

Kurt Weill

Volume 28

Number 2

Fall 2010

Newsletter



Kurt Weill

Newsletter

Volume 28

Number 2

Fall 2010

In this issue

Note from the Editor 3

Features

**Musical Alchemists:
Weill and Anderson as Collaborators** 4
Elmar Juchem

**Lenya's Later Life:
A New Correspondence Collection** 11

Recordings

Das Berliner Requiem, Vom Tod im Wald on Glossa 13
Susanne Schaal-Gotthardt

Books

Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater 14
by Larry Stempel
Tim Carter

Performances

One Touch of Venus at the Shaw Festival 15
Michael Lasser

Der Silbersee in Bremerhaven 17
Jan-Hendrik von Stemm

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny in Madrid 18
Roberto Herrscher

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny in Munich 21
Julia Zupancic

Zaubernacht in Stuttgart 22
Horst Koegler

Topical Weill 1a-8a

ISSN 0899-6407

© 2010 Kurt Weill Foundation for Music
7 East 20th Street
New York, NY 10003-1106
tel. (212) 505-5240
fax (212) 353-9663

Published twice a year, the Kurt Weill Newsletter features articles and reviews (books, performances, recordings) that center on Kurt Weill but take a broader look at issues of twentieth-century music and theater. With a print run of 5,000 copies, the Newsletter is distributed worldwide. Subscriptions are free. The editor welcomes the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for inclusion in future issues.

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.

Staff

Elmar Juchem, *Editor* Carolyn Weber, *Associate Editor*
Dave Stein, *Associate Editor* Brady Sansone, *Production*
Kate Chisholm, *Staff Reporter*

Kurt Weill Foundation Trustees

Kim Kowalke, *President*
Philip Getter, *Senior Vice President and Treasurer*
Guy Stern, *Vice President*
Edward Harsh, *Secretary*

André Bishop Susan Feder
Joanne Hubbard Cossa Walter Hinderer
Paul Epstein Welz Kauffman

Teresa Stratas, *Honorary Trustee*
Milton Coleman, Harold Prince, Julius Rudel, *Trustees Emeriti*

Internet Resources

World Wide Web: <http://www.kwf.org>

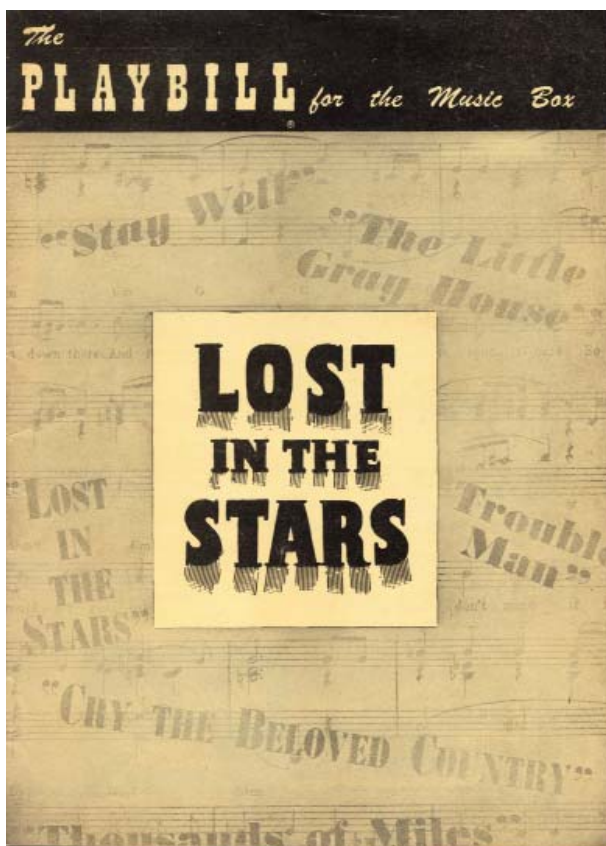
E-mail:

Information: kwfinfo@kwf.org

Weill-Lenya Research Center: wlrcc@kwf.org

Kurt Weill Edition: kwe@kwf.org

Cover photo: Weill and Maxwell Anderson taking a break from *Lost in the Stars* rehearsals (1949).
Photo: Hugelmeyer



Note from the Editor

Mark your calendars: On 25–26 January and 3–6 February 2011 in New York City you will have a chance to hear the two stage works that Weill created with Maxwell Anderson, *Knickerbocker Holiday* and *Lost in the Stars*. The former is a “musical comedy” from 1938 that introduced the famous “September Song,” the latter a “musical tragedy” from 1949 that turned the very notion of musical comedy on its head. The proximity of these two upcoming events—both imaginatively conceived, semi-staged productions by prestigious New York organizations—seems like a rare alignment of the stars that has attracted stellar performers and creative teams (for detailed information see “Topical Weill,” p. 1a). This prospect is more than enough reason to train the spotlight of this issue of the *Newsletter* on the collaboration of Weill and Anderson, which greatly enriched the legacy of the American musical theater and beyond.

