

Four Walt Whitman Songs Propheten

Thomas Hampson, Albert Dohmen, et al.

Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra;
Dennis Russell Davies, conductor

Capriccio C5500

This recent release makes a revelatory addition to Weill's recorded legacy. Here we have first-class performances by world-class artists of two effectively unavailable works, both outliers in Weill's oeuvre. As such, both works provide new insights into his skills in text-setting, dramatic pacing, orchestration, and use of diverse musical forms and styles. These live recordings have an immediacy and intimacy lacking in many studio efforts. The clarity of the orchestra invites close listening, and the program booklet provides illuminating context and commentary. One only wonders why these recordings did not come out earlier.

It is difficult to imagine a better performance of the *Four Walt Whitman Songs*. Thomas Hampson and Dennis Russell Davies both have long and storied careers as champions of American music; they have collaborated on works of Ives, Bernstein, and John Adams. Their musical rapport shines through in all aspects of this 2001 Salzburg Festival performance. Hampson's phrasing, vocal power, and effortless legato combine thoughtful attention to the meaning of the text and engrossing storytelling. He treats the *Whitman Songs* as a mini-drama, with each song contributing to a larger narrative. He and Davies seem to agree that Weill's *Whitman Songs* are much more anti-war than pro-war. "Beat! Beat! Drums!" is far from saber-rattling; its dark and foreboding undercurrent reinforces the hell of warfare. "O Captain! My Captain!" Whitman's substantial lament upon the death of Abraham Lincoln, is performed with stoic tenderness. "Come Up from the Fields, Father" observes a family's grief and denial as they struggle to come to terms with the death of a son. "Dirge for Two Veterans" has two parallel themes: the horror of war, and admiration and love for fallen soldiers. Throughout, Davies and his orchestra take particular care to bring out orchestral effects that heighten the text. Their combined artistry makes for an outstanding and memorable performance.

Propheten (Prophets) is the title given by David Drew to his oratorio-style adaptation of music from Acts III and IV of *Der Weg der Verheißung* (The Eternal Road); Noam Sheriff provided missing orchestrations. Conceived in the style of Mendels-

sohn's oratorios, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, or Honegger's *King David*, *Propheten* requires a symphony orchestra, large chorus, and vocal soloists. Set within a thematic context of societal persecution, the roughly fifty-minute work presents a wealth of musical styles ranging from intimate to bombastic. *Propheten* is both accessible and relevant.

The libretto is a play within a play, with the story of Babylon's conquest of Judah framed by scenes set in a modern (pre-Holocaust) synagogue, in which the congregation huddles in fear of exile. After Jerusalem is destroyed and the people are carried off to Babylon, a thirteen-year-old boy in the synagogue has a vision of the Messiah. The Rabbi and choir celebrate the resilience and survival of their faith, but then local officials drive out the congregation. Only the thirteen-year-old represents a glimmer of hope.

The energy and commitment of this 1998 live performance are augmented by the subtle ambient sound of Vienna's Konzerthaus. All of the singers deliver their spoken and sung parts with purposeful clarity, almost to the point of melodrama. Kurt Azesberger (the Rabbi) and Anselm Lipgens (the Narrator) set the dramatic stage while Weill's four inventive fugatos give a hint of the energetic and strife-ridden music yet to come. Bass-baritone Albert Dohmen delivers Jeremiah's foreboding prophecy and tenor Michael Pabst counters with Isaiah's soaring melody of hope. Gottfried Hornik (the Adversary) clearly enjoys selling idols in the street while Bernd Fröhlich (Hananiah) relieves the tension with a jaunty rebuff of Jeremiah accompanied by tambourines and finger cymbals. Dohmen returns at the end to deliver Solomon's aria with great power and sensitivity. Georg Tsulufis gives a standout performance as the thirteen-year-old boy.

The music marks a departure for Weill, obviously affected by his own exile. He seems to relish the opportunity to flex his encyclopedic knowledge of musical style, especially grand opera. Dennis Russell Davies and the Vienna Radio Symphony provide all of the commitment, dramatic pacing, and flexibility that the music requires. The combined forces of the Wiener Jeunesse-Chor, the Wiener Motettenchor, and the Gumpoldskirchner Spatzen clearly relished digging into the harmonic complexities and vocal demands of several melismatic Handelian choruses and double choruses, delivering edge-of-seat intensity reminiscent of Mahler's Eighth Symphony or even Verdi's Requiem.

Taken alongside a highly recommended 2016 release of a much more comprehensive English-language concert adaptation by Ed Harsh (*The Road of Promise*, Navona NV6059) as well as a 2003 CD of highlights from *The Eternal Road* (Milken Archive, Naxos 8.559402), listeners can now enjoy and study a fuller range of Weill's contribution to one of his most complicated and unique musical theater works. More importantly, *Propheten* encourages us to reflect on societal prejudices against all forms of "otherness" and the life-and-death decisions that persecuted people are forced to make.

David Farneth
Tucson



Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Dutch National Opera
Ivo van Hove, director

Premiere: 6 September 2023

For many traditional opera lovers, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* comes as a solid uppercut, mainly due to its confrontational, painful topicality. The core theme is the power of money, and the ruthless way the world is ruled and manipulated by those who own it. The city of Mahagonny is therefore a profound dystopia, a capitalist pseudo-paradise where morality is effortlessly swept aside in favor of greed in every possible guise. Everything revolves around consumption, exploitation, and where necessary, corruption. Prostitution is ubiquitous, characters dance like puppets to the rhythm of the exchange rates, they seek comfort in intoxication, gambling, brutal violence, and unsatisfying sensuality. Everything in Mahagonny is raw and merciless, thrown into the faces of the audience, especially those who have money of their own—such as traditional opera lovers.

This is not necessarily my opinion, but it certainly is Bertolt Brecht's. For him, opera was a perfect manifestation of a self-deluded society based on hollow pleasure, a crown jewel of so-called "culinarism" and the bourgeoisie that imbibes it. *Aufstieg* is a frontal attack on that hedonic culture. But the opera targets culinarism with the tools of culinarism itself, thus opposing the prevailing culture while consciously taking part in it. Every production team must confront this paradox.

