

# KURT WEILL NEWSLETTER

Volume 7, Number 2

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## IN THIS ISSUE

Revival or Arrival? Kurt Weill in 1990	8
International Kurt Weill Symposium, Duisburg	12
Threepenny on Stage and Screen	14

## COLUMNS

News	2
Letters to the Editor	3
From the Editor	4
Around the World - Cida Moreyra Revives Weill in Brazil	7
From the Archives - Recent Acquisitions	15
New Publications	16
Press Clippings	27

## BOOKS

<i>Bertolt Brecht: Werke</i> edited by Werner Hecht; <i>Mark the Music: The Life and Music of Marc Blitzstein</i> by Eric A. Gordon	17
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## PERFORMANCES

<i>Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny</i> at Los Angeles Opera; Violin Concerto in Detroit; <i>Marie Galante</i> and <i>Happy End</i> (concert versions) at the Redwoods Summer Music Festival, Santa Rosa Symphony; <i>Happy End</i> at Chicago's Court Theatre; <i>Johnny Johnson</i> (concert version) at Merkin Hall, New York	21
--	----

## RECORDINGS

<i>Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny</i> , Jan Latham-König, Kölner Rundfunkorchester on Capriccio; "Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen" on Thorophon; Song Albums by <i>Gisela May</i> on Capriccio, <i>Helen Schneider</i> on CBS Masterworks, <i>Ute Lemper</i> on London, <i>Julie Wilson</i> on DRG, and <i>Michael Feinstein</i> on EMI.	24
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## KURT WEILL 1990

The 90th anniversary of Kurt Weill's birth has sparked programming of virtually every one of Weill's concert and stage works as well as cultural exhibitions, radio programs, film series, and an international musicological conference. To commemorate the varied festivities, the Kurt Weill Foundation has published a special calendar of events. On page 8 is a guide to some of the major performances, as well as a summary of recording, broadcast and publishing projects.

## 3 PENNY OPERA STARRING STING COMES TO BROADWAY IN NOVEMBER

A new production of *The Threepenny Opera* (billed as "3 Penny Opera"), featuring Weill's original musical orchestrations and a new translation by Michael Feingold, begins previews on 19 October at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre. The Broadway production, which has its formal opening on 5 November, is staged by John Dexter. Julius Rudel is the music director, and Jocelyn Herbert designed the sets and costumes. Andy Phillips serves as the lighting designer and Peter Gennaro as choreographer.

*3 Penny Opera* highlights an international cast, including rock star Sting in his Broadway debut as Macheath, Maureen McGovern (Polly Peachum), Georgia Brown (Mrs. Peachum), Alvin Epstein (Peachum) and Ethyl Eichelberger as the Ballad Singer. Kim Criswell (Lucy), Suzanne Douglas (Jenny), Josh Mostel (Matt), and Larry Marshall (Tiger Brown) play the supporting roles. Robert Fisher is the associate conductor.

Prior to its New York run, the production had an engagement from 9 September - 8 October at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C. *3 Penny Opera* is being presented by Jerome Hellman in association with Haruki Kadowakawa and James M. Nederlander.

This new production marks the first Broadway revival since 1933, when an ill-fated attempt ran for only twelve performances at the Empire Theater on Broadway and 40th Street. Although the producers had hoped to recreate the show's phenomenal Berlin success, critics wrote that the show was "not nearly so dirty as advertised."

## KURT WEILL REVUE REVISITED

The 1985 Theater des Westens *Kurt Weill Revue* played at the Hebbel Theater, 9-28 June. The *Revue*, directed by Helmut Baumann and featuring Angelika Milster, Hanna Hegerova and Gaye MacFarlane, includes songs from Weill's German, French, and American works. Ludwig de Ridder served as musical director and Jürg Burth set the choreography. The production preceded a revival of the highly successful 1987 Theater des Westens production of *Die Dreigroschenoper*; the Günter Krämer staging ran at the Theater des Westens from 29 July to 15 October.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## HURRICANE ROARS IN FOUR NEW PRODUCTIONS OF MAHAGONNY

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the premiere of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (Leipzig; 9 March 1930), four opera companies will mount new productions during the 1989-90 season. The Los Angeles Music Center Opera, in a co-production with the Théâtre de Genève and Kentucky Opera, opened its season on 10 September with *Mahagonny* with subsequent performances on 13, 14, 16, and 17 September. [See page 20 for a review.]