A newly acquired trove of Lenya correspondence represents an important addition to the Weill-Lenya Research Center. Excerpts from these colorful letters can be found on pp. 11–12. The review section contains a report about a performance of Weill’s first stage work, the children’s pantomime *Zaubernacht*, not seen and heard in its original form since 1925. Many more reviews round out the issue, most notably a report on a much heralded production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in Madrid, which will be released on DVD.

Elmar Juchem

Original playbill covers from the Weill-Anderson collaborations *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938) and *Lost in the Stars* (1949).

Musical Alchemists

Weill and Anderson as Collaborators

by Elmar Juchem

The Baptist minister's son spoke at a memorial for the Jewish cantor's son: "How great Kurt Weill was as a composer of music the world will slowly discover—for he was a much greater musician than anyone now imagines. It takes decades and scores of years and centuries to sift these things out, but it's done in time—and Kurt Weill will emerge as one of the very few who wrote great music." Maxwell Anderson, the eulogist, took comfort in saying these words. He was looking back at a friendship of fourteen years, a time during which he and Weill had spent countless hours together, discussing plays, books, music, radio, film, and early television, the state of the theater, and often the state of the world. Given the intensity and longevity of their association, their collaborative output seems almost meager. They completed just two shows for Broadway and were in the midst of writing another when Weill died.

Unlike Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, Anderson is hardly a household name today, yet he is the missing link between the two. Woody Allen did his homework for *Bullets over Broadway* (1995), where a blasé actress who had seen better days (played by Dianne Wiest) repeatedly stated something to the effect that she would consider scripts only by Eugene O'Neill or Maxwell Anderson. Indeed, Anderson (1888–1959) was the most prolific and feted American playwright in the 1930s and 40s, a period during which twenty of his plays appeared on Broadway (that's one a year), featuring such actors as Helen Hayes, Katharine Cornell, Ingrid Bergman, Burgess Meredith, and Rex Harrison. The plays won a Pulitzer Prize and Drama Critics' Circle Awards, and about half of them were adapted for the silver screen, where luminaries such as Errol Flynn, Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Edward G. Robinson, or Humphrey Bogart took over.

The precise date of the first encounter between composer and playwright is unknown. Lotte Lenya recalled much later

that publicist Helen Deutsch introduced Weill and Anderson at a party given in connection with Anderson's celebrated play *Winterset*, which had opened in September 1935 (two weeks after Weill and Lenya had arrived from Europe). Deutsch acted as press representative for *Winterset* and press agent for the Group Theatre, which made her a well-positioned matchmaker as Weill had begun to work with the Group by January 1936. Nobody knows what the composer and the playwright talked about during their first encounter, but a likely topic may have been Anderson's *What Price Glory* (1924), the film version of which Weill had seen in 1927 in Berlin and praised in a letter to Lenya as "exhilarating because of its pacifist stance and its artistic realization." In 1929 Carl Zuckmayer's German-language adaptation of the hit play was in need of incidental music. Erwin Piscator headed the production team, which included several familiar faces from Weill's Berlin orbit, among them Caspar Neher, Ernst Busch, and Maria Bard. Piscator had succeeded a year earlier in securing Weill's services for incidental music (for Leo Lania's play *Konjunktur*), but this time it was Walter Goehr who would provide the incidental music (oddly enough—or not—Goehr had conducted incidental music by Weill for a production of Strindberg's *Gustav III* in 1927). Anderson, in turn, could have seen Weill's *Threepenny Opera*, either the ill-fated 1933 run on Broadway—with Burgess Meredith in the cast—or the film version that had opened in New York's Warner Theater in May 1931. At least some of the music must have been familiar, as Anderson's oldest son, Quentin, professed to owning a record with Weill's music, playing it rather too frequently for the taste of his mother (she died in 1931).

An opportunity to intensify the contact came in June 1936, when Deutsch drove Weill and Lenya to Anderson's house in the country. Anderson and his second wife, Mab, lived in New City, N.Y., a hamlet with

a small artists' enclave west of the Hudson, about thirty miles north of Manhattan. That summer Anderson was busy getting not one but three plays ready for Broadway (*The Wingless Victory*, *High Tor*, and *The Masque of Kings*), yet there was much talk and enthusiasm about a possible collaboration. Lenya sang two of Weill's songs for the playwright.

The composer, of course, already boasted an impressive record of luring esteemed playwrights into the world of musical theater. Having long criticized the thematically pointless, dramaturgically bewildering librettos of operas composed in the wake of Richard Wagner, and showing little interest in escapist operetta, Weill had the vision of collaborating with first-rate dramatists rather than second-rate librettists, and he preferred poets over tried-and-true lyricists. Both Georg Kaiser and Bert Brecht, Germany's foremost playwrights in the 1920s, had been novices in the musical theater when Weill approached them. One can easily imagine that Weill used these first encounters with Anderson to hint at the broad range of possibilities for music in the theater.

