

Kurt Weill

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Kurt Weill

Newsletter

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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: Lotte Lenya, ca. 1962



Lotte Lenya rehearsing for a concert at Lewisohn Stadium, New York, July 1958.

Letters

This is just a footnote to Amy Lynn Wlodarski's outstanding discussion of Bernstein's *Kaddish* Symphony and its several texts ("Commemoration or Exploitation?" *Kurt Weill Newsletter* [Fall 2008]). It's not widely known that when he began work on the symphony in the early 1960s, Bernstein approached Robert Lowell (1917–1977), the most celebrated and honored American poet of the decade, to write the text. Lowell actually wrote three poems, more a lament for the extinction of the entire planet ("creation's downward curve") and a profound questioning of the power of God, which Bernstein ultimately rejected in favor of his own text. Copies of the poems were discovered after his death. The first publication of these poems, under the title "Three Poems for *Kaddish*," was in a 1979 issue of the literary journal *Ploughshares* (vol. 5, no. 2), for which I served as guest editor. They have now been reprinted in *Robert Lowell: Collected Poems*, eds. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007 [pbk.]). Though they were apparently not what Bernstein wanted, they remain by far the most powerful and original poems written for his symphony. It's too bad there hasn't been either a recording or a performance of the symphony that uses them.

LLOYD SCHWARTZ
Classical Music Editor, *The Boston Phoenix*

Note from the Editor

The young Kurt Weill grew up at a time when an opera diva would inform a stage director, "I always enter from top left and exit to the right in the back. Now, what do I get to wear tonight?" In *that* world of opera, the singing voice was everything. But Weill wanted more. His first opera had yet to be premiered when he noted, "musically and vocally our opera singers are fit for new tasks, but in terms of acting—be it facial expression or body language or general movement—opera performances lag far behind the accomplishments of today's theater. The lack of genuine, natural performances is especially painful."

When he composed for the musical stage, Weill wrote in any number of dramatic formats; he changed genres, models, and styles not only from one work to another but sometimes even within a work. Yet he was very clear about how each part had to be cast. Whereas *Aufstieg's* Jenny and Jimmy have to be consummate singers with considerable acting skills, Weill tried to cast the famed Marie Gutheil-Schoder—whom he had seen a decade earlier as Elektra, with Richard Strauss himself conducting—for the third major part: "Begbick is a golden opportunity for Gutheil-Schoder, because here at last is a role that doesn't require a beautiful voice as much as it does a grand, demonic portrayal." Paul Robeson and Lawrence Tibbett were on his wish list for years, but sadly all the projects intended for these supremely skilled actors and singers never came to fruition. Weill also combed the world of seemingly plain actors for musical talent, considering such unlikely candidates as Luise Rainer (for Fennimore in *Der Silbersee*) or accommodating Walter Huston in *Knickerbocker Holiday*. He certainly baffled his collaborator Alan Jay Lerner when he toyed with the idea of casting Rex Harrison for a musical show. "Does he sing?!" exclaimed Lerner in disbelief. "Enough," Weill wryly replied. Lerner, of course, remembered Weill's words when he approached Harrison to play Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*.

Whether a trained singer with a talent for acting or a professional actor with a musical voice—the combination of singing and acting was at the heart of Weill's musical theater. His wife and muse, Lotte Lenya, embodied this type of performer and even augmented it with another dimension: a trained dancer. To honor her career—but not to encourage attempts to imitate the inimitable Lenya—the Kurt Weill Foundation established a competition bearing her name during her centenary in 1998. In the last decade, the Competition has grown from modest beginnings to a major international contest whose winners are some of today's finest young performers. High time, then, to put a spotlight on this venture.

Elmar Juchem

Acting Singers/Singing Actors

The Lenya Competition

by Michael Lasser

After hearing his name called as the winner of the \$15,000 top prize in the twelfth annual Lotte Lenya Competition on 18 April, tenor Alen Hodzovic walked onstage holding his head in his hands, then extended his arms sideways and whirled like a helicopter, in a moment of disbelief, unabashed joy, and beguiling modesty. A few hours later, as the post-concert reception wound down, he was calmer, still charming, and only mildly incredulous. As we were choosing a time for an interview, he leaned in to whisper, "I have no classical vocal training. I trained in theater." A moment later, he began to recite the lyrics to a favorite song of his, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart's "It Never Entered My Mind": "Once I told you I was mistaken, / That I'd awaken with the sun." By then, he was grinning.

In the Competition's evening concert in the Eastman School of Music's Kilbourn Hall, Hodzovic had reprised the "Bilbao Song," in German. Earlier that day, though, as part of his four-number set, the Berlin resident had also performed a moving English-language version of "If I Didn't Believe in You" from Jason Robert Brown's 2002 off-Broadway musical, *The Last Five Years*. Even though he had previously appeared in the show in Germany, this was the first time he had sung the song in English. His emotional investment in the performance made it hard to believe that English was not his native language.

Soprano Lauren Worsham placed second (\$10,000) and bass-baritone Zachary James third (\$5,000); 22-year-old mezzo-soprano Ginger Costa-Jackson, who is already singing at the Metropolitan Opera, won one of three Lys Symonette Awards (\$2,500) for vocal talent, as did soprano Yannick-Muriel Noah and baritone Michael Anthony McGee. Named in honor of Weill's musical assistant on Broadway and Lenya's longtime accompanist and advisor, the Symonette awards honor contestants who excel in a particular aspect of the competition but do not win one of the top prizes.

