

## ... a musical view by bruce mcclung

In the topography of Weill's Broadway works between the twin peaks of the integrated "American Opera" *Street Scene* (1947) and the visionary last work *Lost in the Stars* (1949) lies the problematic and ever enigmatic *Love Life* (1948). Problematic because a play which spans 150 years and portrays the decaying institution of marriage is coupled with a simultaneous vaudeville show that provides acts of critical commentary in front of a drop curtain before each scene. Enigmatic because no cast recording was ever released, vocal score published, national tour mounted, or license given for stock and amateur performances of a work that ran for 252 performances and was a progenitor for the concept musicals of the last twenty-five years (*Cabaret*, *Company*, *A Chorus Line*, et al.). The rare opportunity to see this collaboration of the mature Weill and the young Alan Jay Lerner was offered during June by the American Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia. This first professional revival of the work teased, tantalized, and ultimately proved that the work can withstand the ravages of a poor adaptation and insensitive musical direction and still somehow be a success.

Although Alan Jay Lerner admitted the book's inferiority to the musical score, his death in 1986 prevented him from rewriting it himself for production by the American Musical Theater Festival. The present adaptation, which bears the curious credit "Additional Book Materials" by Thomas Babe, focuses on updating the second half of the show where the protagonists, Sam and Susan Cooper, find themselves separated and alienated from one another in the then-present 1940s. The rewrite, which concludes the story somewhere in the late 1950s, gets in the most trouble in the resulting shuffling of musical numbers. Because the second-act ballet (here titled "The Divorce," but originally "Punch and Judy Get a Divorce") was cut before this reviewer got to Philadelphia, Susan's torchy "Is It Him, or Is It Me?" ended up back-to-back with Sam's expansive "This Is the Life"; the juxtaposition proved emotionally exhaustive for the audience and dramatically weakened the impact of both show-stopping numbers. Similarly, choosing to include in the second act the vaudeville number "Susan's Dream" – cut between the pre-tryout run in New Haven (9 September 1948) and the Boston tryout (13 September 1948) – made little sense musically or textually.

The adaptation also attempted to integrate the vaudeville acts into the book's story by the device of an emcee-cum-Hobo named Swank (an expansion of the original Magician's role) who appeared in most of the book scenes in various guises. Whereas the 1948 production had forced an ironic distance upon the audience from the marital problems of the Coopers through such pithy numbers as "Progress," (a soft-shoe act), "Economics" (a black quartet act), "Mother's Getting Nervous" (a kiddy act with a trapeze artist), "Love Song" (a hobo act), and "Ho, Billy O!" (a madrigal parody act), this production presented an ill-suited marriage of the book and vaudeville numbers; the result compromised the integrity of both. For example, after the quartet offers "Economics" – a song about the

and then off again, leaving unrealized the analogy of their disjointed marital state. Similarly, instead of a trapeze artist to accompany and illustrate "Mother's Getting Nervous," Swank paraded around the stage in maternal drag; this did little to elucidate the proceedings. What did carry the vaudeville numbers, however, was the inspired singing and dancing of the fourteen-member chorus. The male ensemble singing in both "Progress" and "Economics" proved first-rate; Don Mayo lent rich bass support and Christopher Vellel supplied a supple first tenor descant for "Economics." The trio of women (Kathryn Kendall, Betsy Ann Leadbetter, and Maureen McNamara) which performed the kiddy-number "Mother's Getting Nervous" was sufficiently brat-like to be believable. Unfortunately, the eight-part madrigal "Ho, Billy O!" was cut (no doubt due to the formidable vocal demands of the piece). Overall, Neal Ben-Ari as Swank contributed little vocally; his rendition of the Hobo's "Love Song" proved especially disappointing.

The singing in the book scenes of the Coopers' marriage was on the whole more satisfying than in the vaudeville acts – if sometimes less musically secure. Debbie Shapiro's portrayal of Susan was vocally hindered by her limited top range, especially evident in the opening numbers: "My Name is Samuel Cooper," "Here I'll Stay," and "Green-Up Time." By contrast, the dark and smokey quality of Ms. Shapiro's voice was perfectly suited to the scorching "Women's Club Blues" and the plaintive "Is It Him, or Is It Me?" Her concluding bumps and grinds with a fifteen-foot boa for "Mr. Right" brought down the house. As Sam, Richard Muenz delivered an inspired interpretation of nearly every number. "Here I'll Stay" launched the show heroically, while the rocking "My Kind of Evening" sounded easy and relaxed. However, it was the emotionally charged aria, "This Is the Life," which stopped the show cold. This number put Mr. Muenz's voice through a variety of paces; Weill's mastery in capturing conflicting emotions while establishing a heightened mood presents certain vocal challenges which were met by Richard Muenz's assured singing.