And Weill didn't give up easily. When he saw Anderson's *The Star-Wagon* in October 1937, he sent the playwright a note praising his handling of reality and fantasy, "so that we don't know any more, where the one starts and the other ends." The same kind of mélange had played a crucial role in an earlier work of Weill's, *Der Silbersee* (1933), written in collaboration with Kaiser. Given the good notices the work had received from the few still independent papers, it is not surprising that Weill considered it a candidate for an American adaptation, as small penciled notes attest; scribbled next to *Der Silbersee* was the name of a possible adaptor: "Maxwell Anderson."

Neither a musical version of *The Star-Wagon* nor an adaptation of *Der Silbersee* ever came to fruition, but in the spring of 1938 an idea finally clicked. When Weill

spent a weekend in the country, Anderson proposed the idea of adapting Washington Irving's satirical *History of New York*—with the clunky subtitle *From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*—as a musical comedy. Published in 1809 under the pen name Diedrich Knickerbocker, Irving's book focused on the last three Dutch governors of New Amsterdam and ridiculed the politics of Thomas Jefferson in the figure of William Kieft. Anderson, on the other hand, wanted to use the figure of Peter Stuyvesant to target recent developments of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Although Anderson had welcomed the election of FDR in 1932, he had grown weary of the long line of government interventions and was alarmed by the “packing” of the Court, FDR's attempt to reorganize the Supreme Court shortly after the beginning of his second term in 1937. For Anderson, it was a matter of principle. He saw the expansion of presidential powers as a potential threat to democracy and to individual freedom—the negative examples were clearly visible in Europe, where Mussolini and Hitler ruled their countries with an iron fist. Weill surely understood the espousal of these Thoreauvian views, but, having barely slipped out of Nazi Germany, it is clear that he saw Roosevelt in a far more positive light and thus tried to steer their project more toward a warning against totalitarianism in general. With the political points left to be fine-tuned, during that weekend in the country Weill and Anderson seem to have agreed on a principal constellation for their story, with Stuyvesant as a villainous colonial governor, Mynheer Tienhoven as a corrupt capitalist and city councillor, and a young rebel hero named Brom Broeck who cannot take orders, which made him the first true American. Thrown into this triangle was the role of Tina Tienhoven, the councilman's daughter who loves Brom but is promised to the older Stuyvesant.

In mid-April 1938 Weill headed out to Hollywood, where he had to complete work on Fritz Lang's *You and Me*. Around the same time, Anderson had his hands full with a bold new venture. He and four other top playwrights—S. N. Behrman, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice, and Robert Sherwood—had grown dissatisfied with the producing organizations on Broadway, including the Theatre Guild, and thus announced in March 1938 that they would form their own producing entity, called The Playwrights' Company. This was a stunning move at the time, in that a group not of young rebel artists but of five established dramatists

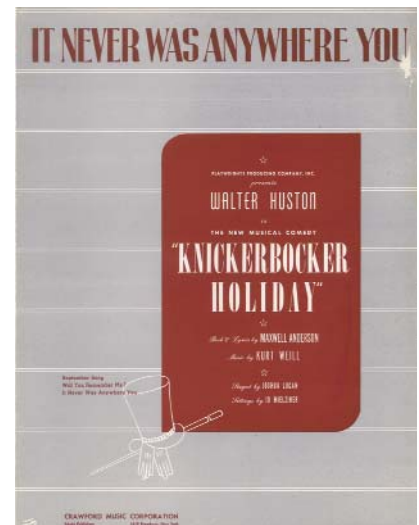
sought to gain more artistic freedom by severing ties with their longtime producers. Anderson's first work to reach Broadway under the auspices of the Playwrights' Company turned out to be his collaboration with Weill: *Knickerbocker Holiday*.

When Weill returned to the East Coast at the end of May, he was somewhat surprised to find a completed draft libretto. Ever since his first opera, *Der Protagonist* (1924/25), he had made a point of collaborating early in the process with his librettists or book writers, so musical considerations could guide and shape the work. It was a delicate process, of course, as the famous writers would not easily accept a *de facto* co-playwright at their side, and Weill had to use all his considerable diplomatic skill to get his points across. With the exceptions of Franz Werfel and Jacques Deval, who proved nearly deaf to Weill's suggestions, the playwrights usually learned to appreciate the composer's contributions (it probably helped that Weill never demanded credit as coauthor of the text). Even Brecht admitted in a personal note scribbled into his daily log in 1943, “er besitzt ein gutes dramaturgisches Urteil” (he has good dramaturgical judgment). Yet, defying musical comedy's traditional division of labor by writing out dialogue and lyrics in one stretch, Anderson had worked swiftly in Weill's absence. Since the composer was not around to advise, the playwright appears to have used Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado* as a guide for placement of musical numbers. But he waited to submit the script to his fellow playwright-producers until his collaborator could weigh in. Weill sublet his apartment in Manhattan and rented a little house about five miles from Anderson's, so that the two could discuss matters daily and in person. Contrary to the playwright's reputation of “refusing to change even a comma of his work”—at least according to the Theatre Guild's Lawrence Langner—Anderson was quite happy to accept the composer's suggestions for revision. The most “Gilbertian” numbers were dropped, and several new numbers written and embedded, among them the romantic duet “It Never Was You” (sung famously by Judy Garland in her final film) and the mildly absurd “Will You Remember Me?” which mocked the traditional operetta love duet with such lines as “Oh, love, will you keep me in mind? . . . When the worms on my corse have dined.”

