

# Kurt Weill Newsletter

VOLUME 41

NUMBER 2

FALL 2023

## FRANCE FALLS FOR *THREEPENNY*

NEW PRODUCTION  
IN AIX AND PARIS

## JOANA MALLWITZ TAKES BERLIN BY STORM

## LATEST NEWS & REVIEWS

OUT FROM THE SHADOWS

# ELISABETH HAUPTMANN

*"The Threepenny Opera wouldn't  
have happened without me."*





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Every issue of the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* is available online at <https://www.kwf.org/newsletter/>

Cover photo: Elisabeth Hauptmann, ca. 1932 (courtesy of the Weill-Lenya Research Center). Cover design by Mike Gerard.

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A variety of opinions are expressed in the *Newsletter*; they do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. Letters to the editor are welcome.

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### 2023 Mid-Year Grant Recipients

*Professional Performance*  
London Philharmonic Orchestra, London, UK. *The Seven Deadly Sins*.

*College/University and Amateur Performance*  
Fort Lewis College, Durango, CO. *One Touch of Venus*.  
Santa Monica College, Santa Monica, CA. Symphonic Nocturne from *Lady in the Dark*, *The Guests* ballet music (Blitzstein).

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Elisabeth Hauptmann, co-creator of *Die Dreigroschenoper* along with Weill and Brecht, takes center stage in this issue as we explore her contributions to the work. Her participation has always been known and acknowledged but not always fully understood. We join with Brecht scholars, theater historians, and lovers of *Die Dreigroschenoper* to celebrate Hauptmann as the indispensable collaborator that she was.

In the guise of *L'opéra de quat'sous*, *Die Dreigroschenoper* has had a big year in France, with a new production headlining the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in July and playing to sold-out houses at the Comédie-Française in the autumn. We suggest here a few of the elements that made it exceptional.

### Taking Berlin by Storm

Berlin is giddy over the ascent of Joana Mallwitz to her new post as music director of the Konzerthausorchester beginning in the 2023–24 season. After holding posts as both symphony and opera conductor in Nuremberg, Erfurt, and Heidelberg, and a stellar array of guest conducting opportunities with opera companies and orchestras all over Europe—her debut at the Salzburg Festival in 2020 made waves—Mallwitz becomes the first woman conductor to lead a major Berlin symphony orchestra. Her advent has inspired so much publicity that *The Guardian* reported, “A virtual unknown figure in the Berlin capital until recently, the musician says she can no longer go to the supermarket or local bakery without being recognised” (12 October 2023).

Mallwitz's choices for her inaugural program on 31 August 2023? For her first concert, she chose first symphonies: Prokofiev's Classical Symphony, Weill's *Symphonie in einem Satz*, and Mahler's *Symphony no. 1*. Weill's symphony, programmed recently by the Berlin Philharmonic under Kirill Petrenko in 2021, struck many observers as the most obscure of the group. Composed in 1921 during Weill's tenure in Ferruccio Busoni's master class, the score was lost for decades and has always been considered something of an anomaly in Weill's oeuvre, not only because it is a symphonic poem composed by a master of theater music, but because the expressionist idiom bears little resemblance to his later, more familiar, work.

Mallwitz made her own powerful case for the symphony at a pre-concert event for eager music lovers at the Konzerthaus. She demonstrated the principal motifs at the piano and talked about its history and interpretation. She has put her finger on some unique features of the work, including this striking statement: “The end of Weill's symphony has the only affirmative minor chord that I know. It is a great ‘yes!’ only in a minor key.” (Mallwitz had already remarked, “You understand we could spend half an hour talking about each chord.”) She comments further of the

The news section sets forth a remarkably full calendar of Weill performances in the first half of 2024 and relays the latest successes of past prizewinners of the Lenya Competition, while memorializing two vastly different Weill stalwarts, Tony Bennett and Robert Brustein.

The *Newsletter* always depends on the efforts of every Foundation staff member and others as well. This issue has benefited enormously from the contributions of consultant Mike Gerard, who designed the front and back covers and our Hauptmann feature.

Dave Stein

symphony composed in the wake of World War I that it shows “a great longing for peace, and the will to achieve it.”

With one Weill performance under her belt, Mallwitz will lead another in early February 2024, offering Weill's *Fantaisie symphonique* (Symphony no. 2) and *Die sieben Todsünden* with Katharine Mehrling as soloist. To top it off, she has already signed a contract with the pre-eminent recording label Deutsche Grammophon; her first pressing will consist of *Die sieben Todsünden* and both symphonies!

#### Excerpts from reviews of the opening concert:

Compared to Prokofiev's First, Weill's one-movement first symphony, composed only a few years later, is a more serious and innovative work, deploying harsher gestures, sharper contrasts, and more experimental tonality. Mallwitz and the orchestra made that clear with their effortless change in musical language between Prokofiev and Weill.

Katharina Granzin, *taz*, 3 September 2023

As presented by Mallwitz and the Konzerthausorchester, [Weill's] symphony

had all the appeal and heft of a new discovery. In the ‘Berliner Sinfonie,’ as it is called, the crazy (not so golden) Twenties in the German capital are captured in a masterful, original orchestration. Under Mallwitz, the work develops precisely the tempi and dizzying undercurrents that we associate with the feel of an old-time, bustling metropolis. . . . For Mallwitz, this is a made-to-order debut; in her first concert she has already opened the ears and hearts of Berliners.

