

Kurt Weill

Volume 19

Number 2

Fall 2001

Newsletter

*Lady
in the
Dark*

Revivals in Philadelphia and
Palermo

Feature article: "*Lady in the Dark*,
Gertrude Lawrence, and *Star!*"

Moss Hart biography reviewed



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Kurt Weill

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The Newsletter is published to provide an open forum wherein interested readers may express a variety of 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.

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The cover photo of Gertrude Lawrence is drawn from the souvenir program for *Lady in the Dark*, 1941.

Lady in the Dark

The glamorous 1941 musical
by Moss Hart, Ira Gershwin
and Kurt Weill


Starring
Andrea Marcovicci
"The Callas of
Cabaret"
-The Philadelphia Inquirer

HELD OVER THROUGH OCTOBER 21

September 29–October 14 2001
at the Prince Music Theater

This glamorous and triumphant musical will kick off our new season and will feature Prince favorite Andrea Marcovicci in the lead role of Liza Elliot, the editor of a fashion magazine who finds herself struggling with indecision about her work and the three men in her life. In three extravagant dream sequences, Liza relives and reinvents her past, emerging from the process with a new sense of balance and discovering her true inner self.

Our production will feature an orchestra of 20 and a cast of 22 singers and dancers, bringing to life what is perhaps Kurt Weill's brightest and most lyrical Broadway score, with some of the sharpest and wittiest lyrics Ira Gershwin ever wrote.



TEATRO MASSIMO STAGIONE 2001
OPERE E BALLETTI

LADY IN THE DARK

Libretto di Moss Hart
Liriche di Ira Gershwin
Musica di Kurt Weill



Personaggi
Liza Elliot
Randy Curtis
Sammy Pastore
Charley Johnson
Miss Frazier
Maggie Grant
Erendell Nesbit
Alison De Basi
Dr. Bravdo
Miss Stevens

Interpreti
Raina Kabaivanika (19, 21, 24, 26, 28, 29 aprile) Susan Daniel (19, 21, 27 aprile)
Gino Quilico (19, 21, 24, 26, 28, 29 aprile) Christopher Schuman (19, 21, 27 aprile)
Ulrich Schnel (19, 21, 24, 26, 28, 29 aprile) Markon Braun (19, 21, 27 aprile)
Victoria Leubsdorfer
Julia Winkle
Clara Zaslavskoff
Federico Pacifici
Mirella Lo Sardo
Emilio Dato Conti
Piera Formisani

Director
Regia
Collaboratore alle scene
Direttore Ensemble male
"I Solti di Operadivano" Fabio Ciulla
Coreografi
Sena
Cantanti
Luca

Steven Mercatoro
Giorgio Marini
Suzuki Hagan
Micha van Hoelke
Matti Pavia
Lena Cossani
Elena Ciccarella
Renata Ciulla

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E PICCOLI DANZATORI DEL TEATRO MASSIMO
PALERMO 19-29 APRILE 2001

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TEATRO MASSIMO
FONDAZIONE

Note from the Editor

"It seems so silly to write music at a time like this," Kurt Weill wrote during a dark hour of world history in 1941. As I assume the new editorship of the *Kurt Weill Newsletter*, it seems similarly difficult to find a perspective for this publication in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and their still unforeseeable ramifications. Weill was a composer—the kind of composer who reacted seismographically to his time and tackled such unlikely issues as the holocaust, war, and racism. It is tempting to speculate how he might have responded to the events of September 11. Would he have set another Whitman poem to music, or commissioned a suitable text? Would he have made an even stronger plea for religious and ethnic tolerance? Would he have created or reworked some patriotic music suitable for concerts that currently program either Beethoven or Copland/Gershwin/Bernstein?

Music has played more than just a decorative role in these past days and weeks. Many concerts were scheduled and programs changed in order to offer people consolation, stimulation, distraction, or simply time for reflection. Therefore, it does not seem only fair that we continue to engage with music, it seems essential. That we do so with the works of Kurt Weill is because they continue to have a bearing on our time—not simply because they are still performed regularly.

Whereas some composers' centennials produce a tidal wave of performances and publications that rapidly recedes when the celebration ends, the interest in Weill has kept its momentum. Recent productions of *Street Scene* by the English National Opera and Houston Grand Opera have been recreated in Chicago and Minneapolis this year. More importantly, *Lady in the Dark*, a unique show that many directors and conductors have tiptoed around for some time, has received two important productions, among the most significant since the original production closed in 1943. Two reviews will provide a picture for those who couldn't attend and may bring new insights for those who did. A new biography of Moss Hart is reviewed, and last but by no means least, our feature article sheds more light on the genesis of *Lady in the Dark*, in addition to revealing a most peculiar piece of reception history.

Elmar Juchem

Art Imitating Life Imitating Art: *Lady in the Dark*, Gertrude Lawrence, and *Star!*

by
bruce d. mcclung

Overture

The art of Moss Hart often imitated life. Frequently it was the lives of others that provided the idea for a new play. The havoc that the talkies were causing among film actors became the basis for *Once in a Lifetime* (1930), Hart's first play with George S. Kaufman. Featuring a trio of vaudevillians who travel to Hollywood and pass themselves off as elocution experts, *Once in a Lifetime* was a world far removed from Hart's orbit, but the story successfully skewered Hollywood's studio system and made Kaufman-and-Hart a household name. Alexander Woollcott's demanding visit to Hart's country retreat produced headaches for the host but subsequently inspired *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1939). Kaufman and Hart built their play around an egomaniac radio personality who becomes indisposed and is made a semi-permanent houseguest of an unsuspecting Midwest couple. Lest anyone miss the caricature, the playwrights dedicated their comedy to Woollcott, who even played himself for the production's West Coast tour.

Other times it was Kaufman's and Hart's personal lives that provided theatrical fodder. For *Once in a Lifetime*, Kaufman played the role of Lawrence Vail, a famed Broadway playwright bankrolled by Hollywood who finds himself grossly underutilized. After Kaufman tired of playing himself eight times a week, Hart, flush with newfound fame, stepped into the role. The playwrights were not above inserting their own thoughts into the mouths of their characters. For *The Great Waltz* (1934), an adaptation of a Viennese operetta, Hart (whose spending was legendary) had the young Johann Strauss declare:

I want to spend. . . I want to know how it feels to go to Doumayers for tea and buy an enormous overcoat, maybe fur-lined and with an astrakhan collar, and pay for my tickets to concerts, and have a carriage perhaps. With three horses . . . just to *have it*.¹

For their last collaboration, *George Washington Slept Here* (1940), Kaufman and Hart drew on their experiences of remodeling country homes in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

When Hart struck out on his own, his experience on the psychoanalyst's couch provided the inspiration for what began as "I Am Listening," but ended up as *Lady in the Dark* (1941). The working title paid tribute to Dr. Lawrence S. Kubie, Hart's psychiatrist, who also received the work's dedication. The inspiration for the title character likely came from a paper that Kubie had presented in 1932 for the American Psychoanalytic Association. "Transvestitism in a Teen-Age Girl" recounted Kubie's analysis of a fifteen-year-old girl who wore riding breeches and boots during the day and formal ball gowns at night. The alternating rhythm of masculine and feminine states matches the heroine of Hart's play: Liza Elliott sports business suits at the office but finds herself donning elegant gowns for her dreams. Because the girl's family ended the analysis prematurely, Kubie never published the paper and may have offered up the case study for Hart's new play.

That said, Liza Elliott is no teenager. Instead she resembles Hart: both are in their late thirties and at the height of their careers. Each success, however, plunges them into depression instead of expected fulfillment. Playwright and character both suffer from insomnia and turn to psychiatry for treatment. The dramatization of the psychoanalytic process metaphorically took Hart off the couch and put him into the psychiatrist's chair for the character in his play. For this he turned to the doctor's 1936 primer, *Practical Aspects of Psychoanalysis: A Handbook for Prospective Patients and Their Advisors*.² Everything from the placement of the analyst's chair, cost and frequency of the sessions, and a trial analysis to the Freudian terminology of free association, biographical analysis, and transference leapt off the pages of Kubie's handbook and into Hart's play. Once *Lady in the Dark* was on the boards, its autobiographical aspects were underscored by Hart's collaborator Kurt Weill: "Moss can only write about himself."³

It would now appear that most of the antecedents for *Lady in the Dark* have been brought to light: a musical play inspired by Hart's own experience with psychoanalysis in general and the process of free association in particular.⁴ In *Lady in the Dark* when Liza lies on the couch to speak whatever comes to mind, the exercise launches a dream sequence. The drama drew on the classic Freudian dilemma of a woman choosing between three men, representing the roles of father, lover, and husband. The manifestation of the woman's psychosis is a mild form of gender dysphoria, perhaps inspired by Kubie's teenage patient. The basis of such cross-gendering was fully explored in the doctor's last published article in which *Lady in the Dark* became a case study for "The Drive to Become Both Sexes."⁵ What will be explored here is the extent to which Gertrude Lawrence influenced the musical play and, in turn, the various ways in which *Lady in the Dark* affected its star.

Act I: Art Imitating Life

Although Hart was well into the first act when she entered the picture, protracted negotiations with Lawrence had a significant bearing on *Lady in the Dark*. They created a drama all their own because Hart had promised the starring role to Katharine Cornell. What ultimately prevented Cornell from playing the lady in the dark was the addition of music. As Hart prepared to begin writing, there was some confusion over just how much music the new play might contain. The *New York Times* announced, "Moss Hart Play Will Have Songs." The story mentioned that Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin would contribute incidental music, but cautioned that, in Hart's own words, it was "definitely not a musical comedy."⁶ Weill evidently intervened, because two days later the *Times* retracted: "Moss Hart, author of 'I Am Listening,' explained yesterday that Kurt Weill's score for his new play could not be classified as 'incidental music.' His contribution and Mr. Weill's are of equal importance to the production."⁷ With the play properly announced, Hart retired to Fairview Farm to begin "a romantic story of a woman's failure," then still envisioned for Katharine Cornell.

Hart was able to sustain the drama for the sessions in the doctor's office, but the brittle repartee of the Kaufman-and-Hart canon crept into the scenes at the fashion magazine, *Allure*. As was his fashion, Hart based his characters on members of New York's café society. For Alison Du Bois, *Allure's* daffy columnist, Hart lampooned the fashion editor for *Harper's Bazaar*. Diana Vreeland's column "Why Don't You . . ." ("Why don't you . . . rinse your blond child's hair in dead champagne?") became Alison's "Why Not" brainstorm ("Why not save your champagne corks and use them to tie back the curtains on your sun porch?").⁸ To make sure the audience got the parody *before* the line was delivered, Hattie Carnegie dressed the character in Vreeland's signature red with a rash of necklaces. The actress who played the part, Natalie Schafer, had some difficulty with her character, so Carnegie invited her to meet the editor personally. Schafer recalled that Vreeland

wore at least a dozen necklaces and clips and brooches, most of them junk jewelry. She walked through Miss Carnegie's home with her lower body slung forward, saying as she entered each room, "It's divine! SIMP-ly divine!" in a half British, half dead-end accent.⁹

Hart traveled to Philadelphia at the end of March to share with Cornell the progress of his play. On the way home, he admitted to feeling "torn between an honest desire to tell her exactly what she was letting herself in for . . . and a grave doubt as to whether she could do it."¹⁰ The following Sunday he and Kaufman attended a rehearsal for a British War Relief Party to which they were to contribute an act. Watching Gertrude Lawrence run a number, Hart realized that her talents were better suited for the role than Cornell's. After the rehearsal Hart invited Lawrence to the Plaza Hotel's Oak Room where, over beer and a snack, he outlined his new play for her. The two agreed to meet the next afternoon so she could hear some of the dialogue. Having now essentially offered the title role to two actresses, Hart reported that falling asleep that night was even more difficult than usual!