Kim Kowalke, president of the Kurt Weill Foundation who also teaches at the University of Rochester, established the Competition in 1998 to celebrate the centennial of Lenya's birth and the Eastman School's receipt of Weill's holograph scores from Vienna. At that time, many classically trained singers were doing crossover recordings of American musical theater, Kowalke recalls, "as if the operatic voice were 'honoring' or 'elevating' this repertoire. At the same time, TV stars were appearing in Broadway musicals with no musical or theatrical credentials. Their only real qualification was their celebrity."

Kowalke hoped that the competition might in a small way encourage singers to become more versatile. "This is a theater singing competition, not a vocal or recital competition," he explains. "Dramatic context and content are very important. When



First Prize winner Alen Hodzovic learns that he has won the 2009 Lotte Lenya Competition. Photos: Kate Melton

opera singers do musical theater, they often treat it with disrespect because they think it's just popular music. We're not saying that every singer must do Weill or even musical theater, but we want to reward those who can 'cross over,' bringing to varied material the resources required to do each idiomatically."

Weill Foundation Director Carolyn Weber, herself a former musical theater performer and artist manager, adds that in vocal competitions singers are used to standing and singing as beautifully as they can, but in the Lenya Competition they have to perform each selection as if they're actually creating a character in a dramatic situation.

Right from the start, the Competition emphasized versatility

and acting as well as singing. The guidelines instruct participants to treat each song as a dramatic moment, complete in itself: “You should know the character, plot, situation, etc. of every excerpt that you sing . . . Think of the four selections as an opportunity to portray four different characters.”

To put it another way, the Lenya Competition reflects Kowalke’s convictions and beliefs: “Somebody has to encourage performers to sing in the right style with the right voice in a wide range of music with honesty and integrity. When you sing an aria, sing it like an aria. When you sing Cole Porter, don’t sing it as if you’re singing Wagner. Give both the respect they deserve.”

Giving that particular kind of respect to whatever you’re singing helps to establish the Competition’s standards and define what makes it distinctive. It also explains why the singers, in Kowalke’s words, “take such fierce ownership of it. ‘We don’t all have big voices,’ they say, ‘but this recognizes what we do.’” Artists are allowed to return for as long as they are eligible age-wise, as long as they have not won a First, Second, or Third Prize; they learn from their experiences in the competition, and some have finally won top prizes after several tries. Richard Todd Adams, 2004 prizewinner, recalled, “The first year I entered, Teresa Stratas was the regional judge and gave me unbelievable feedback. So when I went to the finals, I had a swelled head and faked my way through it. I didn’t win and afterward, Stratas grabbed me and cussed me out: ‘You’re too good to do that crap. You always have to sing from the heart.’ She really opened my eyes. The next year I said, ‘I’m gonna freakin’ win this thing’ and I did.”

Kowalke also underscores the importance of not singing musical theater numbers as popular songs stripped of their dramatic function. The work’s integrity and its original identity are paramount. He instructs participants, “Don’t choose a female character’s song if you’re a male; don’t sing a world-weary song of bitterness and disillusionment for a 45-year-old character if you’re only 22 . . . choose material that you could believably perform if cast in a full-scale production . . .” His cautionary guidance extends to style: “There is a time and place for jazz versions, personal arrangements, and ‘updated’ renditions, but the Lenya Competition is not it.”

Kowalke can be very tough about breaches in the Competition’s guidelines. During the New York City regionals at the Dicapo Opera Theatre, housed in the basement of a church on East 76th Street, he asked where an arrangement had come from. The singer didn’t know the answer, but Kowalke and judge Paulette Haupt soon agreed that it was probably from the 1972 off-Broadway revue, *Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill*, rather than the original production. At another point, Kowalke and Weber wondered why a singer had chosen to perform an English translation of Weill and Jacques Deval’s “J’attends un navire” from *Marie Galante*, originally written in French and performed in Paris in 1934, as the contest rules require all songs to be sung in their original language.

“When I began to branch out from grand opera into other forms of musical theater, I discovered the simple truth that the various categories of musical theater were actually nothing but different ways of mixing the same ingredients—music, drama, and movement.”

Kurt Weill, 1947

unchanged. What *has* changed are the number of participants and the general level of competition. (And the prize amounts: The top prize of \$1,000 in 1998 has increased over time to \$15,000 in 2009. \$300,000 has been awarded since the competition began, including prizes, Lys Symonette Awards, and “encouragement awards” to non-finalists.) Kowalke speculates that someone who would have made it into the finals as recently as four or five years ago might not have done so this year. With 13 finalists drawn from an initial field of 164, this year’s group included singers from Brazil, Canada, and Germany, as well as the United States. “Singers have become self-selective as the competition has become better known. If they know they’re not ready, they don’t enter,” Kowalke says. The age limits remain 18–32, but the median age has increased over time to 28 this year. Hodzovic, 31, entered this year because it was his last chance.

The Competition’s requirements reflect various aspects of Weill’s own career. Each contestant must prepare four numbers—two contrasting numbers by Weill, an aria from opera or operetta, and a song from the American musical theater. At least one selection must also be in a language other than English. In the evening performance, each singer reprises one selection. This year, the performers made their own choices, although in past years the judges have made them.