Both Mr. Muenz and Ms. Shapiro are to be congratulated for surmounting the frenzied musical direction of Robert Kapilow. Not only was nearly every tempo too brisk, but the music, seemingly devoid of rubato, crashed regularly into final cadences without ritardandi. Introductions to pieces as well as reprises were often dynamically in-



Debbie Shapiro as Susan Cooper pines for her "Mr. Right" in the American Musical Theater's production of *Love Life*. Photo: Mark Garvin.

mixing up of priorities between love and money – Swank and the vaudevillians sing their way into the next scene: the Coopers' 1857 bedroom. Moreover, Swank remains to observe the ensuing pillow talk.

The vaudeville numbers were also hampered by the absence of any magical illusion. According to the original book, Sam and Susan should begin their odyssey by being levitated and sawed in half; in Philadelphia, the props for such illusions were merely rolled on stage

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# Theater Festival

## ...a dramaturgical view

by Charlie Willard

The American Musical Theater Festival finally opened the door on Weill's and Lerner's *Love Life*, and, if more questions tumbled out than the periods and exclamation points one expects to find on the musical stage, the questions were always carefully and intelligently phrased.

The big question, of course, is how do you play this crazy patchwork of a show? Are Susan and Sam Cooper "real characters" in a linear book musical that carries with it a running commentary of musical asides? Or, are Sam and Susan outlines for high-definition star-performing in an ultra-sophisticated theatrical revue held together by a sardonic theme and the guiding intelligence of its creators? Like the well-intentioned revivalists in Philadelphia, I'd always opted for the first; I'd figured that *Love Life* was simply a modern concept musical – *Cabaret* or *Pippin* or *Chicago* or *Follies* – in the raw. To stage it effectively today, one has simply to spiff it up with the improvements that its descendants had made since, and like magic, there it would be, *Love Life* in full bloom and glory.

It'd be an easy fix: add an emcee or a leading player to give character dimension to the "comment songs," a lavish and looming environmental set, and a "theme" opening number to set forth the ground rules of the evening (*Cabaret*'s "Willkommen" or *Pippin*'s "Magic To Do") and the seminal if underdeveloped 1948 musical would emerge from its cocoon of neglect a thoroughly trenchant work in the most contemporary Broadway fashion.

That's what the Festival has accomplished. No argument about it. Here, at last, was a leading player-emcee – dubbed Swank for reasons that were never clear – who key-noted all the comment numbers and led a well-drilled chorus which executed snappy, Fossesque routines choreographed by Christopher Chadman. There sat an all-purpose scaffold of a set by Loren Sherman; if it carried strong echoes of Tony Walton's design for *Chicago*, well, that was sort of the point. And right up front was the *de rigueur* theme opening number, vigorously setting forth all the rules and regulations of the evening, newly outfitted for the occasion by Joshua Rosenblum and Eric Salzman from scraps in the Act Two minstrel show sequence. The entire pattern of the evening was as textbook accurate as any student of Harold Prince and his collaborators would have it: a "book scene" in which "real" characters sing out their hopes and dreams

segues into a mini coup de théâtre as the scenery breaks apart to reveal the ensemble and the emcee poised to nail the first comment song. One had only to consider Prince's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* playing in Purchase, New York concurrently with *Love Life* to see the latest incarnation of the form.

Or, has form become formula? That's the thought that streaks in uninvited as one sat at the Walnut Street, watching the careful and intelligent work unfold and wondering why it was all so lackluster; yes, so startling and surprisingly dull. Then, as the next comment song comes predictably into view,



Sam Cooper (Richard Muenz) extols the pleasures of the single life in "This is the Life" at the AMTF. Photo: Mark Garvin.

it hits you: *Cabaret* is twenty-five years old, *Follies* nearly twenty, and *Pippin* and *Chicago* are right up there. The AMTF production of *Love Life* may be the very model of a slick, modern concept musical, but the overworked models are now far from modern and, indeed, are looking decidedly yellow at their edges. Their boldest technique and most primary hallmark – the comment song – is now commonplace. Much like the "dream ballet," the comment song has become a tool of musical comedy technology which, through overuse, has lost its power to ignite true theatrical bonfires. The plain, hard truth is that by the time the newly

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minted emcee and his ensemble have gone through the paces of "Progress," we begin to suspect that progress itself may have done its own number on both *Love Life* and its imitators.