Thomas Heinold, *Nürnberger Nachrichten*, 1 September 2023

We hear piercing moments owed to experiences of the First World War, and also episodes of melodic power, created by an original, daring genius. To be sure, the work also has its flaws, but Mallwitz believes in it. She gives it force and expressive power, and lovingly polishes it to a bright sheen. It could not sound better.

Andreas Göbel, *rbb-Kultur*, 1 September 2023

Joana Mallwitz cannot be praised highly enough for announcing that Weill's music will be one of the centerpieces of her first season at the Konzerthaus.

Wolfgang Schreiber, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 September 2023



PHOTO: SIMON PAULY



# OUT FROM THE SHADOWS

Elisabeth Hauptmann, the spark that ignited *The Threepenny Opera*.



Shortly after they met in Berlin in 1924, Hauptmann began an intensive collaboration with Brecht that lasted until 1933, when both had to flee Germany, and resumed in the U.S. and then again in Germany in the 1940s. Nearly everything published under Brecht's name during his lifetime until Hauptmann's own death in 1973 passed through her hands. Even when Hauptmann herself did not write work attributed to Brecht—the lyrics of the “Alabama-Song” are hers, for example—she participated actively in the conception and construction of Brecht's plays and sometimes revised or edited his poems. In 1956, Lotte Lenya memorably described her as Brecht's “vigilant shadow.”

After Elisabeth Hauptmann learned in 1927 of a successful revival of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* in London that ran for several years, she purchased a modern edition of the ballad opera, including vocal lines and lyrics, and began to translate the text into German; as she translated, she changed things here and there on her own initiative. At some point early in 1928, she started showing selected scenes to Bertolt Brecht in an effort to get him interested. The strategy worked; she and Brecht added “Des Bettlers Oper” (German for “The Beggar's Opera”) to their project list and began working on the text in earnest. As Lotte Lenya recalled in 1956, Hauptmann gave “the German text to Brecht one scene at a time. ... At odd intervals—for fun, for relaxation—he began fiddling with this scene or that, keeping intact what suited him, boldly adding or subtracting as he saw fit.” Anything kept “intact,” of course, was Hauptmann's work.

One of the most famous accounts of the genesis of *Die Dreigroschenoper* comes from producer Ernst Josef Aufricht, who recalled meeting with Brecht and asking him for a play to open his theater. Brecht mentioned the *Beggar's Opera* as an afterthought, and Aufricht asked for the not-yet-complete script. He read it the next day and was hooked. We don't know whether he was aware that the still unfinished text was a joint effort or that Hauptmann was an essential member of Brecht's inner circle. Brecht preferred to work with others in the room; Lenya described him vividly in “That Was a Time” (1956) as “striding back and forth in a fetid blue cloud from his stogy, pausing for a quick question to this sitter, a snap reaction to a line from another; deep-set brown eyes forever blinking, small white hands continuously gesturing, translating everything into terms of theater ... When Kurt arrived for a serious work session, the disciples would depart—most often Elisabeth and I stayed on ...”

Hauptmann's contribution to *Die Dreigroschenoper* was not restricted to work on John Gay's text. She had translated a number of Rudyard Kipling's poems into German, and it became clear during the collaboration that they might find a home in the new libretto. “Screw Guns,” for example, was remade into the “Kanonen-Song” (Army Song), “Wishing Caps” influenced “Lied von der Unzulänglichkeit menschlichen Strebens” (Useless Song), and “Mary, Pity Women” turned into “Pollys Lied” (cut from the premiere production but frequently reinstated later). Some of her Kipling translations survive in a script used during the rehearsal period in August 1928, along with annotations in both her and Brecht's hands.

*Die Dreigroschenoper* turned out to be a surprise hit that knocked Berlin for a loop, and the program listed Hauptmann on the second

page, credited as translator, above Brecht (adaptor) and Weill (composer). The libretto and vocal score were published within three months of opening night; Hauptmann, Brecht, and Weill all appeared on the title pages with the same creative roles specified. At this point, Hauptmann was definitely regarded as part of the writing team, even if the full scope of her work was not acknowledged in her credit. A few years later, she collaborated with Brecht on a series titled *Versuche* (experiments), which included most of Brecht's dramatic works written up to that time. (Many of the works were collaborations, but only Brecht's name appeared on the cover of each volume; collaborators' names were printed at the end of the text.) The *Versuche* edition of *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1932) presented a text substantially different from the first publication of the libretto in 1928. One of the most glaring and oft-quoted additions is a speech from *Happy End*, premiered a year after *Die Dreigroschenoper* and a product of the same three-way collaboration, except this time the book was credited to Hauptmann under a pseudonym, “Dorothy Lane.” That speech, which includes the famous line, “Was ist ein Einbruch in eine Bank gegen die Gründung einer Bank?” (Robbing a bank's no crime compared to owning one!) was inserted into the final scene of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and it is still frequently heard in productions today; in fact, many observers consider it one of the most emblematic lines of the show.