Luciano Berio's Maggio Musicale festival in Florence has announced *Mahagonny* for June 12, 14, 17 and 24. Graham Vick will stage the production at the Teatro Comunale.

*Mahagonny* will also bow on two West German stages in 1990. The Augsburg Stadttheater premieres the work on 4 February, with stage direction by Wolf Seesemann and *mise-en-scène* by Rainer Sinell. In June, the Hamburg Staatsoper will mount its new production in the Kampnagelfabrik, a performance space used for modern and experimental works. Günter Krämer directs and Ingo Metzmacher leads the musical forces. Among the cast is William Pell (Jimmy Mahoney), the Parsifal at this year's Bayreuth Festival.

## 'MACK THE KNIFE' HEIR SUES BIG MAC®

The son of the late singer Bobby Darin is suing McDonald's Corp. for more than \$10 million, alleging the restaurant chain copied his father's singing style in the "Mac Tonight" commercials. The suit, filed last week in Santa Monica, Calif., alleges that the ads infringe on rights to Darin's 1959 hit version of the song "Mack the Knife." The commercials feature a tuxedoed man with a smiling quarter-moon head belting out the hamburger jingle. The suit alleges the character's voice and gestures resemble those of Darin, who died in 1973 of heart problems. The suit was filed on behalf of Dodd Darin, the singer's son and only heir. Darin's upbeat version of "Mack the Knife" sold 2 million copies and won Darin two 1960 Grammy awards. [Reprinted from the Rochester Democrat-Chronicle, 10 October 1989]

## SINS AT JULLIARD

Juilliard Opera Center will present the Lincoln Center premiere of *Die sieben Todsünden* on 23, 25, 27 February at the Juilliard Theatre in New York. The production will be directed by Christopher Mattaliano and conducted by Bruno Ferrandis. *Todsünden* shares a double-bill with the American premiere of Benjamin Fleischmann's unfinished "Rothschild's Violin," which was later completed by Dimitri Shostakovich.

## FOUNDATION AWARDS SPECIAL 1990 CELEBRATION GRANTS

The Board of Trustees of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music is pleased to announce the results of a special round of professional performance grants established to promote celebrations of Kurt Weill's music during 1990.

**American Music Theater Festival**, Philadelphia. First professional revival of *Love Life*.

**Bühnen der Stadt Bielefeld**. Staged production of *Street Scene*.

**Great Lakes Theater Festival**, Cleveland. Administration of a Kurt Weill Festival.

**Heinrich-Heine-Institut and the Dumont-Lindemann-Archiv**. Two exhibitions mounted in conjunction with the Kurt Weill Festival in North Rhine Westphalia.

**Sinfonietta**, Marc-Andreas Schlingensiefen, conductor. Concert performance of *Vom Tod im Wald*, *Bastille Music*, *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, and Concerto for violin and wind instruments.

**Stadttheater Gießen**. Staged production of *Der Silbersee*.

**Städtische Musikverein, Düsseldorf**. Concert performance of *Recordare*, *Kiddush*, *Berliner Requiem*, *Walt Whitman Songs*, "Legende vom toten Soldaten," "Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen," and "In Times of War and Tumult" from *Johnny Johnson*.

**Theater Oberhausen**. Staged production of a triple-bill: *Royal Palace*, *Der Protagonist*, and *Der Zar läßt sich fotografieren*.

## WEIMAR CULTURE EXPLORED AT HARVARD

On 23 February 1990, the Department of Music, Harvard University, will host a symposium "The Tempo of the Times," *American Music in Weimar Culture* which will examine the assimilation of American influences by German artists in the 1920's. Dr. Hermann Danuser, Professor of Musicology, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg im Breisgau, and Dr. Kim H. Kowalke, Professor of Music, The University of Rochester/Eastman School of Music, will deliver formal papers on "Americanisms in the Music of the Twenties - Fiction and Reality" and "Off to Mahagonny." Drs. Christoph Wolff and Reinhold Brinkmann of the Harvard Music faculty will join Danuser and Kowalke in an afternoon panel discussion. A concert of chamber music of Eisler, Hindemith, Schulhoff, and Weill is planned. For further information, call (617) 495-2791.