The following afternoon Hart called on Lawrence at her West 54th St. penthouse, recently done over in an "Arabian Nights" decor. The star recalled:

I invited him to my apartment to read the play and, as I had just done the thing over, I knew I could set the stage. I love to act offstage even better than on, so when Mr. Hart arrived I was at the end of a long living room gracefully posed with a throw over my knees, knitting. Despite the Cecil Beaton atmosphere, Moss Hart drew up a chair and proceeded to read, but I knew he was distracted so I just kept knitting. Finally I was so intrigued I had to put the sweater away.¹¹

After completing the reading, Hart and Lawrence chatted leisurely over tea. He remembered her reaction: "she literally *was* the part as she walked about the room talking about it."¹² Hart was poised to clinch a deal and inform Cornell of the turn of events, but

Lawrence deferred making a commitment because her astrologer had advised her not to make any important decisions until after April 7th. Frustrated, Hart returned to the farm ("cursing Gertie's astrologer all the way down to Pennsylvania") and resumed writing.¹³

Lawrence's belief in astrology gave Hart an idea. Although he had already parodied her seductiveness and egocentricity in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, he would weave astrology into *Lady in the Dark*. It could serve as a foil for the rational science of modern psychiatry and, on a purely personal level, even the score with Lawrence for putting him off. Astrology would be introduced into the plot by the wacky columnist. In Hart's original draft Alison had made references to having seen an analyst herself and taking a physic (the 1940's version of colonic irrigation); now she would extol the virtues of astrology. Once Weill and Ira Gershwin began working on the musical sequences, astrology served as the climax for the third dream sequence. Set in its first incarnation as a trial and minstrel show, the sequence climaxed with Liza's defense speech, "No Matter Under What Star You're Born." Then she and her defense attorney launched into an exhibit of the zodiac signs in order to convince the jury that her fate is in the stars ("Song of the Zodiac").¹⁴

As it turned out, Lawrence's fate wasn't in the stars. She telephoned Hart on April 6th and postponed making a decision until Noël Coward could hear the play:

But don't you see, darling. It all works out! My astrologer said to do nothing until April 7th, and I never do anything without Noël's advice. . . . You must read the play to Noël

and if he says "yes" I'll do it. It's all worked out beautifully. Bless you, darling!¹⁵

Hart "groaned as the receiver clicked." Lawrence's inability to make up her mind influenced *Lady in the Dark* even more than astrology had. This manifestation of the title character's psychosis became one of the dominant themes of Hart's play. Not only would Liza not be able to make up her mind about the men in her life, she would now show indecision at every turn, not the least of which would be choosing an upcoming cover for *Allure*. Once the whole astrology finale was scrapped, Weill and Gershwin drafted "The Saga of Jenny," a number in which Liza—and by extension, Gertie—could extol the virtues of *not* making up one's mind.

Hart's meeting with Coward had to be postponed, causing further delay. It was not until early May that he was able to entertain Coward at Fairview Farm. After Hart read his play, Coward pronounced, "Gertie ought to pay you to play it."¹⁶ A few days later Coward took Lawrence to lunch: "I wagged an authoritative finger in her face as I had so often done in the past. She shilly-shallied a bit, took refuge in irrelevancies, giggled, and finally gave in."¹⁷ Hart's problems with Lawrence were far from over: the contract was not signed until just before she went on tour with *Skylark*, her current project, in mid-July. But in the interim she had provided a host of ideas that had helped Hart through his writer's block. Not only had Lawrence informed the play as a whole, the title role now



The cover of the *Lady in the Dark* souvenir program.

fit her like a glove. Like Woolcott in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, she would be able to take center stage playing a part based on the very personality characteristics she herself possessed. The art of Moss Hart had, again, imitated life.

Act II: Life Imitating Art

What neither Hart nor Lawrence could have predicted was that the relationship between art and life would attain a reflexive quality during *Lady in the Dark's* extended run. That is, although Lawrence had first influenced the character and plot of the musical play, now *Lady in the Dark* would cast its shadow on the actress. The issue of gender dysphoria, perhaps first suggested by Kubie's teenage patient, had been integral to Hart's play from the start. Liza Elliott wears tailored business suits with no jewelry or makeup. Hart describes her office at *Allure* as "not a feminine room" with "a man's desk," large and heavy chairs, and severe curtains. From the scientific point of view, Kubie described the character as living in a "no-man's land between the sexes."¹⁸ Such a diagnosis could hardly apply to Lawrence! An active sex life propelled her through two marriages and countless affairs (the most publicized were with Captain Philip Astley and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.).

During *Lady's* second season, America's entry into World War II profoundly affected the lives of its citizens, including the cast of *Lady in the Dark*. Weill and Hart organized, produced, and wrote sketches for revues presented during lunch breaks at defense plants. In addition, both men volunteered their time as "spotters" (watching for enemy aircraft), with Weill going so far as to register for the draft and Hart drafting a musical for the Air Force. Lawrence's husband was sworn in as a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve and went on duty the day of *Lady's* first anniversary. The cast of *Lady in the Dark* inaugurated the Stage Door Canteen, and Lawrence brought the house down with her ribald "Saga of Jenny." The star herself enrolled in the first Red Cross class of the American Theatre Wing War Service and gave blood on her day off. Soon after passing the Red Cross exam, Lawrence found herself manifesting attributes of her character's gender dysphoria: sporting a masculine Red Cross uniform by day and Hattie Carnegie's feminine gowns by night.

The contrast was not lost on Lawrence's fans. One example will suffice: during *Lady's* Broadway reengagement in 1943, Lawrence participated in a benefit where actors and actresses posed for sculptors and painters. In a scene right out of the *Glamour Dream*, Lawrence's portrait did not depict her in a glamorous evening gown, but instead in her drab khaki uniform. According to a newspaper reporter:

While Gertrude Lawrence posed for Dana Gibson, one old lady turned to another and said: "A most unattractive costume for poor Gertrude, isn't it?" Evidently Miss Lawrence heard the remark because she gazed in their direction . . . then brushed a speck from her left shoulder of her Volunteer Red Cross Uniform insignia. She resumed her original pose as she raised her chin—a little higher than before.¹⁹

Lawrence was not alone in her new attire: American women working for the war effort in ordnance plants, shipyards, and airplane factories were all wearing new work clothes and challenging gender roles. The war also afforded women their first opportunity to serve as regular members of the armed forces. A 1943 *Woman's Home Companion* feature debated whether a "Rosie the Riveter" could still be glamorous.²⁰ Like her character in *Lady in the Dark*,



Gertrude Lawrence as portrayed on the cover of the playbill for *Lady in the Dark*, 1941.

Lawrence advocated for servicewomen a different form of dress in the evening:

"Do you think a man likes to dance with someone who looks like his major?" questioned Miss Lawrence; she hastened to add, "I don't! It just doesn't look right to see women in uniform at night . . . in the daytime, fine! I'm all for it, but at night men still want to see women looking sweet and feminine."²¹

The character of Liza Elliott finishes the musical play by rejecting the advances of both Kendall Nesbitt (the father figure) and Randy Curtis (the lover) and instead ends up with advertising manager Charley Johnson (the husband). Presumably content to assume the traditional role of wife, she agrees in the final minutes of the play to step aside eventually and allow Charley to run the magazine. As problematic as the ending is today (the line is often omitted), Lawrence's own departure from *Lady in the Dark* parallels the final scene. That is, Liza Elliott, a powerful magazine editor, steps down from her position to attend to her personal life. Lawrence, who, in a case of life imitating art, had spent most of *Lady's* tour having an affair with the actor playing Charley Johnson, went home to her husband. A journalist at Penn Station reported,

Getting off the next train from the west was Gertrude Lawrence, bound for Cape Cod and a six weeks' rest. . . . With *Lady in the Dark* now a happy memory, she was just a navy wife, hurrying to the Grand Central station in New York to meet her husband, Lieut. Comdr. Richard Aldrich.²²

Exit Music

The convoluted relationship between *Lady in the Dark* and its leading lady came full circle, albeit posthumously, when *Lady in the Dark* provided the central plot device for *Star!*—the 1968 biographical film about Lawrence directed by Robert Wise and starring Julie Andrews. Through a series of eerie coincidences, Andrews appears to have been destined to play Lawrence. Both Brits had a mother in show business and had gotten their start as



Julie Andrews as Gertrude Lawrence in the publicity for the Robert Wise film *Star!*, 1968.

child actors in vaudeville and pantomime. In addition, both had married in England, had one daughter, and later divorced their husbands. They were both feted as the toast of Broadway in their first American visits, Lawrence in *André Charlot's London Revue of 1924*, Andrews in *The Boy Friend* (1954). After settling in the U.S., both married American producers and played the role of Eliza Doolittle on the Great White Way: Lawrence in Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1945) and Andrews in Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady* (1956). Hart, having directed the leading ladies in *Lady in the Dark* and *My Fair Lady*, even told Julie that she reminded him of Gertie.²³

Star!'s screenplay was the brainchild of William Fairchild, who produced an original script based on various sources. He chose to follow Lawrence's rags-to-riches story from her childhood days in Clapham, England through the opening of *Lady in the Dark* (her subsequent career, which culminated with *The King and I*, was omitted). Not only did "The Saga of Jenny" serve as the dramatic climax of *Star!*, but Fairchild went so far as to graft the central plot of *Lady in the Dark* back onto Lawrence's life. That is, she became the character of Liza Elliott, unable to make up her mind about which of three men she wanted to marry after her brief first marriage. The role of Sir Anthony Spencer (modeled on Captain Astley) maps onto the Kendall Nesbitt figure. Wealthy and from a different class, he proposes marriage, but Lawrence is unable to accept (in real life Astley never proposed). The role of actor Charles Frazier (modeled on Bert Taylor, the scion of a wealthy American family) assumes the young, dashing Randy Curtis character. Finally, Richard Aldrich (Lawrence's real-life second husband) steps into the Charley Johnson part. Refusing to accept her indecisiveness, he calls her bluff and wins her heart.

The transference of *Lady in the Dark*'s plot onto Lawrence's life story became doubly reflexive with Julie Andrews playing the role of Gertie. During the filming of *The Sound of Music*, Andrews herself had undergone psychoanalysis. As she admits, "I have enormous phobias about singing, stemming from the Broadway days when I was trotted out every night and was pretty much mixed up" (shades of Liza Elliott singing her bedtime song, "My Ship"?). Andrews continues, "I suppose another of my failings is that I am a

totally ambivalent person. Ambivalence can either be a vice or a virtue. But I am able to see both sides of anything to such an extent that it is terribly hard for me to make a decision or do anything involving a drastic change."²⁴ And so, the actress who had difficulty making up her mind (and consulted a psychiatrist), played the role of another actress—who herself had had trouble committing to playing a woman who had difficulty making up her mind (and consulted a psychiatrist)—in a film about that actress not being able to make up her mind.

Star! owes even more to *Lady in the Dark* than its plot (a woman choosing between three men), climactic number ("The Saga of Jenny"), and denouement (the heroine is made to understand her problem). From the outset the specter of psychoanalysis hovers over the proceedings. The film begins not in a psychiatrist's office, but with an overture of songs to follow, as if we are in a Broadway theater. The curtain opens to reveal the titles of Lawrence's shows painted upon a scrim. Then the film proper begins, but with a black-and-white credit sequence and a copyright date of 1940! The sixteen-millimeter documentary about Lawrence called *Star!* contains scratchy newsreel footage. Suddenly, the film switches to seventy-millimeter color as the middle-aged Gertie yells to stop the projector. It turns out we have been in a screening room previewing a documentary about her life and career:

DIRECTOR: Miss Lawrence, I need your o.k. to show this picture.

GERTIE: Mm. You need it to use that title song, too, darling.

DIRECTOR: Now, don't be awkward . . .

GERTIE: I am never awkward. I just hate being rushed into decisions.

DIRECTOR: Well, are we right? That you want to be *lots* of different people?

GERTIE: Well, as an actress I did, yes.

DIRECTOR: As a person?

GERTIE: Now look here, Jerry Paul. I get analyzed on stage every night in *Lady in the Dark*. Don't you go probing my psyche . . .