Brecht, of course, understood exactly what Hauptmann's work meant to him and said so many times. The earliest evidence we have comes from the original licensing contract with Felix Bloch Erben for *Die Dreigroschenoper*, signed on 26 April 1928, which specified that Hauptmann would receive a 12-1/2% share of authors' royalties. It also specified unambiguously that she was collaborating on the script (“an dem Buch mitarbeitet”). Towards the end of Brecht's life, in 1955, Hauptmann and Brecht met with director Giorgio Strehler as he prepared a new production of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Their conversation, transcribed by Hans Bunge, contained an unequivocal statement: “Brecht and Hauptmann reported that a play was needed for the opening of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm (managed by Fischer and Aufricht) on 31 August 1928. Brecht had *Die Dreigroschenoper* in the works. It was based on a translation by Hauptmann. Further work with Weill and Elisabeth Hauptmann was a true collaboration that proceeded step by step.”

Indeed, it took a “true collaboration” of those three, each making an essential contribution, to create *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Most scholars, theater professionals, and journalists have come to acknowledge a fact that has been there all along: this eternally popular music theater piece had three co-creators, not two.



# ELISABETH HAUPTMANN and *DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER*: A CHRONOLOGY

Compiled by Kim H. Kowalke and Dave Stein

**1897 June 20:** Elisabeth Hauptmann born in Peckelsheim, Germany to a German father, Dr. Clemens Hauptmann, and an American mother, Josephine Diestelhorst Hauptmann. From her mother, Elisabeth learns English and receives musical training.

**1924 November:** Hauptmann meets Brecht in Berlin. He is impressed with her command of literature and languages, and asks her to work with him. She helps Brecht both with literary matters and with working out musical settings of poems.

**1925-26:** Hauptmann collaborates intensively with Brecht on *Baal*, *Mann ist Mann*, and *Taschenpostille*. She writes two poems in English, "Alabama-Song" and "Benares-Song," for the "Mahagonny-Gesänge" in *Taschenpostille*; her work is not credited.

**1927 March:** Weill meets Brecht.

**1927 July 17:** Premiere of first Weill-Brecht collaboration, *Mahagonny Songspiel*, in Baden-Baden.

**1927 late summer:** Weill, Brecht, and Hauptmann begin near-daily work on the libretto of the full-length opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*.

**1927 December:** Hauptmann orders a copy of *The Beggar's Opera* ("Des Bettlers Oper") and begins a German translation/adaptation. Her efforts kindle Brecht's interest.

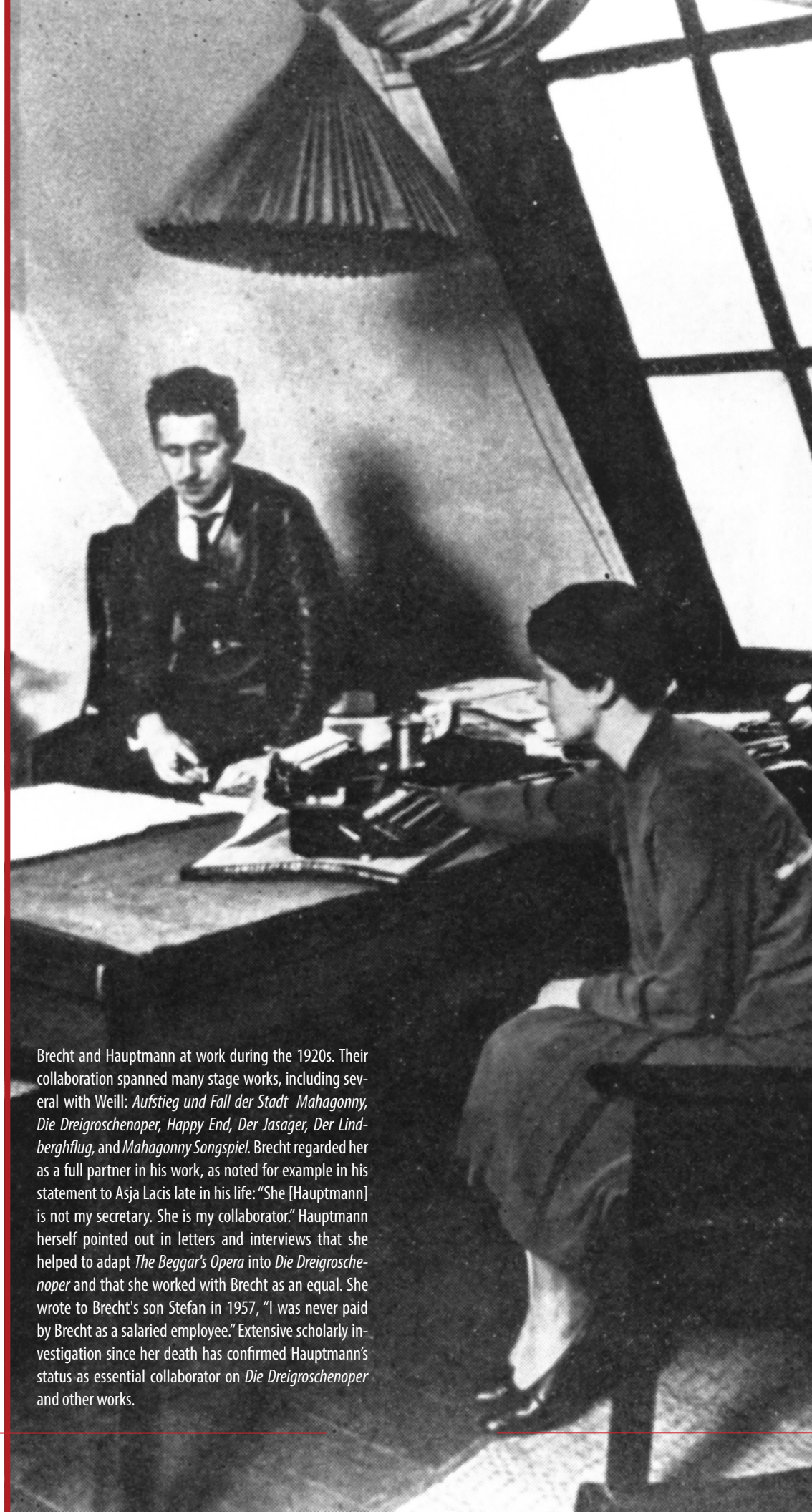
**1928 April?:** Novice producer Ernst Josef Aufricht meets Brecht and learns of "Des Bettlers Oper." Upon reading the incomplete text-in-progress, Aufricht agrees to produce it at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm.