Related to the symposium and examining the nature of the American influence in the Weimar Republic, the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, in association with Goethe House, Boston, opens on 20

January "Envisioning America, The Prints, Drawings, Photographs of George Grosz and His Contemporaries." Dr. Beeke Sell Tower (Goethe Institute) and Peter Nisbet (Daimler-Benz Curator, Busch-Reisinger Museum) serve as curators for the exhibition which runs through 18 March. Dr. Timothy Benson (Associate Curator, Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies) will organize the show for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where it runs from 19 April to 24 June.

## GUY STERN AWARDED GOETHE MEDAL

On 22 March, at Munich, Weill Foundation board member Guy Stern was awarded the Goethe Medal by Dr. Klaus von Bismarck, the President of the Goethe Institute. The Goethe Medal honors outstanding achievement in the study of German culture abroad and the promotion of cultural exchange through artistic or scholarly work. Dr. Stern, Distinguished Professor of German Language and Literature at Wayne State University in Detroit, has most recently published "Thomas Mann und die jüdische Welt" and the book *Thesen und Themen zur Exilliteratur*.

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The Newsletter is published to provide an open forum wherein interested readers may express a variety of ideas and opinions. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. The editor encourages the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for inclusion in future issues. The submission deadline for the next issue is 1 February 1990.

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## WHO SINGS THE "BARBARA-SONG"?

The following letter was sent to Dr. Kim Kowalke. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author. Mr. Vambéry was an eyewitness to the rehearsals and first performances of *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

Dear Prof. Kowalke,

You are absolutely right about the "Barbara-song." Roma Bahn was not only an excellent actress but also an exceptionally quick study. But time was too short, since Aufrecht refused to postpone. Her "Seeräuberjenny," which she nevertheless did, was in no way inferior to the more famous versions of Carola Neher and Lenya.

Robert Vambéry  
21 May 1989  
Los Angeles

COMMENTS ON *MUSIK BEI BRECHT*

To the editor:

Mr. Dümmling's review cites the omission from *Musik bei Brecht* [Joachim Lucch-

esi and Ronald K. Shull. Suhrkamp, 1988] the name of Marc Blitzstein. I haven't gone through that book yet with a fine tooth comb, but I have the impression that American composers in general were left out. For instance, Joseph Raposo, whose obit unhappily was in the *New York Times* a few weeks ago, did an excellent score for *A Man's a Man*, which can be heard any time on a Spoken Arts record. Arnold Black did one for *Elephant Calf* which can likewise be heard any time (this one on a Folkways record). Most conspicuous by his absence is, perhaps, the late Stefan Wolpe, who did the music for two Brecht plays, *Good Woman of Setzuan* and *The Exception and the Rule* (the latter is on a Folkways record). Somewhere the book should point out that *Good Woman* became an American musical at the hands, first, of Liz Swados and, second, of Michael Rice. I could go on.

Eric Bentley  
12 April 1989  
New York

## THREEPENNY CHRONOLOGY

To the editor:

A friend of mine in London sent me the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the *Threepenny Opera*. Since I happened to be among the cast of the 1956 production in London, I was surprised to see that the former 1955 French production in Paris at the Theatre de l'Empire was not mentioned in your chronology. I also participated in this production before the British one—a most interesting privilege having acted first in French in Paris, then in English in London.

I have many photos, magazines, and even a tape recording from parts of the London show, which was unfortunately not officially recorded at the time. I shall never forget the wonderful experience as an actress and singer the *Threepenny Opera* represented, and the exceptional souvenirs that remain with me as a highlight in my life.

By the way, in London, not only did we perform at the Royal Court Theatre, but also at Brighton (first performance), the Aldwych Theatre, then Leicester Square Theatre in London, success having opened the doors of the West End. I played Lotte Lenya's part as Jenny.

My congratulations and thanks for your work and Foundation.

Maria Rémusat  
4 August 1989  
Paris



Above: Raul Julia as MacHeath in Menahem Golan's film "Mack the Knife." © 21st Century Film Corp. Below: Sting as MacHeath in the new Broadway 3 Penny Opera. Photo: Nancy Ellison.