Director Ivo van Hove opts for a culinary approach. For him, *Aufstieg* is a full-blooded opera; therefore, he does not shy away from big operatic gestures. The finale, for instance, is a truly impressive old-style romantic apotheosis, almost a Wagnerian "Menschheitsdämmerung," very effective and emotional—but for some adepts of Brecht's so-called epic theater maybe not sufficiently "alienating." Van Hove consciously refrains from a purely

epic approach intended to make the audience think rather than sympathize. He assumes that contemporary spectators are capable of thinking *on their own* and keeps his distance from Brecht's pedantic side.

Nevertheless, van Hove succeeds in creating an overall atmosphere of ambiguity, generated mainly by the use of film. True, film has become an almost obligatory (and all too often an unnecessary or even confusing) medium in contemporary opera production, but in van Hove's *Aufstieg* it works beautifully. The action on stage is continuously filmed by moving cameramen, who therefore become actors themselves (or at least part of the action). The images they generate are regularly projected on a large screen that is actually the only permanent design element. The work therefore becomes simultaneously an opera and an opera film, caught between two genres that constantly overlap; we are reminded that the film industry is likewise subject to the tyranny of money and all its immoralities, even as the make-believe world of this medium *as a medium* is exhibited and exposed. The use of the green screen to depict the so-called moral tableaux in the second act provides an extra dimension. The technology makes it possible to present extreme renderings of the "Fressen, Lieben, Boxen, and Saufen" scenes while enforcing distance thanks to the black-and-white projection and the visible camera operators. Here again, the interaction of projected images and traditional stage action further blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. It is precisely this obfuscation that seems to form the core of van Hove's concept: reality and illusion become indistinguishable in a world where truth is no longer clear and cannot provide moral guidance.

Musically, it was a truly convincing performance. Conductor Markus Stenz led the orchestra with great precision, maintaining disciplined tempi and notable attention to timbre and sound quality. He avoided exaggerating the many popular stylistic elements or operatic clichés that enrich Weill's score, which would have diluted the characters into weak caricatures. The singers also steered clear of the cabaret sound that the general public, who knows Weill mainly through popular song arrangements, usually associates with him. The four lumberjacks all delivered excellent performances, both singing and acting, and Nikolai Schukoff as Jim Mahoney certainly gave his part its full lyricism.

The performance of the evening however belonged to Jenny, sung by Lauren Michelle. All too often her role is reduced to that of a run-down prostitute who sings accordingly. In contrast, Michelle brings great presence to her character; she sings and acts from a deep and nuanced sense of hurt and broken dignity—nothing slutty about the sheer humanity of her portrayal. Her interpretation certainly contributes to the emotional impact of the opera, an approach that, according to van Hove, absolutely does *not* go against Brechtian theater philosophy.

The Amsterdam audience responded enthusiastically and generously. It is strange to see an audience applauding with passion after absorbing three hours of blunt criticism. Then again, contemplation need not be visible, and applause may express gratitude for an insight, no matter how unpleasant.

Pieter Bergé
University of Leuven

PHOTO: CLÄRCHEN & MATTHIAS BAUS



Jenny (Lauren Michelle), Jimmy (Nikolai Schukoff), and the omnipresent camera operator

Interwar Symphonies and the Imagination: Politics, Identity, and the Sound of 1933

Emily MacGregor
Cambridge University Press, 2023

ISBN: 978-1-00-917278-3

The idea of picking a year for so-called microhistorical analysis is currently in fashion. The advantages are obvious in terms of neat packaging; so are the disadvantages given the choices that still need to be made (much can happen in a year), plus the problems of correlation *vs.* causation. Emily MacGregor's choice of music composed or performed in 1933 makes sense, given Hitler's rise to power in Germany and newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt's promise of a "New Deal" to counter the Great Depression in the United States. As for the "sound" of 1933, many might think of Fred Astaire singing Cole Porter's "Night and Day" (the top-selling record of the year), or Ethel Waters's treatment of "Stormy Weather," a song by Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler that was also covered by the Comedian Harmonists in Germany (as "Ohne Dich") some six months before the group was shut down by the Nazi regime.

MacGregor instead chooses symphonies, and a rather odd collection of them. Readers of the *Newsletter* should be pleased that Kurt Weill takes the lead with his "second" symphony, followed by Hans Pfitzner (Symphony in C-Sharp minor, an orchestration of his String Quartet in the same key), Roy Harris (*Symphony 1933*), Aaron Copland (*Short Symphony*, his "second"), Arthur Honegger (*Mouvement symphonique no. 3*), and Florence Price (Symphony in E minor). Price obviously stands out as a female composer of color. Weill and Copland were both Jewish, and some in Germany suspected the same of Pfitzner and Honegger (they were not). Pfitzner (b. 1869) would soon be forced into retirement. Copland, Harris, and Weill were all in their early thirties, with Harris and Copland both still vying for the approval of their teacher, Nadia Boulanger (Copland won), and for the attention of Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony (Harris won). Only Honegger (b. 1892) was at the top of his orchestral game, and it shows: his consummate *Mouvement symphonique no. 3* did not go down well at its Berlin premiere (under Furtwängler), but it was selected by a tough jury (including Boulanger) for the 1934 festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Florence.

MacGregor misses the significance of these age differences, but her principal argument is a good one: the symphony carried significant nineteenth-century baggage that ran counter to some modernist tendencies. The only other symphony performed at that ISCM festival—outside the competition—was Gian Francesco Malipiero's First ("in quattro tempi come le quattro stagioni"). However, symphony orchestras and their star conductors had a programming problem still apparent today: how to include "new music" in concert halls largely committed to the canonical repertory.

