www.RovenRecords.com

"Karyn Levitt is doing something which, to my ears, is new. She allows (these songs) to bloom and be beautiful in a way which is undoubtedly musically expressive."

– Irving Wardle, music critic of The London Times

“Eric Bentley’s Brecht-Eisler Songbook,” the debut CD from soprano actress Karyn Levitt, will be available from Roven Records on October 30. From her rich collaboration with world-renowned Brecht translator Eric Bentley, Levitt sings over 20 Brecht-Eisler songs in English translation, all rarely-heard and many never-before recorded until now. Bentley adapted the song texts (poems and theater ballads by Brecht) from their original German into English, unlocking Eisler’s starkly beautiful songs for English-speaking audiences. “Eric Bentley’s Brecht-Eisler Songbook” is produced by four-time Emmy award winner Glen Roven.

Karyn Levitt is an Oberlin-trained performer who has appeared at Carnegie Hall and other distinguished venues. Levitt initiated her collaboration with Bentley in 2011 when she wrote a letter to the Theatre Hall of Fame inductee requesting counsel on a pending Weill-Brecht show she was planning. Bentley replied days later suggesting that instead of Weill, Levitt explore the works of a lesser known Brecht composer, Hanns Eisler, obtain Bentley’s 1967 The Brecht-Eisler Song Book, and listen to his 1964 recording Songs of Hanns Eisler. He agreed to meet after Levitt had completed her initial research. Levitt took on the research assignment before meeting with Bentley who ultimately presented her with his unpublished English versions of Hanns Eisler's lieder. Within two weeks, Levitt had recorded a demo of the material for her new mentor, who responded “Bravo, Karyn! Now create a whole show!”

Under Bentley’s guidance, Levitt and pianist Eric Ostling created an evening of Eisler’s songs that has earned rave reviews around the country with Irving Wardle of the London Times raving “Karyn Levitt is doing something which, to my ears, is new. My acquaintance with the Eisler songs is limited to (other) singers (who have) a harsh and urgent style, very much a product of the cruel and dangerous times in which the work first appeared. Ms. Levitt's approach, it seems to me, is to negotiate a passage for these songs into the concert hall. In place of the gritty style, she allows them to bloom and be beautiful.”

The new CD, “Eric Bentley’s Brecht-Eisler Songbook,” is the culmination Levitt’s journey, under the mentoring of Eric Bentley, into the world and music of Hanns Eisler.

“I regard it as a privilege that in our numerous coaching sessions over the years, Eric Bentley has given me his unpublished translations of Eisler songs with words by Goethe, Heine, Eichendorff, Leopardi, Anacreon, Karl Kraus, and even Shakespeare,” says Karyn Levitt. “Eisler’s stylistic range is dazzling. Few composers have used Schoenbergian techniques to such lyrical ends, and few would dispute that Eisler was as important a song composer as Schubert. Brecht and Eisler were one of the 20th century’s great musical partnerships.”
The set list for “Eric Bentley’s Brecht-Eisler Songbook features 23 tracks, half of which have never before been recorded:

1. I came to the cities
2. Ballad of the Soldier
3. The Sprinkling of Gardens
4. There’s Nothing Quite Like Money
5. And What Did She Get?
6. Musical Interlude: Song of the United Front
7. To the Little Radio
8. The Plum Tree
9. The Love Market
10. Song of the Moldau
11. In the Flower Garden
12. The Mask of Wickedness
13. Easter Sunday, 1935
14. The Son
15. On Suicide
16. On the World’s Kindness
17. Song of a German Mother
18. A Saying (for 1939)
19. Musical Interlude: Komintern
20. Truly I live in a time of darkness!
21. The Homecoming
22. Musical Interlude: Solidarity Song
23. You who will be borne up