TV DOCUMENTARY ABOUT EXILES  
PREMIERES

*The Exiles*, a documentary about the emigration of European intellectuals to the United States during the 1930's, had its New York area broadcast premiere on WNET/Thirteen on 24 September. Directed by Richard Kaplan, the film consisted of interviews with European emigrants, including Billy Wilder, Nuriya Nono, scenic designer Wolfgang Roth and Lotte Lenya. The documentary focused upon the profound influence the forced emigration had on education and cultural life in the United States, and in particular, the role of artists and musicians upon the American scene. Weill's music forms part of the sound track.

## CBS SINS GAINS AWARDS

The Edison Foundation in Amsterdam has awarded the CBS Masterworks recording of *The Seven Deadly Sins* the 1988 Edison Award for best recording of a Vocal Solo or Vocal Ensemble with Instrumental Solo or Ensemble Accompaniment. In addition, the *Washington Post* cited it as one of the outstanding show records of the year. The recording features Julia Migenes and the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. Also included is *Little Threepenny Music*.

# FROM THE EDITOR

A few months ago the Kurt Weill Foundation received a rather terse letter from A.B. (name withheld), from New York City:

Why were the rights to re-film *The Threepenny Opera* given to Menahem Golan (arguably the world's worst director) and Cannon Films (arguably the world's most meretricious film company)? I don't have to see the film or read about it to know how it will turn out. Of course, *The Threepenny Opera* is Weill's most overrated work. His most underrated? All of his American theater and film music. Would you have information about Weill's visit to Palestine in the 30's or 40's - I know he went. Keep my name on the mailing list. Love the Newsletter!

As this issue of the *Newsletter* goes to press, a new, first-run, 21st Century Film Corporation production of "Mack the Knife," an adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* directed by Menahem Golan, is indeed scheduled for a premiere showing on 15 October at the Chicago Film Festival and for general release in November. Aficionados of this twentieth-century music theater icon may be as shocked today when confronted with the film's new musical arrangements (complete with soaring horn obbligatos and trilling woodwinds) as when they first heard Peter Sandloff's scoring for the 1963 *Threepenny* film. Conflict between the dearly-held values of serious composers and the aims of the film industry are as old as the industry is young, and Kurt Weill was certainly no stranger to the fray. In 1931, he fought in the courts to prohibit mutilation of his *Dreigroschenoper* score in G. W. Pabst's film; in 1933 he emigrated to Paris convinced that the future of opera, and hence, his future, rested to a great extent in the cinema; and later, he supported himself by submitting to the conventions of the Hollywood film industry of the 1940's where composers were brazenly treated as work-for-hire technicians. Before these pages offer an analysis of Menahem Golan's efforts, an investigation of *Threepenny's* complicated and colorful film history may help to answer inquiries regarding the rights and approvals which have been granted for the various *Threepenny Opera* film treatments.

The film rights to *The Threepenny Opera* have been sold three times by the authors or their respective estates: in 1931 to Nero-Film, in 1958 to Gloria-Film, and in 1977 to the Dino De Laurentiis Corporation.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to recall any other 20th-century musical theater work that has been honored with (or subjected to) adaptation by three generations of movie makers.<sup>2</sup> While the estates of both Weill and Brecht encountered difficulties in exercising any form of artistic control in the latter two films, the authors themselves aroused much public debate in 1930 when they pursued litigation against Nero-Film for the mishandling of their artistic property in the first *Threepenny* film - a film which historians would come to regard

as one of the last great works in the tradition of German Expressionist cinema.

Weill and Brecht thought that they had safeguarded the integrity of *Die Dreigroschenoper* when they negotiated the sale of the film rights for the celebrated G. W. Pabst production. The contract signed on 21 May 1930 between Nero-Film (for Tobias and Warner Bros.) and the publisher Felix Bloch Erben (as agent for the authors) explicitly stated:

The composition of additional music and the arrangement of existing music may only be carried out by the composer Kurt Weill, who is to receive separate remuneration for this from the production company. By the same token, new lyrics to existing music or to any new compositions may only be written by the librettist Bert Brecht, who is to be engaged by the production company to collaborate on the screenplay.<sup>3</sup>

When Nero-Film did not honor the spirit of its commitment to the authors, Weill and Brecht sued the production company. To summarize briefly the outcome, Weill won his case and settled for a cash settlement and the opportunity to provide musical collaboration on three additional Nero films. Although the court ruled against Brecht, partly because of his failure to deliver an outline for the screenplay on time, he was able to obtain from Nero his court costs, a fee for his initial collaboration, and the return of his film rights after three years.<sup>4</sup> The film rights for the music did not expire until after ten years, on 20 May 1940.