When Joshua Logan, fresh from his success with Rodgers and Hart's *I Married an Angel*, came aboard as director, more changes were made. It may have been Logan



Maxwell Anderson in 1935.



First edition of the sheet music.



Weill in 1937 during his first visit to Hollywood.

who advised Weill and Anderson to include a few musical numbers in popular song form. One such addition was a custom-tailored composition for the show's star, Walter Huston (the father of John Huston and grandfather of Angelica), who had been cast for the part of Stuyvesant. Before composing a song for the famous actor, Weill wanted to know his singing range. Huston cabled back from California, "No range whatsoever," but added that he would soon appear on Bing Crosby's weekly radio show and sing something. Weill and Anderson listened to the radio and went to work. Anderson crafted a lyric for a love song that avoids the word "love" altogether, and he revised the text's structure when it was clear that his first draft did not conform to the conventions of the popular song form. For his musical setting, Weill decided to reuse the opening measures of an arietta he had composed for *Der Kuhhandel* in 1934. The song blurs its tonal center while oscillating between major and minor mode. Few people would have predicted that "September Song" would become Weill's biggest hit during his lifetime (he did not live to see "Moritat" turn into "Mack the Knife").

Meanwhile, the show's political aspects had become somewhat complicated, because

Anderson's intended critique of overzealous New Dealers grew more incompatible with the worsening conditions in Europe. Weill seems to have sensitized Anderson to the situation in Germany, as some line changes suggest. For instance, in Stuyvesant's first number, "One Touch of Alchemy," partly repeated in the Act I finale "All Hail the Political Honeymoon," the refrain:

*Then hail the political honeymoon
And the honeymoon of time,
To each individual man his boon
In a plenitude sublime!*

became

*Then hail the political honeymoon
Sing the news to hoi polloi,
Of each individual man his boon
In an age of strength through joy!*

The proclamation of an "age of strength through joy" was a reference to the Nazi organization *Kraft durch Freude (KdF)*, which was familiar to American audiences through news coverage of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Anderson had to fight to keep at least a few pointed references to the "Second Term" sins, because his play-

wright colleagues were all Roosevelt supporters to some degree, with Robert Sherwood moonlighting as a speech writer for FDR in Washington and Elmer Rice a committed leftist. Huston had been a personal friend of FDR's for some time.

On 24 September the show had a single tryout performance in hurricane-flooded Hartford and then went on to Boston. Given the many changes on the road, the Playwrights added another set of tryouts in Washington, D.C. On the last night there an unexpected visitor showed up: Franklin D. Roosevelt himself. The event received extensive news coverage, because the President had attended the theater only twice during his presidency (Rachel Crothers's *When Ladies Meet* in 1933 and Sidney Howard's *Dodsworth*, with Walter Huston, in 1935). Roosevelt appears to have thoroughly enjoyed the performance, taking it all in with good humor. Anderson, on the other hand, could not stomach the idea of accepting the President's invitation to the White House after the performance, and Weill did not attend either, possibly out of solidarity with his new friend.

The opening of *Knickerbocker Holiday* on 19 October 1938 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre had been greatly anticipated, as



Rehearsing in 1938: Weill at the piano, with Walter Huston, Jeanne Madden, and Maxwell Anderson.

people were curious to see how Anderson could possibly write a musical comedy and how Walter Huston would sing and dance on a peg leg. Observers noted the oddity that Weill had created his own orchestrations and that a former conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, Maurice Abravanel, was to lead the orchestra. Critics lauded the work in general, praised Anderson's eloquent lyrics, and noted the exceptional quality and variety of Weill's music. But several critics were miffed by Anderson's analogies between fascism and the New Deal. Perhaps the play's explicit references to elements of both Roosevelt's and Hitler's politics undercut the general message about the dangers of governmental power. In particular, the reviewer for the communist-affiliated *New Masses* was riled by her experience in the theater (but turned out to have a feel for picking a hit song):

I think calling the New Deal fascist is a poor sort of joke, and I consider labeling Roosevelt the American Hitler a vicious perversion. Mr. Anderson is too clever to damn the New Deal by calling it Red. Instead he has his Peter Stuyvesant paraphrase Roosevelt, even to the "my friends"—and then call in Storm Troopers. *Knickerbocker Holiday* is no crude, slambang attack on progressive America. Mr. Anderson makes his points by indirection. His lyrics are suave. His jokes are disarming up to the stinger on the end. . . . It seems a shame to have to add to this review the words, "With Music by Kurt Weill." And Mr. Weill's score for *Knickerbocker Holiday* is delightful. Many of the songs are hauntingly beautiful, and one at least, "September Song," will surely become a classic. Mr. Weill shows a new power in *Knickerbocker Holiday*, and a new variety of expression. I think it is nothing short of a catastrophe that this Kurt Weill music should illuminate Mr. Anderson's book.

