Kurt Weill

Newsletter

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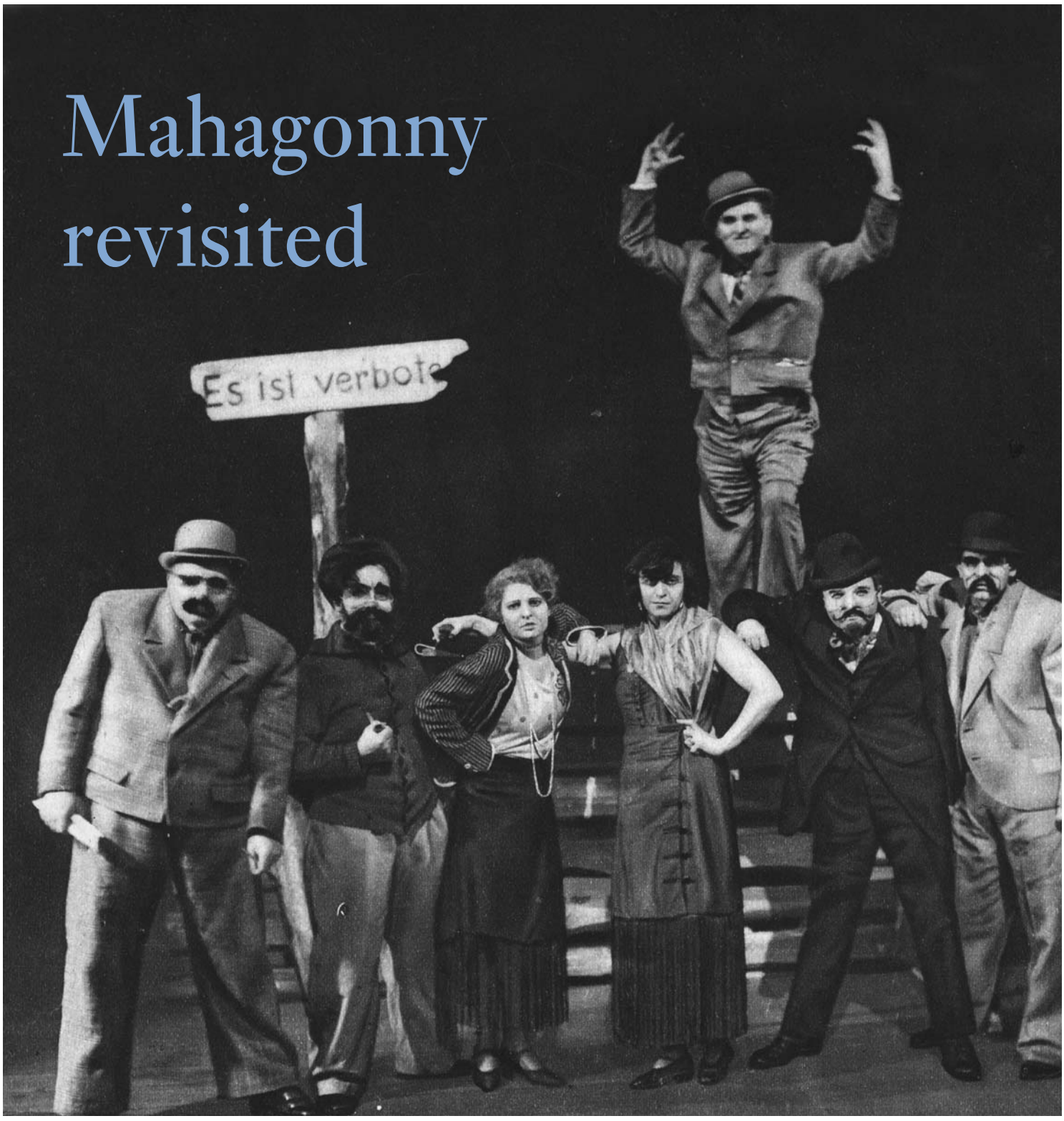

Mahagonny revisited

In this issue

Kurt Weill
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A variety of opinions are expressed in the Newsletter; they do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. Letters to the editor are welcome.

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Cover photo: The Ur-*Mahagonny*: A scene from the opera's world premiere in Leipzig, March 1930. Photo: M. Taggesel; courtesy of the Institut für Theater-, Film- und Fernsehwissenschaft, Universität zu Köln

The finale of Act 1 of *LoveMusik*. Weill (Michael Cerveris) and Lenya (Donna Murphy) aboard the ship that will bring them to the U.S. Photo: Sara Krulwich/*The New York Times*/Redux

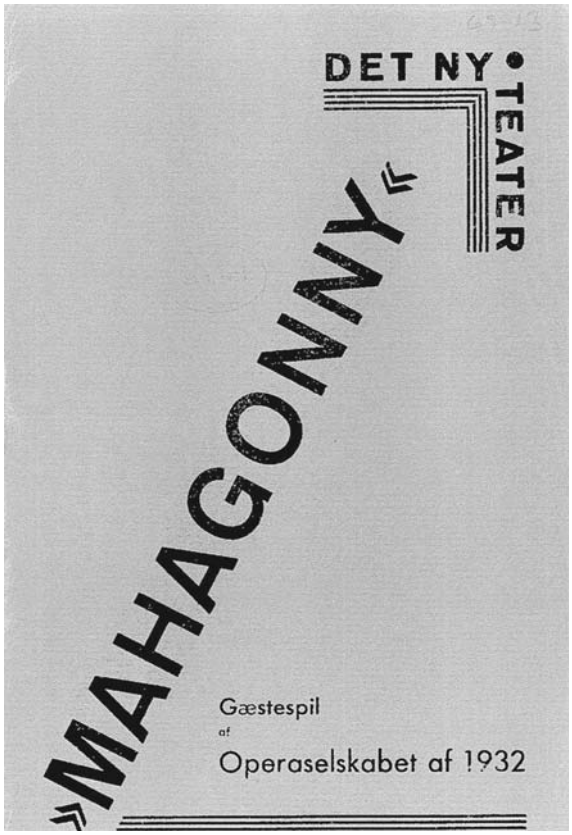
Note from the Editor

Doom city is booming. Over the past three years, there have been eight major new *Mahagonny* productions in Germany alone, and then some: Italy, the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland. This year offers three productions in the U.S. (two of them reviewed in this issue). Creative teams and critics alike are finding that the opera is disturbingly contemporary, and it doesn't take a major hurricane to make the case. Should *Mahagonny*'s topicality frighten us, then? Perhaps a little. But Weill and Brecht hand us a mirror, so we can gather insights into the mechanics of our society and the darker sides of human behavior. Just how much do we want to learn, though? Here, opinions diverge and controversy begins, as the possibilities for the staging of Weill's opera are seemingly endless. This is a joy for operagoers, save for the ever-dissatisfied critic who will complain that productions are either too didactic or too entertaining.

The feature article of this issue looks back at another controversy that was sparked by misguided expectations, assuming that *Mahagonny* was just another *Stück mit Musik*, like *Dreigroschenoper*. The 1933/34 semi-professional production of *Mahagonny* in Copenhagen, the last during Weill's lifetime and one in which he did not participate, had critics arguing over the proper singing style and casting, a debate that continued well into the second half of the last century.

Mahagonny Songspiel, the 1927 kernel of the opera, was Weill's first work in which Lenya had a role, immortalizing "Alabama-Song." New York audiences currently have a chance to see on Broadway, no less, how she may have gotten the part in the Baden-Baden performance: *LoveMusik*, the new show created by Hal Prince and Alfred Uhry, tells the story of Weill and Lenya in theatrical terms, and it has the theater community abuzz. Coverage of the show and an insightful review round out this spring issue.

Elmar Juchem



Program cover from 1934 production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in Copenhagen (see feature article on p. 4). From a collection of programs from Det ny Teater, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen.

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny in Copenhagen, 1933/34: An Early Debate about Performing Style

By Michael Fjeldsøe

When *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* saw its first performance in Copenhagen on 30 December 1933 at Det ny Teater (The New Theater), it was performed by opera singers but received by an audience who expected it to sound like the singing actors they knew from *Die Dreigroschenoper* and from German recordings. Thus, the Copenhagen performance expands our understanding of the early performance history of the opera in two ways. First, it was the last performance of the opera before World War II and is almost unknown outside of Denmark. Second, it points to the fact that early performance tradition was divided into performances by singing actors and performances by acting singers, and that Kurt Weill preferred the latter. A short review of early performances might be useful as an introduction.

The legendary performance of *Mahagonny Songspiel* at the festival Deutsche Kammermusik Baden-Baden in the summer of 1927 was literally unique, as it was performed only once, on the evening of 17 July. Attended by a small audience consisting of contemporary music aficionados but broadcast live on Südwestfunk, the performance was on everybody's lips. It helped to establish the notion that *Mahagonny* songs ought to be performed by singing actors, as Lotte Lenya made the "Alabama-Song" an unforgettable experience, though she was the only non-operatic singer in the six-member cast. "Even Klemperer couldn't stop singing 'Oh Moon of Alabama,'"[1] and he was not alone. Yet one must keep in mind that *Mahagonny Songspiel* was not merely an assemblage of solo numbers. It consists mainly of ensemble scenes performed by the four male singers or the whole ensemble including the two female voices, "Alabama-Song" being the only one performed by the women alone.[2] Except for Lenya, all singers performed in the other works on the program as well—*Kurzopern* by Hindemith, Toch, and Milhaud. Adding to the legend of the *Songspiel* was Lenya's recording of "Alabama-Song" (and on the B-side "Denn wie man sich bettet"), recorded for Ultraphon in February 1930.

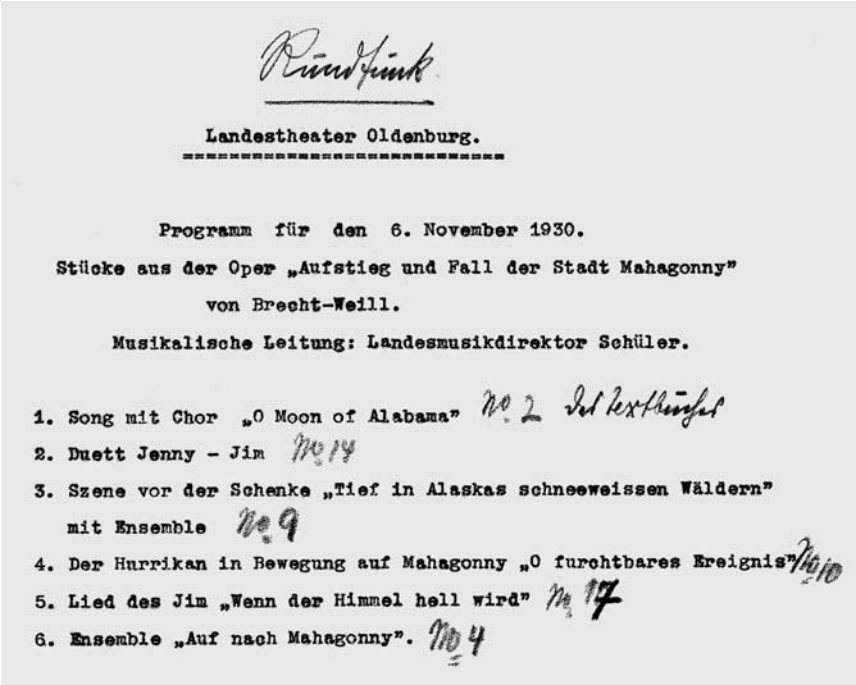
Weill was eager to see his full-length opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* premiered in Berlin, and the fact that Klemperer had taken over the Krolloper in 1927 and turned it into Berlin's most adventurous opera house seemed to present the perfect opportunity. Negotiations continued into the summer of 1929, when Klemperer changed his mind and turned Weill down.[3] Instead the world premiere took place on 9 March 1930 under Gustav Brecher at the Neues Theater in Leipzig, where it had five performances. Three days later, on 12 March 1930, it opened at the Landestheater in Braunschweig under Klaus Nettstraeder (2 performances), and in Kassel (7 performances). Maurice Abravanel, a student of Weill's in the early 1920s who had made a career as kapellmeister in the German provinces, conducted in Kassel. He knew Weill's early operas, since he had conducted *Der Protagonist* and *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* in 1928 in Altenburg and Gera.

These first performances all took place in opera houses with opera singers, and Weill made perfectly clear in a letter to Abravanel that this was what he wanted: "*Mahagonny* is an opera. An opera for singers. To cast it with actors is absolutely impossible. Only when I specifically marked it as 'spoken' should there be any spoken words and any kind of changes are possible only with my explicit permission . . ."[4] Productions later that year also met his requirements. In July 1930 *Mahagonny* was performed at Deutsches Landestheater in Prague under George Szell (2 performances) and in Frankfurt am Main it was premiered during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the opera house on 16 October 1930, conducted by Hans Wilhelm Steinberg (12 performances).