The extent of the adjustments made to Weill's music for the Pabst film pale in comparison to those made in the later adaptations. Although the score was slashed to 28 minutes of music, the spirit and character of the music was retained, largely because the original theater musicians (the Lewis Ruth Band and conductor Theo Mackeben) were engaged to record the soundtrack. (Those readers interested in tracing the specific musical changes should consult Stephen Hinton's forthcoming *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera* (Cambridge University Press) scheduled for publication early next year.)

Upon settlement of the various disputes, the film was completed in simultaneous German and French versions utilizing the same production team and sets, although the costumes received minor cultural adjustments.<sup>5</sup> Leo Lania, Ladislaus Vajda, and Béla Balázs were responsible for the final screenplay, and Rudolf Forster as Mackie Messer headed the German cast which included Carola Neher (Polly), Reinhold Schünzel (Tiger Brown), Fritz Rasp (Mr. Peacham), Valeska Gert (Mrs. Peacham), and Lotte Lenya (Jenny). Solange Bussey, André Mauprey, and Ninon Steinhoff adapted the text for the French version; Albert Préjean, Odette Florelle, Jacques Henley, Gaston Modot, Lucy de Matha, and Margo Lion played the principal roles. The

German version premiered in Berlin at the Atrium theater on 19 February 1931 and it received its first American showing at the Warner Theater in New York three months later on 15 May. The French version was given its premiere in Berlin on 8 June 1931 and then shown in France in October.

Although the Nazis allegedly attempted to destroy all copies of the Pabst film, a print resurfaced for a first post-war showing in West Germany at Göttingen in August 1955. The Museum of Modern Art in New York borrowed a print from the British Film Institute and presented the first U.S. post-war showing on 1 December 1955. Thomas Brandon, a pioneer of art film distribution in the U.S., attempted to locate in Europe all existing prints of the film. As a result of his efforts, and with the assistance of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a restored version was released in 1960 and first shown at the 55th St. Playhouse on 11 July.<sup>6</sup> Numerous third-parties undertook efforts - some of them unauthorized - to distribute the film in the post-war years on both sides of the Atlantic, including a home videotape released in 1984 and a videodisc released in 1988.<sup>7</sup> Music selections from both the German and French versions have been available on records in numerous releases and reissues since 1931.

In 1957, Helene Weigel opened negotiations with Bavaria-Filmkunst of Munich and signed a letter of intent to grant it worldwide, exclusive film rights to *Die Dreigroschenoper* for a period of ten years. Lenya protested Weigel's unilateral actions, and the agreement was never concluded. But soon after, Lotte Lenya and Helene Weigel signed an agreement on 24 March 1958 to license the film rights exclusively to Gloria-Film of Munich for worldwide distribution, excluding the United States. In collaboration with C.E.C. Paris, Kurt Ulrich finally produced the film in 1963; it was directed by Wolfgang Staudte<sup>8</sup>, choreographed by Dick Price, and featured art direction and costumes by Hein Heckroth (the designer of *A Kingdom for a Cow*). Staudte and Günter Weisenborn adapted the play for the screen, and Peter Sandloff liberally rearranged and reorchestrated the score.

Apparently the production company took greater artistic liberties with the property than were permitted by the contract:

Gloria-Film must preserve the satiric conception of the author, the social ideas in the work, its character, and music in the production of the film. The use of music other than that of "Dreigroschenoper" music by Kurt Weill requires the consent of Mrs. Lotte Lenya. The same is required for any divergence from the original orchestration. If new songs or changes in the songs by Bertolt Brecht are to be used in the film, Gloria-Film will require the consent of Mrs. Brecht-Weigel.<sup>9</sup>

There is no evidence in Lenya's papers



to verify that she was consulted on, or gave consent to, the new arrangements and orchestrations undertaken by Sandloff.

The film was shot by Staudte in West Berlin and released in Germany in April 1963 with a cast which included Curt Jürgens, Hildegard Knef, June Richie, Hilde Hildebrand, and Gert Fröbe. The soundtrack of the German version appeared as Telefunken-Decca BLK 16 242. (London Records released the recording in the U.S. as M 76004.)