Anderson tried to clarify his point of view by publishing a "Brief Preface to the Politics of 'Knickerbocker Holiday'" in the *New York Times*. But the bickering about the play's politics ended three weeks after the opening, when the Nazis staged the anti-Semitic pogroms infamously known as "Kristallnacht." The Playwrights' Company acted immediately and announced a benefit performance of *Knickerbocker Holiday* for German refugees, where Anderson gave a curtain speech on 20 November: "It's a little embarrassing to interrupt a lighthearted travesty of dictatorship with a reference to a real dictatorship which is no joke to any of us. There is no one here tonight who is not

aware that a calamity of staggering proportions has befallen the peoples of Europe." Anderson concluded his speech by saying that democracies may have to prepare to defend themselves, even if it meant a temporary infringement of individual liberties.

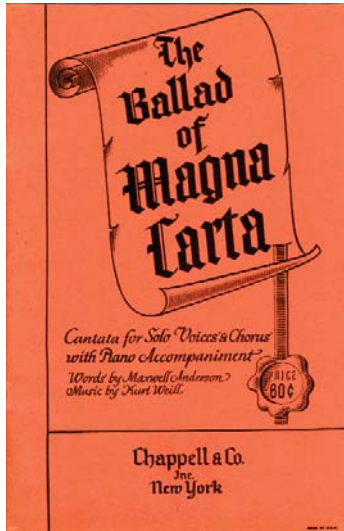
Weill's voice was conspicuously absent in the media during the creation and the run of *Knickerbocker Holiday*, given that interviews with him had appeared in conjunction with *Johnny Johnson* (1936) and *The Eternal Road* (1937). Perhaps he was happy to grant his more famous collaborator the lion's share of the limelight, or perhaps he was preoccupied by the events in Germany (his immediate family had left by July 1938, but many friends and former colleagues hadn't). It was clear, though, that Anderson and Weill were quite pleased with the outcome of their project. Anderson loved his new outlet for poetry—he later confessed "all I enjoy about a musical is the lyrics"—and the two artists seem to have shared a similar, somewhat Schilleresque view about the theater in general. In his preface to the printed libretto, Anderson handed Weill a huge compliment: "*Knickerbocker Holiday* was obviously written to make an occasion for Kurt Weill's music and . . . Mr. Weill responded by writing the best score in the history of our theatre." Weill replied privately, presenting his autograph draft score to "Mab and Max as a token of my undying affection."

While their first collaboration was still playing on Broadway (it ran until 11 March 1939 and then went out on a nine-week tour), Anderson and Weill initiated a new project in January during a vacation in southern Florida, where they were accompanied by their wives. The project they developed in the course of that year would never reach the stage, but four musical numbers surfaced a decade later in *Lost in the Stars*, including the song that would give that show its title. Anderson had described the new project's premise as "essentially the story of a man in a chaotic world in search of his own manhood and his rules of conduct." Anderson and Weill wanted to flesh out an epistolary novelette by the southern writer Harry Stillwell Edwards, *Eneas Africanus* (1919), for the great bass-baritone/actor/activist Paul Robeson. When he declined the title role of an ex-slave (Anderson had made the mistake of enclosing the novelette, which reeked of an "Uncle Tom" tone), the authors approached Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who initially expressed lively interest in the project. Thus Weill and Anderson custom-tailored their musical to Robinson's famous dancing skills. This time they worked

September Song 30 selected recordings

Contrary to many accounts, "September Song" was not an instant hit, even though audiences requested encores from Walter Huston in the theater, and Anderson wrote a third strophe for this purpose. Four recordings appeared during the show's run, but they achieved only a modest measure of popularity. When the film version (1944), starring Charles Coburn and Nelson Eddy, played in theaters, Bing Crosby and Artie Shaw recorded "September Song," but their discs did not become best sellers either. Only in 1946 did the song achieve hit status. A second surge of recordings was set off by the film *September Affair* (1950), which made effective use of the song.