Efforts to secure a Berlin staging continued in 1930, when Max Reinhardt acquired the rights. "It is unclear whether he will present the work in the Deutsches Theater or use one of Berlin's three large opera houses for this purpose."[5] At this time, Weill continued to insist that it had to be performed by professional singers: "People who only know the libretto have spread the rumor that *Mahagonny* could be cast with actors. Of course, that would be absolutely impossible . . ."[6] In the end, nothing happened, as Reinhardt informed Universal Edition in December that he had to withdraw the piece at the Deutsches Theater due to political pressure. The content of his letter was made public.[7]

Only when it became clear that none of the opera houses in Berlin would take up the opera did Weill accept the idea of a production in a theater with Lotte Lenya performing the part of Jenny, which required changes in the vocal lines to accommodate her, omission of the difficult "Kraniche-Duett," and recomposed versions of "Ach, bedenken Sie, Herr Jakob Schmidt" and the ensemble "Lasst euch nicht verführen." Furthermore, the number of players in the orchestra was reduced. It opened on 21 December 1931 at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm, conducted by one of the most experienced and able conductors of contemporary music, Alexander von Zemlinsky. This production presumably lasted about 36 performances (it closed on 31 January 1932) and resulted in a recording of highlights with members of the Berlin cast in 1932. Yet another production opened in Vienna's Raimund-Theater on 26 April 1932 (11 performances); Lenya took center stage again, thereby confirming the Berlin performance tradition.

That accounts for all the productions prior to the Copenhagen staging. Plans for productions in Dortmund, Essen, and Oldenburg were cancelled for political reasons. But my research on early performances yielded new information about the circumstances of the



Rundfunk

Landestheater Oldenburg.

Programm für den 6. November 1930.

Stücke aus der Oper „Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny"

von Brecht-Weill.

Musikalische Leitung: Landesmusikdirektor Schüler.

1. Song mit Chor „O Moon of Alabama" No 2 Ist Textdichter
2. Duett Jenny - Jim No 14
3. Szene vor der Schenke „Tief in Alaskas schneeweissen Wäldern" mit Ensemble No 9
4. Der Hurrikan in Bewegung auf Mahagonny „O furchtbares Ereignis" No 10
5. Lied des Jim „Wenn der Himmel hell wird" No 17
6. Ensemble „Auf nach Mahagonny". No 4

List of numbers for a broadcast on 6 November 1930 from Theater Oldenburg (Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Staatsarchiv Oldenburg).

cancelation at the Landestheater Oldenburg and the nationwide radio broadcast of some excerpts. The broadcast on 6 November 1930 lasted thirty minutes and consisted of an introduction by Intendant Hellmuth Götze followed by six numbers from the opera. The program was part of a weeklong series publicizing German theater, to which Oldenburg had been asked to contribute a "modern music" program.[8] The theater had already acquired the performance rights on 29 December 1929 for a premiere on or after 12 March 1930.[9] A week later, Götze wrote to Universal Edition to request permission to postpone staging the opera to the first half of the next season, due to the "over-the-top [*überspitzte*] world premiere in Leipzig."[10] He did not wish to disrupt negotiations in the *Landtag* (state parliament) over future funding of the theater, and Universal Edition granted his request.[11] When Weill learned of the plans for a radio broadcast, he agreed in principle, provided that "only individual, self-contained numbers . . . be presented without context and without connecting text passages, simply as 'selections from *Mahagonny*.'"[12] The program eventually included six numbers that were conducted by *Landesmusikdirektor* Schüler: "1. Song mit Chor 'O Moon of Alabama' / 2. Duett Jenny – Jim ["Crane Duet"] / 3. Szene vor der Schenke 'Tief in Alaskas schneeweissen Wäldern' mit Ensemble / 4. Der Hurrikan in Bewegung auf Mahagonny 'O furchtbares Ereignis' / 5. Lied des Jim 'Wenn der Himmel hell wird' / 6. Ensemble 'Auf nach Mahagonny.'"[13]

The broadcast took place just days before the Oldenburg city council elections and thus became an issue in the fierce campaign. In particular, the German National People's Party (Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei) and National Socialists attacked the broadcast and Götze himself, who, in his introduction, had advocated theater for the whole population: "The guidelines for our artistic and managerial decisions, which have been in place for years, are based on the general assumption that a cultural institution which is supported by public funds provided by the *entire* population also needs to serve the *entire* population. This means that programming choices cannot be shaped by narrow-minded worldviews or the opinions of political parties."[14] In his view, he was not the one politicizing the theater by performing Weill and Brecht (or other modern operas), it was those demanding that he suppress such productions who turned an artistic institution into a political arena.

The whole affair hit the national press, and Weill himself cited the Oldenburg incident as one of several cases where *Mahagonny* was literally sabotaged: "Oldenburg has also programmed *Mahagonny*, and Intendant Götze is making every effort to push this performance through. As a form of preparation he intended to broadcast a few selections from *Mahagonny* during the national radio's theater week. Prohibited from doing so, he read the [opera's] text to the theater committee, whereupon permission was granted. Then the Nazis tried to cut the telephone cables on the evening of the broadcast, and only at the last minute were their plans thwarted. When, shortly after, Götze presented [Georg] Kaiser's *Mississippi*, the Oldenburg Nazis confused it with *Mahagonny* and made a veritable '*Mahagonny* scandal' at the end of *Mississippi*."[15] Oldenburg was a lost cause, though, as the two aforementioned parties won the city elections, and the Nazis became the state's strongest party in May 1931, winning an absolute majority exactly a year later—more than eight months before Hitler's rise to power. Accordingly, Götze had to postpone the premiere yet again and finally cancelled the production altogether.[16]

Aufstieg und Fall in Copenhagen

Copenhagen's audiences had experienced the music theater of Brecht and Weill first-hand when *Dreigroschenoper* opened in January 1930 at Det ny Teater. It was conducted by Erik Tuxen, a Danish composer and conductor educated mainly in Germany. He had been engaged at Stadttheater Lübeck as a vocal coach 1927–29, taking part in a production of the show there. The musicians, though presented as "Det Ny Teaters Jazzband," were really the German Oscar Joost's Orchestra. Later, actress Gerda Madsen performed songs from the piece on several occasions and study groups of high school students examined Weill's music with the help of piano scores and recordings.[17] Furthermore, *Der Jasager* and *Der Lindberghflug* were performed in Copenhagen in the early 1930s.

Then, on 30 December 1933, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* had its first performance at a private session for members of Operaselskabet af 1932 (Opera Society of 1932), which was in charge of the production. The performance on 1 January 1934 was open to the public and also broadcast live on the radio. Additional performances took place in January; apparently there were eight altogether.[18]

The Copenhagen production upheld the tradition of 1930 by employing opera singers. Helge Bonnén, founder of the opera society, conducted an orchestra of 32 musicians, some of them members of the orchestra of the Royal Guards. Though the Opera Society of 1932 consisted partly of amateurs, the lead roles were

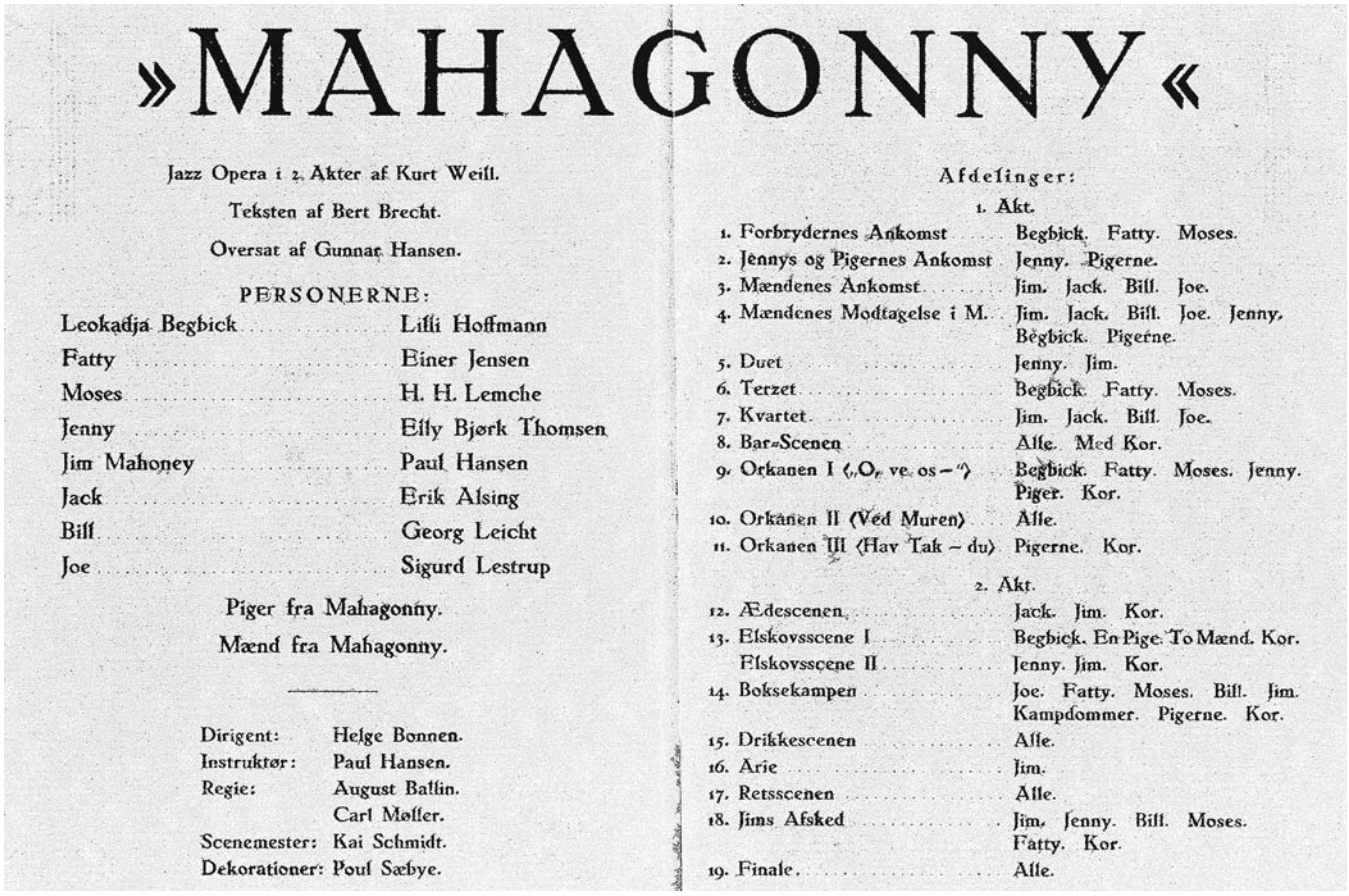
cast with professional singers. Paul Hansen, who sang the principal male role of Jim Mahoney and also directed, had trained at The Royal Theater in Copenhagen. After some years there he worked at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin from 1913–25, and then he was a manager and director at the theater in Gera for five years. The Gera connection is very revealing, as it shows he had knowledge of Weill's music theater from the period prior to *Die Dreigroschenoper*. On 2 April 1928, as mentioned above, Gera premiered two of Weill's operas, *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* and *Der Protagonist*, conducted by Maurice Abravanel. Weill attended a performance and declared his satisfaction with the production. This experience might well have contributed to Paul Hansen's conception of how *Mahagonny* ought to be performed.[19]

The part of Bill was sung by the Norwegian-born Georg Leicht, also trained at the opera academy of the Royal Theater. Lilli Hoffmann, a successful Wagnerian soprano who had appeared in Berlin and Bayreuth, sang Begbick. Jenny was performed by the young Elly Bjørk Thomsen, who had her breakthrough with this role. She began her career singing operetta, then took a two-year break after her marriage. The tenor Ejner Jensen (Fatty) had a wealth of experience; after graduating from the Royal Academy of Music he had performed in radio, opera, operetta and as a singing guitar player in Copenhagen restaurants.

The audience gave the opera a favorable reception and most critics were friendly, too. Those critics who viewed it as modern, contemporary music theater gave it good marks. *Berlingske Tidende* called it "a performance which, despite terrible flaws and obvious mistakes, was entertaining and intense, with scenes whose tempo and form were something out of the ordinary" and "the applause at the end was passionate and the curtain calls numerous."[20] Musically it was "a huge artistic victory"; the score was characterized as "music of our time and of our youth."[21] The reviewer of *Politiken* stated, "*Mahagonny* is a formidable example of modern opera. It captures and conveys the heartbeat of today."[22]

Reviewers who focused on the work as social criticism cited several shortcomings. Prior to the first performance the press had raised expectations by presenting Brecht as "the communist whose works were burned in the streets after the Nazis took over, now living on Thurø at Karin Michaëlis's place," and the libretto was described as "brutal and violent, propagandistic and bloody, mocking anything and everything, caustic acid."[23] These expectations the opera could not fulfill. In fact, the reviews found the production lacked Brecht's characteristic bitterness: "No, it was no satire on society, but a humorously ironic treatment of opera. Brecht it was not. It was gentle, pretty, and Danish . . . That's why everything went so well."[24] One reviewer mentioned that the piece had been cut and that the final scene with the demonstrations had been shortened.[25]

The casting of opera singers stirred up what may have been the first debate over the proper style of singing. Elly Bjørk Thomsen defended her style and provided the key to her understanding of the role. When the newspaper *Dagens Nyheder* asked, "What did you learn from playing Jenny?", she replied: "An intimate knowledge of my means of expression. I have sung *Carmen* and I have



»MAHAGONNY«

Jazz Opera i 2 Akter af Kurt Weill.