Few singers are equally strong in all aspects of theater singing, and therein lies the challenge. Kowalke says, “The finest voices don’t necessarily win. It’s the combination of acting and singing that matters.” Such great singers as Teresa Stratas and Audra McDonald might have won a Lenya Competition when they were young; equally great singers like Birgit Nilsson and Ethel Merman probably would not have because their careers were less varied—Nilsson’s singularly devoted to opera and Merman’s to musical theater.

For Hodzovic, trained in theater rather than opera, performing an aria was the most difficult challenge in the Competition. Instead of selecting something from grand opera, he wisely—and suitably—chose a number from the popular 1930 German operetta, *Im weißen Rößl* (*White Horse Inn*). “I have no classical training,” he says, “but I took a chance.” Similarly, singers trained in opera must be able to “act” a song, most essentially in the two Weill selections and the one from musical theater, some of which display the jazzy “looseness” that makes the American theater song distinctive. Hodzovic, who received the highest first-round point total in the Competition’s twelve-year history, comes impressively close to embodying the values, convictions, and intentions of those who founded it and those who judge it. Describing the particular value of the Lenya Competition, he says, “It’s wonderful to have a competition that rewards acting through song.”

•

When tenor Erik Liberman sang “Try Me” as part of his program in the 2005 finals, Broadway director Harold Prince was one of the judges. Forty years earlier, Prince had directed *She Loves Me*, the Jerry Bock-Sheldon Harnick musical from which the song comes. Following the first round, the judges called some of the contestants to a closed-door coaching session, Liberman among them. Prince said to him, “In the original production, we had a single spotlight

The first Competition in 1998 had 34 contestants, all Eastman School of Music students. As the Competition blossomed from local to international in scope, its essential concept has remained

on the actor's face for this number. I'd like to see if you can do it as if you're being lit that way." After eight bars, Prince interrupted, "That's it; he can do it."

Kowalke explains that Prince was trying to get Liberman to eliminate the extraneous movement that was getting in the way of the song, what Prince privately called "all that crap." Liberman simplified his performance and, later that night, won second prize. Liberman never forgot that moment, and, apparently, neither did Prince. Two years later, he hired Liberman for the original production of *LoveMusik*, the musical based on Weill's and Lenya's relationship as chronicled in their letters, edited by Symonette and Kowalke as *Speak Low (When You Speak Love)*. That kind of quick teaching between the finals' afternoon and evening programs is an essential part of the Lenya Competition's distinctive profile.

Last year, Tony-winning singer and Competition judge Victoria Clark asked finalist Rebecca Jo Loeb to reprise Weill and Ogden Nash's "That's Him" at night, a tender but witty ballad from their score to *One Touch of Venus*. "The judges chose it because it was my worst song," Loeb remembers. "Vicki Clark didn't like my standing behind a chair as if I was hiding. I tend to do too much stuff to indicate what I'm feeling rather than putting it in the song." Loeb's deeply felt version that night helped her to win First Prize. She recently completed featured roles in runs of both a musical and an opera, *A Little Night Music* with the Boston Pops at Tanglewood and *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Juilliard Opera Center, as well as being cast by James Levine as Jenny in *Mahagonny* at Tanglewood. That's precisely the kind of versatility the competition encourages and rewards.

In 2007, I attended the Competition's evening performance for the first time, along with seven friends. When Kowalke announced

the prizewinners, I was dumbstruck by one of the awards. I sidled up to him afterwards to tug at his sleeve and ask how that person could possibly have won. "You had to have been here in the afternoon to hear the entire program," he told me, "the aria and the musical theater number, everything." I took him at his word. The following year, I returned in the evening with the same group, but two of us had also sat through the afternoon session in which each finalist performed a fourteen-minute set of four numbers. Of our group of eight, only the two of us who attended all day picked Rebecca Jo Loeb as the winner. This year, before presenting the awards, Kowalke explained to the near-capacity audience in Kilbourn Hall the scoring system: judges must evaluate each of the four numbers individually, awarding a maximum of ten points per selection, for a possible total of forty. A "perfect 10" on one number won't put a singer into contention if it's offset by a "5" on another selection.

It's easy to fall into the trap of picking the best voice or finest vocal technique, but Kowalke insists again and again, "This is a theater singing competition, not a vocal competition." That insistence frequently leads to additional preparation for those who make the finals. Suggestions from judges or competition administrators usually have to do with increasing or intensifying dramatic content or stylistic range of the program as a whole, and that may involve replacing a song for the finals. Kowalke explains both the reasoning behind it and the way it's done: "Very, very few finalists score well with all four numbers in the regionals, so we discuss with the judge what worked and what didn't. Sometimes the performer does all four numbers perfectly well, but two are so similar in style or affect that one of them becomes a 'wasted' number. We suggest a change, even urge it, on behalf of the judge, but in the end we can't require



Second Prize winner Lauren Worsham performs with accompanist Andy Einhorn. Photo: Kate Melton

it. The contestant is free to refuse and sometimes does, but I have to say, the regional judge was usually right.”