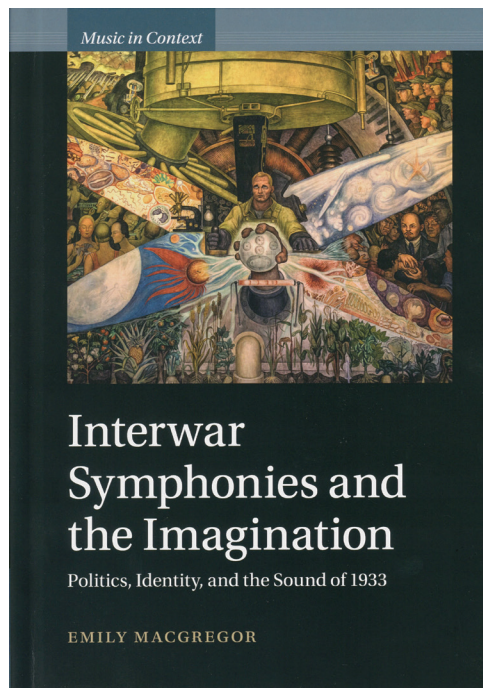
None of MacGregor's symphonies save Pfitzner's was a post-intermission blockbuster. At its premiere at the Concertgebouw under Bruno Walter, Weill's work opened a program moving through Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with the composer as soloist) to Brahms's Fourth Symphony. When Walter did it again in Carnegie Hall, it was preceded by Handel and Mozart (the "Haffner" Symphony) and followed by Beethoven's Violin Concerto. Carlos Chavez and his Orquesta Sinfónica de México squeezed Copland's *Short Symphony* into the second half of a concert between Stravinsky's Suite No. 2 for Small Orchestra and movements from Chavez's ballet, *Caballos de vapor* (also known as *H.P.*). Koussevitzky placed Harris's *Symphony 1933* after Stravinsky's *Apollo musagète* and before Sibelius's Fifth Symphony. Such competition was hard to beat.

Even if modernist composers opted for "symphonies" in search of absolute music free of programmatic concerns, they tended to fail. The audience in Amsterdam heard Weill's "Symphonische Fantaisie (Symphonie no. 1)" (his actual first symphony was not yet acknowledged), and in New York it was "Three Night Scenes": A Symphonic Fantasy. Chavez proposed to Copland "The Bounding Line" as a title for the *Short Symphony*. MacGregor falls into the same

trap: in the Allegro of the *Mouvement symphonique no. 3*, "Honegger exposes pent-up aggression, crass hyperbole, and even potential undertones of militarism as embedded within the symphonic tradition," while the Adagio is "a lament over the ruins of symphonic utopianism" (p. 204). This is not so different from the fanciful stories created in the nineteenth century to "explain" Beethoven's symphonies. Oddly, Price's symphony does not get the same critical or music-analytical treatment, unintentionally putting her back on the margins.

As MacGregor points out, plenty of composers were still writing symphonies in the early 1930s. She is right to bring the repertory to light to rectify music-historical narratives that treat the genre as dead and buried. But her chosen works are only part of a "sound of 1933" that probably has far more complex resonances.

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Weill, Blitzstein, and Bernstein: A Study of Influence

Rebecca Schmid
University of Rochester Press, 2023

ISBN: 978-1-64825-060-6

In this new monograph, Rebecca Schmid offers a stimulating reading of the sometimes conflictual impact of Weill on the two American composers. Schmid maintains that “the spectre of Weill” (p. 5) manifests itself in the scores of Blitzstein and Bernstein and, to sustain this argument, she relies on Harold Bloom’s theory of anxiety of influence and organizes the book in two parts respectively addressing Weill’s influence on Blitzstein and on Bernstein.

In the first half, she examines some of Blitzstein’s major works for the theater to determine the presence not only of unique Weillian harmonic progressions or chords, but also of the German composer’s most consequential theories of musical theater, including the use of songs as building blocks and his vision for an American opera. For instance, her analysis of “Nickel Under the Foot” from *The Cradle Will Rock* (Chapter Two) stresses that the song starts with one of the typical harmonic features of Weill’s song style, which Kim Kowalke called “double-mode” tonality. Schmid also notes the abundant use of half-diminished chords on important words, a chord that pervades the music of Weill’s *Johnny Johnson*, and she draws attention to Blitzstein’s use of the minor-mode added-sixth chord, known as the “*Dreigroschenoper* chord.” Schmid’s comparison of the structural elements of Weill’s *Street Scene* to those of Blitzstein’s *Regina* (Chapter Three) makes a convincing case, Blitzstein having evidently embraced Weill’s successful recipe for American opera in bringing together elements of opera and musical theater.

In the second part of the book, which treats Weill’s influence on Bernstein, Schmid focuses on intertextual analysis and gestive functions. For instance, in Chapter Four, she compares *Die Dreigroschenoper* to Bernstein’s *Candide* and concludes that there are similarities not only in the plots (both works are adaptations of eighteenth-century texts and provide a satirical social critique), but also in the use of some musical gestures, such as the use of the tango to provide an ironic commentary on the text. Similarly, Chapter Five examines the use of the tritone, and dissonances more generally, in *Street Scene* and *West Side Story* as signifiers of imminent violence or danger and focuses on the two works’ similar formal structures or use of musical numbers. She follows up with studies of parallels between *A Prayer by Blecht* and Weill-Brecht-Hauptmann *Lehrstücke*, and between *Trouble in Tahiti* and Weill’s *Lady in the Dark*.