Teksten af Bert Brecht.

Oversat af Gunnar Hansen.

PERSONERNE:

Leokadja Begbick	Lilli Hoffmann
Fatty	Einer Jensen
Moses	H. H. Lemche
Jenny	Elly Bjørk Thomsen
Jim Mahoney	Paul Hansen
Jack	Erik Alsing
Bill	Georg Leicht
Joe	Sigurd Lestrup

Piger fra Mahagonny.

Mænd fra Mahagonny.

Dirigent:	Helge Bonnen.
Instruktør:	Paul Hansen.
Regie:	August Ballin.
	Carl Møller.
Scenemester:	Kai Schmidt.
Dekorationer:	Poul Sæbye.

Afdelinger:

1. Akt.

1.	Forbrydernes Ankomst	Begbick. Fatty. Moses.
2.	Jennys og Pigernes Ankomst	Jenny. Pigerne.
3.	Mændenes Ankomst	Jim. Jack. Bill. Joe.
4.	Mændenes Modtagelse i M.	Jim. Jack. Bill. Joe. Jenny. Begbick. Pigerne.
5.	Duet	Jenny. Jim.
6.	Terzet	Begbick. Fatty. Moses.
7.	Kvartet	Jim. Jack. Bill. Joe.
8.	Bar-Scenen	Alle. Med Kor.
9.	Orkanen I („O, ve os – “)	Begbick. Fatty. Moses. Jenny. Piger. Kor.
10.	Orkanen II (Ved Muren)	Alle.
11.	Orkanen III (Hav Tak – du)	Pigerne. Kor.

2. Akt.

12.	Ædescenen	Jack. Jim. Kor.
13.	Elskovsscene I	Begbick. En Pige. To Mænd. Kor.
	Elskovsscene II	Jenny. Jim. Kor.
14.	Boksekampen	Joe. Fatty. Moses. Bill. Jim. Kampdommer. Pigerne. Kor.
15.	Drikkescenen	Alle.
16.	Arie	Jim.
17.	Retsscenen	Alle.
18.	Jims Afsked	Jim. Jenny. Bill. Moses. Fatty. Kor.
19.	Finale.	Alle.

The Copenhagen program billed *Aufstieg und Fall* as a "Jazz Opera" and combined Acts 2 and 3 into one (from a collection of programs from Det ny Teater, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen).

Elly Bjørk Thomsen (Jenny), Lilli Hoffmann (Begbick), and Paul Hansen (Jim) during "Liebe." Photo: Holger Damgaards teaterfotos, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen

sung *Bajadere*, and in both of these works the external gestures were of great importance. At first, I emphasized them in my portrayal of Jenny, too. But I sensed that something was wrong. I realized that approach would not work; I had to turn *inward* and find something completely different—as few outwardly directed gestures as possible. In that way I succeeded in becoming her." The reporter continued: "It has been said that the part of Jenny should not be sung, but rather spoken?" She replied, "I know, but I feel deep in my heart that that is wrong. Weill would not have created such beautiful music if he didn't want it sung."[26]

The interviewer alluded to an opinion expressed by Copenhagen's most prominent theater critic, Svend Borberg, in the newspaper *Politiken*. He had compared her to Carola Neher (confusing the role of Jenny in *Dreigroschenoper* with the role of Jenny in *Mahagonny*): "Jenny needs hardly any voice at all (Carola Neher, the Berlin Jenny, was ideal with a voice like a tired schoolgirl). . . . Jenny [i.e., Elly Bjørk Thomsen] sang with a huge tone." [27] Even though he misidentified the Berlin Jenny as Carola Neher—she never sang the role anywhere—his statement shows the importance of early recordings in establishing expectations of singing style long before listeners attended an actual performance. After Roma Bahn had left, Neher played Polly in Berlin's *Dreigroschenoper*, the one who sings "Seeräuber-Jenny," and her recording of this song was well known in Copenhagen. Many people knew these recordings of songs from *Dreigroschenoper* and other plays: "Excerpts were known from the gramophone, the concert hall, the press . . ."[28]; "[It is] a piece which lovers of new music simply have been thirsting for and for which their gramophones after all gave them merely a substitute."[29]

Sven Møller Kristensen, a young music critic at *Ekstrabladet* and a prominent figure in the cultural left of the 1930s, shared Borberg's view and clearly preferred the style of *Dreigroschenoper*. He saw *Mahagonny* as Weill's "problem child," which "contains many fine numbers, but its fundamental defect is the form, a hodgepodge of opera, operetta, and revue theater. Frankly, there is too much music in it. Brecht's libretto does not lend itself to being through-composed. *Mahagonny* is as illogical in its form as *Dreigroschenoper* is logical: an operetta turned inside out. Kurt Weill should not be sung in the bad opera-style heard here, or operatically at all, but in the particular German style of revue, which in this country has been mastered by Lulu Ziegler. Elly Bjørk Thomsen made an effort in that direction, but it did not seem natural."[30]

Arguing from a more traditional perspective, the music critic Kai Flor took the opposite stand: "Mrs. Elly Bjørk Thomsen's performance of the role of Jenny was crucial to the opera's success. Her singing was supple as well as fierce, and her voice had all the defiance it needed in 'Denn wie man sich bettet, so liegt man.' It even had to be repeated!" [31] Confronted with the view that her voice was too large for Jenny, Elly Bjørk Thomsen referred to Weill's approval of her interpretation in the daily *B.T.* (not to be confused with the *Berlingske Tidende*): "Well, some critics have stated that the opera should be spoken, but I certainly do not believe they are right. Would Kurt Weill have sent us a telegram to say that he was very pleased, if we had misunderstood his opera on such a crucial point? I hardly think so! . . . The part of Jenny . . . is so brilliantly singable, that it would be absurd not to make the most of it."[32]

The cable from Weill was reported in the Copenhagen press after the live broadcast of the first public performance, which Weill supposedly had heard: "On the occasion of the broadcast of *Mahagonny* from Det ny Teater, the composer Kurt Weil[l] sent a cable to the theater, expressing his satisfaction with the performance: 'Went over beautifully. The music exactly as I intended. The artists are magnificent—congratulations!'"[33] The telegram was really a hoax, though, possibly a publicity stunt staged by the theater. When Weill heard of the production and "his" cable in a letter from Margarete Steffin, he wrote to Lenya: "I had no idea that *Mahagonny* was given there, and I certainly didn't send a telegram."[34]

Due to the success of the Berlin performance and commercial recordings of songs by Weill and Brecht, and also due to the stature of Lenya, not only a magnificent performer but the composer's wife and, after his death, a key figure in preserving his legacy, it is no surprise that a performance style minimizing vocal quality was for decades considered more authentic. But when we review early performances up to and including the one in Copenhagen, it becomes clear that most early productions, in line with Weill's original preference, embodied another performance tradition.

Notes

1. Hans Curjel, "Erinnerungen um Kurt Weill," *Melos* 37, no. 3 (March 1970), 82.

2. Bert Brecht – Kurt Weill, *Mahagonny Songspiel: Urfassung 1927*, ed.

Michael Fjeldsøe is Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Copenhagen. This article is an amended excerpt of his article, "Syngende skuespillere eller agerende operasangere: Om den rette sangstil i operaen 'Mahagonny'" (for full citation see p. 8a of this Newsletter).

Begbick, Jenny, Jim, Moses, and Fatty. Photo: Holger Damgaards teaterfotos, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen

David Drew (Wien: Universal Edition, 1963). Isolated performances of the *Songspiel* in Hamburg (October 1932) and in a revised version in Paris (December 1932), London (July 1933), and Rome (December 1933) did not affect the early performance history of the opera. See David Farneth/Elmar Juchem/Dave Stein, *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2000), 60.

3. Jürgen Schebera, *Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 154–55.

4. Letter from Weill to Abravanel, 2 February 1930, quoted in *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1995), 18.

5. *Die Musik* 22, no. 8 (May 1930), 646.

6. Letter from Weill to Abravanel, 7 May 1930, quoted in *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1995), 18.

7. Press clippings in Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Staatsarchiv Oldenburg, Best. 172-1, Nr. 30, e.g., *Der Mittag* (Düsseldorf), 17 December 1930. Thanks to Wolfgang Henninger from the Landesarchiv for providing copies of documents and clippings concerning *Mahagonny*.

8. Letter from NORAG, Nordische Rundfunk-Aktiengesellschaft, Sendestelle Bremen to Indendant Götze, Landestheater Oldenburg, 30 September 1930, in Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Staatsarchiv Oldenburg, Best. 172-1, Nr. 30.

9. Register of the Oldenburger Landestheater. I would like to thank Martina Kamphus of the Oldenburger Landestheater for providing a copy of the relevant page from the register.

10. Letter of 19 March 1930 from Götze to Universal Edition; Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Staatsarchiv Oldenburg, Best. 172-1, Nr. 30.

11. According to the theater's register: "Premiere according to letter of 4 April 1930 extended until 1 December 1930." This is confirmed by a letter from Universal Edition to Weill, 5 April 1930; see *Kurt Weill: Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, ed. by Nils Grosch (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 241.

12. Weill quoted his letter to the Oldenburg theater in a letter to Universal Edition, 12 October 1930; see *Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition*, 271.

13. Typed manuscript of the program, in Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Staatsarchiv Oldenburg, Best. 172-1, Nr. 30.

14. His introduction was published in full under the headline "*Mahagonny* im Rundfunk," in *Nachrichten für Stadt und Land* (Oldenburg), 7 November 1930.

15. Kurt Weill, "Mit geistigen Mitteln nichts zu machen!" *General-Anzeiger für Dortmund und das gesamte rheinisch-westfälische Industriegebiet*, 21 December 1930; Farneth, *Kurt Weill*, 115. Götze presented Weill's revised version of the opera during a meeting of the city council's theater committee on 23 October 1930, and adjusted a few passages himself; see minutes of the meeting in the papers of the Stadtarchiv, in Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Staatsarchiv Oldenburg, Best. 262-1, Nr. 2978. The Nazis' attempt to cut the cables is not corroborated by the local Oldenburg press.

16. Götze asked for permission to postpone it to the next season in a letter to Universal Edition, 23 December 1930; Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Staatsarchiv Oldenburg, Best. 172-1, Nr. 30. When the Nazis took over in May 1932, Götze left Oldenburg and became intendant in Magdeburg, where he directed Weill's *Silbersee*, after which he was discharged by the Nazis.

17. Under the umbrella of the Association of High School Students, the groups studied both contemporary art music and jazz as forms of modern music. The young composer Otto Mortensen discussed Weill in a session on 19 December 1932; see *Vi Gymnasiaster* 4, no. 5 (December 1932), 14; and no. 6 (January 1933), 11.

18. Niels Krabbe, "*Mahagonny* hos Brecht og Weill," *Musik & Forskning* 16 (1990–91), 127.

19. See Schebera, *Kurt Weill*, 86–87.

20. blk., "Opførelsen af *Mahagonny* interesserede meget," *Berlingske Tidende*, 31 December 1933.

21. K.F. [Kai Flor], "Musikken," *Berlingske Tidende*, 31 December 1933.

22. H.S. [Hugo Seligmann], "Musiken til *Mahagonny*," *Politiken*, 31 December 1933.

23. Mogens, "Kurt Weills Opera, 'der ikke kan spilles,'" *Berlingske Tidende*, 28 December 1933.

24. Svend Borberg, "*Mahagonny* paa Det ny Teater," *Politiken*, 31 December 1933.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Rong., "Jenny fra Mahagonny: Fru Elly Bjørk Thomsen hader Jazz, men elsker Weill," *Dagens Nyheder*, 6 January 1934.

27. Svend Borberg, "*Mahagonny* paa Det ny Teater," *Politiken*, 31 December 1933.

28. blk, *Berlingske Tidende*, 31 December 1933.

29. K.F. [Kai Flor], *Berlingske Tidende*, 31 December 1933.

30. Kris. [Sven Møller Kristensen], "*Mahagonny*," *Ekstrabladet*, 2 January 1934.

31. K.F. [Kai Flor], "Musikken," *Berlingske Tidende*, 31 December 1933.

32. "Klog og velment Kritik stiver en ægte Kunstner af," *B.T.*, 6 January 1934.