MORE ABOUT HANNS EISLER AND ERIC BENTLEY’S THE BRECHT-EISLER SONG BOOK

While many are familiar with Brecht’s other frequent collaborator, Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler and his work remains largely unfamiliar to popular audiences. Eisler, the first of Arnold Schoenberg’s disciples to compose in the twelve-tone method, moved to Berlin in 1925 where he developed a more "popular" musical style, and drew closer to Bertolt Brecht, forging a collaboration which lasted for the rest of Brecht’s life. Eisler collaborated with Brecht on several plays and protest songs, including the world’s first song protesting laws against abortion. The Brecht-Eisler songs of this period tended to look at life from the perspective of prostitutes, hustlers, the unemployed and the working poor. After 1933, Eisler’s music and Brecht’s poetry were banned by the Nazi Party, and both artists joined the generation of anti-Nazi exiles who sought refuge in the United States. In New York City, Eisler taught composition at the New School and wrote experimental chamber and documentary music before moving to Los Angeles in 1942, where he composed several Hollywood film scores, two of which were nominated for the Academy Award. Eisler’s promising career in the U.S. was interrupted when he was the first Hollywood artist blacklisted by the movie industry. Despite the efforts of his supporters including Charlie Chaplin, Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, Eisler was deported in 1948. Eisler settled in East Berlin where he composed the national anthem of the German Democratic Republic, a cycle of cabaret-style songs to satirical poems by Kurt Tucholsky, incidental music for theater, films and television, and the libretto for a modern opera based on the Faust theme that was attacked by Communist censors and ultimately never completed. Eisler never recovered completely from the death of Brecht in 1956, and his remaining years were marred by depression and declining health. He died in East Berlin in 1962 and is buried in close proximity to Brecht.

Eric Bentley, who had started to translate and write about Brecht’s work during the second World War, recognized Hanns Eisler as the “crown prince” when Brecht’s partnership with Kurt Weill ended. Bentley encountered ten volumes of Eisler’s songs which had been published under the auspices of the East German government. To avoid censorship, Eisler had cleverly contrived to mix two genres in his volumes; the regime would certainly not have published what they regarded as his decadent “Schoenbergian” compositions, but randomly interspersed with his militantly political marching songs, the more modernist songs went unnoticed. Incredibly, Bentley sang through every song in these volumes, but soon also began making his own English versions—initially to assist him in interpreting the text. Relatively few of these translations subsequently saw the light of day. Bentley published The Brecht-Eisler Song Book in 1967, which has never been out-of-print since. It includes both modernist and popular songs, and is representative of the broad range of song that marks the original.

"A composer knows that music is written by human beings for human beings and that music is a continuation of life, not something separated from it." - Hanns Eisler
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

KARYN LEVITT (Soprano and Actress), has performed her show Eric Bentley's Brecht-Eisler Song Book (and given related lectures) at Symphony Space, Amherst College, Hunter College, Vassar College, Bates College, USC, and the Goethe Institutes of Boston and Road Productions, Inc., received a major arts grant from Nokia and a research grant from USC for this project. With actor-director Jonathan Epstein, Ms. Levitt recorded a spoken word album, My Father's Moustache. Other shows of Ms. Levitt's have included The Age of Romance: From Vienna to Broadway, performed at Carnegie Hall (Weill); Lyrics by Shakespeare, performed at Oberlin College, MA; and shows which were both performed in the Boston area—Great Songs of the Yiddish Theater and Puccini and His Contemporaries: A Cabaret of Opera and Theater. A long-time student of Soprano Janice Giaima and Jazz/Cabaret singer Rebecca Paris in Boston, and currently a student of William Barto Jones in New York City, she has also worked with coaches Daniel Wyneken, Hankus Netsky, Judy Bressler, Zalmen Mlotek, Tom LaMark, Jonathan Epstein, and has a background in theater and improv. Ms. Levitt is a graduate of Oberlin College, where she earned her degree with Honors in English Literature.

ERIC OSTLING (Pianist and Composer) maintains a career in both the jazz and classical worlds. A graduate of MIT and the Performing Arts School in Louisville, he has studied with Pulitzer composers John Harbison, Karel Husa, legendary jazz figures James Aebensold, Herb Pomeroy and Charlie Banacos. His recording credits include performing as collaborative pianist on soprano song cycles of Schoenberg and Webern, as well as jazz quartet and solo piano CDs. Mr. Ostling has also worked with Eric Bentley on this project and was inspired to compose a medley of three Eisler marching songs, which can be heard individually on this CD. His classical compositions have received orchestral premieres in Louisville and Boston, and by the Muir and Manhattan String Quartets. Additional premieres have included works for chamber orchestra, percussion ensemble, and an expanding song book of more than 60 jazz tunes.