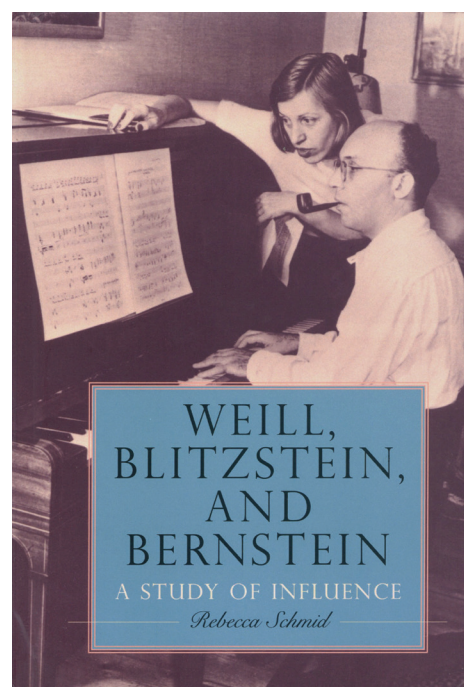
Schmid’s invocation of the anxiety of influence is at times rather compelling. For instance, she considers the fact that Blitzstein “stylized himself as the natural heir to the play with music” (p. 25) after Weill’s death—a case of *apophrades* (the return of the dead) as described in Bloom’s theory. Indeed, the untimely death

of Weill allowed Blitzstein to leave the rivalry behind and assume the role of his “devoted disciple” (p. 25) as he began to add even more layers of complexity, and misrepresentation, to their relationship. However, this theoretical approach may also be problematic, as it can lead the author to overplay examples of such anxiety. Schmid argues that Blitzstein and Bernstein’s red and blue markings on the manuscript of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, as well as their replacement of the original German titles with English versions, could be explained as a case of what Bloom theorizes as *clinamen/tessera*, where the authors make a swerve away from a precursor and then provide a corrective solution. But there is a simpler, more practical, explanation: they needed to mark up the score to prepare for Bernstein’s premiere of Blitzstein’s English adaptation of the work at Brandeis.

I appreciate Schmid’s thorough analysis of the three composers’ scores. I wonder, though, if the author should have also considered the role and influence that Blitzstein had on Bernstein’s development as a composer for the musical stage, and how much of Blitzstein we can find in Bernstein’s works. After all, there is a well-defined lineage: Blitzstein learned from Weill’s song style; Bernstein claimed to be influenced by Blitzstein in everything he wrote for the theater and admired Blitzstein’s use of popular song as a starter for the creation of extended pieces.

Still, while the esthetic influence of Weill on Blitzstein, and consequently Bernstein, is undeniably difficult to untangle, Schmid’s comprehensive archival research and revealing musical analysis offer new perspectives to support the many ways in which the “spectre of Weill” hovers gently over American opera. This book is a valuable contribution to the field, and I plan to cite it in my own work and assign chapters for graduate and advanced undergraduate students in seminars on musical theater.

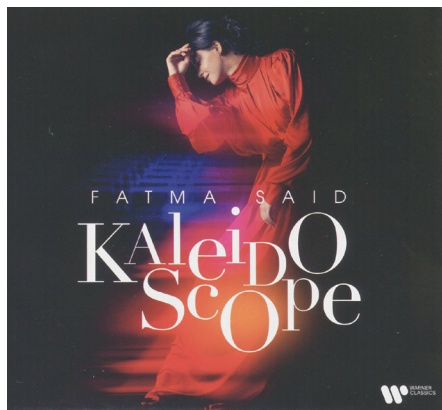
Maria Cristina Fava
Western Michigan University



Wide World of Weill

Julia Bullock continues her advocacy of Weill's music in recitals around the world. On 11 and 13 September, she touched down at New York's Park Avenue Armory for a program with pianist John Arida that boasted four Weill songs and a wealth of music by Black women composers, including Billie Holiday, Alberta Hunter, and Nina Simone. *New York Times* critic Joshua Barone reported, "What the soprano Julia Bullock loves about Kurt Weill's music, she said during her recital at the Park Avenue Armory on Monday, is how it spins the personal into the universal" (12 September 2023).

Egyptian soprano Fatma Said is on the rise; her early-career honors include *Gramophone* Artist of the Year (2021) and a just-completed residency at the Konzerthaus Berlin. And she is a Weill enthusiast: "Kurt Weill is probably one of my absolute favorite composers. His music has this great mixture of classical and jazz. I simply adore singing any song by Weill!" Her latest album, *Kaleidoscope*, includes Weill's "Youkali" among a wide-ranging selection of numbers from opera, operetta, Broadway, and pop. The meditative arrangement includes strings, piano, and percussion. Widely available on streaming services; CD release on Warner 5054197139215.



Having triumphed last summer in Edinburgh, Barrie Kosky and the Berliner Ensemble continue their globetrotting ways with a guest appearance at Australia's Adelaide Festival, 6–10 March 2024. Kosky returns to his native land for five performances of the much-lauded production of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The cast remains the same as in Edinburgh, with Gabriel Schneider as Macheath and original cast members Tilo Nest (Mr. Peachum), Cynthia Micas (Polly), Constanze Becker (Mrs. Peachum), et al. resuming their parts; Adam Benzwi continues as music director.



Congratulations to Julia Koci, who has taken the special jury prize of the Austrian Music Theater Awards for her portrayal of Liza Elliott in Weill's *Lady in the Dark* at the Vienna Volksoper (see review in the Spring 2022 *Newsletter*). The prestigious awards are granted each year by a distinguished group of theater professionals and journalists. Koci's performance had already won widespread acclaim from the press.

All hail Mark Steven Doss! The well-known baritone—who has appeared in most of the world's major opera houses—just issued a new recording, *Welcome to My World*, with pianist Ken Smith (Cedille Records CDR 90000 222). It consists largely of his favorite arias, but he made room for three songs from one of Weill's more operatic Broadway scores, *Lost in the Stars*: "Thousands of Miles," "O Tixo, Tixo, Help Me!," and the title song. Doss chose the songs as a tribute to Todd Duncan, who premiered them on Broadway in 1949, playing the lead role of Rev. Stephen Kumalo.

Mack the Knife continues to get his due, as the October 2023 *BBC Music Magazine* named the "Moritat," the musical celebration of his misdeeds better known under his own name, one of the ten scariest songs of all time. Author Hannah Nepilova notes, "Far from a likeable caricature—as he would come to be portrayed by singers such as Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald—he is a chilling creation, and Weill's original vision for the song, in which the singer is accompanied by the haunting sound of the barrel-organ, makes that very clear indeed." Other composers represented range from Sullivan to Bartók to Poulenc to Maxwell Davies.