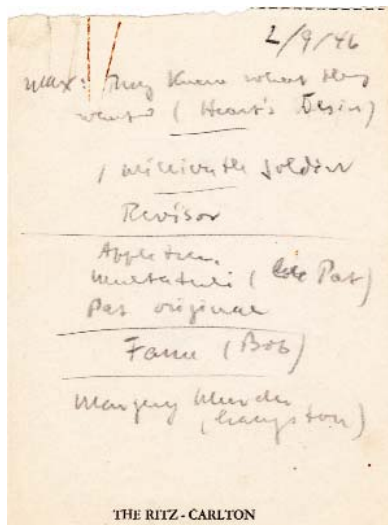
Walter Huston (1938)
 Bing Crosby (1944)
 Artie Shaw (1945)
 Phil Moore Four (1946)
 Dardanelle Trio (1946)
 Frank Sinatra (1946)
 Don Byas Quartet (1946)
 Teddy Wilson w/Sarah Vaughan (1946)
 Jo Stafford (1946)
 Django Reinhardt (1947)
 Harry James (1947)
 Erroll Garner (1949)
 Sidney Bechet's Circle Seven (1949)
 Red Norvo Trio (1950)
 Dave Brubeck Trio (1950)
 Stan Kenton (1951)
 Art Tatum (1953)
 Liberace (1953)
 Chet Baker (1958)
 Ella Fitzgerald (1960)
 Jimmy Durante (1963)
 Benny Goodman Quartet (1963)
 James Brown (1969)
 Dizzy Gillespie (1974)
 Willie Nelson (1978)
 Lou Reed (1985)
 A. Réaux, NY Phil. w/K. Masur (1993)
 Elaine Paige (1996)
 Bryan Ferry (1999)
 Dee Dee Bridgewater (2002)



Piano score published in August 1940.



Weill and Anderson at the watchtower on High Tor.



One of Weill's many project memos, listing ideas for "Max" at the top.

together from the start. Weill joined Anderson for ten weeks on the West Coast, where the playwright tended to his film work. Initial reports about the script, entitled *Ulysses Africanus*, and the music were enthusiastic, so the Playwrights' Company hoped to open a production on Broadway in the fall. In mid-August Weill rushed back to New York for the casting, Joshua Logan was eager to direct again, but Robinson was not immediately available as his current engagement in a tour added week after week of performances; worse yet, the heirs of the rights to the Edwards story demanded a share of royalties that all but doomed the project. Then tragedy struck as the company's Sidney Howard was killed in an accident on 23 August, and with the outbreak of war in Europe a week later the atmosphere in New York changed. The project had to be shelved indefinitely.

The beginning of World War II prompted a radio series on CBS, where broadcasting maverick Norman Corwin was commissioned to create a series called *The Pursuit of Happiness*. It was supposed to celebrate "with thankfulness and humility" that Americans still enjoyed their "constitutional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (which the show's host, Burgess Meredith, paraphrased as "that third inalienable right: the right to chase rainbows"). The series' most famous program featured Earl Robinson and John LaTouche's *Ballad for Americans*, sung by Paul Robeson in November 1939. Anderson and Weill were commissioned to compose a short cantata to be aired in early February 1940. Choosing again a historical subject, Anderson made sure that he had an unmistakable villain at hand this time (unlike Stuyvesant played by the very likeable Walter Huston): Thanks to A. A. Milne every child knew that King John was not a good man, and so Anderson chose the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 to praise one of the roots of the American liberties. Yet he and Weill made some clear allusions to the present situation, as their cantata mentioned the King's atrocities against Jews and called "resistance unto tyrants" a universal and timely duty. Having composed the radio cantata *Der Lindberghflug* on a text by Brecht in 1929, Weill brought some experience to the table. Anderson's first draft narrated the events at Runnymede in a somewhat whimsical ballad of eight strophes, but revisions introduced some dialogue between the historical characters, so the whole affair became livelier. Weill set the words for a singing narrator (performed by Meredith),

bass, baritone, a large mixed chorus, and orchestra. A surviving archival recording shows that the broadcast of the fourteen-minute cantata used special sound effects (galloping hooves, etc.) to heighten the dramatic impact.

Anderson and Weill then seem to have gone their separate ways, yet the opposite was the case. When the spectacular success of *Lady in the Dark* (1941) earned Weill and Lenya enough money to buy a house, they decided to become neighbors of the Andersons in New City, where an old farmhouse was available on South Mountain Road. The path between the two houses became well worn over the years, evenings were often spent discussing each other's projects, the wives frequently joined to offer their expertise as actors, and there was much socializing and cardplaying. After the United States was drawn into the war in December 1941, Weill and Anderson collaborated on a few small projects for the war effort, including an episode for the radio series "This Is War" (also produced by Norman Corwin) in February 1942 and a few propaganda songs for use in unspecified rallies and events. As neighbors in New City, they all became members of the U.S. Army's Aircraft Warning Service, taking their turns watching for enemy aircraft at a tower on High Tor, the mountain north of the road that Anderson had made famous with his play.

The projects discussed during the 1940s offer a fascinating glimpse into the range of their thinking. In 1941 they considered adapting Eugene O'Neill's *The Fountain*, in 1945 Anderson was Weill's first choice as lyricist for *Street Scene* and a serious candidate for adapting *Die Dreigroschenoper*. That same year they drafted an outline of an original musical for director George Cukor based on an episode of Joseph Jefferson's career (the famed nineteenth-century actor best known for his portrayal of Rip van Winkle), and a year later they worked out a solid scheme to adapt Sidney Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted* (which Frank Loesser would turn into *The Most Happy Fella* ten years later). They also planned to create musical versions of Anderson's *High Tor* (so did Stephen Sondheim, who unsuccessfully approached Anderson in 1951) and *The Wingless Victory*, the latter as an opera featuring the star baritone Lawrence Tibbett, with whom they signed a preliminary agreement in May 1949. One of the last unrealized projects they discussed was an adaptation of *Moby Dick* for the Metropolitan Opera.