As for improvements, the notion of gathering all the vaudeville comment songs around one character turns out not to have been a very good one, at least as flatly written by Thomas Babe (hired in good, if mistaken, faith to provide "additional book materials") and routinely played by Neil Ben Ari. Perhaps if the character had more definition – a kind of outlandish Uncle Sam, who becomes grossly decadent as economic progress and materialism become ever more the American demigod; a figure of ever-advancing greed, who corrupts idealized, bucolic America – then it might work. But Babe's and Ben-Ari's Swank, costumed as a clown to no particular effect, remains just an emcee, simply a narrator. He gains no weight from sequence to sequence, there is no change in the temperature readings when he appears; he keeps reappearing in the same clown outfit to do another number with the same choristers in the same sequin jackets executing the same Fossesque didoes.

Just as we are about to give up the ghost on *Love Life* once and for all, something begins to cook in a most unexpected quarter. The leading man, Richard Muenz (Sam Cooper), cast in the role originally played by the conventionally stalwart Ray Middleton, is behaving in a most outrageous fashion. While tossing lines to the right and left (many of them landing big laughs that arise seemingly from nowhere), playing directly to the audience, and singing up a storm of personal intensity, Muenz doesn't seem to be the least bit interested in Sam Cooper or the situations the so-called "book scenes" place him in. Indeed, he is so at odds with the blandness of the production that one wonders if he is trashing the show and trying to distance himself from its proceedings.

Muenz is not a clown exactly, certainly not in the way we think of zanies such as Bert Lahr or Phil Silvers. There is nothing outside or bizarre about him; indeed he looks perfectly orthodox, even button-down square. But there's an air of impropriety about him, an edge, an attitude. Like Jack Haley or Larry Blyden, he's a straight-man clown, a high-definition performer; he takes chances and, in the risk, finds his sparkle.

Whatever he is, he jolts the show to life whenever he's on stage, winning all his legitimate laughs and plenty of illegitimate ones as well. Since he has precisely the right

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persona for the American prototype that the role requires, as well as a big, full-throttle baritone that does justice to all the songs that come his way, Muenz is in control of the evening.

In pointed contrast to Muenz's highwire antics, leading lady Debbie Shapiro plugs steadily away at playing Susan Cooper as if she were a character with a "through line," a construct built upon physiological behavior rather than performing opportunities. For all her diligent efforts, the rewards are skimpy; she wins laughs in the foolproof bedroom scene, but misses the wry humor of "Mister Right." She pumps the necessary steam into "Women's Club Blues" but forgets to wink; there's no charm, no glitter, no insinuation; the number – and the performance – come off too dead in earnest, angry, and tough.

What's happened here? Shapiro plays *Love Life* legit, in the style of the modern concept musical we all thought it was. Whatever its shortcomings, it's a responsible performance. It just may happen to be, surprisingly, the wrong one. Perhaps Muenz was unhappy with Barry Harmon's limp direction and just cut out on his own. On opening night his shenanigans were still tentative, as if he were still finding his way. But when I revisited the show at closing, his "way" had become a wide swath that cut right through the safe blandness of the production around him. He was giving the kind of outrageous performance that you immediately think needs to be reigned in until you realize that its insidiousness is exactly what the material demands. Muenz plays the show as if it were a big 1940s revue, offering just the sort of larger-than-life, star performance that was the cornerstone of those shows, something that has nothing to do with character and everything to do with charm and plain old pizzazz.

Muenz's success and Shapiro's counterpointed failure finally show us that Susan and Sam are perhaps not "real" characters and may never have been intended as such. They are archetypes who need to be performed with authentic stars standing beside them rather than honest actors trying to get inside them; the bonding we make then is not so much to Susan and Sam as to the winning personalities who play them.

Ironically, in a twist of cross-casting, Muenz affirms in 1990 something about the true nature of *Love Life* that, in retrospect, Nanette Fabray may have known in 1948. Like Muenz, she stole the show. Fabray is a performer, not an actress, and she was not well-matched with her director, Elia Kazan, who was an actor's man. Kazan's forte was the well-made, naturalistic play, and no one directed them better. But, clearly, he was not comfortable with the heightened colors of the musical stage. It's a pretty safe bet that he directed *Love Life*'s book scenes as if they were outtakes from an Arthur Miller domestic drama, or, at the very least, snippets from a Rodgers and Hammerstein Americana

just held her own alongside Phil Silvers in *High Button Shoes*, no easy task. *Love Life* was her bid for major musical comedy stardom, and she probably figured early in rehearsal that playing the show as if it were *Bloomer Girl* wasn't going to accomplish much. She must have realized that the material required the kind of personal charm and "in one" clowning that is fundamental to the revue. So she doubtless struck out on her own and scored a tremendous personal triumph. Whatever the actual politics, you can be sure she didn't end up on the covers of national magazines and with a Tony award at season's end by acting some non-entity labeled Susan Cooper. Fabray landed in the winner's circle by playing a vaudeville (read revue) called *Love Life* to the hilt. Her co-star and colleagues may have been doing a musical play in all its detail and nuance but Fabray (like Muenz) played a big Broadway revue for all its outrageous theatricality and vivid colors.