Case in point: When Carolyn Weber called Yale graduate and eventual Second Prize winner Lauren Worsham to congratulate her on making the finals, she suggested that “Mr. Right” from *Love Life* should be sung in the original key (rather than the higher one found in the published popular song version). This would require her to “belt” the number, as Weill intended. The regional judge had also suggested replacing the title song from Adam Guettel and Craig Lucas’s *The Light in the Piazza* because it is about a very specific moment in the plot and thus hard to “land” out of context. Worsham heeded the advice: she sang “Mister Right” down a third and substituted “Simple Little Things” from *110 in the Shade*, because its simplicity contrasted with her other numbers, and its intimacy provided expanded opportunities for acting.

Finalist Marcy Richardson observed that Weber’s comments were very practical and very specific. “You walk away from her phone call with lots of feedback and then you have a month to digest it and master new material.”

Even a cursory look at the brief biographies of this year’s finalists and previous winners (see pp. 8–9) demonstrates how successful the participants have been, including those who did not win a prize. They have consistently been cast in both featured and leading roles in opera and musicals throughout the country, and more recently, the world. For instance, Worsham, who won this year’s Second Prize for her “glittering pyrotechnics combined with the simplest of little things,” has appeared in straight plays as well as at New York City Opera in *Candide*. Third Prize winner Zachary James, who won for his “commanding versatility,” has played in everything from the musicals *Li’l Abner* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* to the operas *Don Giovanni* and *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. Just a week before the finals, he left the Lincoln Center production of *South Pacific* after a year as Seaman Thomas Hassinger.

Among the most notable successes of previous years Nicole Cabell won a Lys Symonette Award in 2002, and then in 2005 won the BBC Singer of the World Competition in Cardiff. She recently appeared as Adina in Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’amore* at the Metropolitan Opera. Looking ahead, on 4 August, at the Ravinia Festival in Chicago, six previous Lenya Competition winners will make up the entire cast of Weill and Brecht’s *Mahagonny Songspiel*.

It was possible to talk to only a few of this year’s prizewinners, but a moment spent looking ahead brought into focus the vagaries, variables, and opportunities of a singer’s career. Alen Hodzovic returned to Germany to appear as Cliff in a German language production of *Cabaret*. Michael McGee went from the Competition to a performance of Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis* with the New York Choral Society and, for the first time, a Tanglewood appearance in *Die Meistersinger* under James Levine. Meanwhile, Lauren Worsham and Marcy Richardson returned to New York, Lauren to start auditioning and Marcy to seek out workshops in both acting and singing. Lauren also leaves the Competition with a dream. She and a friend aspire to start a small opera company in downtown



Kim Kowalke with Competition judges Teresa Stratas, Theodore S. Chapin, and Rob Berman. Photo: Kate Melton

Manhattan, devoted to new work by young composers. She says, “We want to fill the gap between Broadway and opera by using people with beautiful voices who can also act. Not Broadway and not opera, but music theater, the world in between. It would embody the spirit of Lenya.”

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Competition finalists are chosen from regional auditions—held this year in Ann Arbor, Mich., Rochester, and New York City—and from video submissions. I observed one of the three days of auditions in New York; the judge that day was Paulette Haupt, Artistic Director of the National Musical Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Connecticut. She heard nearly three dozen singers, of whom four made the finals (the other regional judges this year were David Loud, actor and Broadway music director; Charlie Scatamacchia, vice president of R&H Theatricals; and Broadway actress Grace Keagy). Unlike the finals, where the singers were together all day, here they pop in a few minutes before their scheduled times, perform, and head back out—just one stop in a busy day. Each singer takes the stage to announce a first selection; Haupt then selects a second number in contrast to the first. That’s it, unless she thinks the singer has a shot at the finals; then she requests the rest of the program. Sitting there, you can’t help turning yourself into a “judge” to see if your choices match hers. What becomes clear very quickly is that from a group of trained, talented singers, the best immediately stand out.

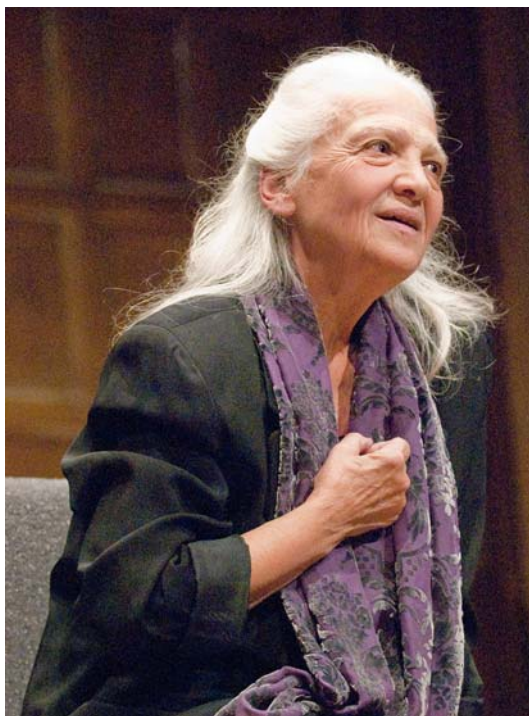
Once the regionals conclude, the Competition administrators begin the process of merging the regional rankings and determining how many top-rated contestants will be included in the finals, usually ten to fifteen. Referring to video records to remind them of contestants’ performances, they compare contestants from different regions. When they reach the “maybe pile,” the last two or three slots, balancing factors such as voice type may be taken into account. If the judges have already put seven sopranos in the top group, another soprano may not have an equal shot at the last slots.