By attending each other's tryouts, Weill and Anderson acted as uncredited show doctors, and on these occasions the composer established even closer contacts with the other members of the Playwrights' Company. When S. N. Behrman left the organization in June 1946, the remaining three playwrights asked Weill to become an official member, a sure sign of their high esteem for the composer's judgment in all matters dramatic.

Anderson's *Truckline Cafe* (1946), which gave Marlon Brando his first big role on Broadway, looked like an opportunity to revive two songs from *Ulysses Africanus* as incidental music, but the numbers were cut before the play opened in New York. The previous year, Anderson and Weill had considered other songs from *Ulysses* for their adaptation of *Street Scene* ("Lost in the Stars," for example, was supposed to conclude Act I, sung by Henry, the janitor). The ultimate destination for "Lost in the Stars" came along in December 1947, when Anderson returned from a trip to Europe and encountered Oscar Hammerstein II and his wife aboard the ship. Dorothy Hammerstein told Anderson about a novel, soon to be published, by the South African author Alan Paton. *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Scribner's, 1948) made an eloquent indictment of the recently established apartheid regime by telling the odyssey of a black pastor, Stephen Kumalo, whose son, Absalom, had murdered a white man's son who happened to be a supporter of the black cause. Pledging to do no more evil, Absalom confesses and is sentenced to death. Anderson and Weill then tweaked the ending a bit: At the hour of his execution, Stephen and Jarvis, the white man, meet and begin an awkward friendship. Although the plot is set in South Africa, the authors made it clear that they had finally found a subject that allowed them to comment on hypocritical segregation policies at home. In spring 1948 they secured the rights and completed an outline for their adaptation before resuming projects already begun (Anderson's *Anne of the Thousand Days* and Weill/Alan Lerner's *Love Life*).

Turning Paton's relentless tragedy into a work for Broadway was a daring endeavor. Weill and Anderson decided early on to transmute the novel's descriptive passages into choral ones and to use the chorus in Greek fashion, much as Weill had done in his opera *Die Bürgschaft* (1932) and also in *Der Silbersee*. When Anderson finished a first draft of the script in mid-February 1949, he subtitled it "A Choral Play in Two

Acts." Given the substantial role of the chorus, Weill decided to score the work for a chamber ensemble of twelve players: five lower strings (i.e., no violins), three woodwinds, a trumpet, piano (also accordion), harp, and percussion. Todd Duncan, who had sung Porgy in the original 1935 production of the Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*, was cast in the role of Stephen Kumalo. Acting on a suggestion by director Rouben Mamoulian (who had staged the 1935 *Porgy*), Weill and Anderson created more material for the great baritone, the song "Thousands of Miles" and the aria "O Tixo, Tixo, Help Me!" so the show eventually became less choral and more dramatic.

Billed as "a musical tragedy," the production opened on 30 October 1949. Its emotional power caught many theatergoers by surprise. One woman stated that "she was made so happily unhappy by *Lost in the Stars* that she felt like dropping in at *Death of a Salesman* just to cheer herself up." Alan Paton, who had arrived from South Africa in time for the premiere, reported that the audience "wept and shouted and clapped." Reviews were quite favorable, although not ecstatic; some papers felt compelled to send both their drama and music critics—a telling sign of Weill's stature and multifaceted style. In the following days newsworthy lines began to form in front of the box office, and it appears that word-of-mouth in particular boosted ticket sales.

This was surprising as many of the show's elements proved to be rather intellectual. The existentialist theme of "Lost in the Stars" is thought-provoking at the very least (the motif of abandonment by God had appeared already in Anderson's poem "Full Circle," published in 1920 in the *New Republic*, and he elaborated on the topic in 1937 in his essay *Whatever Hope We Have*). Similarly, Anderson's probing of the notion of justice in the opening chorus of Act II, "The Wild Justice," picked up on an earlier fragmentary poem that probably dates from around 1937. The choral number "A Bird of Passage" offered a variation of the medieval sparrow-in-the-hall metaphor, and Weill and Anderson contemplated using it as part of a loosely planned "Service for those who die without faith except in men."

But Weill had made all of this both accessible and palatable through his gorgeous settings. *Lost in the Stars* displays an astonishing musical variety, but there are no jarring clashes of idioms. If the four numbers in popular song form seem simplistic in comparison to some of the choral writing or Stephen's *preghiera*, they are each properly

contextualized: Stephen sings "The Little Gray House" and "Lost in the Stars" to his little nephew Alex; Irina, Absalom's girlfriend, naively sings "Stay Well" when it is clear that he cannot be well; and Stephen's optimistic and innocent opening number, "Thousands of Miles," soon turns out to have been naive as well. (For additional information about *Lost in the Stars*, including many reviews from 1949, see this *Newsletter*, Spring 2008.)