It soon becomes obvious that the purpose of both directors (the fictitious one of the black-and-white documentary and Robert Wise) is exactly that: to probe Lawrence's psyche. With the directors impersonating Dr. Brooks, Gertie assumes the role of Liza Elliott. We are meeting her at middle age and the movies—the Twentieth Century Fox film and the film-within-the-film—trace the root of her problem back to childhood and portray the ways it has played out across her adult life. Through the interchange between the fictitious director and Gertie, we learn that the problem itself is a difficulty with making decisions, which is exactly how Lawrence's relationship began with the play that is now serving to tell her life story. Art and life had intertwined to such an extent that they had become inseparable. Put another way, the real life Gertrude Lawrence had originally been the star of *Lady in the Dark*, but now *Lady in the Dark* had become the Gertrude Lawrence of *Star!*

(endnotes on p. 12)

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Feature Reviews

Lady in the Dark

Philadelphia

Prince Music Theater

Premiere: 6 October 2001

Despite routine inclusion in lists of great musicals, *Lady in the Dark* leads an oddly invisible life: much discussed, seldom performed. After its first decade or two (a film version that made a point of eviscerating its source, an early television adaptation, some summer-stock productions), chances to see it became rare: very occasional regional stagings, a couple of prestigious concert presentations, a Royal National Theatre production in London that led to the only truly complete recording to date. It's not much, when compared to the ubiquitous classic musicals of the 1940s and '50s.

Some of the reasons advanced for this rarity are easily dealt with. For instance, the legendary size of the original production (cast and crew more than 50 each, four turntables, and so on) need not be a binding precedent for an imaginative director, any more than the naïve presentation of psychoanalysis-as-instant-breakthrough is a serious problem for audiences used to stage simplifications. More fundamental are two issues that deal directly with protagonist Liza Elliott (beyond the little matter of finding a stellar, charismatic actress). One is her vocal writing. Having been tailored for Gertrude Lawrence, it demands a type of leading lady no longer extant: a light soprano with a comfort zone placed higher than that of almost any popular singer or singing actress of today. Even if her music is transposed (a non-trivial matter with Weill's orchestrations and musically continuous dream sequences), the line sits relatively high in her overall range.

And then there's Liza's dramatic arc: After the pleasure of experiencing a 1941 drama about a successful businesswoman, the ostensible happy ending goes rather

sour with an implication that when she achieves true mental health, she'll want to stop working and hand her job over to its rightful owner—a man. A new production needs to make us experience Liza's dilemma as a personal (not men *vs.* women) one, one with which we can all empathize.

The first of these challenges was handled intelligently, the second brilliantly, in the *Lady in the Dark* production undertaken by the Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia from October 6 to October 21, 2001. (I saw the press opening on October 5, following five previews which had begun on September 29.)

Much of the credit belongs to Ted Sperling, a longtime top-rank music director who has recently turned to stage direction and herewith proves the validity of that shift. With his impressive design team (scenery, costumes, and lighting by James Schuette, David Belugou, and James F. Ingalls respectively), he worked out a production concept that served the material well in both emotional and practical terms, allowing for vivid storytelling and swift pacing. Robert La Fosse's choreography was a helpful part of the achievement, less in dance routines *per se* than in small bits of movement within the dreams.

Perhaps it's facile to say so, but Sperling seemed especially masterful as a kind of "conductor" of the action, with an overall plan for variety of tempo and inflection; some of the dialogue was spoken at top speed in the manner of film comedies of the period, thus earning time for more hesitant pacing at moments of introspection. Let this not be taken to mean that the visual and emotional aspects of the production were anything less than satisfying. As promised in his program note, Liza's central issue was clarified as the kind of lifelong self-censorship ("I won't try to do anything I can't do well" as a justification for giving up) that most of us engage in to some extent.

Liza herself, Andrea Marcovicci, was in many respects a most fortunate choice. She portrays with ease both the glam-



Liza Elliott (center, played by Andrea Marcovicci) receives welcome support from two of her colleagues from *Allure* magazine, Alison Du Bois (Alison Fraser, left) and Maggie Grant (Maureen Mueller, right). Photo: Mark Garvin

orous siren and the hard-edged executive, and is an inventive, appealing actress with wonderful vocal variety when speaking. Unfortunately, she wasn't able to control her singing with equal finesse. She is, of course, at least as well known for singing as for acting, but primarily as a cabaret performer, where she can adjust the material to make the most of her considerable interpretive and expressive gifts. Similar strategies were employed here—keys lowered, “The Saga of Jenny” thoroughly rearranged—but ultimately Liza must command her numbers with confident bravura, and Marcovicci's uneven vocal production prevented this. Excursions into the upper register always felt a bit perilous—one wished her well each time, but the suspense made it hard to stay immersed in the drama. She remains in many ways a smart choice for the part, and without her eagerness to undertake the role we probably wouldn't have had this production at all.

The supporting cast of 21 included some fine characterizations (not forgetting the versatile choristers). The novel casting of Dr. Brooks as a woman proved revelatory: the sight of the two women, analyst and patient, figuring things out together added new poignancy to their scenes, as well as the dramaturgical value of seeing a capable professional woman as part of the solution, and although we meet the doctor only at work, Nancy Hume did more to round out the character than I have previously seen.

Brian O'Brien looked and sounded good as movie star Randy Curtis without quite living up to the worshipful buildup that precedes his entrance; then again, that may be an impossible task—has anyone ever managed it? (The original Randy, Victor Mature, had the look but couldn't sing.) But Maureen Mueller was slouchy-elegant perfection as Liza's confidante Maggie Foster, and Alison Fraser's mannered



The New York skyline looms in the background as Sutton (Nina Hennessey) brings Liza up to date during the *Glamour Dream*. Photo: Mark Garvin

brightness proved just the thing for her caricature cameo, madcap columnist Alison Du Bois.

Beau Gravitte's laid-back self-assurance and insolent charm hit the right notes for Charley Johnson, a character who can become unpleasant if exaggerated. Mark Victor showed similar restraint to even more welcome effect as photographer Russell Paxton; while the requisite fey manner was there, entertainingly so, it was just one part of an endearing character's reality. And his “Tschaikowsky” was the one genuine showstopper of the evening; it's always effective if decently done, but this was polished to a dazzling degree.

The overall visual scheme is always an important part of *Lady in the Dark*, what with two locations that define the real

world, contrasted with a cinematic flow for the dreams that contain all the music. The plan here was simple and worked beautifully: The two offices occupied different depths of stage so that the dropping of a wall could take us from one to the other instantly. Or everything could slide away and the size of the stage expand for the dreams, with the analyst's couch remaining onstage almost throughout, an unforced symbol that could transform itself as needed (into a limousine, for example). Of a long string of memorable images, I'll name three, one from each dream: a gorgeously evocative Manhattan skyline behind the *Glamour Dream*; Liza's former classmates eulogizing her at her funeral (an invention that fit the ominous music and made a neat equation between death and her impending marriage); and the transformation of a lattice of windowpanes into a giant jungle gym.

Textual matters: Weill's full orchestration was used (splendidly conducted by Rob Berman), with the adaptations for Marcovicci noted above. The only noteworthy musical excisions were the “Is it Impressionistic?” guessing passage in the first dream and Liza's “Tra la” refrain in the

third. (But what happened to some of the spoken tags in “The Princess of Pure Delight”?) The full Entr'acte was played, and cut songs were used instrumentally to accompany the childhood flashbacks.

Some tucks were taken in the dialogue, probably coinciding for the most part with those made in the original production (which the published script does not reflect). These mostly worked well, especially in not dwelling overlong on now-familiar psychological issues (Kendall Nesbitt might have benefited from a few more lines; that excellent actor Sam Freed couldn't make much effect with what he had to say), and contributed to the tight two-and-a-half-hour running time. One altered word is worth mentioning: Liza's

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final hint that as co-editor with Johnson she may step down “after a while” was spoken as “for a while”; I hope (despite my purist principles) that it wasn’t a one-night mistake, for the implication (that her time off wouldn’t be permanent) does wonders for the denouement.

So, does *Lady in the Dark* still work for present-day audiences? Certainly for this audience member it does, in such a persuasive production: a “good show” that’s also an unexpectedly moving look at the process of self-discovery. The aspects that might seem dated prove not to be, when the point

of the writing is respected and conveyed as it was here. We also now have proof that it’s all doable, with style, on a less lavish scale than the original, as long as those in charge have their priorities right. Casting Liza remains a challenge, although who knows?—if all our Broadway divas started demanding the chance to play her, we might get some pleasant surprises there, too.

Jon Alan Conrad
University of Delaware



Movie star Randy Curtis (Brian O’Brien) tries to convince Liza that he is the one for her, ultimately without success. Photo: Mark Garvin

Lady in the Dark

Palermo
Teatro Massimo

19–29 April 2001

American musicals have only recently begun to enjoy real popularity in Italy, partly because of an increasingly widespread knowledge of English among audiences, partly perhaps due to a decline in affection for traditional Italian opera, compared to which even a work sixty years old—like *Lady in the Dark*, which was recently given its Italian premiere in Palermo—can appear refreshingly modern in its musical idiom and subject matter. At the performance seen on April 24 at the Teatro Massimo, one of Italy’s largest and most imposing opera houses, Weill’s bewitching score came across strongly, if not subtly (amplification was used, in spite of the theater’s excellent acoustics and the use of opera singers), to the evident delight of a sizable audience. What did not really come across convincingly were the story line and character interplay devised by Moss Hart. About three-quarters of the often witty lines in his book were cut, and much of the skeletal dialogue that remained was distorted beyond recognition, making it hard to judge the work’s theatrical viability. Although something of a period piece—in Italy too the craze for psychoanalysis, widespread in the 1970s, now seems passé—it surely contains enough home truths about the sometimes uneasy and alienating role of an emancipated woman in modern society to seem relevant today.

Some of the most successful musicals in Italy in recent years, such as the production of *West Side Story* mounted at La Scala last season, have been largely imported packages. In Palermo they chose, courageously, to use an Italian director, designer, orchestra, chorus, and ballet company, an almost entirely Italian cast of actors and the Bulgarian soprano Raina Kabaivanska (who has lived in Italy for decades) as the protagonist Liza Elliott. The other singing roles were taken by Americans, and the Italian-American Steven Mercurio conducted.



Liza Elliott (Raina Kabaivanska) reclines on the psychiatrist's couch. Photo: Studio Camera Palermo

Apart from helping to save money and avoid union protests, this method of casting was logical enough in theory, since it allowed Italian artists to gain much-needed experience in an increasingly popular genre alongside expert foreign performers. And Kabaivanska, though something of a veteran (she made her Met debut in 1962), still possesses considerable charisma and has proven her versatility in recent years by stretching her repertory to include works by Janáček, Poulenc, Britten, and even Weill's songs in recital. Moreover, her presence undoubtedly had a healthy effect on the box office.

The soprano's delivery of the spoken dialogue, however, though initially even charming in a vaguely Garboesque manner, was marked by such frequent misplacing of stresses within sentences, often to bizarre effect, that it was difficult to take the character of Liza Elliott seriously. And if the dialogue scenes lack credibility, it is harder for the audience to suspend disbelief in the dream sequences. Kabaivanska's singing, though boldly projected and occasionally virtuosic in breath control, missed the irony in Ira Gershwin's lyrics, and the amplification could hardly hide the lack of bloom in the sound. Yet her performance of the songs was never dull and always made one aware of the magical potential of the music.

The Italian actors proved on the whole to be something of a liability. Their pronunciation was generally poor and their diction in many cases no less stilted than the soprano's. Federico Pacifici was unable to make anything of Kendall Nesbitt and Emilio Dino Conti turned Dr. Brooks into a grotesque parody, quite the opposite of what Hart intended. In this, as in other cases, director Giorgio Marini was surely to blame. His overall aim—having perceived the relative sophistication of this musical—seemed to be to demonstrate his own sophistication rather than trying to make the piece work on its own terms. The set designed by Lauro Crisman, with its surrealistic decor and *tapis roulant*, and the Schiaparelli-inspired costumes designed by Elena Cicorella, were certainly nice to look at, but failed to provide an ade-

quate contrast between Liza's office and her dream world. The dreams themselves were elegantly choreographed, with some telling quotations from films of the same epoch, by Micha van Hoecke. The circus dream came off best, although even here the execution of the dancers was not always sufficiently on the beat, and the singing and dancing of the chorus (the "Solisti dell'Operalaboratorio") were well below Broadway standards.

There was much to enjoy, however, in the performances of the other lead singers. Julia Wade as Miss Foster/Miss Sutton looked and sounded distinctly classy and Gino Quilico and Victor Ledbetter were ideally cast as Randy Curtis and Charley Johnson. Shon Sims made a positive impression too, although as the Ringmaster his rendition of the famous "Tschai-kowsky" number proved less than irresistible.