HANNES EISLER (Composer) was born in 1898 in Leipzig where his father, Rudolf Eisler, was a professor of philosophy. In 1901 the family moved to Vienna. During WWI Eisler served as a front-line soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army and was wounded several times in combat. Returning to Vienna after Austria's defeat, he studied from 1919 to 1923 under Arnold Schoenberg and was the first of Schoenberg's disciples to compose in the twelve-tone or serial technique. In 1925 Eisler moved to Berlin, then a hothouse of experimentation in music, theater, art and politics. His orchestral works on politics and the disaffected, more "popular" in style with influences drawn from jazz and cabaret. At the same time, Eisler drew closer to Bertolt Brecht, forging a collaboration which lasted for the rest of Brecht's life, with both men also sharing a leaning towards Marxism. Eisler wrote the music for several Brecht plays, including The Measures Taken (1930), The Mother (1931) and Schweik in the Second World War (1944). They also collaborated on protest songs; their "Solidarity" became a popular militant anthem sung in protests throughout Europe, and their "Ballad of Paragraph 218" was the world's first song protesting laws against abortion. The Brecht-Eisler songs of this period tended to look at life from "below" - from the perspective of prostitutes, hustlers, the unemployed and the working poor. After 1933, Eisler's music and Brecht's poetry were banned by the Nazi Party, and both artists joined the generation of anti-Nazi exiles who sought refuge in the United States. In New York Eisler taught composition at the New School and wrote experimental chamber and documentary music. He moved to Los Angeles in 1942, joining Brecht who had arrived there the year before, and while in L.A. composed several Hollywood film scores, two of which - Hangmen Also Die and None but the Lonely Heart - were nominated for Oscars. In 1947 Eisler wrote the book Composing for the Films with Theodor Adorno. Still, in several chamber and choral compositions of this period, Eisler also returned to the twelve-tone method he had abandoned in Berlin, and his "Fourteen Ways of Describing the Rain" - composed for Schoenberg's 70th birthday celebration - is considered a masterpiece of the genre. During the 1930s and 40s, Eisler's compositions included a choral symphony in eleven movements based on poems by Brecht and Ignazio Silone, and a cycle of art songs with lyrics by Brecht, Moerike, Hoelderlin and Goethe, establishing Eisler's reputation as one of the 20th century's greatest composers of German lieder. Eisler's promising career in the U.S. was interrupted by the Cold War. He was the first Hollywood artist blacklisted by the movie industry. In two interrogations by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, the composer was accused of being "the Karl Marx of music" and the chief Soviet agent in Hollywood. Despite the efforts of his supporters, which included Charlie Chaplin, Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, Eisler was deported in 1949. On March 26, 1948, Eisler and his wife Lou departed from NYC to Prague. Eisler settled in East Berlin where he composed the national anthem of the German Democratic Republic, a cycle of cabaret-style songs to satirical poems by Kurt Tucholsky, and incidental music for theater, films and television. His most ambitious project of the period, a modern opera on the Faust theme, was attacked by Communist censors and never completed. Although he continued to compose and to teach at the East Berlin Conservatory, the gap between Eisler and the cultural functionaries of East Germany grew wider in the last decade of his life. Eisler never recovered completely from the death of Brecht in 1956, and his remaining years were marred by depression and declining health. He died in East Berlin in 1962 and is buried near Brecht in the Dorotheenstadt Cemetery.