Six days after the opening, Weill strolled over to Anderson's house and proposed an adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn* as a musical. Anderson was genuinely intrigued by the idea and sat down that very night to refresh his memory of the novel. In the following days he revisited also Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. From mid-November through January they worked intently on a story line, proposing and rejecting many ideas and struggling with the ending. Mamoulian had already agreed to direct. Anderson began the actual writing on 25 January 1950 and handed each completed lyric over to his collaborator. Weill drafted his first number, "Come in, Mornin'," on 13 February. The second one, "River Chanty" (also the proposed title for the entire project), followed two days later—it would have been the show's grand opening number. Things got delayed when they attended the tryout of Joshua Logan's *The Wisteria Trees* in Boston. In March Weill suffered from a serious case of psoriasis that forced him to bed. On 16 March he composed the "Catfish Song," but coronary pain in the following days and a major heart attack on 19 March incapacitated him. He was rushed to a hospital in Manhattan. A week later, he began feeling slightly better and Anderson brought him more lyrics, which Weill started to draft while lying in bed; he also proof-read pages for the publication of the piano-vocal score of *Lost in the Stars*. The last song he put on paper was called "This Time Next Year." On 2 April Weill asked Anderson to bring the completed libretto to the hospital, but he did not live to see it: the next day he suffered a second heart attack, this one fatal.

Weill's death was a shock to everybody near him. Anderson wrote in his daily log, usually reserved for professional matters: "Kurt—of all men!" He spoke a few words at Weill's funeral and it was probably his idea to engrave a stanza (music and text) of "A Bird of Passage" on his friend's tombstone. Over the next fifteen months, Anderson felt obliged to finish the incomplete project. About fifteen composers

would approach him with offers to “finish” the musical; he himself explored the notion with Burton Lane, Harry Warren, Arthur Schwartz, Tom Scott, Irving Berlin, Frank Loesser, Richard Rodgers, Ralph Blane, Victor Young, and Aaron Copland. In the end, however, none of them could replace his friend and collaborator.

For further reading:

Anderson, Hesper. *South Mountain Road: A Daughter's Journey of Discovery* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Avery, Laurence G. *Dramatist in America: Letters of Maxwell Anderson 1912–1958* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1977).

Juchem, Elmar. *Kurt Weill und Maxwell Anderson: Neue Wege zu einem amerikanischen Musiktheater* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000).

Wharton, John F. *Life among the Playwrights: Being Mostly the Story of the Playwrights Producing Company* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974).



Discussing a project: Anderson over at Lenya and Weill's house, late 1940s.

Two Letters from Weill to Anderson:

June 22, 1947

Dear Max and Mab,

judging from your letter, you really seem to have the Hollywood blues and I wished you could pack up and come home. The Road is absolutely lovely this year (or it seems so to me after 6 weeks absence)—but it isn't quite real without you around. I got mad when I heard that your contracts aren't signed yet. That's the worst case of Hollywood trickery I've ever heard . . .

The flight from London to New York was lovely (7 hours across the Atlantic), and coming home to this country had some of the same emotion as arriving here 12 years ago. With all its faults (and partly because of them), this is still the most decent place to live in, and strangely enough, wherever I found decency and humanity in the world it reminded me of America, because, to me, Americanism is (or ought to be) the most advanced attempt to fill the gap between the individual and the technical progress. Countries like France and Italy seem too far removed from this form of Americanism, which England, at the moment, seems to get a little ahead of us—and I have a suspicion that Russia could become, in this sense, “Americanized”—if we want it. . . .

“Joan” is the big thing in all summer theatres. I saw Aufrecht's friend in Paris who made a very excellent adaptation and seems pretty sure that Edwige Feuillère (who is a great actress!) will play it. – We walked over to your place. Everything looks lovely, including the new “cabin” (some cabin!!). Now it is raining—perfect weather for you. So: come back. We miss you all.

Love – Kurt

July 25, 1947

Dear Max,

. . . I am quite impressed with Bob's [Sherwood] play which to me, even in its present, rather unfinished form, is way above anything he has done in years. . . .

As to our plans: I felt in your last letter that your ideas for the space-ship story [it would have included the song “Lost in the Stars”—ed.] are moving very definitely in the direction of a play rather than a musical, and, of course, as you say, you have no control over your imagination and have to follow where it leads you. I just know that some day we will hit again on an idea that cannot be done any other way except as a musical, and we will know it when we find it. I hope very much that this will happen because you are my favorite lyric writer, and it is such a shame to have this wonderful talent of yours wasted. I will make myself available for this event if and whenever it will happen—and we will have lots of fun.

The two show projects that have been suggested to me lately are still very vague. The one, I wrote you, might be something for us to work on (it has a wonderful part for Walter [Huston]), but I won't bother you with it now, especially since the movie rights are not cleared. The other is an interesting idea which Lerner brought to me last week and which we are investigating now. Well, we'll talk about it all soon.

In the meantime all our love to you all,

Kurt