All the singers were given strong support by Mercurio, thanks also to the surprisingly idiomatic, if not entirely uninhibited, playing of the Teatro Massimo's orchestra.

**Stephen Hastings
Milan**



With the jury behind her, Liza belts out "The Saga of Jenny" during the Circus Dream. Photo: Studio Camera Palermo

Remembering Scott Merrill (1918–2001)



Photo: Louise Dahl-Wolfe

The actor and dancer Scott Merrill, perhaps best known for his portrayal of Macheath—Mack the Knife—in *The Threepenny Opera*, died on 28 June 2001 in Branford, Connecticut. He was 82 years old.

A native of Baltimore, where his parents ran a cocktail bar, Merrill took up dancing lessons after a doctor's diagnosis of diabetes. While performing in various local clubs, he landed his first role in a Broadway show when Weill's *Lady in the Dark* was on tour in Baltimore. The tour company needed to replace a dancer, and Merrill was asked to join them in Pittsburgh as a member of the Albertina Rasch Dancers (his job during the "Circus Dream" was to lift Gertrude Lawrence into the air). Merrill stayed on for the remainder of the tour and returned with the ensemble to the east coast for the reopening on Broadway in late February 1943.

In New York, Merrill launched a successful dancing career, often as leading dancer. Among the many shows he appeared in were *Oklahoma!*, *Bloomer Girl*, *Small Wonder*, *Paint Your Wagon*, and the crucial 1952 revival of *Pal Joey*. In April 1949 Merrill replaced one of the dancers in the Weill/Lerner concept musical *Love Life*.

Weary of dancing, Merrill started to search for acting roles. His first opportunity came when he successfully auditioned for the off-Broadway production of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1954. Merrill joined the cast as Macheath alongside Lotte Lenya, who was recreating her famous portrayal of Jenny in the 1928 Berlin premiere. He received excellent notices; Daniel Blum, editor of *Theater World*, called him one of the "most promising personalities of the Broadway stage." Others named in that category were Orson Bean, Harry Belafonte, James Dean, Ben Gazzara, and Eva Marie Saint.

A series of acting engagements followed the success of *Threepenny*, including appearances on television and as Tallulah Bankhead's co-star in the 1957 play *Eugenia*, an adaptation of Henry James's novel *The Europeans*. In the 1970s, Merrill retired from the stage and became the director of a center for the elderly in Bristol, Connecticut, where he worked for about a dozen years before he retired.

(continued from p. 7)

Notes

I wish to thank Kim H. Kowalke, Mary Sue Morrow, and Mary Watkins for reading drafts of this essay and making helpful suggestions.

1. As quoted in Steven Bach, *Dazzler: The Life and Times of Moss Hart* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 119.
2. Lawrence S. Kubie, *Practical Aspects of Psychoanalysis: A Handbook for Prospective Patients and Their Advisors* (New York: Norton, 1936).
3. Manuscript letter dated 25 September 1941 from Kurt Weill to Lotte Lenya, as quoted in *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, ed. and trans. Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 276.
4. The idea for a play based on free association had been percolating since 1937 when Kaufman and Hart had briefly entertained it as a vehicle for Marlene Dietrich.
5. Lawrence S. Kubie, "The Drive to Become Both Sexes," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 43 (1974): 349–426.
6. "Moss Hart Play Will Have Songs: But 'I Am Listening' Is Not a Musical Comedy—Story of 'A Woman's Failure,'" *New York Times*, 24 February 1940.
7. "News of the Stage," *New York Times*, 26 February 1940.
8. As quoted in Bernadine Morris, "Museum Celebrates the Flair That Was Vreeland," *New York Times*, 2 December 1993; Moss Hart, *Lady in the Dark* (New York: Random House, 1941), 45–46.
9. Alice Hughes, "Today's Woman: Star of *Lady in the Dark* Steals Play from Celanese Creative Fabrics Showing," *New York Post*, 19 February 1941.
10. Moss Hart, "Life with Gertie: In Which Some Light Is Thrown on *Lady in the Dark*," Box 13 U.S./Mss/13AN of the Moss Hart-Kitty Carlisle Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, 2. When the article was subsequently published as "The Saga of Gertie: The Author of *Lady in the Dark* Tells How He Found a Star," *New York Times*, 2 March 1941, dates and details were changed perhaps in order for Hart to avoid offending Cornell.
11. Charles Gentry, "Lawrence, Lady of Energy," *Detroit Times*, 1 December 1942.
12. Hart, "Life with Gertie," 4.
13. *Ibid.*, 5.
14. See this author's "Ira at 100, Life after George: The Genesis of *Lady in the Dark*'s Circus Dream" *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 14.2 (Fall 1996): 4–8.
15. Hart, "Life with Gertie," 5.
16. *Ibid.*, 6.
17. Noël Coward, *Future Indefinite* (London: Heinemann, 1954), 126–27.
18. "Dr. Brooks" [Lawrence S. Kubie], preface to *Lady in the Dark*, x.
19. *Waterbury* (Connecticut) *Democrat*, 2 March 1943.
20. Virginia Bennett Moore, "Begrimed—Bewitching or Both," *Woman's Home Companion*, October 1943, 80.
21. "Simple Lines, Solid Colors Star's Choice: Gertrude Lawrence Likes 'Comfortable' Clothes Above All," *Camden* (New Jersey) *Courier-Post*, 3 May 1943.
22. Adeline Fitzgerald, "These Charming People," *New York Sun*, 31 July 1943.
23. Robert Windeler, *Julie Andrews* (New York: Putnam, 1970), 49.
24. *Ibid.*, 208, 209.

Books

Dazzler: The Life and Times of Moss Hart

Steven Bach

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. 462 pp.
ISBN: 0-679-44154-9

Anyone wanting to write about Moss Hart faces one major hurdle: Hart's own memoir *Act One*. It is, as they say, a tough act to follow. Steven Bach had the additional obstacle of the non-cooperation of Kitty Carlisle Hart, Moss Hart's widow. Bach has, however, written a detailed and sympathetic treatment of his subject, carefully attending to the recollections of those who knew Hart, the documents of his life, and the broader world he lived in. The *Hart of Act One*, beloved by all theater fans, told of how his love of theater brought him from poverty to fame. Bach, in delineating Hart's invention of himself, shows that Hart was more complicated and conflicted than he let us know.

Bach's portrait of Hart shows the effort that went into the making of the man in the splendid, carefully posed Irving Penn photograph on the dust jacket: a handsome, well-dressed, elegant gentleman. As he proceeds, Bach corrects *Act One* several times: Hart expanded his years in the fur company and omitted his employment at National Cloak and Suit. He killed off his Aunt Kate before she became, as she did in real life, a troublesome arsonist. Misrepresentations are, of course, part of the process of self-invention, and Bach exposes Hart's lies about his education (he said he had studied creative writing at Columbia University; he hadn't), his draft status (he said the Navy turned him down for "insufficient education"; it didn't), even about when and how many tennis lessons he had had.

From young adulthood, Hart showed signs of manic-depression. For this and other reasons he eventually began psychotherapy. The influence of psychiatrists on twentieth-century men of the theater—judging from the impression left by their biographers—has been, generally speaking, unfortunate. Their emphasis appears to have been less on the patient's self-discovery than on his conformity to the therapist's views. George Gershwin's psychiatrist diagnosed his neurological problems as neurotic ones. The psychiatrists who tried to cure the homosexuality of Tennessee Williams, Jerome Robbins, and Montgomery Cliff may not have killed them but seemed more effective at damage than cure. Hart's intense and frequent sessions with his therapist did, however, produce one success: *Lady in the Dark*. Hart often drew on real people for characters in his plays (most famously perhaps Alexander Woollcott in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and Franklin D. Roosevelt in *I'd Rather Be Right*), but here the character of Liza Elliott, the lady in the dark, was himself, the patient in analysis. Like his accounts of every production Hart was involved in, Bach's account of this production is thorough and entertaining. He tells, for example, how and why Gertrude Lawrence made "The Saga of Jenny" one of the show's hits although she had initially refused to sing it. The tale is a show business classic.

Kurt Weill makes his first appearance at this point. When he met Hart in 1939, Weill was having a Broadway success with *Knickerbocker Holiday*. His music and orchestrations would be a major part of the success of *Lady in the Dark*. In addition, he introduced Hart to Harry Horner. Horner, a Czech emigré and "visual genius," had trained with Max Reinhardt. Without Horner, Bach believes, the dream sequences for *Lady in the Dark* "would have been impossible." Weill turns up again in 1945 when Kitty Carlisle's agent argues that the part Weill had written for Lotte Lenya in a new show called *The Firebrand of Florence* should go to Kitty Carlisle (not yet involved with Hart romantically). In the end, Lenya got the part.

Dazzler guides us through Broadway and Hollywood before and after World War II. Bach's account of the production of *Winged Victory* and the tour of military bases in the South Pacific with *The Man Who Came to Dinner* provides a theatrical perspective on the war years as well. Hart's career on Broadway and in Hollywood includes a large and mostly stellar cast of characters (Marilyn Miller, Beatrice Lillie, Noel Coward, Clifton Webb, Irving Lazar, Dore Schary, Leonard Sillman, George Kaufman). Lesser-known, but no less interesting persons also appear as important figures in Hart's professional and personal life. While establishing the connections, charting the successes and failures, Bach notes the relationships and experiences that preoccupy the playwright and spark his imagination. He tracks, for example, Hart's conflict with his own father as reflected in his works. He sees Hart's sympathy for actors and his skill in dealing with them as deriving from his own stage experience as well as from his memory of the tongue-lashing he saw Basil Dean give another actor. He even notes the continuing influence of George Kelly on both Hart's acting and playwrighting, particularly in that playwright's one-act *The Flattering Word*.

Bach's discussions of Hart's productions all have their interesting moments, but the one of *My Fair Lady* has the most excitement. Guiding us through the maze of the Shaw estate, the influence of Gabriel Pascal, the bad behavior of Rex Harrison, and Hart's Higgins-Eliza relationship with Julie Andrews, Bach's account is as compelling a show business tale as *Act One's* background for *Once in a Lifetime*.

At the end of this biography one feels well informed about the life and the world of Moss Hart. Bach depicts his subject from his birth at the "wrong end" (as Hart said) of Fifth Avenue through his career as writer, producer, and director. He introduces the many people Hart worked with, discovered, helped and, in some cases, deceived or abandoned, but somehow the man himself is elusive. It may not, of course, be possible to find him. The man who could decorate his Ansonia apartment in the Spanish style, his Waldorf suite with English antiques, his Pennsylvania farm with American colonial artifacts, and his East Side town house in Victorian style is the man Moss Hart invented, an actor who suits himself to the occasion, ultimately Moss Hart, the charming, talented, well-dressed man of the Penn photograph. Bach's sympathetic treatment of Kitty Carlisle Hart, though, suggests that there may be another story, the story of a Moss Hart known only to her.

Joseph Kissane
New York City

Books

Opernführer für Fortgeschrittene Das 20. Jahrhundert I: Von Verdi und Wagner bis zum Faschismus

Ulrich Schreiber

Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2000. 772 pp.

ISBN: 3-7618-1436-4

Following extremely favorable reviews for the first two volumes of this four-volume series, "History of Musical Theater" (vol. 1: From the Genre's Beginnings to the French Revolution; vol. 2: The 19th Century), the publication of the first of two parts on the 20th century has been much anticipated. As indicated by the title, the concept of this series allows the reader to see the place of each work within the context of the genre's history of music and ideas. Therefore, it may not be surprising that the beautifully edited volume, comprising over 700 pages, poses some challenges to the reader. Ulrich Schreiber surveys the territory in question ("From Verdi and Wagner to Fascism") from a standpoint of profound knowledge, presents an abundance of interesting facts, explores (hidden) connections, and also considers "off-road terrain" of the development of opera. In short: Even though the author does not address trained scholars, reading the book requires the highest degree of concentration, not least on account of the concise, even compressed, prose.