Indeed, after all has been said and done, isn't *Love Life* really an ultra-sophisticated – that is, more orderly and intellectually coherent – spin on the theme revues of the period? Aren't its brethren *Make Mine Manhattan* or *Inside USA*, shows that took the tenor of the times as a peg board for their songs and sketches? The great revues display the American musical in its purest, most authentically theatrical form. In their native habitat, revues were wild and outlandish things with tough-minded satire and brightly colored streaks of meanness right down their middles. We have largely forgotten this because the revue was the first theater form to be domesticated by television. Those early TV shows with Milton Berle and Red Skelton were still called revues ("The Admiral Broadway Revue"), and they even retained a wild, irreverent tone. By the mid-fifties they had become variety shows, bland and tame.

In the forties, Broadway was alive with sharp and witty revues which featured great performers. Indeed, at the time of *Love Life*, the theme revue was much in vogue with big hits like the socially conscious *Call Me Mister* and the satirical *Inside USA*. It's no stretch then to imagine that this is what Lerner and Weill had in mind or at least a highly advanced version thereof.

Certainly Lerner and Weill's notes support such a notion. In the often-reproduced Platonistic dialogue between collaborators that served as the show's introductory piece in *The New York Times*, the authors refer to the scenes as sketches ("the sketches and vaudeville acts have a continuity that supplement each other," and "one sketch is a musical play, one is an American ballad . . ."). Again, in the original program, the authors noted:



Nanette Fabray invites the October 1948 readers of *Look* to see her as Susan Cooper in the world premiere of *Love Life*. Photo: Bob Sandberg.

homily. Photographs of the original production suggest little directorial flair or style; everything looks tidy and flat, like musical domestic drama. (In the great minstrel show sequence, the company is sitting on chairs!) Indeed, Kazan has probably always been the fly in *Love Life*'s ointment.

If Muenz got away from his director (Harmon was certainly working in the Kazan tradition), Fabray must have bolted from Kazan in the same way. Fabray knew about revue (she first arrived on Broadway in one called *Meet the People*), and she certainly knew what clowns were all about; she had

"The sketches . . . are presented in the physical style of the various periods . . . the vaudeville acts which come between each sketch are presented in a vaudeville pattern." Sketch would appear to be the operative word, not scene. Scenes are the building blocks of musical plays, but sketches are the stuff of revues.

The score, too, is replete with revue-like set pieces: "I Remember It Well" isn't much of a "book" song (it worked better as one in *Gigi*). You can better imagine it as a self-contained routine for two stars of "opposite" colors (try Bert Lahr and Nancy Walker). "Green Up Time" has no particular tie to the Coopers and could easily serve as a lavish production number, a feature of all revues. Revue is precisely what *Love Life* was all about until Kazan got into the act and domesticated it.

So, although *Love Life* introduced many techniques of the modern concept musical, it isn't one itself, even in the raw. It doesn't need clammy tinkering and adjustments to its "book." In the right hands, the show's sketches ("book scenes" if you must) play wonderfully in high revue style. So fie on all those who would "update" *Love Life*, who would *Cabaretize* or *Pippinize* it, who try to manufacture "through lines" and "points of crisis" and other such dramaturgical niceties for the Coopers. All *Love Life* needs is its jazzier, nastier numbers restored (namely "The Locker Room" and "You Understand Me So"), some adjustment to its Act Two musical profile, and two stars in tandem with a director who understands revue.

So one goes home from Philadelphia grateful to one performer who, probably in frustration, ends up offering a plausible answer to the whole puzzle of *Love Life*. When Muenz is on-stage, one feels the raw intelligence and boldness of Weill's and Lerner's genuine innovation – the creative spirit of one of the few truly original works ever fashioned for the American musical stage. For the rest of it, you can't help but play a little game of time-warp casting: Nanette Fabray and Richard Muenz in *Love Life*. Now that would be – or, might have been – something great to see.