When Embassy Pictures acquired the U.S. rights to Gloria's film adaptation in December 1964, it made an English version and interpolated new scenes featuring Sammy Davis Jr. as the Streetsinger against the wishes and without the permission of Staudte.<sup>10</sup> Most of the English text was simply dubbed over the German, but some of the songs were newly filmed in English versions. The lyrics were by Eric Bentley, with the exception of "Mack the Knife," "Salomon Song," and some portions of the Finales which employed Blitzstein's translation. RCA won the contract to release the English soundtrack, and Video Yesterday distributed a home videotape (no. 164) in the U.S. for a short period in the early 1980's. The exclusive rights for distribution of the Gloria version expired on 31 December 1970, thus making it possible for yet another producer to attempt a film adaptation of the "play with music."

While the first two films were produced by the same companies which signed contracts directly with the authors or the authors' estates, Menahem Golan, in contrast, acquired the rights to make "Mack the Knife" after they had traversed a maze of complicated third-party contract assignments. In the early 1970's, Bertha Case (then the agent for both Lenya and Stefan Brecht) began negotiations on the film rights for *The Threepenny Opera* with Stanley Chase, one of the two producers of the famous 1954-1961 Theatre de Lys production in New York. Chase, who was anxious to acquire the rights and who had already proven his well-intentioned interest in the property, began working with Paul Kohner to put together a workable package including financing, cast, director, studio, etc. When the various negotiations stalled, Chase approached producer Herb Ross, who hoped to do the film for Warner Brothers. In May 1973, Stanley Chase, in partnership with World Film Services, Ltd., confirmed a new offer to acquire the film rights and began negotiating with Bertha Case, Lester Levin (attorney for Brecht), and Floria V. Lasky (attorney for Lenya) for what all parties thought would be a final contract. But



EIN TONFILM DER TOBIS-WARNER-PRODUKTION

TOBIS

WARNER

WARNER BROS.



**Top:** Announcement of the Pabst 1931 film. **Middle:** Curt Jürgens and June Richie in Staudte's 1963 production. **Bottom:** Raul Julia and Rachel Robertson in the new Golan film. © 21st Century Film Corp.

World Film Services pulled out of the negotiations, leaving Chase without financial backing at a time when Universal Edition (the original publisher of the music) and other parties complicated matters by claiming rights and demanding participation in the dealings.<sup>11</sup>

In April 1975, the attorney for Dino De Laurentiis Corporation, the attorney for Stanley Chase, Floria Lasky, Lester Levin, and Bertha Case met in an attempt to reach a basic understanding so that negotiations could go forward for De Laurentiis to acquire an option. The correspondence files show Bertha Case to be a persistent advisor to Lenya throughout the negotiations, and her report on the meeting lays bare her frustrations with the prolonged attempts to secure the rights for Stanley Chase:

I did reveal to Floria... the Paramount interest and gave her the figure we were offered. She wasn't too impressed because she felt that we would run into the same kind of difficulties with that studio as we are facing with De Laurentiis - mainly legal - endless restrictions, such as reversion of rights after a certain period, they will also want us to supply them with warranties and guarantees that no claim will be made against them, which neither Floria, on your behalf, nor Lester, on Stefan's behalf, can agree to. Also, Floria feels it would be foolish to jeopardize the De Laurentiis deal for one which is still quite uncertain, plus the fact that we would be starting from scratch with Paramount (if their interest is really concrete) which may, God help us all, take another year!<sup>12</sup>

After a year of discussions between the two estates and the attorneys for the producers, no agreement had been reached, prompting Lasky in March 1976 to communicate to Levin that the Brecht estate was being too demanding with the business terms (as opposed to the artistic issues) of the deal:

... [Lenya] regards the Brecht attitude as unreasonable and arbitrary. There is also considerable pessimism, to say the least, about obtaining another offer for these rights in view of all of the conditions imposed. In fact, these conditions, we believe, would make it impossible to sell the rights.<sup>13</sup>

But another year passed as the various parties sought resolutions to two ancillary issues: a synchronization license with Universal Edition and distribution rights in the Nero-Film version of 1931. Finally on 1 September 1977, Lenya, Stefan Brecht (individually and as attorney-in-fact for his sister, Barbara Schall, and his half-sister, Hanne Hiob), and Dino De Laurentiis Corporation, executed an "Option Agreement" which gave De Laurentiis the "exclusive and irrevocable

# FROM THE EDITOR

cable" option to purchase the film rights, and on 22 August 1978, the De Laurentiis Corporation and Universal Edition signed an "Option Agreement" and a "Synchronization and Performing License." After another two years of delay requiring extensions of the option, the principals executed the final "Literary Purchase Agreement" on 27 August 1979, eight years after Stanley Chase's initial inquiry. Although not a party to the agreements with the authors' estates, Stanley Chase remained in partnership with the De Laurentiis Corporation.