The book is divided into five historical chapters, interrupted by two monographic way stations dedicated to the "pillars of repertory," Richard Strauss (the subtitle "Destined to Become a Classic" comes from René Leibowitz) and Giacomo Puccini ("Abundance of Melodious Sound," inspired by a characterization from Thomas Mann). Extensive introductions to individual chapters as well as numerous bold subheadings permit quick orientation, especially if the volume is used as a reference work. The first chapter's heading, "The Circumpolar Opera"—Schreiber adopts a term coined by Theodor Kroyer as early as in 1920—outlines the situation of those German operas created in the overpowering shadow of Richard Wagner "which found their claim for aesthetic autonomy more in distancing themselves from him than in attempting to become his heirs" (p. 20). Subsequently, the conditions for the development of Italian opera among Verdi's successors are recounted. The historical arch in this volume ends with the development's disruption by growing fascism in Europe ("Italy's Path from Futurism to Fascism" and "German Opera under the Third Reich").

Placed in the center, the most crucial and largest chapter (over 230 pages) focuses on the development of German opera between World War I and the Third Reich ("Von Heute auf Morgen oder Hin und Zurück"). At its beginning Schreiber outlines the essential features of "the almost unstoppable time machine of opera development between 1915 and 1930" (p. 391). Because the picture given here of the progressive and emancipatory efforts is so reliable, especially of younger composers between Max Brand and Alexander Zemlinsky, a certain tendency toward bold catchphrases is acceptable (e.g., "away from the Wagnerian model," "opera's social utopia," "renunciation of soundpainting illusionism").

Already in this context Schreiber highlights the special significance of Kurt Weill as one of those composers (in addition to Schreker, Krenek, and Hindemith) who "consciously linked their topics, bearing in part on the *Zeitoper* genre, to a reduction of complexity in musical material [*Materialstand*]" (p. 394). Just like his fellow composers he suffered a double ostracism, first in 1933 by the Nazis, then after 1945 by the preachers of serialism; only in his work, however, did the influences of a contemporary style accumulate in such an intense fashion.

Schreiber dedicates the last forty pages of this chapter exclusively to Weill's works. The Adorno essay named in the heading—"Restitution by Truth" (taken from his review of the Frankfurt performance of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in 1928)—marks the starting position of Weill reception insofar as the aesthetic significance still ascribed here to the work (*Die Dreigroschenoper* as the most important event in contemporary musical theater next to Berg's *Wozzeck*) forms exactly the argumentative basis for later criticism of the Broadway composer. Schreiber begins by sketching Weill's intricate, multi-dimensional reception history (conflicts with a romanticist aestheticism, co-opting by the process of commercialization, the critical stigma caused by the overpowering success of *Die Dreigroschenoper*) and the significance of the scholarly and artistic efforts for a *Werktreue*, which are hardly common in current dealings with and productions of Weill's compositions for the theater. Hereafter, it is intelligently laid out how the young Weill, in an independent grappling with Busoni's aesthetic, outlines his own musicodramaturgical concept whose first impressive embodiment is presented in the one-act opera *Der Protagonist* ("Music as Action," "disillusionment of the theatrical event"). For the ensuing path "toward an epic musical theater" Schreiber properly clarifies the respective contributions of Weill and Brecht. A detailed and extensive assessment of the *Mahagonny Songspiel* serves this purpose: Brecht regarded the conceptual style elements as signs of a theatrical art for new audiences whereas Weill viewed them as a "redemption of Busoni's theories about the liquidation of the adventure-like and illusionist theater" (p. 593). The center of gravity is formed by the discussions of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*: they represent ideal commentaries as promised in the preface, revealing the reasons for compositional decisions down to the smallest detail (alas, limited space allows for only a few examples). In his interpretative evaluations of *Die Bürgschaft* and *Der Silbersee*—the latter work also marks the chapter's end—Schreiber emphasizes the symbolic quality of these works under the political circumstances of the time and honors the dedication that informs the recasting of a sociocritical stance into an artistic expression ("The culinary elements of the song style oriented by entertainment culture are abandoned and sharpened into criticism," p. 617).

Conclusion: There is a world of difference between Schreiber's concept and that of a traditional opera guide which treats operas simply as familiar plots retold with the aid of music. Throughout his book, Schreiber points the advanced operagoer to facets of musicostructural phenomena in which the impact of the whole opera as a staged event is essentially rooted, and he enables the listener/spectator to see the single work embedded in a web of historical genre influences. Some subjective remarks by the "music critic" Schreiber as well as his prefatory statement highlighting the work-of-art character of the operas appear to be problematic; on the whole, however, his unarguable competence as well as the eloquence of his portrayal outweigh any doubt.

Gunther Diehl
Wiesbaden

Books

Kurt Weill. Briefe an die Familie (1914–1950)

Edited by Lys Symonette and Elmar Juchem with assistance from Jürgen Schebera

Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001 (Veröffentlichungen der Kurt-Weill-Gesellschaft Dessau, 3). 448 pp.
ISBN: 3-476-45244-1

After the release of *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya* (edited and translated by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke. Univ. of California Press, 1996), a second large body of correspondence by Kurt Weill is now available in *Briefe an die Familie*. As with the Weill-Lenya correspondence, the editors chose to publish the documents in their entirety. This was a wise decision, despite scattered and arguably unjustified criticism about this policy in the case of *Speak Low*, since it allows readers to make their own judgments rather than depending on the editors' subjectivity. *Speak Low* had disappointed those musicologists who had hoped for clues about issues ranging from the extent of Weill's influence on Brecht's aesthetics to the possibility of "exile traces" in Weill's Second Symphony. Nor, for that matter, did the letters seem to reveal any hidden programs in Weill's work that could be readily used as tools for a semantic analysis. Yet the unbiased reader has discovered many treasures in these sources that will serve as research material for many years to come. And how will people fare when scrutinizing the newly published family correspondence? These documents should be used to draw a more accurate portrait of Weill, correcting old flaws wherever necessary.

We already know Weill was a negligent archivist. But whereas Lotte Lenya seems to have rescued some of the letters addressed to Weill, almost no such letters survive within the family correspondence (in any case, the book in hand restricts itself to letters written by Weill). Thanks to the work of Lys Symonette—whose editorial achievements left a profound mark on the Weill-Lenya edition—and the young Weill scholar Elmar Juchem, these unfortunate gaps have been competently bridged (filling them would have been impossible). The editors devote themselves so thoroughly to explaining every single point that in some cases they lose all sense of what can be taken for granted, as when they gloss "anti-Semitic" as "having an anti-Jewish attitude." On the whole, however, the accuracy and competence reflected in the editorial apparatus is astounding. In spite of the correspondence's one-sided nature, hardly a question remains unanswered; even the non-specialist reader will grasp the larger context.

The bulk of the family correspondence comprises Weill's letters to his brother Hans, only one year his senior. As "friend and brother (on the side)" he discusses with Hans family matters ("Now I'm going to glean apples with Grandpa"), school issues ("I asked Piefke why I didn't get an A in conduct"), the course of World War I ("Well, in the West the great regrouping has been accomplished"), as well as subsequent political turmoil ("if only one did not have to be afraid of one thing: that instead of having a dictatorship of the

aristocracy, we might now get a dictatorship of the proletariat"). But most of all Hans is his conversation partner in all cultural matters until the early 1920s. An interesting book is hardly finished or a theater performance ended before Kurt informs his brother: Georg Hermann's style is "pure music," Else Lasker-Schüler, on the other hand, "exaggerates for the most part, rarely leaving a favorable impression," while Romain Rolland fills the 18-year old "with enthusiasm." The most valuable information, however, concerns Weill's musical "socialization," to be found especially in the early letters. We learn a great deal about the aspiring composer's musical studies and his lessons with Albert Bing where he "digs" into Bach chorales and conducts *Fidelio*; we are surprised by Weill's enthusiasm for Pfitzner. The young Weill eagerly seizes every opportunity to attend a concert or an opera performance, first in his hometown Dessau and later in Berlin, always reporting to his brother. Over and above all the assorted influences, one can detect the roots of Weill's later aesthetics when in November 1917 he discusses the Dutch composer Jan Willem Frans Brandts Buys's opera *Die Schneider von Schönau*, praising the "orchestra's marvelous adaptation to the varying degrees of intensity as well as to the action on stage, but never becoming mere musical background to the characters' thoughts."

From a sociocultural perspective, the most significant document is a letter to his mother, written on New Year's Eve 1924. Here are revealed the experiences of a young German raised as a Jew, who now as an adult has fallen away from religious institutions but has not called his personal belief into question. Up to this point we have learned many details about the life of a German-Jewish family in the early years of the 20th century; in subsequent letters we rarely hear Weill mention religious issues at all. Only when his parents settle in Palestine do the letters—often written in English for fear of wartime censorship—touch on specific Jewish matters, but these issues are fundamentally political, not religious.

Numerous examples could be cited which would demonstrate the invaluable significance of the family correspondence; for instance, many letters illuminate the history of specific compositions. But when all is said and done, I must raise one strong objection, which is directed more toward the publisher than the editors. The importance of the family correspondence for Weill scholarship and beyond is evident. In the years and decades to come this source will be consulted again and again. Hence the poor quality of the printing is inexplicable. The facsimiles of Weill's autograph music examples are barely readable because the low resolution causes an unsightly screen. In general, the illustrations are amateurishly reproduced. The cheap binding ensures the book's rapid transformation into a loose-leaf edition (the decision to publish the first edition in paperback can only cause us to shake our heads). Regrettably, only two facsimiles of Weill's handwriting are given (a letter on the dust jacket and one postcard, from 7 March 1918); a few more samples of Weill's changing handwriting might have been of interest not only to specialists. These flaws, however, should not detract from the great achievement of the editorial team Symonette/Juchem, whose edition of Weill's letters to his family represents an important scholarly contribution—and not only to Weill research.

Christian Kuhnt
Lübeck

Books

Kurt Weill, ou la conquête des masses

Pascal Huynh

Arles: Actes Sud, 2000. 464 pp.
ISBN: 2-7427-2612-8

Certain environments lend themselves particularly well to reading certain books. The smoky bustle of a Montreal café seemed to create a more than suitable backdrop for exploring Pascal Huynh's recent study of Kurt Weill's life and works, which appeared in France in 2000, just in time for Weill's centenary. Lulled by the steady rhythm of the thick spring rain and comforting smell of roasting coffee, it was hard to resist Huynh's invitation to indulge in a book that would not provide an "exhaustive biography" or "systematic analysis of Weill's work," but rather "paint the most faithful portrait of one of the most controversial composers of the twentieth century," by "emphasizing the most notable events [of his life] and key works" (p. [9]). Written in a fluid, welcoming, essayistic style, and opening uncharacteristically with a quote by Léo Ferré, Huynh's study seemed to promise hours of pleasurable reading, a treasury of insights, commentaries, and anecdotes, and a kaleidoscope of unexpected perspectives on Weill by one of the most knowledgeable experts on the subject. I looked forward to a wonderful afternoon.

At least a third of the way into the first section of Huynh's book, I realized that the hint of the first pages had been somewhat deceiving. Rather than extended literary reflections, Huynh has provided here a fairly standard "life and works," in the tradition of his early mentor Jürgen Schebera, aimed not at Weill experts or specialists on the Weimar Republic, but rather at a broad French public, which is now provided with the first substantial biography of the composer in their language. Unlike Schebera and other biographers, however, Huynh divides his biography into three relatively equal sections reflecting the German, French, and American periods in Weill's life, thereby giving welcome, rare emphasis to Weill's connection to France. In each section he proceeds similarly: after indicating key events in Weill's life, general cultural debates relevant to his work, and important political background, he dwells on extensive *descriptions*, rather than analyses, of musical works, reinforcing the impression that his book is intended for those who are not yet familiar with Kurt Weill. One very quickly recognizes that Huynh, like Schebera, is a master of the difficult art of writing a popular biography directed at a broad public. He evinces the same remarkable ability to draw together historical, personal, and compositional facts into a lucid narrative that communicates in one vast, general sweep the cultural, musical, stylistic, and biographical context of Weill's major works. Such talent is rare, and one cannot help but admire his achievement.