The German edition of *Stages of Reform*, Professor Stephen Hinton's study of Weill's stage works, comes out on 11 December, published by Jüdischer Verlag (an imprint of Suhrkamp). *Kurt Weills Musiktheater. Vom Songspiel zur American Opera*, translated by Veit Friemert, launches with an event on 9 January 2024 in Suhrkamp's office building in Berlin. Slated to perform: Winnie Böwe and Felix Kroll, the adaptors of "Happy End in a Hurry," an abridged version of the Weill-Hauptmann-Brecht play with music.

There was no one quite like Harry Smith, folk song collector, artist, and filmmaker. The Whitney Museum honors his work with an exhibit in New York, "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten," which closes 24 January 2024. Smith's film, *Mahagonny*, which shows on four screens at once and whose soundtrack consists entirely of the 1956 recording supervised by Lenya of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, plays continuously in the gallery. The projected images are not based directly on the opera. Smith expressed his aim: "translating, as nearly as I can, images of the German text into universal, or near universal, symbols and synchronizing the appropriate images with music."

Last summer's Edinburgh Fringe Festival welcomed Monét X Change, season 20 winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. In an hour-long program, "Life Be Lifein," she adopted Weill and Maxwell Anderson's song "Lost in the Stars" as a framing device, opening the show with the piano introduction, then veering off into an autobiographical narrative—which ultimately explains why she kicks off the show this way. Don't worry, she finally sings it as part of the closing medley of songs that have affected her the most deeply. That's one more alum of *RuPaul's* show who has turned to Weill, along with Jinx Monsoon (see Fall 2022 *Newsletter*). Monét's love of opera and extensive vocal training have inspired her to use her celebrity to make opera more popular among the younger generation.



A Spark of Hope

Dessau's new synagogue, which bears the Weill family name, is now open! The consecration of the first synagogue built in the state of Saxony-Anhalt since the end of World War II became international news because of Hamas's shocking attack on Israel only two weeks before, as German officials seized the opportunity to stand with Israel and the Jewish people. Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Israeli ambassador Ron Prosor, and Minister-President of Saxony-Anhalt Reiner Haseloff all attended the ceremonies on 22 October. Haseloff described the new house of worship, which replaces the synagogue destroyed by the Nazis during *Reichspogromnacht* (formerly known as *Kristallnacht*) in 1938, as a "sign of hope," particularly with anti-Semitism on the rise, and not only in Germany. Scholz concurred: "I am deeply outraged by the way in which anti-Semitic hatred and inhuman agitation have been breaking out since that fateful 7 October on the internet, in social media around the world, and shamefully also here in Germany. That is why our 'never again' must be unbreakable. ... Germany will do everything to protect and strengthen Jewish life."

The old synagogue had opened in 1908, when Kurt's father Albert Weill still served as cantor there. In naming the newly opened temple "Weill-Synagoge," the local community honors both father and son.

Blitzstein Rarities

Kudos to London's Arcola Theatre, which presented the European premiere of Marc Blitzstein's opera *No for an Answer* in July 2023 as part of its annual Grimeborn (not Glyndebourne) Opera Festival. Blitzstein's next stage work after *The Cradle Will Rock* premiered in New York early in 1941 with Carol Channing, Curt Conway, Martin Wolfson, and others—the cast recording, still available, includes such gems as "Penny Candy," "Dimples," and "The Purest Kind of a Guy"—but never found its feet in the repertory.

A pro-labor anthem like *Cradle*, the work arrays ordinary people against wealth and power. Set in a workers' social club housed within Nick's Lunch Counter, the story concerns seasonal resort employees who face threats from influential politicians and developers who want to tear down the club so they can build a winter resort. The locals try to defend themselves, but they are overwhelmed by corruption and greed.

Artistic Director Mehmet Ergen already brought *Cradle* to the Arcola in 2010; now, along with music director and pianist Dan Turek, he has taken a deeper plunge into Blitzstein's stage works. Critical opinion is often divided when unknown works are offered in public performance, and this time around was no exception. However, Rachel Halliburton of the *Times* called the work "a fascinating piece of musical history" and admired "a production that's so atmospheric you can almost taste the tzatziki." On *broadwayworld.com*, Michael Higgs lauded the "constantly engaging score" and noted that the production's "good moments are fantastic."

No for an Answer is not the only rarely performed Blitzstein work to get an airing in recent months. The Santa Monica College Symphony, conducted by Mercedes Juan Musotto, played Blitzstein's complete score of *The Guests* (a ballet composed for Jerome Robbins) on 22 October, along with the Symphonic Nocturne from Weill's *Lady in the Dark* followed by works by Ravel and Tchaikowsky.



Newly opened Weill-Synagoge in Dessau

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Kurt Weill Fest 2024: "Lighting Up the Shadows"

Next year's Kurt Weill Fest Dessau, titled "Leuchten im Schatten," will honor Marc Blitzstein on its final day, 10 March 2024, the seventieth anniversary of one of the greatest events in the history of off-Broadway, the opening of his English adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* at New York's Theater de Lys. The expert team of Jürgen Schebera (narrator), Stefanie Wüst (vocals), and Thomas Wise (piano) offers an overview of Blitzstein's achievement through a mix of commentary and performance, featuring songs (including some from *Threepenny*) and music for piano solo.

The 2024 Fest focuses on women artists—violinist Liv Migdal is Artist-in-Residence—and offers programs devoted to Lotte Lenya (featuring Andrea Eckert), Elisabeth Hauptmann (featuring Katharina Thalbach), and Alma Mahler (featuring Ute Gfrerer), among many others. Two Lenya Competition laureates, Gan-ya Ben-gur Akselrod and Tom Schimon, headline the opening concert on 23 February with a rich selection of Weill's songs; Aaron Copland and Florence Price will also appear on the bill. Organizers promise a many-faceted program that offers something for everyone, including readings, concerts, lectures, dance (not only onstage!), theater, and conversation. More information as opening night draws nigh from kurt-weill-fest.de.