33. *Berlingske Tidende*, 2 January 1934.

34. Weill, letter to Lenya, 12 January 1934; *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, trans. and ed. by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 110.

Sidebar: ***Aufstieg und Fall*** **in Berlin, 1931/32**

Roughly three weeks into the run of *Mahagonny* in Berlin, on 11 and 12 January 1932, Weill appeared as piano accompanist in a reading by Karl Kraus of excerpts from the opera. At that time, Weill was considering a musical adaptation of one of Kraus's published stories, but the idea never took flight. Aside from publishing *Die Fackel*, Kraus was famous for his public readings of Nestroy, Shakespeare, and Offenbach, in which he read and sang all the parts. He was infamous, though, for his vanity and craving for recognition. During his readings, the pianist was not allowed to be visible on stage and thus condemned to play behind a screen. Presumably Weill received different treatment. Lenya's performance in Berlin had enraptured Kraus and he tried (unsuccessfully) to convince her to perform in Offenbach's *Périchole* in Vienna. For Kraus's importance in the Offenbach renaissance, see Joel Galand's article in this Newsletter 22, no. 2 (Fall 2004).


THEATER

2 Offenbach-Abde.

KARL KRAUS (Wien)

I. Abd.: 100. Berliner Vorlesung: „Vert-Vert", übersetzt und bearb. v. K. Kraus (mit Zeitstrophen).
II. Abd.: „Die Grossherzogin v. Gerolstein", bearbeitet von K. Kraus (mit Zeitstrophen).

Brettkopfsaal. Montag, 11. Januar, 8 Uhr

KARL KRAUS (Wien)

liest aus

Mahagonny v. Brecht u. Weill und Chansons von Frank Wedekind und Karl Kraus.

Am Flügel: Kurt Weill.

Der Reinertrag f. d. Frank Wedekind-Gedenk-Fond

Karten Mk. 1.10 bis 3.30 für jeden Abend.

Bechsteinsaal. Sonnabend, 9. Januar, 8 Uhr

Einziger Klavier-Abd. Poldi Mildner

Karten f. ob. Veranst. b. Bote & Bock, Werth. u. a. d. Abendk.

Announcement of the first of two evenings in *Berliner Tageblatt,* 3 January 1932.

Announcement of Ernst Josef Aufricht's *Mahagonny* production in Berlin and, directly below, of a reading by Kraus of Offenbach's *Vert-Vert.* From the *Berliner Tageblatt,* 1 January 1932.

Letter from Hans Heinsheimer to Weill, 31 December 1931

I've talked a lot about *Mahagonny* with Karl Kraus, who is very much looking forward to a recital of a few passages with your accompaniment. By the way, Kraus, too, couldn't stop gushing about Lenya's absolutely fabulous and grand accomplishment and heartily congratulates her on the overall sensational success. Of course, it would be really great if Kraus would do a reading of the entire *Mahagonny* in Vienna, and I will try one more time to talk him into it.

Letter from Weill to UE, 13 January 1932

Karl Kraus's reading from *Mahagonny* was quite interesting, but—between you and me—it corresponded so little with my own views, and was musically so deficient, that I couldn't make much of it. After this attempt at collaboration, I've come to the conclusion that Kraus belongs to an older generation which isn't of much use to me in creative terms.

Karl Kraus

Search for Sheet Music and Band Arrangements

Wanted: Help from Our Readers

The Kurt Weill Edition is preparing a volume entitled "Popular Adaptations, 1927–1950," edited by Charles Hamm. The 300-page volume will contain a gallery and catalogue of all sheet music editions, adaptations, arrangements, etc. published during Weill's lifetime. A selection of these will appear in full-size facsimile. While we have located and obtained more than 170 editions and images (many coming from national libraries), there are still a number of missing items.

Below, we list the missing publications according to their country of origin. Where possible, a photo of a similar piece is provided for reference. Please contact us if you have any information about any of the missing items: kwe@kwf.org

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France

Eschig's edition of "Ballade de la vie agréable" for voice only (chant seul)

(Editions Max Eschig)
"Chant d'amour" chant et piano; chant seul
"L'inanité de l'effort humain" chant et piano; chant seul

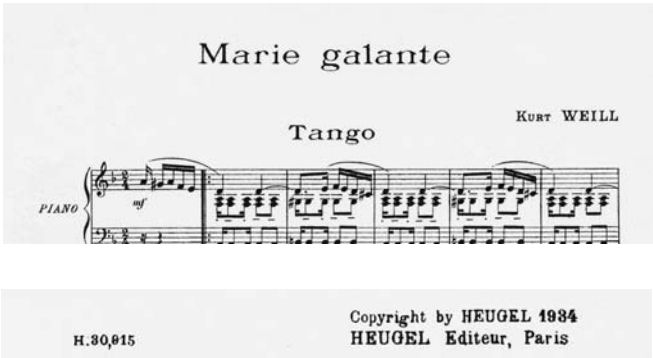
(Editions Salabert)
"Surabaya Johnny" chant et piano; chant seul
"Bilbao-Song" chant et piano; chant seul

(Editions CODA, Heugel)
"Youkali" chant et piano; chant seul (© 1935 [*not* 1946])

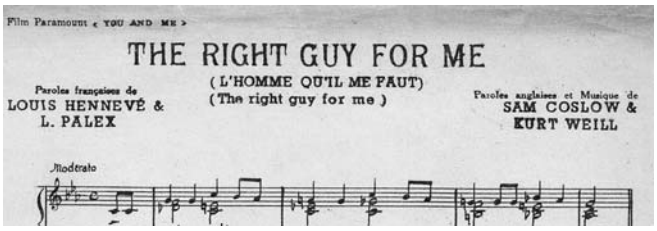
(Chappell S.A.)
"The Right Guy for Me" (L'homme qu'il me faut) chant et piano; chant seul
"September Song" (J'ai peur de l'automne) chant et piano; chant seul

A 1951 edition of "September Song" for voice only, occasioned by the release of the film *September Affair* (Les amants de Capri)

(Heugel)
"Tango" piano seul, 1934 (title and imprint shown below): Though engraved, this instrumental number may have been withdrawn from the *Marie Galante* album (see above).



"The Right Guy for Me" was published in a French edition in 1939, but no copy with a cover has been traced.



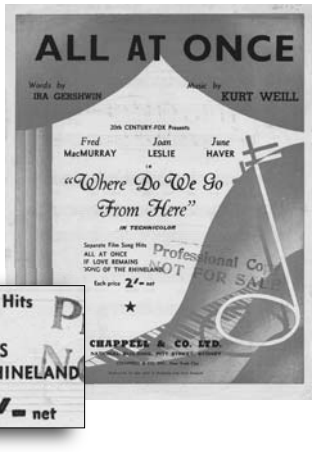
United Kingdom

(Chappell & Co., Ltd.)
"Piano Selection" from *A Kingdom for a Cow*
"September Song" 1947 printing

An Australian edition of "September Song." The missing British 1947 edition may have had a similar cover design.

Australia

(Chappell & Co., Ltd. Sydney)
"If Love Remains"
"Song of the Rhineland"



Australian edition of "All At Once." The small print on the cover shows that the two missing titles from the film *Where Do We Go from Here?* were also published as sheet music.

United States (band arrangements only)

(Crawford Music Corp.)
"There's Nowhere to Go But Up!" (arr. ?)

(Chappell & Co., Inc.)
"This Is New" (arr. Jack Mason)
"My Ship" (arr. Bob Noeltner)
"Speak Low" (arr. Bob Noeltner)
"All At Once" (arr. Bob Noeltner)

Band arrangement of "September Song" published by Crawford in 1938

Jack Mason's 1948 arrangement of "Here I'll Stay"

Italy

"September Song" (Settembre) per voce e pianoforte

1951 edition (voce sola) of "September Song"

Various Countries

While there is no positive evidence, it is possible that popular adaptations of Weill's music were published in the following countries: Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Norway, and the Soviet Union. Any information would be greatly appreciated.

Music

Der Protagonist, op. 15

Kurt Weill Edition, Series I, Volume 1
Edited by Gunther Diehl and Jürgen Selk

New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; European American Music Corporation, 2006. 382 pp. (Critical Report 57 pp.)
ISBN: 0-913574-64-3

With their impeccable edition of Weill's first opera, *Der Protagonist*, Gunther Diehl, Jürgen Selk, Giselher Schubert (whom the editors thank for his extraordinary contribution), and the Kurt Weill Edition have presented a tremendous gift to scholars, performers, and fans. This publication, the latest in the utterly remarkable Kurt Weill Edition, stands out for its conceptual clarity, attention to detail, competence, effective and transparent editing strategies, accessibility, and scholarly erudition. It is an achievement that will surely bring Weill scholarship forward by leaps and bounds, providing the first sustained access to an opera of tremendous importance not only to Weill's compositional career, but also to the history of music in the early twentieth century. All of us who love and study Weill can feel particularly grateful for this achievement.

The edition is presented in two volumes, according to standard practice. The large main tome contains a substantial "Introduction" by Gunther Diehl and Giselher Schubert, in an exquisite translation by Stephen Hinton. Here the authors discuss the genesis, compositional process, performance materials, premiere, and reception of the opera (both at the premiere, and before and after World War II) in minute detail. This essay is followed by a selection of carefully chosen facsimiles of sources, which serve as a preface to the complete edition of the opera (which takes up the bulk of the publication). The second, smaller companion volume or *Critical Report* includes a "Statement of Source Valuation and Usage," followed by an extended "Commentary: Critical Notes," and ending with a careful list of "Source Descriptions."

I did not know what was in store when I sat down to read Gunther Diehl's and Giselher Schubert's "Introduction." Both names are intimately familiar to Weill scholars: Diehl for his pioneering study of Weill's *Der Protagonist* (*Der junge Kurt Weill und seine Oper "Der Protagonist"* [Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994]) and Giselher Schubert for a career so rich and inspiring in musicological and humanistic research on Hindemith, Weill, Schoenberg, and twentieth-century music that it can hardly be subsumed in a single sentence or list of works. I felt these two authors' considerable talent and experience in every aspect of this introduction, from its thoughtful concern with presenting all known information about the opera in as objective a context as possible to its utter precision in outlining the opera's chronology in terms of genesis and performance. In the spirit of maximum revelation, the authors provide extended quotations from their primary sources throughout, relying primarily on Weill's correspondence with Universal Edition, and original newspaper reviews (which they offer in English translation in the main text with the original language quoted in the extensive endnotes). These reviews are an absolute treasure chest for Weill scholars in that they outline a reception history with implications far beyond the boundaries of this particular work. Only once do the authors depart from their documentary perspective, however, when they suddenly introduce a bulleted list of reasons for the decline in quantity and quality of productions after World War II—a section of their introduction that seems strangely out of synch with the rest. Otherwise, their essay is terrific, and tremendously useful to Weill scholars.

The edited score itself is a pure joy. For scholars like myself, who remember first studying this opera on faded copies of the 1926 UE piano-vocal score, it is an incredible treat to be able to read its full orchestral score for the very first time. As the editors make clear in the *Critical Report* and "Introduction," Weill was particularly meticulous in producing the main source used for this edition, a holograph full score completed in 1925. He thus left posterity what most editors can only dream about: a rare, almost perfect, original manuscript source. The youthful earnestness and precision of that source are everywhere evident in this volume, accentuated by the high quality and sheer beauty of the typeset chosen by the Kurt Weill Edition. Even the frequent footnote numbers in the text referring to the "Commentary" in the accompanying *Critical Report* appear unobtrusive, often referencing information I found not only helpful, but actually exciting and interesting. The transparency of the whole resulted in a curious and welcome effect: I felt as if I were *directly experiencing* Weill's compositional process while reading! Through the very precision and thoughtfulness of their undertaking, I thought, the editors had cleared away decades of obscurity from the history of this opera, giving the public access for the first time to the secrets of Weill's youthful compositional process.

The edition ends with a bang, in the form of the "Statement of Source Valuation and Usage" and "Commentaries" in the *Critical Report*. I found the description of sources utterly riveting, and so marvelously researched and clearly articulated that I could remember weeks later minute details of each source, fascinated by their differences and the intricate history that had produced them. The commentaries on editorial variants, and on questions raised by the sources, are fastidious, accessible, and clear. I am not sure if the editors realize what a tremendous contribution they have just made to the study of twentieth-century music through their dedicated attention to detail and material truth. This is extraordinarily high-quality work, and an achievement of the highest order for Weill scholarship.