In the finals, the three-person panel of judges always includes one singer, one theater practitioner (director, actor, producer), and one composer, coach, or conductor. This year, legendary soprano Teresa Stratas judged for the ninth time and Theodore S. Chapin,

president and executive director of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization, for the sixth. For *Encores!* Music Director Rob Berman, it was the first. Judges in the past have included producer and director Harold Prince, actor and director Alvin Epstein, musical director and arranger Ted Sperling, composer William Bolcom, and conductors James Holmes and Julius Rudel. There are disagreements, even arguments, between the judges, but not always predictably. “You’d think an actor would speak up for the best actor and a singer for an outstanding singer, but sometimes the ‘theater’ judge favors the singers and vice versa,” Kowalke explains. The judges often advocate passionately for their opposites until the expert points out the problems, perhaps in technique, perhaps in interpretation.

Each of the three judges awards a maximum of ten points for each of a contestant’s four numbers—a maximum of 120 points per singer. Each singer’s total becomes the basis for discussion although, in nearly every case over the years, the person with the highest score in the first round ended up winning. The judges start with the numbers, but set them aside as they consider individual strengths and weaknesses, which they may try to address in private callbacks or in the evening concert. Close decisions, often about second and third prize, have been made on the basis of second looks during the evening concert. “Standards change and judges change,” says Kowalke, “but what defines the Competition doesn’t change.” He makes no attempt to define for the judges what each of the numbers, one through ten, means. He asks only that each award them consistently, and he waits eagerly for the first score of ten.

This year, when Lauren Worsham sang “Glitter and Be Gay” from *Candide* with panache and humor, “the judges knew what a ten looked like. It gave them a reference point. It’s important to avoid inflating the numbers, and equally important to keep from having that ten bleed over into your evaluation of everything else you hear from that contestant.”



Teresa Stratas. Photo: Kate Melton

In addition to providing knowledge and insight, the judges, especially those who have done it before, have another role to play. Kowalke says that no one is a better consensus builder than Chapin. At the same time, it’s hard to imagine the Competition without Stratas because Lenya crowned her as her successor; Kowalke calls her “the keeper of the flame.” As a judge, she is both demanding and enormously sympathetic. Although she doesn’t believe in competitions and participates only in this one, she embraces the goal of deeply felt singing combined with equally genuine acting. She yearns for performers whose deepest self informs their singing. “It’s no small thing to bare yourself. Ultimately,” she says, “I’m looking for something that will stir my heart. I want these young singers to be truthful, to strip away artifice. I want them to go away knowing that the most important thing is for them to bring what is special about themselves to their singing.”

Stratas adds, “This is the only competition that requires contestants to prepare so many kinds of songs, and then take what the judges give them and immediately put it to work.” She reflects on what the competition bearing Lenya’s name achieves: “What a terrific idea that honors the singing and Lenya both. And now it’s one of the most important international competitions in the world.”

Notable Engagements after They Won

Brian Mulligan (1998): Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, English National Opera.

Jennifer Dyan Goode (2001): Baz Luhrmann’s *La Bohème* on Broadway.

Kyle Barisich (2002): Raoul, national tour and Broadway, *Phantom of the Opera*.

Lucas Meachem (2002): title roles in *Don Giovanni* (Santa Fe Opera) and *Billy Budd* (Paris Opera).

Nicole Cabell (2002): leading roles at Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Metropolitan Opera, and Deutsche Oper, Berlin.

Elaine Alvarez (2003): Mimi in *La Bohème*, Lyric Opera of Chicago and Frankfurt Opera.

Richard Todd Adams (2004): *Woman in White* and *The Pirate Queen* on Broadway; title role in the national tour of *Phantom of the Opera*.

Amy Justman (2004): Broadway productions of *Company* and *White Christmas*, *A Little Night Music* at Baltimore Center Stage.

Liam Bonner (2005): Leading roles at English National Opera, Houston Grand Opera.

Erik Liberman (2005): *LoveMusik* on Broadway, *Merrily We Roll Along* at Signature Stage (Helen Hayes Award), *Motel in Fiddler on the Roof* national tour.

Rodel Aure Rosel (2006): Comprimario roles at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Metropolitan Opera.

Jeanine De Bique (2007): New York Philharmonic debut in Mahler’s 8th Symphony.

Zachary James (2009): *The Addams Family*, bound for Broadway in 2010.

Timeline: The Lotte Lenya Competition, 1998–2009

12 November 1998, Eastman School of Music for students of the University of Rochester.

Winners: Rachel Albert, Leah Arington, Heidi Bieber, Rebecca Comerford, Katia Escalera, Danielle Frink, Elizabeth McDonald, Brian Mulligan, Lauren Pastorek, Tami Petty, Teresa Winner.
Judges: Teresa Stratas, Julius Rudel, Mark Cuddy.

3 December 1999, Eastman School of Music for students in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

First Prize: Amy Orsulak (Manhattan School of Music); Second Prizes: Christina Carr (Eastman School of Music), Dirk Weiler (City College, City University of New York); Third Prizes: Daniel Spiotta, Amy Van Looy (both Eastman School of Music). Lys Symonette Prize (Outstanding Accompanist): Thomas Rosenkranz (also of Eastman).
Judges: Teresa Stratas, Jonathan Eaton, John Mauceri.