No for an Answer: Members of the cast assemble in Nick's Lunch Counter

PHOTO: ALEX BRENNER

Carnegie Considers the Weimar Republic

Many observers have compared the recent political and social history of the U.S. to that of the short-lived Weimar Republic (1919–1933), which rose from the ashes of war and empire and died as the Nazi regime took over. Carnegie Hall's upcoming festival, "Dancing on the Precipice," runs with the analogy, seeking to investigate through music the "forces that led to the fall of the Weimar Republic—and the many lessons about the fragility of democracy that can be gleaned from its extraordinary collapse." The festival gets underway on 20 January 2024 with the Cleveland Orchestra and wraps up with the Bavarian Radio Symphony on 2 May.

Not surprisingly, the programming includes a healthy dose of Weill and other German composers of the period, including Hindemith and Krenek. Altogether, Weill's music appears on nine programs:

22 January: *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik* performed by the Met Orchestra Chamber Ensemble (Weill Hall)

23 January: *Fantaisie symphonique* (Symphony no. 2) performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Yannick Nézet-Séguin (Stern Auditorium)

9 February: Songs performed by Ute Lemper (vocals) and pianist Vana Gierig (Zankel Hall)

29 February: *Symphonie in einem Satz* (Symphony no. 1) and "Alabama-Song" (Christina Courtin, vocals) performed by The Knights, Eric Jacobsen, conductor (Zankel Hall)

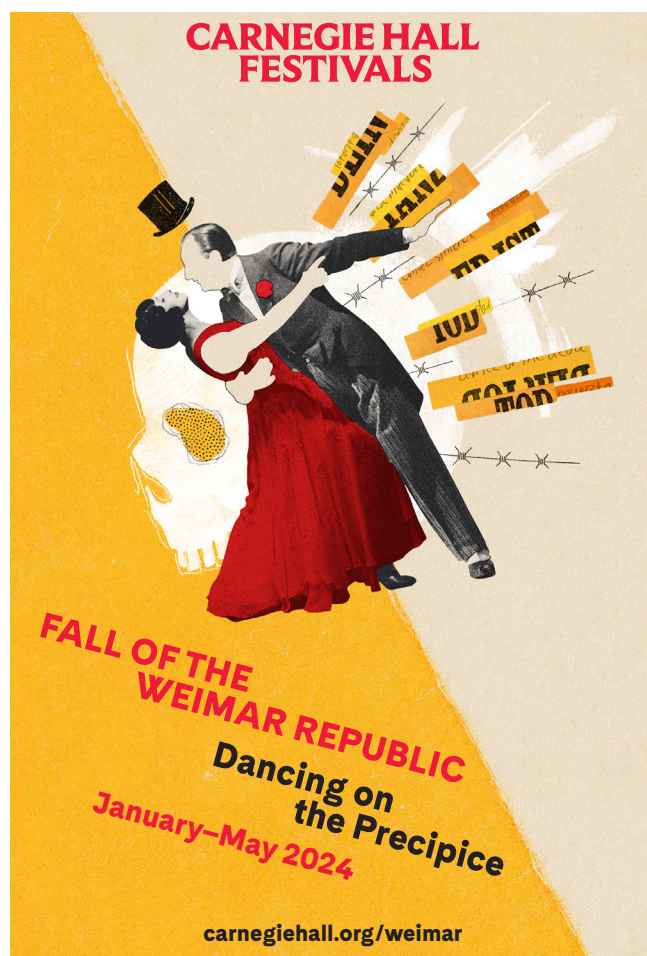
5 March: *Four Walt Whitman Songs* and selections from *Die Dreigroschenoper* performed by Justin Austin (baritone) with pianist Howard Watkins (Weill Hall)

12 March: "My Ship" from *Lady in the Dark* performed by Chrystal E. Williams (mezzo-soprano) with the American Composers Orchestra (Zankel Hall)

21 March: Songs performed by Max Raabe and the Palast Orchester (Stern Auditorium)

9 April: String Quartet no. 1, op. 8 performed by Ensemble Connect (Weill Hall)

12 April: the fifteen-player version by Christian Muthspiel and HK Gruber of *Die sieben Todsünden*, performed by Wallis Giunta (mezzo-soprano), male quartet amarcord, and Ensemble Modern conducted by Gruber (Zankel Hall)



ARTWORK BY MATTHEW HANCOCK PROVIDED BY CARNEGIE HALL



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PHOTO: HANS VAN DER WOERD

And More Performances

The season has gotten off to a remarkable start, with major stagings in Amsterdam, Berlin, Dresden, Graz, Meiningen, and Paris. Weill's music has been heard in Buenos Aires, Innsbruck, London, New York, Riga, San Antonio, and Valencia as well. There is more in store; here's a guide to forthcoming highlights of the second half of the 2023–24 season:

PHOTO: WERNER KMETITSCH



From left:
Michael Heller as
Huckleberry Finn,
Euiyoung Peter
Oh as Ben Harper,
and Tom Schimon
as Tom Sawyer

Oper Graz (Tobias Ribitzki, director; Kai Tietje, conductor): over twenty performances of *Tom Sawyer* between 3 November 2023 and 26 June 2024 (Austrian premiere)

Stockholm, Swedish National Theater (Sofia Adrian Jupither, director; Sebastian Ring, conductor): over fifty performances of a new production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* between 2 December and 27 April

Mannheim, Nationaltheater (Calixto Bieito, director; Jürgen Goriup, conductor): ten performances of *Der Silbersee* between 10 December and 6 January

Ghent and Antwerp, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen (Jeroen Verbruggen, choreographer; Alejo Pérez, conductor): eleven performances of *Die sieben Todsünden* (original version) between 16 December and 4 February

New York, Carnegie Hall (Julia Bullock, soprano; Bretton Brown, piano): five songs by Weill, 19 January (for more on Carnegie Hall in 2024, see p. 20)

Berlin, Konzerthausorchester (Joana Mallwitz, conductor): Fantaisie symphonique (Symphony no. 2) and *Die sieben Todsünden*, 2–4 February

Los Angeles, Pacific Jazz Orchestra with vocalist Rufus Wainwright: “Wainwright Does Weill,” 2 March (Weill’s birthday!)