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trusive while Mr. Kapilow's flailing left-hand (a signal for the singers to speed up) seemed more apt for hailing a cab than sensitive conducting. The musical cuts in the overture (the central fugue) as well as one in the "Women's Club Blues" (one of the verses) were both lamentable. With Kapilow at the wheel, the journey through the score was a speedy ride; the first act occupied just over an hour and the second just under (at its 1948 opening *Love Life* clocked in at over three-and-a-half hours!).

The concluding Minstrel Show, where the worlds of vaudeville and the Cooper's mar-

*Love Life* is Weill's most ambitious Broadway work; with an orchestral score running 738 pages, it represents a conundrum of possibilities and problems which the American Music Theater Festival deserves credit for tackling. Without taking a slavish approach to any of the versions of the original, artistic director Eric Salzman and director Barry Harman sought new answers for a work fraught with strong musical and dramatic contrasts. Although many of the new ideas were certainly workable, some of *Love Life*'s inherent appositions were lost by the misguided attempt to integrate the conceptually disparate elements of the show. Rather than exploiting these differences, the production seemed bent on showing the importance of



Neil Ben-Ari as Swank leads the Illusion Ensemble in the American Musical Theater's production of *Love Life*. Photo: Mark Garvin.

riage meet, provided a satisfying climax to the show. This extended sequence, which conceptually borrows from the "Circus Dream" of *Lady in the Dark*, began with the duet "Madame Zuzu," sung wonderfully by Betsy Ann Leadbetter (Miss Horoscope) and Kathryn Kendall (Miss Mysticism) – it seemed oddly topical considering America's former first lady's fascination with this "science." In the next illusion, "Takin' No Chances on Nuthin'," Michael McCoy (Mr. Cynic) delivered a caustic parody of a country western singer. The final illusion, "Miss Ideal Man," mocked 19th-century, self-indulgent vocal exhibitionism with a somewhat androgynous-appearing personage (Maureen McNamara), who agilely negotiated the extravagant coloratura. The concluding image of Sam and Susan beginning a marital tightrope walk to meet each other "half way" concluded the show, again without an illusion of the risk so crucial to the metaphor.

*Love Life* in the evolution of later "concept musicals" by grafting aspects of these shows onto the Weill-Lerner collaboration: most of the choreography resembled *Pippin* or *Dancin'*, the costumes for the male ensemble looked as if they had been borrowed from the finale of *A Chorus Line*, while the character Swank resembled the emcee from *Cabaret* re-costumed. All of these foreign elements appeared as poor imitations of their originals masquerading in a context where they clearly could not belong. The audience, which left the theater humming tunes from the score, had most certainly been awakened to the richness and bold originality of what the authors termed a "vaudeville musical." However, in the landscape of critical discourse and popularity of Weill's mature works, *Love Life* remains a sleeping giant.



# Lucy's Aria in *Die Dreigroschenoper* -- A Problem of Environment

by Christopher Shaw

Without knowing anything about the genesis of "Lucy's Aria" and why it was taken out of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, it is easy to see that it is rather different from much else in that work. It parodies the grand manner of the late eighteenth-century operatic vocal *scena*, but one difference between the aria and the other songs is that, here, much of the text is either a literal translation or a paraphrase of Gay's words, and not an original lyric by Brecht. The parody is straight and direct, without any of the oblique associations which are thrown up elsewhere by what one might describe as a technique of cross-pollination of varied musical idioms and poetic images, which do so much to give *Die Dreigroschenoper* its flavor.

Lucy's conflicting emotions are presented through a series of easily recognizable musical motifs and characteristic gestures drawn from the opera repertoire of the late eighteenth century. Weill adds his personal touch with some characteristically swift side-steps in harmony – he is capable of such conjuring tricks as a transposition of the opening motif down a semitone from tonic minor to the leading note, which sounds as if the phrase were being transposed up, followed by an upward transposition to the supertonic which sounds as if it were going down, and all in the space of fifteen bars! Otherwise, he leaves his chosen formulas mostly untouched, although he pulls off another conjuring trick by compressing into one both the introductory accompanied recitative, with which nearly all eighteenth-century *scenas* begin, and the final allegro, with which they nearly all end. It is only when the "rage" aria is over that the audience might realize that it had been listening to a precis rather than a full-blown copy.

"Might realize" is the operative phrase here, because the aria was cut and is seldom heard in most productions of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. In an article in *Die Musik*, Weill gave some typically brief and practical reasons for removing it, but its excision may have been due to more than the mere fact that the sort of singer he wanted for it was not available; otherwise, why not restore it when the right singer did turn up? The decision to cut it was taken before he had orchestrated it, which implies that there was little time before the opening night, and might suggest that somewhere along the line he and Brecht had realized that this simple, though effective, send-up of operatic convention did not belong to the same family as its companions.