**1928 April 26:** Weill and Brecht sign a contract with Felix Bloch Erben for theatrical representation of "Des Bettlers Oper." Brecht's share of royalties is set at 62-1/2%, Weill's at 25%. The contract names Hauptmann as a collaborator on the book ("die an dem Buch mitarbeitet") and accords her a 12-1/2% share.

**1928 June:** The earliest surviving draft of the play, entitled "Die Ludenoper," preserves most of Gay's characters and plot but differs markedly from the final version.

**1928 August 10:** Rehearsals for the premiere begin at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin. Extensive annotations, additions, and emendations in both Hauptmann's and Brecht's hands appear in one of two rehearsal scripts that have survived (used by the director's assistant, Julius Halewicz) and inserted pages include drafts of Hauptmann's translations of several Kipling poems for use as song lyrics.

**1928 August 31:** Opening night. Authorial credits in the 4-page pamphlet program read: "Übersetzung [translation]: Elisabeth Hauptmann / Bearbeitung [adaptation]: Brecht / Musik [music]: Kurt Weill." Despite mixed reviews, the show creates a sensation and immediate demand for script and score.



Brecht and Hauptmann at work during the 1920s. Their collaboration spanned many stage works, including several with Weill: *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, *Happy End*, *Der Jasager*, *Der Lindberghflug*, and *Mahagonny Songspiel*. Brecht regarded her as a full partner in his work, as noted for example in his statement to Asja Lacin late in his life: "She [Hauptmann] is not my secretary. She is my collaborator." Hauptmann herself pointed out in letters and interviews that she helped to adapt *The Beggar's Opera* into *Die Dreigroschenoper* and that she worked with Brecht as an equal. She wrote to Brecht's son Stefan in 1957, "I was never paid by Brecht as a salaried employee." Extensive scholarly investigation since her death has confirmed Hauptmann's status as essential collaborator on *Die Dreigroschenoper* and other works.

**1928 October - November:** Universal Edition publishes a piano-vocal score for *Die Dreigroschenoper*; Bloch Erben and UE co-publish a libretto both for rental by theaters and for sale to the public. The title-page credits are very similar to those printed in the opening-night program. Galley proofs of the libretto were corrected by Weill and Hauptmann, with numerous annotations in her handwriting.

**1932 January:** Kiepenheuer publishes the third volume of Brecht's *Versuche*, which contains a revised version of the book and lyrics of *Die Dreigroschenoper* prepared by Hauptmann and Brecht. The front cover of Heft 3 of the *Versuche* bears only Brecht's name. At the end of the *Dreigroschenoper*, however, the credits read "Brecht. Hauptmann. Weill." with no elaboration.

**1949 February 7:** Brecht signs a contract with Suhrkamp Verlag in Frankfurt that makes it the new publisher and licensor of almost all of Brecht's plays, including *Dreigroschenoper*; the same contract specifies that Hauptmann shall be authorized to negotiate with theaters on his behalf and to edit his works for publication. A rider to the contract lists Brecht's dramatic works to be represented by Suhrkamp, each with its collaborators. Hauptmann and Weill are both credited for *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

**1949 February 15:** Hauptmann moves to Berlin and agrees to work with Brecht and Suhrkamp.

**1954:** Hauptmann becomes *Dramaturgin* of the Berliner Ensemble and collaborates on new work with Brecht. She also continues as editor of his works for publication and as agent in arranging productions of *Dreigroschenoper* and other works.

**1955 May 25:** Hauptmann gives an interview to Lotte Lenya and George Davis in Berlin in which she recalls the genesis and development of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The interview becomes source material for Lenya's article, "That Was a Time," published May 1956 in *Theatre Arts* magazine.

**1973 April 20:** Elisabeth Hauptmann dies in East Berlin. Her papers are preserved in the Brecht-Archiv and in the Hauptmann-Archiv in Berlin's Akademie der Künste.

**1977:** Aufbau-Verlag publishes a posthumous collection of Hauptmann's writings, *Julia ohne Romeo*.

**2018:** Feature films by Heinrich Breloer (a Brecht biopic) and Joachim Lang (an account of the genesis and success of Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* and his film treatment, *Die Beule*) both depict Hauptmann as an essential co-creator of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and credit her as such.