Munich Philharmonic (Wayne Marshall, conductor): Symphonic Nocturne from *Lady in the Dark*, 16–17 March

Paris, Ensemble Intercontemporain: *Das Berliner Requiem*, 2 April

Reggio Emilia, Teatro Valli (Danielle de Niese, soprano; Marco Angius, director; Daniele Abbado, conductor): *Die sieben Todsünden*, 5 and 7 April (de Niese will also give a concert rendition of the work with the London Philharmonic, 13 March)

Kallithea, Greek National Opera (Yannis Houvardas, director; Miltos Logiadis, conductor): six performances of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* between 12 and 25 April

Nancy, Opéra national de Lorraine (Ersen Mondtag, director; Gaetano Lo Coco, conductor): 4 performances of *Der Silbersee* between 14 and 20 April

Bobigny, Académie de l’Opéra national de Paris (Ted Huffman, director; Yshani Perinpanayagam, conductor): five performances of *Street Scene* between 19 and 27 April

Staatsoper Stuttgart (Ulrike Schwab, director; Cornelius Meister, conductor): eight performances of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* between 11 May and 29 June

2023 Kurt Weill Prize

The 2023 Kurt Weill Book Prize for an outstanding scholarly book on music theater since 1900 has been given to *Making Broadway Dance* (Oxford University Press) by Liza Gennaro, a choreographer and Dean of Musical Theatre at the Manhattan School of Music—this year’s unanimous top choice. The advisory panel praised Gennaro’s “remarkable work, that is as approachable and engaging as it is carefully researched,” and lauded the inclusion of “many illuminating and overdue corrections to misconceptions about the authorship of some pieces of choreography, and the provocative questions raised about the legacies of certain Golden Age musicals as a result.” The Book Prize carries with it an award of \$5,000.

The panel also acknowledged a close runner-up by awarding Special Recognition to *An Inconvenient Black History of British Musical Theatre: 1900-1950* (Methuen Drama), by conductor and educator Sean Mayes and music theater historian Sarah K. Whitfield. Praised by the panel for its “crystal-clear arguments made with electric passion and backed by thorough research,” the book “fills an important gap in telling the Black History of musical theater in the first half of the 20th century.”

Amanda Hsieh, Associate Professor of Musicology at Durham University, won the \$2,000 Kurt Weill Article Prize for “Jewish Difference and Recovering ‘Commedia’: Erich W. Korngold’s *Die tote Stadt* in Post-First World War Austria,” published in *Music and Letters* in 2022. The Article Prize panelists selected Hsieh’s article from a pool of twenty-nine nominees, celebrating “a sensitively crafted, fresh and fascinating analysis of *Die tote Stadt*, which deftly explores the collision between Wagnerian style (and ideology) and commedia.”

David C. Paul, Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of California Santa Barbara, earned Special Recognition for the runner-up article, “Race and the Legacy of the World’s Columbian Exposition in American Popular Theater from the Gilded Age to *Show Boat* (1927).” According to the panel, Paul’s article, published in *American Music* in 2021, “unquestionably succeeds in shining a new and enormously illuminating light on an already exhaustively studied work.”

Awarded biennially by the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, the Kurt Weill Prizes recognize distinguished scholarship in music theater since 1900, including opera and dance. Books and articles published in 2021 or 2022 were eligible for the 2023 prize; book and article nominations were each reviewed by a separate panel of music and theater experts. The Kurt Weill Book Prize was inaugurated in 1995, with the Article Prize following shortly thereafter in 1999. For a complete list of Kurt Weill Prize winners, see www.kwf.org/awards.

In Memoriam

Tony Bennett (1926–2023)

Icon, legend, immortal ... it's easy to run out of words to describe Tony Bennett, one of the all-time great crooners, who left us on 21 July. His repertoire ranged widely over the great American songbook, but he seemed to have a special love for two Weill songs, "Speak Low" and "Lost in the Stars," both of which he performed frequently and recorded multiple times. (He even recorded "Speak Low" as a duet with Norah Jones.) A London concert from 1991, released on home video as *Watch What Happens*, features both songs. Early in the set, he offers a subdued, almost *sotto voce* delivery of "Speak Low," except for the line, "Love is pure gold, and time a thief," when he emphasizes the last word, placing it in sharp relief against the rest of the lyric. His "Lost in the Stars" occurs almost exactly at the midpoint of the show and serves as a fulcrum of sorts. After he provides a brief introduction to Weill and Maxwell Anderson's musical tragedy—already anomalous in a performance that moves quickly from one number to the next—he tells the audience, "I hope you really listen to this one, because it's something else." Then he lays down his microphone and delivers a powerful, heartfelt rendition, his unaided voice bringing home the pain and despair in the song.



Tony Bennett sings
"Lost in the Stars" in
London, 1991

PHOTO: COURTESY OF WEILL-LEIVA RESEARCH CENTER

"Lost in the Stars" provided Bennett with at least one other striking stage moment. As he recalled, "Once, when I was singing Kurt Weill's 'Lost in the Stars' in the Hollywood Bowl with Basie's band and Buddy Rich on drums, a shooting star went falling through the sky right over my head and everyone was talking about it, and the next morning the phone rang and it was Ray Charles, who I'd never met, calling from New York. He said, 'Hey, Tony, how'd you do that, man?' and hung up."

Robert Brustein (1927–2023)

As head of Yale Drama School and Yale Repertory Theatre during the 1970s, Robert Brustein exercised an outsized influence on American theater. Part of his impact stemmed from a groundbreaking series of productions of works by Weill, Brecht, and (in all but one instance) Elisabeth Hauptmann that did much to push them into the standard repertory. As he wrote of the opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* shortly before Yale's 1974 production, "*Mahagonny* is the work towards which all our previous Brecht-Weill productions have been heading—in the opinion of some, including myself, the most important music drama of the twentieth century."