16 February 2000, Akademie der Künste Berlin for students in Germany.

First Prizes: Sophia Brickwell (Leipzig), Lisa Löfquist (Berlin), Juliane Price (Essen), Susanne Serfling (Berlin); Second Prizes: Nicole Johannhanwar (Munich), Rosa Schneider (Potsdam), Annela Ulmer (Chernitz).

17 February 2000, Kurt Weill Zentrum Dessau for young professional singers in Germany.

First Prize: Annette Postel (Baden-Württemberg); Second Prizes: Kaja Plessing (Düsseldorf), Kathrin Unger (Berlin), Cordula Wirkner (Nuremberg).
Judges for both competitions: Teresa Stratas, Elmar Ottenthal, James Holmes.

17 March 2001, Eastman School of Music for students in the United States and Canada.

First Prize: Jennifer Dyan Goode (Manhattan School of Music); Second Prizes: Raquela Sheeran (The Juilliard School), Jacob Langfelder (Boston Conservatory); Lys Symonette Special Awards: Noah Stewart (The Juilliard School), Misty Ann Castleberry Sturm (Eastman School of Music).
Judges: André Bishop, Teresa Stratas, Welz Kauffman.

13 April 2002, Eastman School of Music for singers residing in the United States and Canada who had not yet reached their 32nd birthday as of 31 December 2001.

First Prize: Lisa Conlon (Rochester, NY); Second Prizes: Kyle Barisich (New York, NY), Ethan Watermeier (Astoria, NY). Lys Symonette Awards (Outstanding Vocal Talent): Amy Van Looy (Rochester, NY), Nicole Cabell (Chicago, IL), Lucas Meachem (Rochester, NY).
Judges: Eric Stern, Teresa Stratas, Stanley Walden.

22 March 2003, Eastman School of Music for singers residing in the United States and Canada born after 31 December 1970.

First Prize: Siri Vik (Cincinnati, OH); Second Prize: Peter McGillivray (Toronto, ON); Third Prizes: Elaine Alvarez (Brooklyn, NY), Jeffrey Behrens (Pittsburgh, PA), Michael McKinsey (Brooklyn, NY).
Judges: Teresa Stratas, Theodore S. Chapin, Ted Sperling.

27 March 2004, Eastman School of Music for singers born after 31 December 1971.

Three equal prizes awarded to Richard Todd Adams (New York, NY); Amy Justman (New York, NY), and Misty Ann Sturm (Lindenhurst, NY).
Judges: Theodore S. Chapin, Alvin Epstein, Angelina Réaux.

9 April 2005, Eastman School of Music for singers born between 1 January 1973 and 31 December 1985.

First Prize: Jonathan Michie (Rochester, NY); Second Prizes: Liam Bonner (New York, NY), Erik Liberman (New York, NY); Third Prize: Morgan James (New York, NY); Lys Symonette Award (Outstanding Individual Number): Jendi Tarde (Chicago, IL).
Judges: William Bolcom, Harold Prince, Angelina Réaux.

22 April 2006, Eastman School of Music for singers born between 1 January 1974 and 31 December 1986.

First Prize: Justin Welsh (Toronto, ON); Second Prizes: Justin Lee Miller (New York, NY), Rodell Aure Rosel (Chicago, IL); Third Prizes: Sarah Blaskowsky (New York, NY), Hallie Silverston (Rochester, NY); Lys Symonette Awards (Outstanding Individual Number): Karim Sulayman (New York, NY), Meredith Arwady (Chicago, IL), Bray Wilkins (Port Gibson, MS).
Judges: Teresa Stratas, Theodore S. Chapin, James Holmes.

21 April 2007, Eastman School of Music for singers born between 1 January 1975 and 31 December 1987.

First Prize: James Benjamin Rodgers (New York, NY); Second Prize: Analisa Leaming (Rochester, NY); Third Prizes: Christopher Herbert (New York, NY), Leena Chopra (New York, NY); Lys Symonette Awards (Outstanding Vocal Talent): Paul Corona (Chicago, IL), Jeanine De Bique (New York, NY); Lys Symonette Award (Outstanding Dramatic Talent): Brian Charles Rooney (New York, NY).
Judges: Teresa Stratas, Ted Sperling, Theodore S. Chapin.

12 April 2008, Eastman School of Music for singers born between 1 January 1976 and 31 December 1988.

First Prize: Rebecca Jo Loeb (New York, NY); Second Prize: Ariela Morgenstern (Brooklyn, NY); Third Prizes: Bray Wilkins (Moscow, ID), Maija Skille (Helsinki, Finland); Lys Symonette Awards (Outstanding Individual Number): Tora Augestad (Berlin, Germany), Lauren Jelencovich (New York, NY), Elizabeth Reiter (New York, NY); Lys Symonette Award (Vocal Promise): John Brancy (Mullica Hill, NJ).
Judges: Victoria Clark, James Holmes, Theodore S. Chapin.