**2021 August 13:** Premiere of a new production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* at the Berliner Ensemble, directed by Barrie Kosky. The program credits read, "*Die Dreigroschenoper* nach John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* von Bertolt Brecht (Text) und Kurt Weill (Musik) unter Mitarbeit von Elisabeth Hauptmann."

**2023 October:** Suhrkamp issues a press release explaining that many of Brecht's works will remain under copyright in the European Union after 2026, the seventieth anniversary of his death. Because of Hauptmann's collaboration, *Die Dreigroschenoper* is a prime example, with protection for the entirety of the work lasting through 2043.

Please visit a comprehensive chronology of Hauptmann's collaboration at <https://www.kwf.org/research-center/elisabeth-hauptmann-chronology>

PHOTO: COURTESY OF WEILL-LENYA RESEARCH CENTER



She became my best collaborator. She has an extraordinary talent for languages and collaborated actively and critically in all of my dramatic works.

— Bertolt Brecht  
on Elisabeth Hauptmann, 1935

1 Die Bühnen-Fantämen des Werkes werden zwischen Herrn Bert Brecht, Herrn Kurt Weill und Frau Elisabeth Hauptmann, die an dem Buch mitarbeitet, wie folgt verteilt:

Herr Bert Brecht erhält:	..... 62 1/2 %
Herr Kurt Weill erhält:	..... 25 %
Frau Elisabeth Hauptmann erhält:	..... 12 1/2 %

*Handwritten signature: Kurt Weill*

2 Theater am Schiffbauerdamm  
Direktion: Ernst Josef Aufrecht

**Die Dreigroschenoper**  
(The Beggars Opera)

Übersetzung: Elisabeth Hauptmann  
Bearbeitung: Brecht  
Musik: Kurt Weill  
Regie: Erich Engel  
Bühnenbild: Caspar Neher  
Musikalische Leitung: Theo Makeben  
Kapelle: Lewis Ruth Band.  
Technische Leitung: Hans Sachs

3 Projektion: Text der nachfolgenden Strophe.

ALLE (singen zur Orgel, nach vorn gehend):  
Verfolgt das Unrecht nicht zu sehr, in Bälde  
Erfriert es schon von selbst, denn es ist kalt.  
Bedenkt das Dunkel und die große Kälte  
In diesem Tale, das von Jammer schallt.

Brecht. Hauptmann. Weill.

4 Sie werden heute Abend eine Opfer für Bettler sehen. Weil diese Opfer so unerkennbar ge dacht war, wie man Bettler sei erkennen und weil sie doch so billig sein sollte, dass Bettler sie begablen können, heißt sie "Die Dreigroschenoper".

**No. 1 OUVERTÜRE**

Während der Ouvertüre ist der kleine Zwischenvorhang, auf dem: „Die Dreigroschenoper“ steht, auf, und man sieht auf den beiden Tafeln rechts und links den Titel: *Vorspiels*

*Handwritten: Richtungs*

Nach der Ouvertüre schließt sich der Kleinvorhang. Wenn er wieder aufgeht, stehen die Schauspieler, wie jedesmal, schon auf ihren Plätzen, sind aber nicht beleuchtet, damit man die Schrift auf der Tafel sehen kann. Der Titel des *ersten* Bibles heißt: *kleine Vorhang*

*Handwritten: Vorspiels*

**Die Moritat von Mackie Messer.**

Jahrmarkt in Soho. Die Bettler betteln. Die Diebe stehlen, die Huren huren. Ein Moritarsänger singt eine Moritat. Auf der Orgel geht die Moritat an.

**ERSTER AKT**  
VORSPIEL

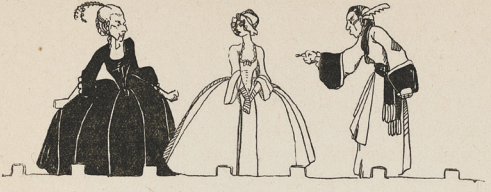
**MORITAT**

Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne,  
Und die trägt er im Gesicht,  
Und der Macheath, der hat ein Messer,  
Doch das Messer sieht man nicht.

An 'nem schönen blauen Sonntag,  
Liegt ein toter Mann am Strand,  
Und ein Mensch geht um die Ecke,  
Den man Mackie Messer nennt.


*Handwritten notes on right side:*  
Nach dem die Tafeln so lange beleuchtet waren, dass man die Inschriften lesen konnte, geht die Beleuchtung von den Tafeln weg und setzt auf den Schauspielern.

5



ACT I. SCENE I.  
SCENE, Peachum's House.  
Peachum sitting at a Table with a large Book of Accounts before him.

AIR I. An old Woman clothed in Gray, &c.



Through all the Employments of Life  
Each Neighbour abuses his Brother;  
Whore and Rogue they call Husband and Wife:  
All Professions be-rogue one another:  
The Priest calls the Lawyer a Cheat,  
The Lawyer be-knaves the Divine:  
And the Statesman, because he's so great,  
Thinks his Trade as honest as mine.

6

**Berufe der Frauen**



Aufn. Gerth Simon, Berlin

Elisabeth Hauptmann hat es verstanden, den vorwiegend handreichenden Beruf einer Sekretärin so zu verinnerlichen und zu vergeistigen, daß sie zur Mitarbeiterin des Dichters Bert Brecht wurde und neben ihm und dem Komponisten Weill als Übersetzerin und Textverfasserin am Erfolg der »Dreigroschenoper« Anteil haben konnte.