Tamara Levitz
University of California at Los Angeles

Books

Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical

bruce d. mcclung

Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, xxi, 274 pp.
ISBN 0-19-512012-4

A number of recent books on the American musical suggest a burgeoning interest in a genre slowly entering the academic canon. In part, this slowness has been due to a typical resistance to so-called popular culture. In part, however, it reflects the continued presence, or not, of these shows in the collective memory, and their problematic status as "works" fit, or even just available, for performance and study. As a result, surveys of the musical often tend to rest on shaky ground, uncertain of their materials and even, perhaps, of their particularities: hence the widespread retreat into broader generic, cultural, and/or social trends. Yet without the detailed investigation still to be done on the sources and interpretation of individual musicals, it is hard to sustain even the less outrageous claims made for them in general surveys of the genre. Two very recent one-work monographs on classic Broadway musicals each attempt to grapple with these problems. I had an easier time with my *"Oklahoma!" The Making of an American Musical* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), given the iconic status of Rodgers and Hammerstein's first collaboration. Kurt Weill's *Lady in the Dark* causes bruce mcclung more problems, for reasons that are worth exploring.

He begins, sensibly enough, with an evocative account of the show's opening night at the Alvin Theatre on 21 January 1941. Unlike *Johnny Johnson* (1936), *The Eternal Road* (1937), and *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938)—each unusual for various reasons—*Lady in the Dark* saw Weill engaging with standard Broadway production methods, with a book by Moss Hart—well known for a string of successful plays and musicals with co-writer George Kaufman—and lyrics by Ira Gershwin. As mcclung outlines, the idea came from Hart, whose periodic bouts of depression led him to engage in the newly fashionable enterprise of psychoanalysis under Lawrence S. Kubie, who became an unofficial adviser for the show and thereafter claimed significant credit for its accuracy, not least in terms of the diagnosis and subsequent "curing" of its heroine, Liza Elliott, by way of free association through a series of dreams. Liza, editor of the fashion magazine *Allure* (a take-off on *Vogue*), is living with an older, married man willing to leave his wife for her; she considers a fling with a Hollywood idol (first played by Victor Mature); but she finds a safer future with her advertising manager, turning a stormy professional relationship into last-minute respect that will become something more so long as Liza agrees to share the top job and maybe even step down. Her increasing self-awareness is signified by a melody from her childhood which she can barely remember prior to psychoanalysis—its memory buried by trauma—but which she learns to sing again. The fact that her future husband also knows "My Ship," which we hear in full only at the end of the show, sets the seal on their relationship.

Clearly, this is no ordinary musical—it was labeled a "musical play," a term gaining cachet even before *Oklahoma!*—although it has parallels with contemporary works such as Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* (which opened on 25 December 1940, just before the tryout of *Lady in the Dark* in Boston on 30 December) dealing with the seamier side of modern life in a manner perhaps influenced by the emerging genre of *film noir*. The three dream scenes, a *Glamour Dream*, a *Wedding Dream* (both in Act I), and a *Circus Dream* in Act II, scene 1—a fourth "Hollywood Dream" was planned but cut—provide a musical justification somewhat less conventional than the "let's put on a show" trope. The idea was not entirely new, and likewise the associated phenomenon of the dream-ballet, as in the Kern–Hammerstein *Three Sisters* (London, 1934) and *Very Warm for May* (1939), as well as Rodgers and Hart's *Babes in Arms* (1937) and *Pal Joey*, and Irving Berlin's *Louisiana Purchase* (opened 28 May 1940). In Weill's case, however, he provides extended musical sequences (for example, 778 measures in the *Glamour Dream*). The longest, the *Circus Dream*, is the most heterogeneous, culminating in back-to-back showstoppers, the well-known patter song "Tschaikowsky"—which was delivered at breakneck speed by Danny Kaye—and then Liza's "The Saga of Jenny" as part of her mock "trial by jury" (mcclung notes the parallel with Gilbert and Sullivan) for being unable to make up her mind between her lovers (Jenny, in contrast, regularly makes up her mind to disastrous effect). The show's star Gertrude Lawrence turned this into a raunchy *tour de force*.

All this is covered very well in mcclung's "biography" of *Lady in the Dark*, which looks backward from opening night to the show's genesis, the creation (and substance) of the musical score, and the tryout, followed by the Broadway run, the national tour and then the return to Broadway (playing for a time concurrently with *Oklahoma!*) plus a trip to the West Coast before the show finally closed in early July 1943 (somewhat annoyingly, mcclung is vague on precise dates here and elsewhere). This was after a total of 777 performances, for which Lawrence, trouper that she was, was indisposed for only eleven. We then have a (slightly feeble, alas) chapter on the "cultural context," and a longer (and better) one on the later versions of the show, including the 1944 movie with Ginger Rogers as Liza, various radio broadcasts (including one in 1947 with Lawrence recreating her role, and another in 1953 with Judy Garland), and a television version (1954) with Ann Sothern. *Lady in the Dark* also played a prominent part in the Twentieth Century–Fox film *Star!* (1968), a bio-pic of Gertrude Lawrence

(played by Julie Andrews). As mcclung notes, stage revivals have been less frequent, with German versions in 1951 (sponsored by the U.S. Office of Military Government; the same year as *Oklahoma!* appeared in Berlin), 1976–77, and 1983, a 1981 production in Nottingham (England) with Celeste Holm (the first Ado Annie in *Oklahoma!*), the Royal National Theatre (London) revival in 1997, and others in Philadelphia and Italy in 2001. Clearly, mcclung is right to extend the notion of "biography" through the show's reception-history, although he is very worried—and perhaps unduly so—that *Lady in the Dark* can never work for modern audiences given the need for a star, the extreme staging demands, and the "downright sexist" (p. 197) language that would force judicious cuts (so *Don Giovanni* is downright sexist and should likewise be cut?. . .). His conclusion (p. 198), "to keep it as loosely as a period piece, without being slavish to the original," is fraught with editorial consequences, but mcclung elsewhere gives better reasons for the problems facing the show: while forward-looking in terms of structure and plot, it was less so in style, and even during its own wartime period, *Lady in the Dark* soon became outdated and irrelevant. The feel-good patriotic overtones of *Oklahoma!* were much more in keeping with the times, and Rodgers and Hammerstein found a way to avoid such superfluous set-pieces as "Tschaikowsky." Moreover (but mcclung fails to point it out), *Oklahoma!* was explicitly associated with prior canonic Americana, including *Show Boat* and *Porgy and Bess*, whereas *Lady in the Dark* was left to float more freely. The creators of *Oklahoma!* prided themselves on not having big-name stars (surely a dig at Lawrence and Ethel Merman), and they cleverly inserted the show into several different histories; *Lady in the Dark* was a fad of the moment anchored solely by its lead player.

Here and elsewhere, mcclung sometimes fails to join up the dots. His "biography" does not always do justice to the biographies of those involved in its creation. We learn a fair amount about Hart, Gershwin, and Weill, but much less about producer Sam H. Harris, production and lighting designer Hassard Short (who also staged the musical sequences), and choreographer Albertina Rasch. However, the major unanswered question is the extent to which the show was written (and rewritten) for Gertrude Lawrence. Moss Hart originally had in mind for Liza Elliott Marlene Dietrich (at a very early stage) and then Katharine Cornell, but in late March or early April 1940 (again, mcclung is annoyingly unclear on dates) he saw Gertrude Lawrence in action and immediately switched horses (although Hart was slow to tell Cornell). Negotiations with Lawrence dragged on until she signed her contract, apparently in July (another unclear date): the terms were extraordinary, with a salary of $2,000 per week plus a significant percentage of the gross receipts. Also, she was deemed to be irreplaceable and never had an understudy. We learn all this in chapter 4 (on the tryout), but surely it belongs in chapter 2 (on the show's genesis), given that Weill and Gershwin got down to work only in May 1940, when Hart was still writing the book, and major decisions about the structure of the show were still being made in late summer and fall, and even (but not unusually) during the rehearsals scheduled to start on 15 November (although mcclung does not tell us when they did). The chronology is crucial, not least because *Lady in the Dark* is, potentially at least, replete with elements of Lawrence's own biography. After her divorce from director Francis Gordon-Howley, she quickly became engaged in 1928 to Bertrand L. Taylor Jr., a New York stockbroker, but then called the marriage off; she married again only on 4 July 1940 (when she was considering the contract for *Lady in the Dark*) to theater-owner Richard Aldrich. Lawrence's other lovers included Sir Gerald du Maurier, the Hollywood idol Douglas Fairbanks Jr., du Maurier's daughter Daphne, and Beatrice Lillie. Psychiatrist Lawrence Kubie would presumably have had a field day with the "real" Liza Elliott, noting her tendency to dress in austere, mannish clothes (save in her fantasy dreamworld), and putting her inability to "make up her mind" sexually and otherwise down to Lawrence's own troubled (it seems) childhood. There is also something slightly manic about her support for the British (and later, American) war effort, extending to driving around Cape Cod in uniform in a station wagon equipped with Red Cross flags and bearing a stretcher for emergencies. Whether Hart and his collaborators wrote all this into the show, and whether the obvious connections were some manner of open secret (although some contemporary comment suggests that they were), Lawrence's nightly bumping and grinding of "The Saga of Jenny" seems to have been somehow cathartic for her: in an unctuous epilogue that might better have been edited out, mcclung recounts Lawrence's quiet return from Los Angeles as "just a navy wife, hurrying to the Grand Central station in New York to meet her husband, Lieut. Comdr. Richard Aldrich" (quoting the *Chicago Herald American*, 21 July 1943). She had entered her own "safe" relationship and did not appear on stage again until 26 December 1945.

Other, lesser niggles are that mcclung gives fewer details than he might of the show's rewriting—perhaps he is saving them for his critical edition of the show—and of how a musical that Lawrence wanted to open at the Music Box Theatre (a more intimate space used for topical revues and sophisticated comedies, as Lawrence may once have thought *Lady in the Dark* to be) turned into a mammoth extravaganza that required a cast of fifty-two plus fifteen stagehands, and an unreasonable two days to set up the complicated revolving stages in any touring theater. The absence of detailed archival references (to collections but not to their boxes, folders, or the like) is a little tiresome. *Le Coq d'or* (the name of the restaurant used as the springboard for the deleted fourth dream sequence), which mcclung rightly links (p. 49) to the Rimsky-Korsakov opera in its popular (in New York) staging by dancers and mimes with singers at the side, keeps returning in Broadway mythology: Kern referred to it in 1933 as a model for a new type of musical drama permitting psychological exploration, and Hammerstein made a similar connection in his draft for the dream-ballet of *Oklahoma!* However, *pace* mcclung (p. 160), this dream-ballet was never going to be based on a circus theme (Agnes de Mille seems to have invented that story only in 1979). The melody of "Mack the Knife" does not begin with major second followed by a minor third (p. 67) but vice versa. And I suspect that the "flu" for which Lawrence was treated nightly at the Doctor's Hospital just prior to and during the New York opening (p. 102) was yet another of that institution's famous euphemisms: when Lorenz Hart was periodically admitted there for alcoholism, the diagnosis released to the public was "undulant fever."

Scholars wanting fuller details on *Lady in the Dark* will still need to refer to mcclung's doctoral dissertation "American Dreams: Analyzing Moss Hart, Ira Gershwin, and Kurt Weill's *Lady in the Dark*" (University of Rochester, 1994): it is a pity that not more of this was included here. But the present book is a fine piece of work that should help nudge studies of the Broadway musical in significant new directions by proving the benefits of careful attention to sources and contexts.

Tim Carter
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Performances

Der Jasager

Tokyo Chamber Opera
New National Theater

12–14 January 2007

Japan has seen several surges of interest in Western classical music. Unlike previous waves, the latest installment is not limited to established "high culture" but has made strong inroads into various subcultures, where it enjoys considerable popularity. The New National Theater, which opened its doors almost ten years ago, is playing a vital part in that trend by presenting contemporary operas and plays from outside the traditional canon (be it Japanese or Western). Although these works are a long way from entering the repertoire, it's a promising start.

The production of Weill's *Jasager* was part of a double bill, presented with Sadao Bekku's new opera, *Izutsu no Onna* (The Lady of Izutsu) during Tokyo's Performing Arts Festival in January. Though not officially billed as such, the performance actually marked the 75th anniversary of the Japanese premiere of *Der Jasager*. Klaus Pringsheim, a student of Mahler (and twin brother of Katia Mann, the Nobel laureate's wife), conducted the work in July 1932. As a faculty member of Tokyo's conservatory, Pringsheim had convinced officials, who routinely rejected opera productions on the grounds of indecency, to allow it to be staged. Since *Jasager* featured no love story and wore its educational agenda on its sleeve, the censors accepted the work, all the more because it was based on a Japanese Noh play, *Taniko*.

After the Second World War, Brecht scholarship had a decisive impact on the performance history of *Jasager*, also in Japan. Production teams and critics focused on the transmission of the *Lehrstück* features, while musical matters took a back seat. With a running time of about thirty minutes, the need for a companion piece was often filled by Brecht's *Neinsager*, which doesn't have any music by Weill. More recent stagings have combined *Jasager* with *Taniko*, with attention focused on the differences between original and adaptation. Such was the case in a 1994 staging of *Jasager* by the highly acclaimed Noh actor and director, Hideo Kanze (who also appeared in a repeat performance of the double bill in 2000 in New York City).