The general public will very much enjoy Huynh's virtuosic account of Weill's life and works. The musicologist or Weill specialist may be somewhat disappointed, however. Those who have read the numerous biographies available in English and German will find the terrain Huynh covers to be familiar, and will perhaps be saddened that he has not provided more personal, critical interpre-

tations of Weill's music, subtler historical perspectives on the era in which he lived, more biographical detail, and greater reflection on the recent scholarly literature. Instead, one is confronted frequently, especially in the German and American sections of the book, with general statements, standard accounts, and stories so rooted in the Weill mythology that many people no longer ask whether they are true. He repeats the myth about Busoni calling Weill a "Verdi of the poor" (p. 73), refers to Stravinsky's compositions as "minimalist" (p. 79), and defines *Neue Sachlichkeit* vaguely as a "reduction of means" and "rejection of pathos" (p. 81). He also emphasizes the importance of "dance rhythms" in general in Weill's work without exploring specific rhythms (pp. 88, 90, 106), repeatedly uses the problematic word "kitsch" (pp. 107, 113, 129) and speaks of the popular song style of Tin Pan Alley without defining it further (p. 311). The specialist may also wonder why Huynh has chosen to quote Weill and others throughout the first section from rare, original sources (without indicating the names of French translators), rather than from better-known, accessible recent editions. Or why he inconsistently uses French or original German sources for Ernst Bloch, Brecht and Adorno (pp. 86, 93, 96 *passim*) and why quotations are sometimes left without any source whatsoever (pp. 173, 259). It may seem rather picky to worry about footnotes, yet their inconsistencies intruded frequently on my reading pleasure, indicating that the author still vacillated curiously, albeit only in hidden corners, between a scholarly and popular style.

Most curious for those who know Weill's life and work, however, are Huynh's narrative descriptions of his compositions, which consistently summarize prominent keys, intervals, rhythmic textures, dynamics, and general musical styles, and which he applies to widely varied types of music, from Weill's Symphony No. 1 to *Lady in the Dark*. Although much of Weill's music is understandable primarily in its interaction with words, and although Weill's creative output relied on interaction with gifted writers, Huynh describes his music, and even individual numbers, almost without reference to the texts. Reduced in Huynh's descriptions to absolute music, songs such as "Seeräuberjenny," for example, become simple classical forms, seemingly interchangeable with thousands of other compositions:

The first part of the song proceeds in two parts: a breathless progression around the interval of a minor third and culminating in a double statement, vocalized and spoken with a suspenseful, *sforzando* punctuation. The second part supports the two pivot notes, B natural and F sharp, which form the interval of the final fifth. The last five measures, "broadly" unfurling, expose large leaps of the sixth and fifth. Musically identical, the two first strophes lead to a final one that takes the form of a slow march (*Meno mosso*) in which the danger becomes noticeably greater. The instruments, *piano*, punctuate the dramatic evolution that culminates in a final moment of nakedness, brought to life by a triangle (originally cymbals) and the spoken responses over the image of the severed head. Rarely has a piece had such a powerful cadential effect (p. 112).

Here and elsewhere in Part One of his book, Huynh necessarily finds himself resorting to familiar descriptions of gestus, epic theater, and Weill's famous irony, which he can hardly interpret without the texts. Sadly, in spite the excitement and sincerity of Huynh's account, his descriptions of intervals, harmonies, dynamics and instrumentation fail to communicate the *meaning* of Weill's music. For example, here, we miss the power of Brecht's fantastic

text; Weill's brilliant, complex, and disputable musical interpretation of it; and Lotte Lenya's spectacular performance of it in Pabst's film. Huynh's descriptions reminded me how little scores help sometimes in understanding the effect of Kurt Weill. Nevertheless, given the consistency with which Huynh applies this descriptive methodology to Weill's works, I had to assume that he inherited it from a cultural or musicological tradition of compositional biography with which I am unfamiliar. Its goal seemed to be to indicate general stylistic trends in Weill's music for the purpose of broad categorization.

Huynh approaches musical description and historical biography similarly throughout the three sections of his book, albeit with varying effect. The minute one turns the page into the second section on "Paris," for example, one feels suddenly transported, plunged into the romanticized, nostalgic world of the French Weill, skillfully brought to life by Huynh through a newspaper account of Weill's shadowy figure disappearing into the fog of the Gare du Nord (p. 179). Huynh is in his element here, his text brimming over with ideas, connections, and anecdotes. The reception history and cultural context no longer seemed familiar, but rather strikingly original. I had never thought about the connections between *Mahagonny* and Jules Romains's *Donogoo* (p. 190); the relationship between Pabst's *L'Opéra de quat'sous*, Antonin Artaud, Weill, Fantômas, and Alejo Carpentier (p. 192); Weill's address book and its importance in determining the course of his career in France (pp. 203–05); the extent of French anti-Semitism and its effects on Weill and other emigrés; French interpreters of Weill (pp. 276–81); Weill's influence on post-war French cabaret (pp. 284–88); or about the complex political and cultural reasons for Weill's mixed reception in France. The numerous original reviews and commentaries are particularly valuable in bringing to life Weill's frequently neglected French years.

After the richness of Part Two, the last section of Huynh's book feels almost like an epilogue. Although his approach to Weill's American years is unusually fair, it remains somewhat distanced, perhaps because Huynh attempts here to pack fifteen years of constant compositional productivity into little more space than he had just given two years of exile in France. He includes significantly less reception history and cultural context, and begins to rush his descriptions of musical works, especially in the case of *One Touch of Venus*, *The Firebrand of Florence*, and *Love Life* (pp. 361–74). Huynh does not explain the imbalance between the different parts of his book, and one tends to want to forgive him for it, given the enormous sympathy he holds for all of Weill's oeuvre. Nevertheless, I could not help thinking that this is not the biography to use for a seminar on Weill's American works. In the appendices that end his book, Huynh includes a work list, chronology, discography and bibliography.

On the whole, Pascal Huynh's biography is a valuable achievement. In spite of its inconsistencies and similarity with existing biographies in other languages, it does provide enough new impulses, especially in the section on France, to make it very much worth reading. As the rain stopped and I packed the book away, I was able to leave the Montreal café content, looking forward to future, more interpretive and specialized studies by Pascal Huynh, who I believe has an enormous amount to offer all those interested in Kurt Weill.

Tamara Levitz
McGill University

Performances

Four Walt Whitman Songs

The Hampson Project
Salzburg Festival

30 July 2001

The press release for the first in Thomas Hampson's eponymous series of four concerts (subtitled "I Hear America Singing") with Dennis Russell Davies' Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra quotes the baritone as drawing his inspiration from "a culture chiseled out of a fierce independence of mind and heart and soul forever grounded in the very myriad of racial histories from which it hearkens [*sic*]." With Salzburg as its venue, a town where variations on the dirndl remain the ne plus ultra of haute couture, Hampson's project is perhaps as misplaced as some of the words in the press release, which one hopes is a translation of his words back into English from one made into German. A puzzled audience in the sauna-like Felsenreitschule began flipping through its programs when the singer and conductor appeared in front of the set for Janáček's *Jenufa* still occupying the stage, and the evening commenced not with the announced opener, Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, but with a declamation of Whitman's "I Hear America Singing." Hampson sat down at the initial percussive assault of the Copland and half the audience jumped out of its seats. So disconcerted were they by the *Fanfare* that its conclusion was met with stone cold silence.

Hampson then rose to give a revised edition of Weill's Walt Whitman settings its premiere. The order of the songs, all four of which are now available for baritone, had been thoughtfully altered to match a 1947 recording, bracketing the interior narratives "Oh Captain! My Captain!" and "Come Up from the Fields, Father" with the martial "Beat! Beat! Drums!" and "Dirge for Two Veterans." Regrettably, Hampson buried his head in the score, depriving these gorgeous melodies and mordant narratives of his considerable interpretive powers. Davies was of little help, employing inappropriately fast tempi and allowing the brass to cover the vocalist completely in the tutti passages of "Beat! Beat! Drums!" and "Dirge for Two Veterans." In the two less intense middle numbers, illumination of the texts and observation of dynamic markings were sparse at best. Sorely missed was any attempt to match the orchestra's urgency in the reading of the letter and the mother's intuition of her son's death in "Come Up from the Fields, Father." When it could be heard, Hampson's customary rich, well-produced voice appeared in good health, although attempts to sustain *pianissimo* head tones throughout the song cycle shattered.

Returning to the stage after performances of Karl Amadeus Hartmann's *Sinfonia tragica* and Ives' *Three Places in New England*, Hampson comforted his decidedly perplexed listeners with straightforward renditions of seven numbers from Copland's *Old American Songs*. Contending with lighter orchestrations than in the Weill and physically freed up by having these folk tunes memorized, Hampson was finally able to demonstrate just how much he can convey with a simple gesture, a decrescendo into falsetto, the coloring of a single word, or an added snap of his fingers. One eagerly anticipates the occasion when he is equally familiar and at home with Weill's Whitman songs.

Larry L. Lash
New York City

Performances

Die sieben Todsünden

Dessau

Kurt-Weill-Fest

8–10 March 2001

Ever since its renovation, Dessau's gothic Marienkirche has served as a concert hall, but the building's ecclesiastical atmosphere still comes through strongly. Thus no venue seemed better suited for a performance of *Die sieben Todsünden* at the Kurt-Weill-Fest in Dessau: Brecht takes up medieval theology's register of sins and updates it; Weill's music lends an ironic sacred tone to No. 4 ("Gluttony"), the ballet's centerpiece. Andreas Auerbach's sparse set in the chancel emphasized the unornamented architecture of the church. What came to mind was the thesis of German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) that capitalism grew out of the spirit of the Protestant ethic.

Even before the concert, director and choreographer Dietmar Seyffert's decision to cast the double role of Anna with two men, the soprano Jörg Waschinski and the dancer Gregor Seyffert, had stirred up trouble. The director tried to counter charges that the aim of this "queer version" was pure sensationalism: men playing women was a tradition in the kind of Asian theater which always fascinated Brecht; in the original version the role of the mother in the quartet is scored as a bass. In particular, "Weill's intended artificiality, defamiliarization, and elevated treatment of the material represented" is achieved by this means.

The performance demonstrated that these arguments were not simply the evasive defenses so popular in program notes. It turned out to be rather less obtrusive than the usual stagings, perhaps because there was no danger of seeing Anna as one of Weill's many Jenny characters (from *Dreigroschenoper*, *Mahagonny*, or *Lady in the Dark*). The first scene captivated instantly: Anna II, the passionate and emotional self, playfully peeled off the cloak shared with Anna I, the disciplined, rational self. Gregor Seyffert's playful attempts to escape then changed gradually into des-

perate efforts. Waschinski's articulate singing of the original key version—not unlike the Evangelist's voice in a Passion setting—gave the superego Anna I, deformed by capitalism, a rather eerie absolute and unapproachable quality; on the other hand, the singer's dance-like flexibility made it possible for him to follow sensitively the impulses of his alter ego.

To be sure, there were grotesque and comic moments, like the dancer turning his back to the audience and presenting his gray dress and then orange underwear at the cue, "Now she shows off her little round white bottom." On the whole, however, a moving and quite frightening parable of the breaking of a human being to the service of profit emerged. The religious fervor displayed by the Atrium Quartett as the family while singing the passage "There's no market for hippos in Philadelphia!" was as entertaining as it was profound. The Berlin-based vocal quartet (Sebastian Lipp, Klaus-Martin Breggott, Martin Schubach, Frank Schwemmer), acting intelligently as individual characters, also interacted superbly on the musical level with homogeneous sound and alert interpretation.

Regrettably, a few crucial passages of the "family" were overshadowed by the busy choreography for Anna I and II. Especially in comparison to the evening's second work, a setting of Bertolt Brecht's *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner* (Reader for City-Dwellers) by the Berlin composer Friedrich Schenker, it became apparent just how clearly Weill's music speaks for itself, not requiring any reinforcement from stage business. Schenker, on the other hand, in a rare case of compositional restraint, subordinated his music to the pre-existing choreography of Dietmar Seyffert, even incorporating the sounds caused by the movements of the three actors on stage into his score. The director's wish that the actors' bodies produce "their own sounds, tensions, rhythms, and metric" became thoroughly palpable. Weill, however, would probably not have gone along with relegating the

music to a subservient and largely illustrative role.