Although the eighteenth-century *scena* is a highly formal and disciplined musical structure, and therefore might be termed "classi-

cal," the sensibility expressed therein is much closer to the spirit of the Romantic movement in its preoccupation with personal emotions and reactions which exclude all other considerations at the moment when those emotions are given expression. Even if the range of emotion is wide, it is, in a sense, one-dimensional. The extent of communication, though, depends on the extent to which the author (or the composer) identifies his own emotions with those of the characters, thereby inviting his readers or spectators to do the same, and "feel with" rather than "feel for" the characters or situations. This approach does not permit that distancing of the spectator from the matter in hand which can lead to the sudden evocation of unexpected, often disconcerting, associations and images in his own mind. If, at first sight these images may seem to be almost independent of the subject under scrutiny, they naturally exercise a powerful influence upon the spectator's reactions to the subject. Lucy's sense of rage and distress is, in this respect, simple in comparison with the terrifying dreams and fantasies revealed to us by Jenny, in what is ostensibly a simpler kind of musical composition. It is unlikely that the nightmarish vision of "the ship with eight sails" would be able to scare as it does if the musical treatment had been similar to that employed for Lucy. The fright we get from Jenny comes not from herself but from those images awakened in us by her words and her notes, set as they are in those "heartless," "detached" patterns. We may think, "What a beastly girl!" after she has finished, as opposed to "Poor old Lucy!," but our revulsion is all the sharper because the emotional distance between protagonist and spectator catches us off our guard and opens up a whole field of fears and fantasies within ourselves.

Perhaps one should not speculate whether the authors' concept of the work altered as they progressed with it, but one may wonder if the initial concept may not have been for something rather simpler than what finally emerged, a work perhaps where straightforward, parodistic send-ups might have formed the basis for both text and music. Could Weill, as he wrote more and more of the music, have sensed that it demanded a different kind of creative approach from that required by pure parody? Furthermore, even if he had intended at first to write a parody for Lucy, and no matter how ironic his attitude may have been before he started work, could he have found when he did write it that he was having to adopt the same emotional attitude and approach towards the object of his satire as did the original writers of the real thing?

The most successful parodists have always been those who do not just stand back and

laugh at whatever they are making fun of, but who are capable of adopting the approach and thought-processes required to produce a genuine, "serious" specimen. In literature, Lewis Carroll's "Hiawatha's Photographing" does not merely sound like Longfellow but thinks like Longfellow, and one might ask how many people would have spotted the joke if a mischievous printer had slipped Henry Reed's "Chard Whitlow" into one of T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets." An artist like Weill could easily have found himself respecting his model in this way while sensing, maybe only subconsciously, that this approach was fundamentally at variance not only with the particular work in hand but with his own greatest strength as a dramatic artist, namely his ability to distance himself, and thus his audience, through the ironic use of musical idioms which may not seem at first to have much to do with either the time, the setting, the situations, or the personalities with which he is dealing. It is this "classical" approach which often makes him appear to be direct when actually he is very far from being so. The demands, however, of a genre such as the dramatic *scena* had begun by the late eighteenth century to require another kind of gift, one where the artist must not only appear, but be, and remain direct all the time. If the sheer quality of Mozart's musical invention is his greatest achievement, the directness with which he approaches any dramatic subject or character is hardly less important, and it is the combination which makes his operatic scenes so powerful.

Mozart's music is, of course, the model for "Lucy's Aria," and the precise model in Mozart would appear to be Donna Elvira's "In quali eccessi, o Numi," in Act 2 of *Don Giovanni*. There are several parallels to be drawn, the most obvious being that both Elvira and Lucy have been seduced and abandoned. Both cry out for vengeance, Elvira wishing it to fall on her betrayer, and Lucy on her rival. The closest similarity of all is found between the opening descending flourish in Weill's aria and the precipitate downward rush of the first and second violins in unison when Elvira "sees" the thunderbolt of retribution hurtling down upon Don Giovanni ("Sentir già parmi la fatale saetta . . ."). It is not necessary to suppose that Weill would have had to look this up, like a composer hunting for someone else's theme for a set of variations; nor need he have thought of it consciously. Indeed, the spontaneity of his opening might bear witness to a subconscious memory rising to the surface in response to the idea of vengeance plummeting downward. He could easily have written the phrase first and only remembered later from where it actually came.