18 April 2009, Eastman School of Music for singers born between 1 January 1977 and 31 December 1989.

First Prize: Alen Hodzovic (Berlin, Germany); Second Prize: Lauren Worsham (New York, NY); Third Prize: Zachary James (New York, NY); Lys Symonette Awards (Outstanding Individual Number): Michael Anthony McGee (New York, NY), Yannick-Muriel Noah (Toronto, ON); Lys Symonette Award (Vocal Promise): Ginger Costa-Jackson (New York, NY).
Judges: Rob Berman, Theodore S. Chapin, Teresa Stratas.

The New Music Theater

The New Music Theater: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body attempts to survey recent developments in music theater around the world, offering a unique perspective on the origins and future of the genre. The book takes up such larger issues as technological advances, changes in audience, the role of organizations in shaping musical theater, and the uses of theater in society. The authors state in the Preface: "The lack of categorization and lack of definition is at once the glory of music theater and its problem. . . . Our job as we see it is to connect the dots, draw lines, follow ideas, interweave details, pick up the bits and pieces, and set them into a large picture" (p. vii). The portions of Chapter 15, "The Show Must Go On," reprinted here come from the book **New Music Theater** by Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi. Copyright © 2008. Reprinted by arrangement with Oxford University Press, Inc. (www.oup.com/us). All rights reserved. Footnotes have been omitted.

The Weill Heritage

The downtown theater movements of the 1960s involved the creation and production of small-scale music theater in a popular mode. This was a continuation or resumption of the small-scale and political music-theater movements of the 1930s but also in the direct line of Kurt Weill and the Weill/Brecht collaborations. Weill's major American disciple, Marc Blitzstein, wrote and composed *The Cradle Will Rock* in 1936–37.

[. . .]

Blitzstein's later work—*No for an Answer* (1941; in a mode similar to *Cradle*); *Regina* (1949), an operatic version of *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman; *Reuben Reuben* (1955); *Juno* (1959; based on Sean O'Casey); and *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1959–64; commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera but left incomplete at his death)—continued to have resonance in the New York musical theater, although none of it ever quite equaled the impact of his *Threepenny Opera* translation. Blitzstein was a close friend and colleague of Leonard Bernstein, and there is a direct line to works of Bernstein like *On the Town* (1944), *Wonderful Town* (1953), and especially, *West Side Story* (1957). Stephen Sondheim, who wrote the lyrics for *West Side Story*, picked up the torch as a composer in music-driven works like *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Assassins* (1990), *Passion* (1994), and others. The post-Sondheim generation of Bill Finn, Michael John LaChiusa, Adam Guettel, and Jonathan Larson continues to dominate the serious side of New York musical theater.

Weill's influence on popular music and musical theater has never entirely disappeared. It continues to resonate in the New York theater in populist pieces with social themes like *Cabaret* and *Chicago* (1966 and 1975; both by John Kander and Fred Ebb), the Sahl/Salzman collaborations (*The Conjurer*, 1975; *Stauf*, 1976; *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1977; *Noah*, 1978; and *The Passion of Simple Simon*, 1979), the musicals of Bill Finn (*In Trousers*, 1979;

March of the Falsettos, 1981; *America Kicks Up Its Heels*, 1983; *Falsettoland*, 1990; *The Twenty-fifth Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, 2005), Mikel Rouse's *Dennis Cleveland* (1996; a "talk-show opera" inspired by the Jerry Springer TV show), Jonathan Larson's *Rent* (1996), Adam Guettel's *Floyd Collins* (with Tina Landau; 1994), Michael John LaChiusa's *The Wild Party* (with George C. Wolfe based on the verse novel of Joseph Moncure March; 2000), and even recent off-Broadway pieces like *Urinetown* (1999; Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis) and *Avenue Q* (2003; Robert Lopez, Jeff Marx, and Jeff Whitty). This kind of performance piece—small scale with social commentary, unsentimental music, and some measure of non-linear, satirical bite—has retained its cachet as the leading edge of musical theater in New York.

Although the major impact of Weill was on the musical theater, there has also been more than a trace of influence on the course of new opera in the United States. William Bolcom's first collaboration with Arnold Weinstein was a surrealist anti-war music-theater piece in a *Dr. Strangelove* mode entitled *Dynamite Tonight* (1963). This very Kurtweillian work, which had a long and checkered history off-Broadway and in regional theater, was followed by *Greatshot* (1967–69), commissioned by the Yale Repertory Theater, and a series of cabaret songs, which have been very widely performed. Subsequently, the Bolcom/Weinstein collaboration moved toward the classical musical with *Casino Paradise* (1990; commissioned by the American Music Theater Festival) and opera with *McTeague* (1990–92; with Robert Altman), *A View from the Bridge* (1997–98; adapted from the Arthur Miller play with Miller's participation), and *A Wedding* (2004; again, a collaboration with Altman after one of his films).

There is a trace of Weill influence on Anthony Davis, whose opera on the life of Malcolm X—entitled simply *X*—was premiered at the American Music Theater Festival in 1985 and later performed at the New York City Opera. Other operatic works of Davis include *Under the Double Moon* (1989; a science fiction opera with a libretto by Deborah Atherton), *Tania* (American Music Theater Festival, 1992; a theater opera about Patty Hearst with a libretto by Michael John La Chiusa), and *Amistad* (Chicago Lyric Opera in 1997; libretto by Thulani Davis about a slaveship uprising). He also wrote the music for Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* (1993). Davis, who had his own improvisational ensemble, Episteme, has made it a practice to include improvisational elements in his operas although the overt references to jazz in his work are restricted and generally have dramatic significance (i.e., the scenes of Malcolm X as a street hustler).