The "Brecht tradition" was palpable even in Tokyo's latest production. With a cast of professional singers, director Masayoshi Kuriyama felt compelled to have an actor explain the Brechtian view of *Jasager* before the curtain, apparently because he doubted that singers could convey the full sense of the piece, but also because the text was sung in German. Noh is a type of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (not to be confused with the Wagnerian kind), where dancing, singing, and music were thoroughly integrated. But the *jiutai*—similar to a Greek chorus—could be seen as an element of defamiliarization. Weill surely didn't write music in the Noh style, but he responded to the text's structure and simplicity with a musical language that is very clear and almost condensed in its expression.

The production's backdrop featured landscapes drawn in ink. Eight singers stood upstage like a Noh chorus; the three students in the center wore white domino half masks, while the principals wore no masks at all. Kuriyama's concept had the characters move only minimally, allowing Noh elements to make their way back into the European work. This produced a peculiar effect, as the singing voice itself became the "main character." Keiko Yoshiwara sang the little boy; her highly refined, chaste voice explored all nuances of the part, even though Weill's music is relatively austere. With little stage action, listeners could focus on subtle harmonic shifts, highly original ideas in the instrumentation, or slowly changing colors in the painted backdrops. Hiroshi Wakasugi conducted the orchestra with a sure hand. All in all, the production was an intriguing and successful attempt to recast *Der Jasager* as a modern Noh opera. This approach was probably prompted by the evening's second work. Bekku, a student of Olivier Messiaen, also based his opera on a Noh play, and the audience had a chance to compare the two approaches, albeit by composers from vastly different cultural backgrounds working in different times.

Misako Ohta
Kobe University

The Boy prepares to be thrown into the valley as the *jiutai* (chorus) looks on. Photo: Hideo Nakajima

Performances

LoveMusik

Biltmore Theatre
New York City

Premiere: 3 May 2007

In *Much Ado About Nothing* a young woman is advised by a wise older man, "Speak low if you speak love"—make your flirting talk whispered, intimate, sexy. Ogden Nash's lyric to a Kurt Weill tune in *One Touch of Venus* harmlessly changed "if" into "when." But an unknown person at the music publisher's office inserted a comma before "love," turning it into a vocative endearment. Thus "speaking low" no longer referred to love talk, but to a desideratum for femininity, as in Lear's eulogy for the dead Cordelia, "Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman."

By eliminating the erroneous comma after "speak," the musical *LoveMusik*, like the book of letters on which it is based, *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, puts the sotto voce back where it is most apt, into the words of love—on pillows, in letters, in love life.

The new musical, conceived by Harold Prince, with book by Alfred Uhry and music by Kurt Weill (culled from his extensive catalogue), was engendered by that hefty tome of correspondence, consummately translated and edited by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke. It fell into Prince's hands, and that savvy man of the theater passed it on to Alfred Uhry. Thus came about, after a long gestation, the wonderful musical that, as stated in the program, was "suggested by the letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya."

It concerns a love affair that, in and out of matrimony, remained unconventional. There was a marriage, then a divorce of convenience, and a remarriage. It was an open marriage: Lenya's infidelities were many and brief, Weill's much fewer and one of them serious. Because of their far-flung work, the spouses were often, sometimes prolongedly, apart. This stimulated infidelities but also elicited fascinating letters. Uhry's libretto is only sparsely based on actual quotations from them; more heavily on the biographical information the editors supply. As Uhry said in an interview, his libretto catches "the temperature of the letters."

The temperature or the volume (in the sense of loudness or lack of it) in the letters. They bespeak a steady underlying love often rambunctiously expressed, but they do speak low. In Weill's famous remark to Lenya, quoted in the show, she came first with him—right after the music. That, understandably, was not what she wanted to hear. In a sense, Kurt was not enough for Lenya, and she, threatening his concentration on composing, was too much for him. But, in a deeper sense, Weill and Lenya's low-speaking but enduring love suited both of them.

The rowboat: Weill (Michael Cerveris) and Lenya (Donna Murphy) on Peetzsee. Photo: Carol Rosegg

There are two sets of expectations not to be brought to *LoveMusik*. The first is the expectation for a typical Broadway musical: big production numbers, lots of dancing, elaborate costumes and scenery, and a book progressing steadily from scene to scene.

Instead, there is something more like the Brecht-Weill "epic theater": short scenes connected not by pretty ribbons but by jumps—or, if it were a movie, jump cuts. This brevity and episodicity precludes sentimental dawdling, and keeps the temperature from a boil. In other words, it speaks low.

The second inappropriate expectation is to hear all your favorite Weill songs, or at least the most famous ones. The 27 numbers included are more than a drop in the ocean, 27 warm or cool waves from a great sea of songs, almost every one a masterpiece. But even such a very popular song as "Pirate Jenny" is used only briefly as underscoring. If a song does not fit the story being told—Kurt and Lenya's 26-year relationship, from the 1924 meeting to Weill's death in 1950—it will not be included.

Moreover—and this is one of the beauties of the musical—you may get the well-known song in a surprising situation or from an unexpected mouth. Take "That's Him," which in *One Touch of Venus* was sung by a goddess acknowledging her mortal love, but here is delivered piteously by Kurt trying to justify to himself one of Lenya's flings. "September Song," in *Knickerbocker Holiday* an old man's plea to his young love, becomes a duet after Kurt's death for Lenya and her next husband and successful promoter, the homosexual George Davis. That was to become a marriage that spoke even lower. But it sang out loud, as Davis steered Lenya into a splendid singing and acting career long delayed and richly deserved.

The very opening number of *LoveMusik* is telling. From a background of darkness, a spotlight picks out Weill stage right, singing "Speak Low." Eventually, Lenya, in a spotlight stage left, takes over, with the song's end a tender duet. Sharing the song denotes a kind of togetherness, yet the distance between the singers remains—symbol of a separateness for two.

There follows the 1924 scene where Lenya, then a maid in the household of the playwright Georg Kaiser, rowed across the Peetzsee to pick up Weill at the railway station and ferry him across to the Kaiser

home for the young composer's collaboration with the established dramatist. The collaboration between man and woman in the boat became even closer.

Alfred Uhry, in his book, had to invent a lot, but his inventions are always in character and believable. He has provided much more than song cues: the very plausible story of two sometimes prickly, sometimes complaisant individuals, now rubbing each other achingly wrong, now soothingly smoothing out their differences.

Harold Prince is an expert director, and he moves his actors around the intimate stage of the Biltmore Theatre with savvy evolved through long experience—including having directed Lenya in *Cabaret*. In the pit is a ten-piece band playing the masterly orchestrations of Jonathan Tunick, for piano (played by the able conductor, Nicholas Archer), two often honeyed violins, a virile viola and cello, two sensuous woodwinds, a sassy trumpet and sardonic bass, plus drums and percussion. These orchestrations inject the leanness of Weill's own ones with a bit of Broadway razzmatazz.

Beowulf Boritt's scenery gleefully espouses the Brechtian spirit: tongue-in-cheek caricatures that laughingly capture the genius loci, and can handily change moods. Prince had his designer create a commenting inner proscenium, in this case nude figures in erotic interplay that drolly shame the less than orgiastic proceedings, except for one brief moment when, in bed, Lenya straddles the supine Kurt. The sex here, you might say, speaks low like the love.

There is a cast of ten whose minor members often double, always adroitly. And then there are the amazing principals.

Michael Cerveris has distinguished himself in several Sondheim musicals among other roles, most recently that of Kent to Kevin Kline's Lear. His Kurt Weill is exultant one moment, wrenching the next, but always finely calibrated for maximal effect with the most sparing means. The slightest smile, a barely audible sigh, an aborted gesture—and something deep within is magisterially conveyed. Quiet understatement portrays passionate immersion in music; a sweetly fragile singing voice becomes heartrendingly frailer when imbued with Lenya-caused suffering. His spoken lines come out new-minted; his singing is as simple and straightforward as spoken dialogue.

Donna Murphy is one of our two or three supreme singing actresses or acting

Weill (Cerveris) and Brecht (David Pittu) are casting *Mahagonny Songspiel*. Photo: Carol Rosegg

singers. Easefully she gets at Lenya's essence, at her less than beautiful but enthralling attractiveness. In rebellion, she is endearing; in compliance, ever so slightly bristling. German has a word for it, the untranslatable *herb*—sharp or rough, yet tasty, like dry wine. How drolly she spouts slang, how variously she intones the nickname "Weillchen." She sings superbly, endowing pure tones with a little extra savor, and she is as good at Lenya's youthful, slightly squeaky soprano as at her later smoky, around-the-block mezzo. Like Cerveris's, this is a performance as lived-in as a pair of cherished slippers. Together, these actors create with utter credibility the unlikely union of a proper middle-class Jewish boy and a raunchy, lower-class lapsed Catholic.

Both of them deftly speak and sing in very pronounced German accents throughout, whether it is meant to be their native German or their foreigners' English. It could be claimed that the accents should be deployed only for America, but one can also argue for unified continuity throughout. Perhaps like horses, accents should not be changed in midstream. In any case, far from producing a Brechtian alienation effect, they are lovably involving.

David Pittu is a superbly mordant, arrogantly selfish, deliciously sarcastic, funnily infuriating Brecht, down to the man's visibly carious teeth and dirty fingernails, here only sensed. He looks alarmingly like Brecht, in a performance so real you can almost smell it. Prince and Uhry give him a steady retinue of one wife and two mistresses, for musical and sexual backup. Patricia Birch choreographs this ménage a quatre's movements as drolly as she does the rest of her witty choreography.

John Scherer portrays George Davis with dignified aplomb, and the supporting cast, which includes such major talents as Judith Blazer and Ann Morrison (who also understudies Lenya), is flawlessly flexible. And throughout, there are subtly detailed directorial and design touches, which one discovers with growing pleasure.

But what, ultimately, matters most is Weill's music, which makes that of the best current musicals seem like small, nay, minuscule potatoes. *LoveMusik*, whose title suggestively combines English and German, embodies the truth about Weill's music, which has been wrongly viewed as breakable in halves, European and American. Nonsense: Weill's music speaks only one fully international language, adaptable to all ears, uplifting to all spirits, as this show compellingly demonstrates.

Twelve fine but quite different lyricists—German, French, American—proved equally perfect fits for these songs that know no boundaries. Thus Maurice Magre's French lyrics for "Je ne t'aime pas" come across as strikingly in Michael Feingold's English translation as "I don't love you." And what nationality is the music of a thriller like "Surabaya Johnny"—German, American, or Javanese? Just as Weill could recycle his music from symphonic to popular or vice versa, the show proves songs from any period or situation equally potent in other contexts or continents. Some of the pungent Brechtian lyrics lose a little in translation (especially when soft-pedaled by Marc Blitzstein), but no matter. The music speaks—low or loud, sweet or bitter, syncopated or flowing—to mind, heart, and gut.

A great Weill song with words by Walter Mehring (not in the show) asks *Wie lange noch*—how much longer? That is the question *LoveMusik* raises. How will it survive the mixed reviews, some good, some uncomprehending? Its staying power on Broadway may be in question; but in one way or another—in performance, on hoped-for disc, or in memory—it should be with us forever.

John Simon
New York City

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Los Angeles Opera

Premiere: 10 February 2007

In its mere twenty years of existence the Los Angeles Opera has now staged *Mahagonny* twice: Jonathan Miller's intellectualized (read: stylized, drab) 1989 version and now John Doyle's somewhat-less-than the above. It ran seven performances, from 10 February through 4 March, filling approximately eighty percent of the 3000-seat house every night, at a time (hurrah!) when *Mahagonny* revivals seem to be popping up across the land. The *Mahagonny* of our (and Weill/Brecht's) dreams may still wait in the wings, but both the Los Angeles performance and its general reception merit celebration. Almost everybody I know went twice.

Doyle's stage mettle did not measure up to his recent Broadway Sondheim triumphs with *Sweeney Todd* and *Company*; perhaps crowd scenes aren't yet his field of honor. The numbing final moments, with the crowd hurling its challenges and the band picking up from where Mahler's Sixth left off, came off as numbing in another sense—the stage a line of grayed-out stick figures, James Conlon's fine orchestra sort of abandoned.

Mark Bailey's designs set the action along a strip of U.S. 666, which is either the Mark of the Antichrist in *Revelations* or a highway out of Gallup, N.M. (works either way). Flashing neon, girlie ads, and heavy traffic markers further suggest a proximity to Las Vegas; later on, of course, the script will call for a typhoon in the neighborhood of Pensacola. (Said typhoon was left a-blowing through the sound system during intermission, one of Doyle's less happy directorial inventions.)