1. Excerpt from final page of the 1928 contract with Bloch Erben, which states that Hauptmann was "collaborating on the book" (an dem Buch mitarbeitet).

2. The creative credits in the program for the original production at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm listed Hauptmann first as translator, then Brecht for the adaptation, then Weill for the music. Director, designer, and other production credits followed.

3. From the last page of the Versuche edition of Die Dreigroschenoper. The names of the co-creators appear in a different order from the original program at the end of this revised script (1931).

4. The first page of the libretto proof shows the well-known introduction to Die Dreigroschenoper ("You are about to hear an opera for beggars ...") added in Hauptmann's hand.

5. The first page of the libretto of The Beggar's Opera from Hauptmann's own copy, now preserved in Berlin's Akademie der Künste. Weill retained and reharmonized the melody for the second vocal number of Die Dreigroschenoper, "Wach auf, Du verrotteter Christ."

6. From Westermanns Monatshefte, April 1930. The caption says, in part, that Hauptmann has become the "collaborator of the poet Bert Brecht; along with him and composer Weill, she can take a share of the credit for the success of Die Dreigroschenoper, both as translator and text author."



The fact that Hauptmann was a co-creator of *Die Dreigroschenoper* has implications beyond literary history. Suhrkamp Verlag, the publisher of Brecht's works and licensor of productions of his plays, has already affirmed that *Die Dreigroschenoper* remains protected by copyright in the European Union until 2044.

## THE PUBLISHERS SPEAK

**Press Release: Suhrkamp Verlag, October 2023 (excerpt)**

Bertolt Brecht died on 14 August 1956. Therefore, all of Brecht's works for which he is the sole rights holder will enter public domain on 1 January 2027. It is well-known that Brecht created some works (especially stage works) with others, either fellow rights owners or collaborative composers.

A prominent example is *Die Dreigroschenoper*, for which Elisabeth Hauptmann is a rights holder who has received royalties since the world premiere in 1928. Hauptmann died on 20 April 1973. Thus, according to German law § 65 Abs. 1 UrhG, *Die Dreigroschenoper* is protected by copyright until 31 December 2043. By German law § 65 Abs. 3 UrhG, Weill's music for *Die Dreigroschenoper* is protected until the same date.

### European American Music

Copyright laws in the United States differ from those in the European Union. In the case of *Dreigroschenoper*, there is no single date of US copyright expiration for the entire work. The licensing agent for *Dreigroschenoper* in the U.S., European American Music Corporation, summarizes the situation after 1 January 2024:

"In the United States, works created before 1978 generally receive a 95-year term of copyright protection beginning with the year of either the work's first publication or its pre-publication copyright registration, whichever occurs first. The term of protection applies only to the elements of the publication as registered, such as a libretto, individual songs, or a piano-vocal score. When components of a single work have differing publication/registration dates, their terms of copyright protection vary accordingly. For example, the initial German libretto and vocal score of *Dreigroschenoper* were first published in 1928. Their contents will indeed therefore enter the public domain on 1 January 2024. Lyrics, dialogue, and songs not included in the original versions published in 1928 remain protected longer. For example, Weill's full score and orchestrations (and any arrangements thereof) will remain under copyright in the U.S. through 2067. A substantial amount of additional material that first appeared in print in the critical edition of *Dreigroschenoper* (2000) will be protected through 2095. All existing English translations continue to enjoy protection, as well."

**For more detailed information, see [www.kwf.org/contact/copyright](http://www.kwf.org/contact/copyright)**

Foundation staff members have completed a comprehensive catalogue of copyright information for all of Weill's works and may serve as helpful guides for those planning performances and productions.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF WEILL-LENYA RESEARCH CENTER



Elisabeth Hauptmann, Berlin 1972

## EXPERIMENT Die Dreigroschenoper at the Staatsschauspiel Dresden

On 6 October 2023, a new production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* opened at the Staatsschauspiel Dresden, unlike any that have come before. The familiar songs—both music and lyrics—are unchanged. The plot, however, has been reworked extensively by director Volker Lösch, and dialogue drafted by playwright Lothar Kittstein frequently replaces the original. The goal of the effort, according to *Dramaturg* and co-adaptor Jörg Bochow, is to "move *Die Dreigroschenoper* into a contemporary political context ... to create new and current associations and turn the work into a play about today, just as it was in 1928." Briefly, the story, now set in 21st-century Germany rather than 19th-century London, concerns an attempted right-wing takeover of the government, an uncomfortably real prospect in Europe and the U.S. This experiment was approved by the estates of Brecht and Weill as well as the licensor, Suhrkamp Verlag. Brecht's granddaughter Johanna Schall described the adaptation as "interesting in form and content."

The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* (5 October 2023) suggested that the rights holders are preparing for the day when the copyrights on *Die Dreigroschenoper* will run out and directors will be free to do whatever they want with the piece. According to author Wolfgang Höbel, that moment will arrive at the end of 2026, when "Brecht will have been dead seventy years." However, *Der Spiegel* has subsequently issued a retraction, prompted by a letter from German lawyer Ulrich Fischer, in which he noted, "As Höbel acknowledged in his article, Elisabeth Hauptmann was an author and copyright holder in *Die Dreigroschenoper*, along with Brecht and Weill." She died in 1973; therefore, the work will not enter public domain in the European Union before 2044.