Contrary to the provisions for artistic control included in the contracts for the 1931 and 1963 versions, the De Laurentiis agreement merely gave the owners consultation privileges on the screenplay and lyric writer, music arranger, and three principal cast members.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding these privileges, the contract gave the film maker a free hand to devise adaptations of the original work:

[T]he Property Purchaser shall have the unlimited right to vary, change, alter, modify, add to and/or delete from the Property, and to rearrange and/or transpose the Property and change the sequence thereof and the characters and descriptions of the characters contained in the Property, and to use a portion or portions of the Property or the characters, plots, or theme thereof in conjunction with any other literary, dramatic or other material. . . . Notwithstanding the foregoing the Purchaser agrees that its arrangements of the music and use of the text contained in the Property shall be faithful to the spirit of the Property and its plots as written by the Authors, taking into consideration the differences as art forms between live stage performance and motion picture . . .

In retrospect, the most important clause in the contract permitted the De Laurentiis Corporation to "assign and transfer [the] agreement or all or any part of its rights . . . to any person, firm or corporation without limitation." Before the ink was dry on the 27 August 1979 option agreement, the rights were transferred to Stanley Chase Productions Inc. by virtue of a previous agreement between Chase and De Laurentiis. Four years later, in August 1983, Chase Productions assigned the rights to RKO Pictures Inc. while retaining controlling interest with a side-partnership arrangement. When it was discovered that the synchronization rights granted by Universal Edition expired in 1984, RKO then signed a new agreement in March 1986 with all the authors and various concerned parties to provide for extensions of certain rights and to secure distribution rights to the 1931 and 1963 versions.<sup>15</sup> During this period, Chase began to scout for a cast and director, and he discussed the project with Martin Scorsese and Sting,

among others. However, before any arrangements were finalized, RKO (or Stanley Chase Productions as controlling interest) subsequently sold the rights again in July 1986, this time to Menahem Golan for Cannon Films.<sup>16</sup>

Golan had a long-standing ambition to be involved in a new film version of *The Threepenny Opera*, and, after holding initial discussions with a number of directors, he decided to direct the film himself. "In adapting *The Threepenny Opera* for the silver screen," Golan notes,

I was careful to remain very true to Brecht's and Weill's original intentions. I went back to Brecht to be true to him, but in a cinematic way. I'm using Weill's arrangements that reflect their comments on cynicism in life.<sup>17</sup>

In July 1988, Golan launched pre-production activities for "Mack the Knife" in London where Michael Dixon supervised the recording of the soundtrack. Principal photography began on 26 September 1988 in Föt, Hungary, a small farming community thirty minutes outside Budapest. The post-production work was nearly completed when Golan parted with Cannon in early 1989 to form his own production company, 21st Century Film Corporation. 21st Century will release "Mack the Knife" in November 1989 with the leading roles played by Raul Julia, Julia Migenes, Richard Harris, Julie Walters, and Roger Daltrey. An advance press kit gives the following credits "written for the screen and directed by Menahem Golan; executive producers, Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus; produced by Stanley Chase; choreography by David Toguri; edited by Alain Jakubowicz; director of photography, Elemer Ragalyi." Golan chose Jack Fishman as lyricist and music director to head up a "music team" comprised of Nick Ingman, Roland Shaw, Kenny Woodman, Harry Roberts, and Zack Lawrence. After the soundtrack was recorded, a spokesperson for Cannon informed the Foundation that each member of the team arranged and conducted two or three numbers. Dave Hunt recorded the music portions of the soundtrack, which is scheduled for release on CBS Masterworks.

Whatever critical reception is bestowed upon Mr. Golan's efforts when the film opens this fall, the estates of the authors can neither accept the credit nor share in the blame. They did not make an agreement directly with Mr. Golan, nor did they have any substantive influence on the treatment of Weill's and Brecht's artistic property. But, for the record, the film rights will become available once again in 1995, although the distribution rights for Golan's version will continue until the copyright in the property expires.