Whatever its origins, this phrase is the key to the riddle of how to score this piece. Unless his intention had been to write a rather weird and disconcerting backing to the voice part, it is much more likely that the entire song was conceived in terms of string orchestra accompaniment alone. In other words, having found he had to "respect" his model in the way I have suggested, he carried that respect beyond the use of a few simple motifs and clothed his parodistic homage in the same orchestral dress which his model (one of the great heroes!) would have used.

If this theory is correct, every problem of orchestration is readily solved. The opening phrase is played by 1st and 2nd violins in unison, just as in Mozart. The violas are divided for the C and A-flat quavers of the accompaniment, and the cellos and basses take care of the bottom line. In bar 5, the violins play *divisi* octaves, and the only slight problem to be settled is the best instrumental assignment for the four-note chords in the treble on the third beats of bars 2 and 4. The tremolo at the *meno mosso* represents pure dramatic string music; one might omit the double-basses in this section, and bring them back at the return of Tempo I. The remaining decision concerns the rising scales leading to the climax under Lucy's "Hier!" The simplest solution is probably the best, i.e. to allow the 1st and 2nd violins to continue playing in unison. The only argument against it would be that the final note of each scale might sound a bit isolated, placed so far above the accompaniment (especially in the final scale which ends on a high F). One solution would be to give the 2nd violins a chain of repeated on-the-line "G"s in the same rhythm as the lower strings for the four final scales on C, D, E, and F which come between Lucy's last sung or spoken lines. Once this remaining question is settled, it only requires a copyist to write out a score.

The possibility that a string orchestra was intended here raises several tantalizing questions. First, did Weill ever plan to have a conventional string section as the basis for *Die Dreigroschenoper* with, perhaps, wind, brass, and percussion in some numbers? Second, when did he discover that was not going to work for the kind of music he was writing? Third, were the songs conceived from the start in terms of a theater band, and did the musical ideas occur to him with their orchestral dress already on, as Verdi said his ideas came to him? Fourth, once the complement of the band had been virtually settled, did he reject "Lucy's Aria" because it would be as pointless (and difficult) to transcribe a piece written for one kind of orchestra into another, as it would be to expect a dozen string players to rush into the orchestra pit for this aria alone? Finally, did he suspect that, even with the right singer, his "Tombeau de Mozart" really belonged to another world, one where his own creative temperament only allowed him to be a visitor but not a permanent inhabitant?

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Above: Excerpt from "Lucy's Aria" by Kurt Weill. © Copyright 1972 by Lotte Lenya-Weill. Used by permission.

Below: Excerpt from "In quali eccessi, o Numi," Act II, *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Christopher Shaw, British composer and accompanist, is the translator, with his wife Jean Shaw, of various operas and operettas.



## Kurt Weill in Israel

*Editor's Note: This report is compiled by Margaret Sherry from information and press reports provided by Mr. & Mrs. W. Goldwasser of West Galilee. The Goldwassers have organized many Weill-related events locally and maintain a large collection of books and recordings.*

The fortieth anniversary of Kurt Weill's death on 3 April 1950 did not go unnoticed in Israel. On 6 April 1990 Eberhard Otto published a feature article about Weill entitled "Ein Pfahl im Fleisch der Gesellschaft: vor vierzig Jahren starb Kurt Weill" in the *Israel Nachrichten*. This article demonstrates familiarity with the basic outline of Weill's career, although it simply reiterates the stock European prejudice against Weill's American music, stressing instead the importance of his role in his German period as a thorn in the flesh of the bourgeoisie. Not to underestimate Weill's success at assimilating to his New World home, Otto does add that the 1945 premiere of *Down in the Valley* should be remembered as an unusually convincing reflection of the Americanization of a refugee artist.

Several other events of the 1990 season in Israel helped to celebrate this Weill-anniversary year. Gottfried Wagner, great grandson of Richard Wagner, delivered a lecture to the Music Department at Tel Aviv University entitled "Das antiwagnerianische musikalische Zeittheater von Weill und Brecht" on 8 January 1990. The Herzliya Chamber Orchestra presented four performances of *Der Jasager* between 17 and 24 February. In mid-March Adi El Zion Zak, who several years earlier had presented a program entitled "Homage to Kurt Weill," did a show called "Evil Loves: Songs by Kurt Weill." One of the less successful revivals of the season, however, was the film *Mack the Knife*, Menahem Golan's adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera*, which closed after only

a week in a Tel Aviv movie house. A critic in one of the local papers apparently entitled her review "Not Worth the Price of the Ticket."