# À la Française

## Extraordinary Team Tackles *L'opéra de quat'sous*

A landmark production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* inaugurated the Aix-en-Provence opera festival on 4 July 2023, moving to Paris in September. *L'opéra de quat'sous* (four-penny opera), as it is still known in France, drew a remarkable volume of attention for a host of reasons. We can't hope to sum up the highly publicized production in this space; the sampling below from the press, organized by topic, may give a feel for the efforts that went into the staging, and its broader significance.

### A Fistful of Firsts

The new production was distinguished by a number of things that had never happened before:

- "Pauv' Madam' Peachum," written by Weill and Yvette Guilbert for a 1937 Paris production of *L'opéra de quat'sous*, was sung for the first time in a stage production (by Véronique Vella as Mrs. Peachum).
- Alexandre Pateau's new French translation was performed for the first time.
- Longtime stage director Thomas Ostermeier led his first music theater work.
- A full company from the Comédie-Française appeared for the first time at the Aix festival.
- The festival opened with a stage work other than a grand opera for the first time.



PHOTO: © JEAN-LOUIS FERNANDEZ, COLL. COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE

### The Music

We had vigorous discussions with our conductor Maxime Pascal about phrasing and prosody. The characters must suddenly begin singing with no connection to what came just before. We had to discover how to move from speaking to singing in a way that doesn't sound like a Disney movie.

Interview with actor Benjamin Lavernhe (Tiger Brown) by Juliette de Banes Gardonne, *Le Temps*, 3 July 2023

Conductor Maxime Pascal of Le Balcon has led the band from the very first performance to heights of dynamism, lucid ensemble playing, and rich orchestral color. The players bring energy to a production that has obviously chosen to limit the energy onstage.

Philippe Venturini, *Les Echos*, 5 July 2023

For once, Maxime Pascal's musical choices miss the point. Just because there are references to Mahler, Schoenberg, or Stravinsky in Weill's score doesn't mean the conductor had to take the music in a serious direction. That does Weill no favors.

Sophie Bourdais, *Télérama*, 5 July 2023

### The Cast

The actors are all excellent, and they can sing, too! Véronique Vella's amazing Mrs. Peachum, captivating and loud. The elegant and grave Jenny of Elsa Lepoivre, Cläina Clavaron's sensual and ardent Lucy, and the perfectly judged sass of Marie Oppert as Polly. As for the men, we honor Birane Ba's moving characterization of Macheath, a sentimental Brown played by Benjamin Lavernhe, and above all the irresistible Christian Hecq [Mr. Peachum], halfway between comedian and psychopath.

Marie-Aude Roux, *Le Monde*, 5 July 2023

Then Polly Peachum enters, spotlight in the center of the stage to deliver that legendary song "Seerüberjenny." Here Marie Oppert [Lenya Competition Trustees' Award, 2020] offers unalloyed operatic pleasure. The actor began her career as a singer, and it shows. Her Polly gave the opera festival audience the gift of opulent vocal ability.

Eberhard Spreng, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 5 July 2023

Ostermeier's visually subdued production derives most of its pleasures from letting the cast's superb talents loose.

Laura Cappelle, *New York Times*, 6 July 2023

## The company acted with driven intensity and a fluidity rarely seen in the opera house.

Stephen J. Mudge, *Opera News*, October 2023



## Design

Just to complicate matters here, the frame of visual reference is firmly Russian. Graphic video and black metal sets (by Sébastien Dupouey and Magda Willi) take motifs from the 1920s creation of Meyerhold and Mayakovsky, creating the utopian aesthetic world which was soon to be destroyed by disillusionment and despair.

Nicholas Kenyon, *The Telegraph*, 5 July 2023

... Magda Willi's set design, constructivist and very effective; Sébastien Dupouey's videos in form of collages, with homages to Edward Muybridge and the Lumière brothers; the flawless light design of Urs Schönebaum ...

*El País*, 6 July 2023

The costumes visually associate scenes with eras (sequins and spangles from 1920s cabaret, bourgeois apparel from the 1930s, modern outfits for the beggars). The lighting every now and then echoes that of Pabst's 1931 film. It all serves precise, virtuosic direction ... but sometimes the parodic tendency is overdone, for instance during the endless wedding scene with its slapstick and custard pies in the face.

Marie-Aude Roux, *Le Monde*, 5 July 2023

The visual world of this *Dreigroschenoper* allows itself to entertain without restriction. The LED boards display introductory texts for each scene, which Brecht used to situate the action. The boards are deployed horizontally, vertically, diagonally and call Jenny Holzer's installations to mind.

Eberhard Spreng, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 5 July 2023



Custard pies in the wedding scene

PHOTO: © JEAN-LOUIS FERNANDEZ, COLL. COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE

## Contemporary Relevance

Burning cars, looting, hundreds of arrests. In recent days, France has experienced an unprecedented wave of violence. National debates over such issues rage on, and even affect the festival in Aix.

*Dramaturg* Timothée Picard explains, "*Die Dreigroschenoper* takes up these matters of revolt and rioting which are occupying France at the moment. We hope this coincidence will lead to more operas engaging with the crises of our time." Let the festival turn into a forum for addressing adverse social conditions openly.