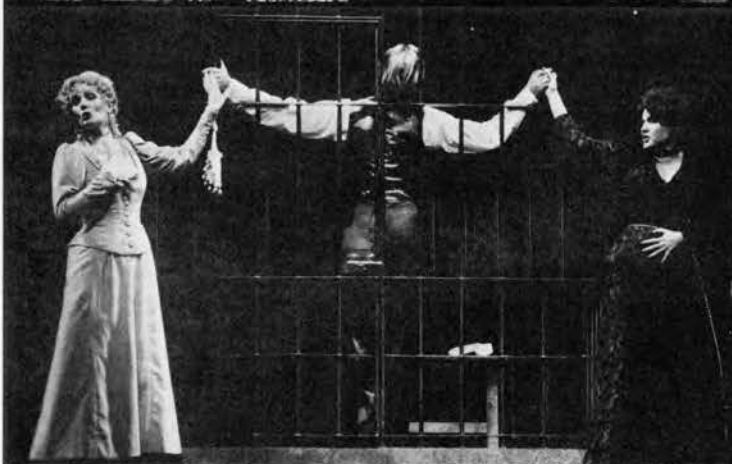
## Notes

1. This does not include film and video licensing of single songs or television broadcasts of live performances.
2. *Show Boat's* three film adaptations date from 1929, 1936, and 1951.
3. English translation by Stephen Hinton. All of the contracts discussed in this article are located in the archives of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music.
4. Hinton, Stephen. *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera*. Unpublished typescript.
5. *Photo: Casparius* (ed. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek. Berlin: Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin, 1978) provides extensive photo documentation of both the German and French versions and includes press clippings, the filmscript, and reproductions of documents.
6. Varaldiev, Anneliese. [Program notes] *The 3 Penny Opera*. Criterion Collection, 1988. [videodisc].
7. Videodisc: *The 3 Penny Opera*. Criterion Collection, 1988. Videotape: *The Threepenny Opera*. Los Angeles: Embassy Home Entertainment VHS 6041, 1984.
8. Wolfgang Staudte had worked with Brecht on an ill-fated film adaptation of *Mutter Courage* in 1955. The collaboration broke after ten days of shooting, with the director declaring that Brecht had "an utterly hostile attitude to the cinema." Cf. Willett. *Brecht in Context*. London: Methuen, 1984. p. 126.
9. Translation by Michael Hoexter.
10. Hinton, Stephen. *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera*. Unpublished typescript.
11. The Weill-Lenya Research Center holds extensive correspondence on the transaction (Series 42, Box 2, Folders 11-14).
12. Letter from Bertha Case to Lenya, 22 April 1975.
13. Letter from Floria Lasky to Lester Levin, 1 March 1976.
14. "Consultation" in this context indicates that the purchaser must simply inform the owner of their choices; the owner has no contractual power to veto them.
15. RKO's contract called for an extension of the rights for five years from the date of release, or nine years from the date of the agreement: 25 March 1986.
16. Reportedly RKO sold its rights to Golan for a sum six times the amount paid by De Laurentiis in 1979, and the authors' estates had no participation in the transfer. RKO was sold to Ted Turner in 1988 and disbanded.
17. "Mack the Knife" press kit distributed by 21st Century Film Corporation.

David Farneth



## THREEPENNY ON STAGE AND SCREEN



**Broadway's 3 Penny Opera:** directed by John Dexter  
*Top to bottom:* Jenny (Suzanne Douglas) and the Street Singer (Ethyl Eichelberger) perform the "Solomon Song;" Mr. and Mrs. Peachum (Alvin Epstein and Georgia Brown) learn of Polly's (Maureen McGovern) marriage to MacHeath; Polly (Maureen McGovern) and Lucy (Kim Criswell) wish they could crucify MacHeath (Sting) Photos: Nancy Ellison

**Hollywood's "Mack the Knife":** directed by Menahem Golan  
*Top to bottom:* Roger Daltrey as the Street Singer; Julia Migenes (Jenny), Richard Harris (Mr. Peachum), Julie Walters (Mrs. Peachum), and Bill Nighy (Tiger Brown); Jenny and Tiger Brown lead a demonstration. ©21st Century Film Corp.