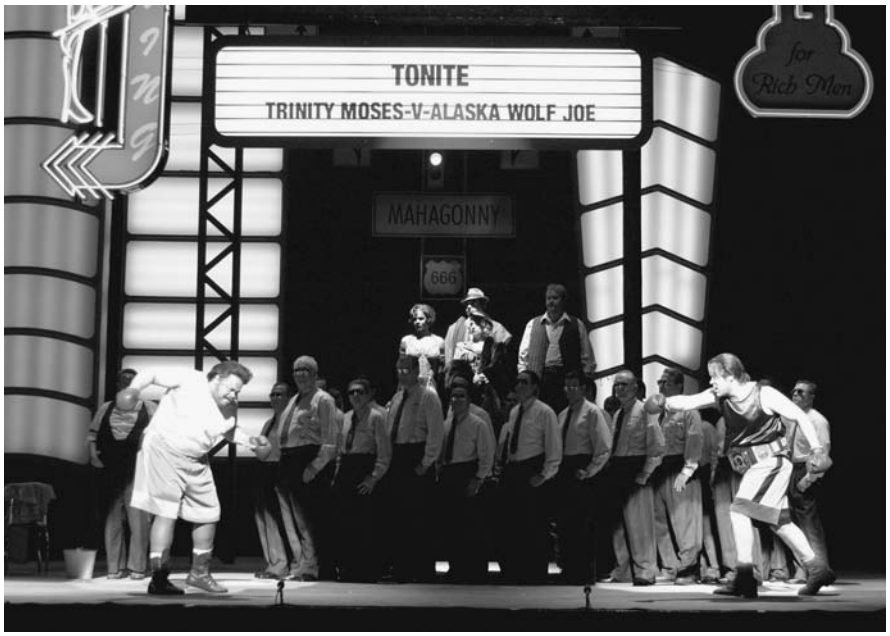
Other moments in the stage plan seemed to demonstrate a mistrust of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion's generous stage dimensions. The Trial Scene, for example, in which hero Jimmy must face blame for going broke, was set up as a TV production, cramped in mid-stage with the face of Judge Trinity Moses (the excellent Donnie Ray Albert) on a monitor. The third-act "Love Scene," similarly, with its extraneous "Crane Duet" (when will they learn to leave that out?) takes place on stage right in a sort of pileup. Small moments in the staging remain in the memory as simply stupid; one, deplored by all critics and just about everyone else I've spoken to, was the idea of handing over a folded-up flag to Jenny after the execution of "her" Jimmy, as if he were some kind of war hero.

Yet this was a highly recognizable, sometimes superb *Mahagonny* worth a visit or two, even at the $220 top that glides past without demurrer in Los Angeles these evenings (mitigated by the fact that nobody need dress on these balmy winter nights). Among the principals I was let down only by the Begbick of Patti LuPone, who sang prettily but who I felt was wrongly cast—for reasons, I freely admit, having to do with memories of the glorious harridan of Astrid Varnay at the Met all those years ago. That was Begbick, as LuPone in her Mae West get-up was not. (Perhaps Doyle should have let her keep her tuba from *Sweeney*.) As compensation there was the sensational Jenny of Audra McDonald, than whom I never expect to see a better: every overtone of the pussycat and the tiger perfectly in place, her rejection of Jimmy at the end as shattering as anything opera can offer.

Anthony Dean Griffey was Jimmy, her patsy, his bright tenor nicely colored with a touch of the pathetic at the end. (His last name was changed from the "Mahoney" of Michael Feingold's translation to the more singable "McIntyre.") John Easterlin consumed his fill of calf-flesh (and then some), Steven Humes and Robert Wörle filled out the lumberjack contingent.

Since this is James Conlon's first year as L.A. Opera's music director, it may be be coincidence that *Mahagonny* was on the schedule as he arrived full of plans to embark the company on a long-term exploration of Germany's music under the Nazi shadow. Three days after the final *Mahagonny* Conlon led the first of a series he calls "Recovered Voices," including short selections from *Jonny spielt auf*, *Die tote Stadt* and other (and better) works of the time, plus a complete performance of Zemlinsky's *Florentine Tragedy*. His enthusiasm for the repertory is matched by his skill; it was not his doing that the great, blistering moments of this *Mahagonny* did not blister on stage as they did in the pit.

Alan Rich
Los Angeles



Trinity Moses (Donnie Ray Albert) and Alaska Wolf Joe (Steven Humes) square off in Act 2.
Photo: Robert Millard

Alan Rich is music critic of *L.A. Weekly*. His most recent collection of critical writings is *So I've Heard* (Amadeus Press).

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Opera Boston

Premiere: 23 February 2007

Begbick (Joyce Castle), Trinity Moses (Philip Lima), and Jenny (Amy Burton). Photo: Clive Grainger

While Boston's premiere opera company has retreated to repeating the standards and eliminating modern or challenging opera from its schedule, Opera Boston sold out its entire run of Weill and Brecht's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in late February before a single review had appeared.

The success of this production—audiences stood and cheered through multiple curtain calls—can be credited to the strength of *Regietheater* when intelligently and imaginatively deployed. Director Sam Helfrich and his design team, Caleb Wertenbaker (set), Nancy Leary (costumes), and Christopher Ostrom (lighting) created a single, flexible, and utilitarian environment that could have been an abandoned factory or the back of a truck stop in the middle of nowhere. Flanked on stage left by a row of three porta-potties, and on stage right by a dumpster, the main structure's loading dock with its roll-up door served as a dandy stage within a stage, allowing the set to expand and contract easily as the action demanded.

This monochrome, dog-eared set suggested forcefully that the pleasures of Mahagonny were largely illusions, something that one experienced and enjoyed because he had paid the seedy lady at the door a small fortune, and because he wanted so badly for it to be so. No wonder that an innocent like Jimmy (here called MacIntyre rather than Mahoney) could get fleeced out of everything he had, including his life. Program notes, by the way, explained that the co-creators intended a different list of character names for each country in which their opera was to be performed.

Human values were few and far between in this *Mahagonny*, no more so than when the corpse of death-by-gluttony victim Jack O'Brien was picked up dutifully and then unceremoniously tossed in the dumpster. Widow Begbick's girls entertained their clients standing up in the porta-potties, the better to get them in, out, and make way for the next customer as quickly as possible. The finale built to immense power as the assembled cast and chorus advanced on the audience with the awkward, vacant-eyed shuffle of the doped-up and drugged-out.

What hit with the greatest impact was the simple, brutal message that if you are without wealth, you are without power, status, even identity. Although the look of this *Mahagonny* was somewhat updated, little manipulation was needed to connect Brecht and Weill's bitter thesis to conditions in contemporary America, where the gulf widens daily between rich and poor and thousands are turned out into the streets by mortgage scams. The bodies were dropped over the rim into the dumpster one by one, without regard for basic respect, let alone human compassion.

Conductor Gil Rose found a beauty and lyricism in Weill's score that didn't undermine its pungent harmonies and spiky rhythms, but set them off to even greater effect. Rose is the rock on which this company is based, having brought his Boston Modern Orchestra Project into collaboration with Boston Academy of Music's endearing, thoroughly traditional and notably inconsistent opera department. The result has been an opera company not just reinvigorated but reborn, one able to perform everything from bel canto to what was written last week with equal virtuosity.

Casting, generally more than adequate with this company, was luxurious and well balanced, the famous guests helping raise the level of the local talent. Joyce Castle, her mezzo atmospherically worn but strongly insinuating, made for a deceptively seedy, almost grandmotherly Begbick as the boys were lured in, and a toxic dictator as they met their various fates at the hands of her gang. Amy Burton's Jenny had the polish and finesse of a high-class call girl, the tough-as-nails realism of a survivor who's been around. Vocally she lavished on the score the kind of beauty and allure she brings to her Mozart and Handel.

The men maintained the standard. Most interesting was Daniel Snyder as Jimmy. He traced a firm line and displayed some real, unforced heldentenor strength throughout his range. Appealingly young and fresh, he was an unusually sympathetic and tragic presence in the role.

Philip Lima was a black-voiced, dangerous Trinity Moses and Frank Kelley a slimy, pencil-thin Fatty the Bookkeeper—his nickname clearly an inside joke among the gang. Stephen Salters, Tom O'Toole, Christian Figueroa and, in particular, Matthew DiBattista as Jack O'Brien made solid vocal and vivid dramatic contributions.

Opera Boston had a breakthrough experience two seasons ago with a luminous, elegantly inventive production of Adams's *Nixon in China*. With *Mahagonny*, the company demonstrated clearly that those high standards were not a fluke—this company has arrived.

William Fregosi
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Performances

Judgment of Paris

Rambert Dance Company
Kurt Weill Fest Dessau

4 March 2007

The programming officials of the Rambert Dance Company were too easy on themselves in responding to an invitation from this year's Kurt Weill Fest. A little more Weill surely would not have hurt. Thankful though we were for an encounter with *Judgment of Paris*, Antony Tudor's 1938 ballet choreographed to six piano numbers from *Dreigroschenoper*, it was a little lost between Merce Cunningham's enthralling *Pond Way* (music by Brian Eno) and two subsequent pieces, Martin Joyce's *Divine Influence* (to the last movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*), and Michael Clark's *Swamp* (with music by Bruce Gilbert), two works flavored with a somewhat stale off-the-rack modernism. I would have preferred a revival of Christopher Bruce's ballet to *Berliner Requiem*, which he created in 1982 for the Ballet Rambert. And, to extend my wish list, it would have been nice to learn a few more details about the genesis of *Judgment of Paris*.

Juno dances for Paris as the headwaiter looks on. Photo: Kai Bienert

It is a piece typical of the "dirty thirties," placed against the backdrop of the global feeling of resignation that preceded World War II. Little is known about the world premiere. It appears to have taken place in June 1938 at London's Westminster Theatre (possibly as a curtain-raiser for Gogol's comedy, *The Marriage*), and danced by an *ad hoc* ensemble composed of members of the Ballet Rambert.

The ballet is set in a dimly-lit, sleazy nightclub, with a tired headwaiter and three *belles de nuit*, advanced in years, sitting around a table and stretching their arthritic limbs. Midnight has long passed and yawns provide the only movement in the bleak atmosphere. Props, backdrops, and costumes were originally designed by Hugh Laing, one of the dancers—everything is filthy and run down. In the background sits a pianist, tinkling a few measures from the "Moritat," followed by "Polly's Lied." The drowsy staff begins to stir at the entrance of a late visitor who has already looked deeply into a glass. To all appearances, he is the perfect petit bourgeois embodiment of Paris. And now the three graces, elevated to goddesses, begin their show: Juno swishes her fan alluringly and gyrates her prominent bottom, the faux-blond Venus juggles three wooden hoops, and Minerva handles her boa like a flickering snake in front of the guest. They go through their well-worn music hall steps, move very close to him and tease his lust, but duck his attempts to grab and grope them. The waiter continually replenishes his glass until the guest finally hits the floor, completely drunk, whereupon the four swoop down on him and relieve him of his wallet, watch, and gold chain.

The whole story is fairly depressing. The 30-year-old Tudor captured the atmosphere and the characters with fine strokes—sardonic and bitter, like a provincial brothel of the day, with borrowings from the variety shows of the outer boroughs, and lots of hip swaying and lascivious come-hither gestures. But he never ridicules his characters, rather coating them with a worn, melancholy patina. It is a ballet closely related to *The Miraculous Mandarin* (though obviously without the expressionist zeal) and Kurt Jooss's critical commentaries in *The Big City*. Tudor's choreography shows a dancer's touch and follows the Weill pieces sensitively in their threadbare piano reductions (we hear "Cannon Song," "Jealousy Duet," "Barbara Song," "Pirate Jenny," and the final measures of the "First Threepenny Finale").

At the world premiere, Tudor danced the tipsy Paris, Hugh Laing the snobbish headwaiter, and Agnes de Mille portrayed Venus (five years later she would choreograph an entirely different Venus, Weill's *One Touch of Venus*). She later remarked: "Every gesture is a satire of some other kind of bad dancing and I knew what Antony was satirizing. I became [Isadora] Duncan, or I became some other dance artist. With each one there was a bad odor. And Antony's performance was superb, drunker and drunker and eyes glazing with just a touch of lust that faded as he lost his senses. He was a damn good actor. They can't do *Judgment* any longer. . . . They can't act, they don't know how to do comedy."

Her response to this performance by the Rambert Dance Company—a revival from 2005—in Dessau would have been, alas, along the same lines. The blame, though, rests less with the performers themselves, who obviously enjoyed dancing to the Weill tunes as they were evoked by Stephen Lade on the piano, than with whoever cast dancers too young and healthy to suggest the world-weariness of these sorry characters. Thus Robin Gladwin as Paris resembles a naive youngster rather than a drunken roué, while Hubert Essakow as the blasé waiter seems to have been recruited from an agency that specializes in students who need to increase their meager incomes. I wish, though, that Lenya were still around to coach the three prostitutes Mikaela Polley (Minerva), Angela Towler (Venus) and Gemma Wilkinson (Juno) in their craft—beyond the proper execution of their steps. Mind you, I can only hope to have assigned each dancer her actual role, for the program lists them only alphabetically, without specifying who dances which character.