Luis Jachmann, *SWR2*, 8 July 2023



Macheath (Birane Ba), Peachum (Christian Hecq), Polly (Marie Oppert) at top of stairs, Mrs. Peachum (Véronique Vella) at right

PHOTO: © JEAN-LOUIS FERNANDEZ, COLL. COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE

## Direction

Ostermeier's staging works well. The front of the stage is empty but for a quartet of microphone stands; irregularly shaped screens display a variety of projected video images, mostly faintly disturbing or reinforcing political messages. Stagehands are continually reshaping the rear of the stage with a variety of metal stairs and scaffolding. It adds interest without being obtrusive.

David Karlin, *bachtrack.com*, 5 July 2023

The plot is not transposed to our day or placed in an indeterminate time. References to early cinema by Méliès or Bunuel, along with some of the costumes, plunge us into the era between the two wars in which Weill, Brecht, and Hauptmann created *The Threepenny Opera*. The darkly humorous tone demanded of the actors and their lively but occasionally jerky movements read like a transposition to the stage of the expressionism of Dix or Munch.

Clément Taillia, *forumopera.com*, 27 September 2023

Despite a few draggy moments, the production shows great esthetic coherence, perfectly smooth transitions from one scene to the next and absolute commitment from the artists.

Emmanuelle Giuliani, *La Croix*, 5 July 2023

## Translation

To get the right flow, the translator drew inspiration from certain rappers and slammers who produce powerful texts by cultivating alliteration. Additional difficulty: he had to deal with the tendency of German to accent words on the first syllable. That led him to eliminate nearly all masculine rhymes, so that he had to rewrite some songs up to fifteen times. ... The result is convincing, lively and fluent at the same time.

Philippe Chevilly, *Les Echos*, 29 June 2023

As for the decision to perform the piece in French, newly translated by Alexandre Pateau, it allows spectators to become acquainted quickly with the protagonists without doing too much harm to the sung passages.

Emmanuelle Giuliani, *La Croix*, 5 July 2023

[The project was] a real whirlwind; I thought about nothing else for a year and a half! I heard the work so often that I knew it by heart in both languages. At every opportunity, I would sing a passage to myself in order to improve the translation. ... It was a truly diabolical exercise. I went hundreds of rounds with some of the songs, coming up with as many as four variant translations, each with a different rhyme scheme, for each stanza.

Alexandre Pateau, quoted in *La Liberté*, 17 June 2023

## Coda

The performance was rewarded with persistent but unenthusiastic applause. Peachum interrupted it all of a sudden so that everyone onstage (instrumentalists included) could sing a rhymed quatrain that Brecht added in 1948 to the same music as the closing chorale. The gesture was unequivocally political; the lines stir us to "arm ourselves" to resist the "new fascists," who cause "night to persist" and "our tears to overflow."

*El País*, 6 July 2023

## L'opéra de quat'sous

Directed by Thomas Ostermeier  
Orchestre Le Balcon conducted by Maxime Pascal  
Translated by Alexandre Pateau  
Set design by Magda Willi  
Costume design by Florence von Gerkan  
Choreography by Johanna Lemke  
Video design by Sébastien Dupouey

Macheath ... Birane Ba  
Mr. Peachum ... Christian Hecq  
Polly Peachum ... Marie Oppert  
Mrs. Peachum ... Véronique Vella  
Jenny ... Elsa Lepoivre  
Lucy ... Claïna Clavaron  
Tiger Brown ... Benjamin Lavernhe

10 performances at Aix-en-Provence, 4–24 July 2023  
32 performances at the Comédie-Française, 23 Sept. – 5 Nov. 2023

## Ostermeier on Brecht and *Dreigroschenoper*

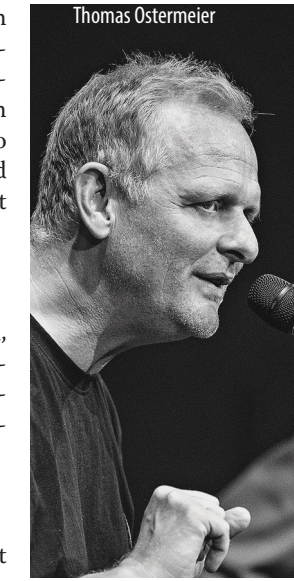


PHOTO: © JEAN-LOUIS FERNANDEZ

I myself was trained at the Ernst Busch school in East Berlin, where Brecht's plays serve as a catechism of sorts, before joining the Berliner Ensemble. I belong to that tradition.

Ostermeier quoted in *Le Monde*, 4 July 2023

Brecht's great mistake, in my opinion, was to believe that you can change the world through theater. ... It's bizarre to think you can summon up a revolution onstage; that's the dumbest method imaginable. There you are, in front of an audience which, along with the government, is subsidizing the theater. To think you can appeal to revolution in a place like that requires a stupidity that is beyond my understanding.

There is also a grotesque element that turns it into a parody of opera, of how the bourgeois amuse themselves; he ridicules the entertainment while using it as a tool to reach as many people as possible. ... We don't do Brecht like we did in the 1940s and 50s, when everything was gray, dusty, didactic.

Ostermeier quoted in *Transfuge*, 1 June 2023

I admire this work because Brecht describes the state of the world without pretending he knows how to fix it.

Ostermeier quoted in *La Provence*, 4 July 2023

## Cast recording available!

On LP, CD, and DVD issued by Alpha Classics