BERTOLT BRECHT was one of the most influential playwrights of the 20th century. His works include The Threepenny Opera (1928) with composer Kurt Weill, Mother Courage and Her Children (1941), and The Caucasian Chalk Circle (1958). Brecht was born in Augsburg, Bavaria, in 1898, and the two world wars directly affected his life and works. He wrote his first poetry in 1921, and his first communist party at the age of 18. During WWI Eisler served as a front-line soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army and was wounded several times in combat. Returning to Vienna after Austria's defeat, he studied from 1919 to 1923 under Arnold Schoenberg and was the first of Schoenberg's disciples to compose in the twelve-tone or serial technique. In 1925 Eisler moved to Berlin, then a hothouse of experimentation in music, theater, art and politics. His rightwards political orientation and his continued disaffection with the Schoenberg's dismay, more "popular" in style with influences drawn from jazz and cabaret. At the same time, Eisler drew closer to Bertolt Brecht, forging a collaboration which lasted for the rest of Brecht's life, with both men also sharing a leaning towards Marxism. Eisler wrote the music for several Brecht plays, including The Measures Taken (1930), The Mother (1931) and Schweik in the Second World War (1944). They also collaborated on protest songs; their "Solidarity" became a popular militant anthem sung in protests throughout Europe, and their "Ballad of Paragraph 218" was the world's first song protesting laws against abortion. The Brecht-Eisler songs of this period tended to look at life from "below" - from the perspective of prostitutes, hustlers, the unemployed and the working poor. After 1933, Eisler's music and Brecht's poetry were banned by the Nazi Party, and both artists joined the generation of anti-Nazi exiles who sought refuge in the United States. In New York Eisler taught composition at the New School and wrote experimental chamber and documentary music. He moved to Los Angeles in 1942, joining Brecht who had arrived there the year before, and while in L.A. composed several Hollywood film scores, two of which - Hangmen Also Die and None but the Lonely Heart - were nominated for Oscars. In 1947 Eisler wrote the book Composing for the Films with Theodor Adorno. Still, in several chamber and choral compositions of this period, Eisler also returned to the twelve-tone method he had abandoned in Berlin, and his "Fourteen Ways of Describing the Rain" - composed for Schoenberg's 70th birthday celebration - is considered a masterpiece of the genre. During the 1930s and 40s, Eisler's compositions included a choral symphony in eleven movements based on poems by Brecht and Ignazio Silone, and a cycle of art songs with lyrics by Brecht, Moerike, Hoelderlin and Goethe, establishing Eisler's reputation as one of the 20th century's greatest composers of German lieder. Eisler's promising career in the U.S. was interrupted by the Cold War. He was the first Hollywood artist blacklisted by the movie industry. In two interrogations by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, the composer was accused of being "the Karl Marx of music" and the chief Soviet agent in Hollywood. Despite the efforts of his supporters, which included Charlie Chaplin, Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, Eisler was deported in 1949. On March 26, 1948, Eisler and his wife Lou departed from NYC to Prague. Eisler settled in East Berlin where he composed the national anthem of the German Democratic Republic, a cycle of cabaret-style songs to satirical poems by Kurt Tucholsky, and incidental music for theater, films and television. His most ambitious project of the period, a modern opera on the Faust theme, was attacked by Communist censors and never completed. Although he continued to compose and to teach at the East Berlin Conservatory, the gap between Eisler and the cultural functionaries of East Germany grew wider in the last decade of his life. Eisler never recovered completely from the death of Brecht in 1956, and his remaining years were marred by depression and declining health. He died in East Berlin in 1962 and is buried near Brecht in the Dorotheenstadt Cemetery.

ERIC BENTLEY (Translator), born in England in 1916, became an American citizen in 1948, and was inducted into the (American) Theater Hall of Fame in 1998. In 2011 the American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded him their Gold Medal for his contribution to belles lettres. He had a long and distinguished career as playwright, translator, critic, and performing artist. Bentley also taught at leading universities, giving the Christian Gauss Lectures at Princeton and the Norton Lectures at Harvard. He became Brandeis Matthews Professor of Dramatic Literature at Columbia. Three volumes of his plays were published as Raising Cries, Monstrous Martyrdoms, and The Kleist Variations, and Broadway Play Publishing Inc. recently published Our Bentley: Round One, Round Two, A Reader. He was a contributor to Die & A Time to Be Free: Bertolt Brecht's The Steinhem Trilogy. At least two of his many critical studies are now classics: The Playwright As Thinker and The Life of the Drama. In "The Brecht Memoir," appended to his book, Bentley On Brecht, he details his personal association with Bertolt Brecht. The latter's chief translator and interpreter in the English-speaking world, Mr. Bentley is also editor of the Grove Press's Brecht edition.

SOPRANO KARYN LEVITT AND LEGENDARY TRANSLATOR AND MUSIC HISTORIAN ERIC BENTLEY ARE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS REGARDING "ERIC BENTLEY'S BRECHT-EISLER SONGBOOK."