In spite of its musical retreat, the work, commissioned for this year's Kurt-Weill-Fest, made a lasting impression which—to be fair—benefited primarily from the intense, sometimes breathtaking performances by Julia Jentsch, Victor Calero, and Boris Wagner of the Berlin Hochschule für Schauspielkunst "Ernst Busch." In ever-shifting combinations, they developed a disturbing performance about isolation and aggression under the sign of unrestrained capitalism. It was not far at all from the reality outside, particularly in this region of Germany, where the crisis of transition after the end of the socialist regime is still very visible.

Placing the orchestra behind the stage seemed appropriate for Schenker; in Weill's case it was not unsatisfying acoustically. But the Kammer-symphonie Berlin under the direction of Jürgen Bruns performed the score of *Die sieben Todsünden* with too much weight and solemnity; the witty and dry passages of Weill's music (as in No. 3, "Wrath," which Weill borrowed from the "Bananentanz" in *Der Silbersee*) suffered the most. The evening's punch line, however, came across. At the ironic C major triad which closes the epilogue, the family and Anna gather for a family picture, the kind on display in every camera shop in Germany: they are grinning into the camera, proud of their achievement! Yet daughter Anna is broken, without having quite realized it.

Andreas Hauff
Mainz



Jörg Waschinski (Anna I) and Gregor Seyffert (Anna II) enact the fifth deadly sin, Lechery. Photo: Jens Schlüter

Performances

Der Kuhhandel

Hagen, Germany
Theater Hagen

Premiere: 19 May 2001

So Kurt Weill has now returned to the place where he started his professional career as a theater man in 1919. Well, not exactly to Lüdenscheid, which offered him his first job as an operetta *Kapellmeister*, but to Hagen, just around the corner, only twenty-six kilometers away, where the municipal theater embarked on Germany's third production of his operetta *Der Kuhhandel*. As in Dessau last year, the intendant was responsible for the production—in the German theater, intendants' productions command more money and resources than those of lesser directors. Whereas Johannes Felsenstein in Dessau flopped because of his overzealous political ambitions, his colleague Rainer Friedemann in Hagen failed for the opposite reason: his production was absolutely devoid of any stimulating ideas. In fact the occasional smile and even applause was provoked by the contributions of the designer Hartmut Krügener: the gaudy colors of the Henri Rousseau-ish Caribbean island paradise, the lavish and quite sexy costumes, and the appearance and antics of the cow with its sorrowful eyes. But the intendant's decision to place supers in the audience, who leaped from their seats and waved their little flags while joining the actors in their hymns of praise for the President of Santa Maria, caused only embarrassment—failing miserably to stimulate the spectators to participate in the jolly goings-on.

Actually, I wondered whether Friedemann, maybe as a firm believer in historical performance practice, might have been aiming at a reconstruction of what an operetta performance in Lüdenscheid must have looked like in 1919—but, then again, they could never have afforded such a sumptuous staging in the aftermath of the first world war. However, his direction of the singers and the chorus (reinforced by an additional chorus) was terribly clumsy; “provincial” seems rather too flattering a



General Garcia Conchaz (Stefan Adam), President Mendez (Jürgen Dittebrand), and Felipe Chao (Richard von Gemert) in Act I. Photo: Olaf Struck

word to describe the routine arrangements and poses he had them adopt in front of the footlights. It all added up to one of the most depressing and long-winded evenings of theater I have encountered in several seasons. The dialogue especially seemed endless and monotonous, in desperate need of pruning. The production robbed the work of all its satirical sting, ruining any chance for effective social or political criticism.

Nor did the musical realization of Weill's saucy score compensate for the lack of punch and drive on the stage. On opening night, conductor Arn Goerke had to make do with an ersatz band of musicians because the Hagen Philharmonic, which normally functions as the house orchestra, was playing an engagement that night in Siegen, a city some seventy kilometers away. Instead we had the Südwestfälische Philharmonie Hilchenbach in the pit, a name so pompous that it sounds like an operetta title in and of itself. Unfortunately, the orchestra with the operetta title could not produce the slightest operetta glitter or gaiety. Not even the infectious General's Fandango caught fire.

One cannot blame the singers, though. They were a competent flock, with attractive, youthful, strong voices, not without some charm, even sex appeal in the cases of pretty Magdalena Bränland (Juanita) and the dashing Volker Thies (Juan). As the blustering General, Stefan Adam offered a much more subtle performance than his colleague in the 1990 *Capriccio* recording under Latham-König. The others were

quite decent, including Jürgen Dittebrand as the somewhat timid pacifist President, Richard von Gemert as the servile opportunist Felipe Chao, and Edeltraud Kwiatkowski as the voluptuous Madame Odette. They all would have fit right into an American summer-stock performance. Actually, that was what the Hagen production looked like: a stock performance at the end of the summer season.

And yet, and yet . . . Time and again I stirred, moving uncomfortably in my seat, tapping my feet, trying in vain to control my hands, which automatically started to conduct. So infectious and intoxicating are Weill's tunes, so delectable his melodies, so piquant his sparkling rhythms, so bitter-sweet their harmonic crust that all my critical armor melted away—just like the non-working weapons supplied by the Waterkeyn Armaments Corporation of Cleveland. How long, O Lord, how long must we wait for the savior who will substantiate Josef Heinzelmann's daring claim in *Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters: Der Kuhhandel* is “simply the best operetta written in the twentieth century”?

Horst Koegler
Stuttgart

Performances

Street Scene

Minneapolis

Minnesota Opera

Premiere: 24 February 2001

While writing the scores to successful Broadway musicals such as *Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus*, Kurt Weill dreamed of composing an American opera on a truly American subject and making use of the Broadway idiom of which he had become a master.

He did it with *Street Scene*, which opened on Broadway in 1947, a work based on the Elmer Rice play of the same name that won a Pulitzer Prize in 1929. Though the opera isn't as political as Rice's play, Weill and his collaborators, the poet Langston Hughes and Rice himself, retained the play's essential story of life in a New York tenement between one evening and the next afternoon with the intertwining plot threads of thwarted young love, loneliness and an unhappy marriage that leads to murder. The reviews called the show "Broadway's first real opera." Olin Downes of the *New York Times* described *Street Scene* as "the most important step toward significantly American opera" that he had yet encountered. Weill thought *Street Scene* his best work for the stage and hoped that it would live on. The puzzle is why we don't know the work better than we do, why it isn't performed regularly by those opera companies that can muster the considerable resources the work requires, why Weill's subtle and abundant score isn't by now part of our shared musical heritage.

Maybe that's soon to change. The Chicago Lyric Opera will present *Street Scene* in the fall of 2001, and, before that, a production of the work by Minnesota Opera, which played for two weeks in

February at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul, with its strong cast and persuasive staging, certainly made a strong case for the work. No one who saw it was likely to argue with the composer's high estimation of his own creation. Staged by Michael Ehrman and conducted by Rob Fisher, the production was created originally for the Houston Grand Opera in 1994 and then played briefly in Berlin.

To be sure, there were a few bumps in the road on opening night. Fisher displayed an aptly expansive feeling for the romance in Weill's music, and the rich orchestration of the work was given ample expression, but up-tempo numbers like "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed" could have swung a little more. And not all the dialogue could be understood, though with the lyrics projected above the stage, we were helped out during the musical numbers. (One wonders what Weill would have

was given just the right sort of achingly ardent sincerity by Brandon Jovanovich, who sang a sweetly nuanced version of the haunting "Lonely House," the only song from the show that has taken on a life of its own in recent decades. The only problem here was that Sam shouldn't be quite as handsome and well-built as Jovanovich is; Vincent, the neighborhood bully, was no match for him. In addition, some of Comeaux's words couldn't be heard. But their scenes together were radiant, and they made it clear, as it has to be in this story, that he loves her more than she loves him.

As for the other couple, they were superb, and they anchored the show. As Anna Maurrant, Maria Plette's pliant dramatic soprano embodied all the frustrations of a bad marriage along with a carload of dreams deferred in a compelling delivery of "Somehow I Never Could Believe," while Kimm Julian etched a complicated portrait

of the tormented Frank, whose growing anger masks his fear of a changing world. Jill Slyter overdid her high-pitched, squeaky Adelaide-Vivian Blaine-*Guys and Dolls* voice, especially since her singing voice is at least an octave lower. But the character was engaging, nonetheless, and Slyter's big dance number with the nimble Tony Vierling, "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed," nearly stopped the show on opening night.

Ehrman's staging struck the right realistic tone throughout, only moving toward stylization in numbers like the "Ice

Cream Sextet," Weill's clever opera parody. Moreover, Ehrman's cast delivered the needed ensemble feeling. They all looked as if they had been neighbors for a long time. Kathleen Humphrey (Mrs. Jones), Emil Herrera (Henry) and Charlie Corbo (Willie) were stand-outs. Gail Bakkom's costumes gave us an assured 1940s look.

**Michael Anthony
Minneapolis**



Jenny Hildebrand (Adriana Zabala) celebrates her graduation with friends and neighbors in "Wrapped in a Ribbon and Tied in a Bow." Photo: Gary Mortenson

thought of surtitles giving the English text of a performance in English to an English-speaking audience. The best response: Broadway theaters were—and are—relatively small, and audiences of 1947, unlike those of today, knew how to listen.)

On the brighter side was Adrienne Lobel's amazingly detailed set, a tenement that rose as far as the eye could see. The set was so realistic one expected Ralph and Alice Kramden to walk out onto the front stoop during a fight. ("One of these days, Alice . . . Pow! Zoom!") The set almost became a character in the show: a prison of the spirit for its young romantic leads, Rose Maurrant, played so winningly by Elisabeth Comeaux, and Sam Kaplan, who

Michael Anthony is the music critic of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis.

Performances

Street Scene

Chicago
Lyric Opera

Premiere: 2 October 2001

Kurt Weill had high hopes for his *Street Scene* ushering in a revitalized American opera that might achieve the kind of artistic and commercial success on these shores that his collaborations with Bertolt Brecht had found in Germany before he was forced to flee the Nazi onslaught. It did not quite turn out that way, although his operatic version of Elmer Rice's play, with lyrics by Langston Hughes, had a run of 148 performances following its 1947 Broadway opening—disappointing for a musical but not bad for a new opera.

One of Weill's best and most eclectic stage pieces, *Street Scene* requires the resources of a major opera house to bring its diverse elements to life. That diversity mirrors, in a way, the multi-ethnic tenement in 1940s New York where the tuneful tragedy of love, death, and shattered dreams takes place.

The terrific production of *Street Scene* the Lyric Opera of Chicago presented for the first time reminded one how sturdily Weill's depiction of melting-pot America in its time—the 1920s in Rice's play, the 1940s in his—has held up. Urban malaise has not changed much in 54 years, even if the stakes have gotten higher and deadlier.

The opera's central characters—the lonely, disillusioned Anna Maurrant (Catherine Malfitano), trapped in a terrible marriage to a bullying lout, and her daughter Rose (Lori Ann Fuller)—represent two generations of quiet desperation. The older woman hopes against hope there will be a brighter day tomorrow. The younger woman finally realizes that the only way to find a better life is to run away from her depressing surroundings and give up Sam Kaplan (Gregory Turay), the shy young man who adores her.

The apparent paradox of *Street Scene*, of course, is that surrounding this thin slice of American verismo are elements—ballad, swing, jitterbug and blues—borrowed from American popular music of the '40s. Perhaps only Weill, an emigré composer who straddled two musical worlds, could have blended the serious and the frivolous in a way that doesn't feel forced.

Director David Pountney, restaging his acclaimed production from the English National and Scottish Operas, fused the show's arias, duets, dance numbers and dialogues into a seamless musical and dramatic whole. To move nearly seventy singers and actors, a pack of cute kids, and one



Sam Kaplan (Gregory Turay) and Rose Maurrant (Lori Ann Fuller).
Photo: Dan Rest/Lyric Opera of Chicago

adorable dog around the stage so naturally was no small feat. Gritty naturalism and snazzy theatricality coexisted happily. Discreet amplification was used; even at that, not all of the spoken words emerged clearly.

At least designer David Fielding's brownstone tenement and period-perfect costumes looked believably lived-in, while the neighborhood denizens were sketched in telling dramatic strokes. In a nifty post-modern touch, lighting designer Paul Pyant threw chill yellow light on frozen figures in a ruined next-door building during

Sam's wistful aria, "Lonely House."