### Gottfried Wagner

Gottfried Wagner's lecture represented a milestone in German-Jewish relations, particularly with reference to the traditional lack of reception of his great grandfather's music in Israel. The lecture hall was filled to capacity for all four of the Wagner-related lectures



Albert and Emma Weill soak up the morning sun outside their home in Naharia, Palestine.

he presented. Due to the coverage given them in the press, the German embassy, which had initially ignored his visit, found time to arrange a dinner for him before his departure. Wagner's approach to the Weill-Brecht collaborations was of special interest because of his book *Weill und Brecht: das musikalische Theater* (Kindler, 1977).

### Der Jasager

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, the Herzliya Chamber Orchestra's production of *Der Jasager*, based upon the fifteenth-century Japanese Noh drama *Taniko*, was its

way of saying "Noh" to dull programming. The production relied successfully upon the style of traditional Noh theater for its staging, costumes, and scenery. Musical director Harvey Bordowitz combined this attractive aesthetic with a biblical one, emphasizing in the program the relation of Weill's "school opera" to the story of Isaac. The review in the paper *Ma'ariv* called attention indeed to the relevance of the opera to all myths of child sacrifice, but the Old Testament connection received especially powerful reinforcement in Ada Brodsky's Hebrew translation. Yet the further parallels to the political situation in Germany drawn in the program at the opera's world premiere in 1930 called the listener's attention to "the horror released by the yes-sayers just a few short years later."

Weill's thirty-five-minute school opera was presented as the second half of a concert which also included works by Sibelius and Janáček. Critics were evidently unfamiliar with the style appropriate to Brecht's "Lehrstücke," because they complained about the monotony and static nature of the production, while nevertheless enjoying the music. Seen from another angle, however, this reaction suggests that Weill's German works are experiencing a more accurate interpretation than was previously the case. According to press clippings, the New Israel Opera's 1987 production in Tel Aviv of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, for instance, was too traditionally opulent in style, thus removing the satirical bite this 1929 epic opera was intended to have. Only slightly more successful past productions have included those of the three works, *Das Berliner Requiem*, the first "Pantomime" from *Der Protagonist*, and *Die sieben Todsünden*, presented at the 1985 Israel Festival in Jerusalem by Mendi Rodan and the Israel Sinfonietta Beer-Sheva with David Alden as the director. The staging of the *Requiem* successfully emphasized the tragedy of war, gangster attacks, and ethnic conflict, but what should have been a very funny resolution of plot in the "Pantomime" was dissipated by letting the actors run into the audience as they vocalized their "Ah's" and "Oh's."

## Weill Visits Palestine in 1947

It was perhaps something of a coincidence that the 21 February performance of *Der Jasager* was given in Naharia, the town in which Kurt Weill's parents and his eldest brother Nathan settled upon emigrating from Germany before World War II. Weill visited them there in 1947. Hannelore Marom-Bergman, the daughter of his older brother Nathan, who had also settled in the area, writes from Haifa about having seen her uncle at that time:

In the early summer of 1947 my uncle Kurt Weill arrived in what was then Palestine, mainly to visit his aging parents, his brother and his brother's family in Naharia, a small settlement in the north of the country, bordering Lebanon.

We brought him straight home from the airport. His presence in Naharia created great excitement, since most of the settlers there were of German origin and hence knew his music. A big reception was arranged by the town mayor to which everyone was invited. Weill stayed for about one week and then left for Rehovot to visit Chaim Weizman, soon to become the first president of Israel. As far as I can recollect, this visit was arranged by Meyer Weisgal, a friend of Ben Hecht, who wanted to express his gratitude to the composer for writing the music to *A Flag*



The Palestine Symphony Orchestra attends to the words of Kurt Weill in Tel Aviv in June, 1947.



Kurt Weill's parents and their neighbors spend an afternoon together in Naharia, Palestine.

*is Born*. He hoped to get him to contribute to further support for the new Jewish state. Weill was also the guest of the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra, where his orchestration of "Hatikvah" was played in his honor.

After traveling to Jerusalem as the guest of the Hebrew University, Weill returned to Naharia for a few more days. We took him on several side trips to Haifa and various other settlements and kibbutzim. I remember how thrilled he was to see the greenness of the country which he had imagined to be more like a desert, bare of trees and other vegetation.

After a twelve-day stay he returned via London and Paris to the USA.

A photograph on this page shows Weill addressing the Palestine Philharmonic. His orchestration of the Israeli national anthem "Hatikvah" was first performed in the United States on 25 November 1947, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky, as part of a concert given at a testimonial dinner on the occasion of Chaim Weizmann's 73rd birthday.