Horst Koegler
Stuttgart

Performances

Die Dreigroschenoper

Schauspiel Frankfurt

Premiere: 19 January 2007

Strolling in front of Frankfurt's Schauspielhaus shortly before curtain time for *Dreigroschenoper*, one could hear music coming from the neighboring opera house, where the performance had already begun. Speakers transmitted Zemlinsky's one-act operas, *A Florentine Tragedy* and *The Dwarf*, into the plaza. A neat coincidence, as the Austrian composer conducted the first staging in Berlin of *Ausfstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in 1931, prompting Weill to rave, "Zemlinsky is simply outstanding!!!" But in terms of their compositions, the two artists were worlds apart. Zemlinsky's sumptuous, refined, and insinuating sounds, and the fin-de-siècle themes of these works (based on Oscar Wilde) seem to represent the very type of opera that Weill and Brecht sought to rough up. It is hard to believe that only six years separate the world premieres of *Dwarf* (1922) and *Dreigroschenoper* (1928). If Frankfurt had decided to combine the works in one bill, one would have realized instantly the enormous provocation that *Dreigroschenoper* must have caused back in the day.

Some eighty years later, *Dreigroschenoper* is no longer provocative in the same way, and contemporary stagings are exploring new qualities. The sparse program notes quoted from the "Anstatt-dass-Song": "Instead of / They do something that has purpose and a goal / They prefer fun / After which of course they end up in the hole." The fun provided by André Wilms's staging had, of course, a purpose and a goal: transmitting the work's insights in a playful, offhand way, not bogged down in leaden ideology. Tiny human silhouettes dance across the curtain during the overture and set the pace and tone for this staging, which zips right through without an intermission. On the heels of the overture, a little boy (Jonas Maiwald), who had been sitting with his legs dangling into the orchestra pit, gets up to sing the "Moritat von Mackie Messer." Then Macheath himself appears, pushes the boy away, and finishes the song. At the very end of the show this business is repeated; Macheath gets the final word, and the play has come full circle. Wolfram Koch (Macheath) is a slick jack-of-all-trades, more rascal than monstrous criminal, who wiggles neatly out of every situation. His character, like all the others, is stripped of all larger-than-life pretensions. Karin Neuhäuser becomes the audience's darling with her portrayal of Mrs. Peachum as an alternate mousy and brassy but constantly boozed-up slut in a cheap negligee and plush slippers (costumes: Mareike Uhlig). One of her props neatly summarizes the playful ruptures of this staging: a pillow that she always carries around—symbol of comfort in a hostile world—has Brecht's gutsy slogan embroidered on it: "Glotzt nicht so romantisch." (Stop that romantic gaping.)

The kid who sang "Moritat" could have devised the sets: Adriane Westerbarkey's design divides the stage into several levels and compartments, resembling a shabby cardboard dollhouse, where the rooms are always visible and populated (e.g., the whores sprawl in front of and inside their cubicle throughout the play). Having actors on stage while they are not participating in the plot has an enlivening effect and opens up possibilities for interaction. Yvon Jansen's Jenny Diver, for instance, repeats the last lines of Polly's (Sascha Icks) "Seeräuberjenny" as if in a daze.

Such an imaginative staging of a song reveals just how much the music drives both the show and its characters. It is the more abstract of the two media that make up the piece, and it is more responsive to an ever-changing present than language, and in Wilms's staging it seemed that the music even gained extra intensity. The switching between book scenes and songs relied on agility and swiftness, which also informed the overall tone. But what was fun in the book scenes turned earnest during the singing. This was possible because the cast did not disappoint musically despite varying singing skills (especially focused and precise: Joachim Nimtz as Mr. Peachum). The Ensemble Modern, supplemented by members of the Internationale Ensemble Modern Akademie, gave superb musical support. In the spirit of the staging's light touch, the musicians donned circus-band costumes, but the parallel ended right there. Led on alternate nights by Nacho de Paz and Manuel Nawri, the Ensemble Modern delivered a clean, clear, and crisp sound. Compared to this invigorating performance, the Ensemble's recording of *Dreigroschenoper* released in 1999 appears almost bland.

Gisela Maria Schubert
Frankfurt am Main

Polly (Sascha Icks) and Macheath (Wolfram Koch) celebrate their wedding. Photo: Alexander Paul Englert

Performances

Die sieben Todsünden

Royal Opera House
London

26 April – 9 May 2007

The Seven Deadly Sins is the only one of Weill's works so far to have been performed on the main stage of the Royal Opera House. In 1973, Kenneth MacMillan's version for the Royal Ballet was given as part of a triple bill, with Georgia Brown and Annie Ross alternating as the singing Anna, and Jennifer Penney as her dancing alter ego. It was not particularly well-received, and did not stay in the repertory for long. (MacMillan's choreography had first been seen back in 1961, at the Edinburgh Festival, when Lotte Lenya had been contracted to sing, but once she saw his plans, she withdrew, and Cleo Laine replaced her.)

Although it has become one of Weill's most frequently performed and recorded works, the *ballet-chanté* poses greater problems in its way than many of Weill's larger-scale works. The balance between singers and orchestra is difficult to achieve, with or without amplification, if the stage is to be used to its full effect for dance. If it were performed in the original German, for an English-speaking audience, nowadays people would expect surtitles. This, though, would distract attention away from the ultimately more important (in ballet terms) visual element.

Will Tuckett, the choreographer entrusted with making this new adaptation, decided to move the action forward in time to the 1960s. Thus the two Annas were identically kitted out in miniskirts, beehive hairstyles, and instead of being enveloped in a single cloak at the start, they wore stylish knee-length trench coats. The set by Lez Brotherston was a three-sided iron structure, the upper balcony of which served as a platform for the family quartet to sing from. This solved one problem at least; with the four male singers out of the way, the stage was clear for the dancers.

Tuckett was fortunate to have as his dancing Anna one of the Royal Ballet's greatest ballerinas of today, Zenaida Yanowsky. Her sinuous movements, with spectacularly elastic extensions, and brilliant, often touchingly fragile pointe work, made this Anna especially vulnerable and lovable. Her other half was sung by Martha Wainwright, a folksinger famous for an album entitled *Bloody Mother Fucking Asshole*. Her voice is attractive and light, with a slight catch in it. Although she sang the transposed version of the score, she is not a growler like Marianne Faithfull or Gisela May, so at least this Anna sounded youthful. She and Yanowsky are exactly the same height and build, so they made totally convincing sisters.

The family was sung by Roderick Earle, Paul Goodwin-Groen, Philip O'Brien, and Christopher Steele. They were placed too far back much of the time for their words to be easily audible, but for "Gluttony" they were allowed to descend from their perch on high, and it became the musical high point of the performance. Martin Yates conducted and achieved a good balance between urging the music forward and showing consideration for the dancers.

Anna II (Zenaida Yanowsky) and Anna I (Martha Wainwright). Photo: Bill Cooper

Tuckett imposed some extra elements on the story, with a character called Mr Big (danced by Christopher Saunders), who negotiates the transactions, first of all selling Anna to a sleazy Motel Man (José Martín), then a Strip-Club Owner (Thiago Soares), and then a Film Director (Gary Avis). In "Sloth," Anna was repeatedly assaulted, and in "Pride" she was forced to follow the instructions of the Stripper (Marianela Nuñez). During "Gluttony" she was taking part in a porn movie, which was being photographed by Fernando (Edward Watson), with whom she then falls in love, during the heart of the work, "Lust," which Weill composed in an amazing flight of inspiration. Elsewhere, Tuckett sometimes tried to introduce too many ideas, with over-detailed action. Here, though, the pas-de-quatre made its mark, as the two Annas danced with Fernando—Edward Watson's sensitive, almost fragile good looks made a great contrast with the fiery masculinity of Eric Underwood as Edward. As Wainwright cradled Watson in her arms, once Anna II was lost to him, all the movements came together to spell out the heartbreak.

In "Envy," Anna was dressed in furs and spangles to attend a movie premiere—by the finale she had lost all dignity and self-esteem, as, almost naked, she was given back the trench coat. Yanowsky's wonderful barefoot retreat, as the family advanced on her, brought out the full level of regret.

Tuckett is a very talented choreographer and man of the theater, but this version of *Die sieben Todsünden* was successful only in part. It would work much better in the smaller Lindbury Theatre at the Royal Opera House, where it would not be necessary to mike the singers. I cannot have been the only member of the audience to be bewildered by the contrast between this inadequately amplified staging and the work that followed it—Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* declaimed in *Sprechgesang* from the orchestra pit by Linda Hirst, while Glen Tetley's ballet was danced on stage. No words for this were provided in the program, although Auden and Kallman's translation of Brecht's text was printed in full (as it had been in 1973). Isn't it time the New York City Ballet revived Balanchine's 1958 choreography—does it still exist?—or aren't there enough people still around to recreate it?

Patrick O'Connor
London

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Weill's and Brecht's 1929 attempt at a follow-up hit to *Die Dreigroschenoper* has suffered over the years at the hands of academics, though continuing to win over audiences. The script (primarily by Elisabeth Hauptmann), while a cobbled-together mishmash of incidents, comic business and cartoon characters, can be made to work with smart editing and quick-footed direction; but the songs show composer and lyricist at the peak of their form.

My hopes were high for this first English-language version, but alas, after listening with open ears, I can only concur with the sentiments sounded and implied so deftly, hauntingly, and ironically by Brecht and Weill throughout the piece—nostalgia ain't what it used to be. Take the show's keynote number, "The Bilbao Song." In this version, it comes over as a rather hectoring, four-square, and, yes, charmless account of ambivalent past joys. Surely, if directors and performers are to tackle the work, they should start from an awareness of Weill's and Brecht's sense of the enduring efficacy of Villon's "Où sont les neiges d'antan?" (Where are the snows of yesteryear?). Their collaboration could, at times, almost be reviewed as variations on "no time like the past," even "nostalgia for nostalgia."

This has little to do with pat sentimentality, and everything to do with re-evoking the smell, the feel, and the dubious attractions of, inter alia, the years in India (Macheath and Brown), the (problematic) times so very far away (Macheath and Jenny), the sense that it was "nice while it lasted" (Polly), the world of Bills Ballhaus in Bilbao (translated here, for dubious alliterative reasons, and ultimately incomprehensibly, as "beerhall.")

In this version of the number, there's no time for reflection between verse and chorus, no suggestion that the performers are actually working with Brecht's images and Weill's notes to paint the scene for the listener. It's music theater by numbers, with the second and third verses in particular utterly devoid of their crucial ambiguous charm.

But maybe I'm being ungracious. After all, as Michael Feingold's translation tells us, "It was fantastic—beyond belief." Without wishing to sound pedantic, let me suggest that this crassly contemporary piece of adolescent argot could not be more inappropriate and more unsingable than the original. Listen to the singers squeeze out "bee . . . leef," how they force the "a" not once but twice in "fantastic." Just a quick attempt at an alternative comes up with "I'm not so sure what you'd have thought all that was worth | But: it was the greatest place/show on earth." Not perfect, but much easier to sing and much better at conjuring up the lost world.

To continue with translation solecisms: I lost count of the number of clumsy renditions of text and image, let alone fatal misunderstandings of register (linguistic, not vocal). When, in "Surabaya-Johnny," Lillian sings, "You thought nothing I did was right," she sounds like a querulous housewife from some bad soap opera, whereas Brecht's original is tougher and more direct. And the very opening line, "I had just turned sixteen that season," is surely unfortunate, with its hint of regular times of, perhaps, rural fertility or coming-out dances. Brecht's lapidary and matter-of-fact statement deserves better than that.

On the other hand, "The Mandalay Song" gets a rip-roaring rendition, up to speed and full of character. Charlotte Cohn's account of Lillian's anthem, "Lieutenants of the Lord," is as good a reading of this awkward number as one might hear, and the various choruses for the Salvation Army fold come over with neatly gauged ironic authenticity.

The band is tight, mostly attentive to the shifts in style (though I missed the Hawaiian guitar in "Surabaya-Johnny"), but sometimes hampered by curious tempi. "The Sailors' Tango" is surely far too brisk, suggesting that Lillian might be about to take a jet-boat to Burma; the harmonium in "The Brandy Dealer's Dream" bounces, rather than wheezes, along; and Weill's hallmark trudge bass that opens "Surabaya-Johnny" sounds here more suited to a dead march, suggesting the singer dragging a coffin of expired illusions behind her. Lenya never sang it like a dirge, so why do so many singers today persist in *signing* the song's outcome from the opening bars? It's a song about a series of physical journeys and one emotional one, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Straightforward, perhaps, but for too many it remains, in Brecht's words, "das Einfache, das schwer zu machen ist" (the simplicity that is so hard to do).

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