He did not do it alone, of course. Alvin Epstein, already well established as actor and director, led productions of *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *Rise and Fall*, while Michael Posnick helmed *Mahagonny Songspiel* and *Happy End*. Yale Drama School supplied American film and theater with a stream of actors who became household names; some of them did part of their apprenticeship in the Weill series as students or young professionals, notably Meryl Streep, Sigourney Weaver, and Henry Winkler. (Streep later took the role of Lilian Holiday in *Happy End* to Broadway.) Michael Feingold served as translator and *Dramaturg*; his English versions of all four works are still in wide use.

Brustein gave American audiences an opportunity to attend thoughtful and arresting presentations of Weill's German work, offering a rich diet to a public familiar only with *The Threepenny Opera*. Because of his stature and that of Yale Rep, many members of that audience were theater professionals in a position to follow his lead. He provided the resources and led the way. We all owe him a debt of gratitude for a life of service to the theater; Weill fans owe him even more.

Land of Gershwin

Thanks to Weill's work with Ira Gershwin—two Broadway shows, two films, and lots of entertaining correspondence—there will always be a link between them. That continues to be true as the Gershwin Edition, housed at the University of Michigan, produces its first fruits this year: a critical edition of the score of George's *Rhapsody in Blue*, edited by Ryan Bañagale; and Ira's travel notebooks from Europe in 1928, edited by Michael Owen. The Gershwin Edition has profited extensively from the example of the Kurt Weill Edition, as its "Guide for Volume Editors" attests. (And, because the KWE has already brought out *Lady in the Dark* and *The Firebrand of Florence*, the Gershwin Edition is spared the trouble, unless significant new source material comes to light.)

Meanwhile, the Library of Congress has completed processing acquisitions for the latest Gershwin-related research collection and opened the Ira and Leonore S. Gershwin Trust Archive, supplementing the essential George and Ira Gershwin Collection. The material donated by the Gershwin Trust in 2011 contains musical material, office files, and correspondence. Long a locus of research into George and Ira, the Library's Music Division has raised its Gershwin game dramatically. Finding aids and more available at loc.gov.

Lenya Competition Prizewinners Stay in the Spotlight

No surprises: Lenya Competition laureates continue to earn pride of place on stages around the world. This year, we can point to a remarkable total of ten past winners taking lead roles in major stages:

Zachary James (Third Prize, 2009) will portray Hades in a new British production of *Hadestown*, opening February 2024 in London—his West End debut.



Marie Oppert

PHOTO: JEAN-LOUIS FERNANDEZ

Marie Oppert (Trustees' Award, 2020) starred as Polly in a production of *Dreigroschenoper* in Aix-en-Provence and at La Comédie-Française in Paris (see pp. 11–13). She appears on the original cast recording of the production, released October 2023 on LP, CD, and DVD by Alpha Classics.

Lauren Michelle (First Prize, 2015) earned raves during Dutch National Opera's presentation of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in September 2023; one reviewer named her "an ideal Jenny in every way" (see review on p. 15).



Lucas Meachem

PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

Lucas Meachem (Lys Symonette Award, 2002) took the title role of *Don Giovanni* at Los Angeles Opera during September and October 2023.

Christian Douglas (\$10,000 winner, 2018) starred as Tony in *West Side Story* at The Muni in St. Louis this summer before jumping into the lead role of Christian on the *Moulin Rouge* national tour.

Tom Schimon (Carolyn Weber Award, 2016) reprises the title role in *Tom Sawyer*, a new musical utilizing songs by Weill, at Oper Graz starting in November. Tom starred in the world premiere at Komische Oper Berlin last season.

Nkrumah Gatling (Marc Blitzstein Award, 2018) plays Coalhouse Walker in *Ragtime* at Virginia's Signature Theatre. Performances run through 7 January.

John Brancy (\$15,000 Winner, 2018), turned heads with his virtuosic pioneering of the "counter baritone" *Fach*, requiring a vocal range of nearly three octaves, in the world premiere of *Picture a Day Like This* by George Benjamin at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in July. John and the production moved on to The Royal Opera House in the fall.

Cooper Grodin (Lys Symonette Award, 2010) stars as Pierre in a production of *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* in Shanghai this season. Covering Cooper is fellow Lenya laureate, **Robert Ariza** (Lys Symonette Award, 2014).

Michael Maliakel (Third Prize, 2015) continues to own the title role in *Aladdin* on Broadway this season.

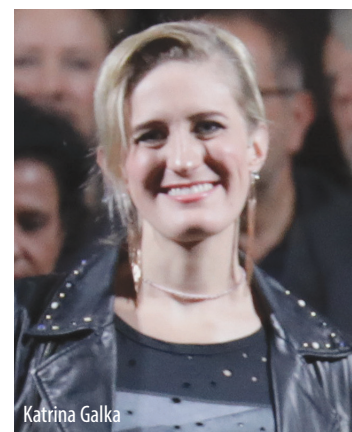
Even those not taking lead roles this season are still racking up some pretty impressive credits:

Katrina Galka (Second Prize, 2022), made her Teatro alla Scala debut this month in a new production of *Peter Grimes* as the First Niece.

Briana Elyse Hunter (Lys Symonette Award, 2014) remains a regular at the Metropolitan Opera. This season she will take part in no fewer than three productions there: *Carmen*, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, and *Madama Butterfly*.

Jacob Keith Watson (Second Prize, 2012) has returned to Broadway, this time in the cast of *Merrily We Roll Along*.

Kyle Scatliffe (Lys Symonette Award, 2010) joined the cast of *The 12*, a new musical presented at Goodspeed Musicals in September and October.



Katrina Galka

PHOTO: BRESCIA AMISANO/TEATRO ALLA SCALA



John Brancy

PHOTO: CAMILLA GREENWELL

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Above: Prizewinners of the 25th Anniversary Lenya Competition, 2023
From left: Nyla Watson, Taylor-Alexis DuPont, Ryan Johnson, Celeste Rose, Jeremiah Sanders

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