Richard Buckley's conducting was a mixed bag. On one hand, he conducted with keen attention to the opera's showbiz roots as well as its bittersweet romanticism. On the other, his fussy insistence on subdividing every single beat tended to strait-jacket the hard-working orchestra musicians and slowed the pace at those moments when the tempo needed to move. Choreographer Nicola Bowie stopped the show with those irresistible song-and-dance numbers—the "Ice Cream Sextet" and "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed," sensationally danced by Stephanie Ann Sheppard and Kirby Ward against a dazzling Manhattan nightscape.

The sensitive Anna Maurrant is worlds removed from the cynical floozy Malfitano played in Lyric's 1998 *Mahagonny*, but it is a wisely chosen role for her at this stage of her career, and she made the audience feel intense sympathy for the unhappy housewife who only wanted to be loved. Fuller, making her Lyric debut as Rose Maurrant, has a clear, sweet soprano, and she made "What Good Would the Moon Be?" a touching study in the young woman's conflicting emotions.

Turay brought a sympathetic manner to the bookish Sam, but too often his smooth lyric tenor strained at vocal lines that lay beyond the most effective part of his range. Dean Peterson did what he could with the brutish Frank Maurrant, a one-dimensional role in both the play and opera. The choicest characterizations among the supporting singers came from Timothy Nolen as the suavely lecherous Harry Easter and Judith Christin as the tenement's ace busybody and gossip, Emma Jones. David Cangelosi as Daniel Buchanan, Dorothy Byrne as Olga Olsen, Anthony Mee as Lippo Fiorentino and Philip Kraus as Abraham Kaplan likewise turned in memorable cameos.

John von Rhein
Chicago

John von Rhein is the music critic for the *Chicago Tribune*.

Recordings

Marie Galante / Davy Crockett

Joy Bogen, soprano
Orchestra of St. Luke's
Victor C. Symonette, conductor
Thomas Hrynkiw, piano

Koch-Schwann 3-6592-2

The latest addition to Koch-Schwann's mixed-blessing catalogue of Weill recordings (this is the label which gave us the *Four Walt Whitman Songs* performed by a baritone with only a passing acquaintance with English) professes to be the "world premiere" recordings of "highlights" from *Marie Galante* and *Davy Crockett*.

After *Johnny Johnson* and the long-delayed premiere of *The Eternal Road*, Weill spent the first two months of 1938 working on some songs for a *Davy Crockett* project with playwright Hoffman Reynolds Hays in the dying days of the Federal Theatre Project. When a long hoped-for collaboration with Maxwell Anderson materialized, Weill scooted to Rockland County to pen the score for *Knickerbocker Holiday*, leaving the *Davy Crockett* music labeled "incomplete; for rehearsal purposes only." The five numbers delivered here to piano accompaniment (two of them in arrangements by Lys Symonette and Victor C. Symonette) suggest that they should have remained in their box in the Yale Music Library, honoring the composer's instructions.

Hays' texts are, quite simply, utterly unsingable. With ungainly lyrics like "Blood of your own kind binds you surely" and the necessity of setting a sustained note on the word "soil," this narrative prose negates any chance of melodic development. On the rare occasions when rhymes are volunteered, they are puerile ("clock" is set against "tick tock"). Weill even sinks to the stereotypical "Injun" background drum beats (on the first, third, and fourth beats of a four-four measure) used for several decades in grade B Westerns and arcane rituals of the Cub Scouts.

Even though he managed something approaching a nice tune in the closing vocalise to the "Hillbilly Narrative," an

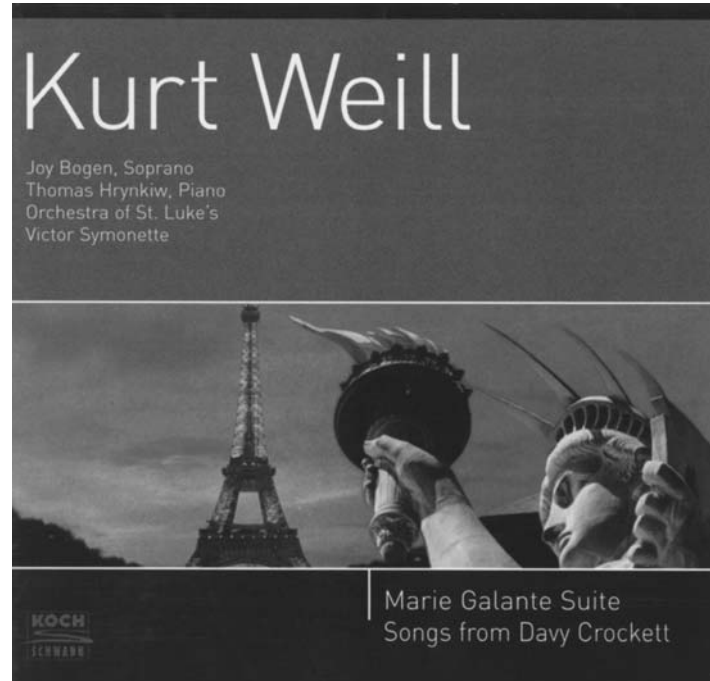
echo of the American employed in *Johnny Johnson* in "The Death of Josh Hawkins," and a hint of "Je ne t'aime pas" in "Time Is Standing Still" (described in the liner notes as "a typical Weill soprano solo"), you can tell Weill's heart was never in this project.

As for the *Marie Galante Suite*, we have all heard the five songs sung

better and in more interesting interpretations by the likes of Stratas and Lemper, and the orchestral music played with more dash by HK Gruber as the "Suite Panaméenne" on his *Berlin im Licht* album (Largo 5114). The only music new to us, a whopping six minutes' worth, comes in the form of an Introduction drawn largely from "Les filles de Bordeaux" and an Intermezzo derived from the "Youkali" tango. (The Gruber disc must again be cited for offering an alternate fanfare of an Introduction and a totally new Tango, fleshed out by the conductor from Weill's sketches.)

Joy Bogen, credited as the executive producer of this album, delivers the songs in a hollow, nasal cabaret voice, abruptly switching gears to a forced, unsupported operatic vocal production. The *Marie Galante* songs are devoid of both humor and urgency. The *Davy Crockett* songs are strident and mannered. Under Victor Symonette's direction, the usually excellent St. Luke's Orchestra is merely competent in the *Marie Galante Suite*, missing the spark and drive in these giddy dance band tunes and sultry tangos. Thomas Hrynkiw knocks out the uninspired piano accompaniment to the *Davy Crockett* fragments.

Yet again, Koch-Schwann gives us a maddening CD booklet with a full fifty percent of Patrick O'Connor's notes devoted to a Weill biography, no credit for who concocted this *Marie Galante Suite* (the numbers are not given in the order in which they appear in the play), contestable



matters of opinion ("the biggest hit song of his career" is here awarded to "September Song"), generalizations ("she became her only student" with respect to Ms. Bogen and Lenya), and contradictions with other sources (is Marie befriended by a Japanese man or an old black man?). While the chorus and percussionist in the *Davy Crockett* songs remain anonymous, credit is given to Roger Fernay, who wrote the lyrics to the alternate vocal version of "Youkali" which is not even included on this recording. With sentences such as "The 'Hillbilly narrative' song rans [sic] throughout the play," and paragraphs which begin in one language and end in another, there appears to have been no budget for an editor (or, for that matter, an art director: Quick, name two other Weill albums with the Statue of Liberty on the cover). Billed as "Joy Bogen sings Kurt Weill" on the back of the CD booklet, "Highlights from the musicals *Marie Galante & Davy Crockett*" on its label, and "Songs and Melodies from *Marie Galante & Davy Crockett*" on its spine, this album can't even make up its mind what it wants to be called.

Larry L. Lash
New York City

Recordings

Life, Love and Laughter: Dance Arrangements, 1927–50

[issued in Europe as *Charming Weill:
Dance Band Arrangements*]

Palast Orchester
HK Gruber, conductor
Max Raabe, vocalist

RCA Red Seal 09026-63513-2

RCA recently released this unique Weill compilation, devoid of original-cast performances, studio reconstructions, or the likes of Miles Davis's "My Ship" or Bobby Darin's "Mack the Knife." Instead, what's promised—and delivered—are faithful renditions of the published "vintage" dance-band arrangements that were an important component in popularizing Weill's melodies on both sides of the Atlantic.

Gruber has sympathetically shaped each reading captured here, leading excellent musicians who are fully attuned to the styles they're emulating. The section playing is consistently tight, with just-right tone quality and vibrato served up by the reeds and brass—as well as the Palast Orchester's violinist, whose portamento is employed judiciously and lovingly. The disciplined rhythm section plays well both for dancing (steady and crisp) and recording (sparse, with a minimum of "fills"); the banjo and tuba of the 1920s selections are replaced by guitar and string bass for the later arrangements. This CD brings to mind the Pasadena Roof Orchestra, a British outfit which, beginning in the 1970s, has resurrected authentic playing (and singing) of 1920s–30s dance band tunes from the U.S. But the Palast Orchester musicians can stand the comparison, both for their technical polish and their nuanced attention to details of performance practice.

Max Raabe, who recently appeared on HK Gruber's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (also for RCA), is heard on eight selections. He sings both in English and German, with a

crisp, light baritone (and some artful falsetto) that's especially appropriate for the earlier songs. Whatever his aim, Raabe's delivery of the later numbers is not convincingly American; for me, however, his appearance as the sole vocalist adds a welcome unity to the collection.

Each arrangement heard here was authorized by Weill, according to Gruber. In the U.S., at least, it was common for songwriters' publishing contracts to permit issuing of "stock" dance-band arrangements and other such market exploitation, and so one wonders if "authorized" carries the same meaning here as "approved." That said, I'd guess Weill to have been pleased with these arrangements. The European items retain more of the instrumentation and "feel" of Weill's originals. If, however, the American scores are more "generic" in their conforming to publishing practice of their time, the most essential features of each song shine through—uncluttered presentations of Weill's melodies, with harmonies and even bass lines preserved to an encouraging degree. Though America's "name" big bands in the 1930s and 1940s each attempted, via their arrangers, to create an instantly identifiable "sound," the resulting liberties and elaborations didn't always please the period's songwriters. We can be grateful to "stock" arrangers like Jack Mason who, while writing scores adaptable to varied or incomplete instrumentation, let more of a composer's creation speak for itself.

Life, Love and Laughter's 22-page accompanying booklet includes a short introduction by Gruber and extended essays by Jürgen Schebera and Charles Hamm.

Schebera, author of *Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Life* (Yale Univ. Press, 1995), ably surveys the musical ferment that spawned the European Weill's theater music, with due attention to commercial matters—the recording and publishing activities of the day. Hamm, whose scholarship has embraced seemingly every aspect of music in the U.S., provides much detail on the conventions of "stock" dance-band arranging during the second phase of Weill's career, along with each song's role in its parent production. Schebera and Hamm have augmented the value of this recording both substantially and engagingly.

The U.S. release's liner notes are exclusively in English, except for the lyrics for Raabe's vocal numbers, given also in German. The translations aren't necessarily "singable"—they don't always match their source in rhyme, accent, and syllable count—but they nonetheless convey nicely the sense of each lyric.

The recorded sound, without drawing attention to itself, is clean and transparent. Granted, it uses more "spot" microphones and processing than were common when these songs were new, but the aural perspective is not compromised. The mix is likewise free from the distraction of instrumental solos and vocals pushed too far "forward."

Gruber presents the CD's nineteen tracks not in chronological sequence but "according to purely musical and largely associative criteria." I was at first skeptical, but repeated hearings have swayed me to his view. The American scores benefit especially, allowing the listener to focus on the arrangers' departures from "formula"—the Dixieland-ish clarinet-trumpet-trombone trio in "Green-up Time" and the melody briefly at the *bottom* of the harmonized saxophones in the title song, to name but two. (Those intent upon faithful chronology may program their CD players to a track sequence something like this: 8–12–18–19–2–13–14–11–9–16–1–5–15–4–10–17–6–3–7.)

A product of fine oversight, musicianship, and scholarship, *Life, Love and Laughter* is indeed "charming"—both artistically first-rate and unlike any previously recorded compilation of Weill's music.



George J. Ferencz
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

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