[. . .]

Kurt Weill in Europe; *The Black Rider*

One of the curious facts about the Kurt Weill connection is that while his influence can still be found in New York, it hardly exists in Europe except perhaps in a very diluted form. Elements of Brecht/Weill survived in East Germany and may be found in works like the Udo Zimmermann *Weisse Rose*, but in Western Europe, there are only a few theater artists and composers whose work is

connected in any way with that tradition: Hans Werner Henze, several British composers beginning with Cornelius Cardew, the Dutch composer Louis Andriessen, and the Viennese group around Kurt Schwertsik and HK Gruber, all of whom have already been discussed. Heiner Goebbels (who will be discussed further in Chapter 18) has written a work called *Eislermaterial*, referring to (and quoting extensively from) Brecht's other major musical collaborator. There is also the strange case of the Swiss director Christoph Marthaler, whose work is close to music theater.

Marthaler, who started his career as a musician playing the oboe in theater orchestras, began to develop his own theatrical language from the *mise-en-scène* of the *Liederabend* or song recital, a basic concept out of which many of his later works grew. The visual characteristics of his work are closely connected to the stage and costume designs of Anna Viebrock. Marthaler goes back and forth between theater and opera, and as he is an habitué of the in-between, his works for the theater have a musicotheatrical character. He is one of the few director/artist/*auteurs* in today's music theater who has the power to divide the audience, making political what is most human.

[. . .]

Not surprisingly perhaps, one of the most successful incursions of the Kurt Weill tradition in modern Europe came from two Americans working in the theater. The three Robert Wilson/Tom Waits commissions came not from the opera or any other musical institution but from theater companies: *The Black Rider* and *Alice* (after Lewis Carroll) from the Thalia Theater in Hamburg, Germany, and *Woyzeck* from the Betty Nansen Theatre in Denmark. Waits, it should be said, had previously worked with considerable success at the Steppenwolf Theater in Chicago, one of the most innovative nonprofit regional theaters in the United States. Wilson, of course, has crossed all the lines between theater, opera, and performance art.

The Black Rider, based on a piece of German folklore that is also the basis of the opera *Der Freischütz* by Carl Maria von Weber, is the best known of these collaborations. The immediate sources of the story were a novel by August Apel and Friedrich Laun from 1810 and an English version by Thomas de Quincey published in 1823. The musical was commissioned by Jürgen Flimm, then director of the Thalia, and was first performed there on March 31, 1990. The success of the work is partly to be explained by the fact that this is an American retelling of a German redemption story about someone who made a pact with the devil and has to go into exile. Wilhelm sings, "... don't cry for me, for I'm going away, and I'll be back some lucky day." This was less than a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Another remarkable thing about *The Black Rider* concerns the choice of an author. This is the story of a man who has made a pact with the dark side and who subsequently kills his beloved with a bullet gone astray. *The Black Rider* was actually written by a man who had made a pact with the dark side and killed his wife with a bullet gone astray. This would be William Burroughs, and it was the writer's last major work. The concept of the piece belongs to Robert Wilson, who conceived it as a black comedy and staged it in a presentational style in which the actors explain, to each other and to the audience, the moral of the story as well as their characters and what they are doing.

The Black Rider is not realistic, it is not psychological, and its use of expressionism is almost quotational, postmodern. It is tight-

ly choreographed with a typical Robert Wilson use of time. People and things appear and disappear. Objects are misshapen and transform from one thing into another. It is child-like, cartoonish, and two-dimensional at the same time that it is complex and (in spite of the story) nonlinear. Everything is odd, colorful, funny, and threatening at the same time.

Tom Waits has been quoted as saying that he had been "trying to find a music that could dream its way into the forest of Wilson's images and be absurd, terrifying and fragile." Many of the Tom Waits songs, in his rough, American gospel mode, grow out of the text, but others seem quite peripheral to the action. Much of the music is actually arranged and extended by Waits's collaborators, Greg Cohen, Gerd Bessler, and the band itself (The Devil's Rubato Band), which played an important role in developing the score. Although the music plays a major part in the success of the work (most people probably think of the work as Tom Waits's *Black Rider*), Waits himself did not actually perform in the original production. However, he worked very closely and successfully with the musicians and the cast in putting it together and he left his unmistakable imprint on their performance style. The score is, so to say, Kurtweillian, not only in the sense that it often sounds like Weill, but also in the way that it provides a solid anchor for a musical play organized in numbers. Although, many of the numbers and most of the scene music, much of it by Waits's associates, grow out of the dramatic situations and can be considered music-theater numbers rather than show songs, they do not always or necessarily advance the action and sometimes they actually stop or even negate the dramatic movement. Often they express something that the character—or the actor playing the character—needs to convey to the audience. The use of American pop styles is sometimes at odds with the Germanic folklore and Wilson's surrealist/expressionist stage style. Also, the use of both German and English and the presentational manner of the performance—with the actors talking and singing directly at the audience as much as at each other—produces an oddly "off" effect that tends to give the entire structure something of the character of camp cabaret in a *grand guignol* manner. *New York Times* critic John Rockwell called it a cross between *Cabaret*, *The Threepenny Opera*, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

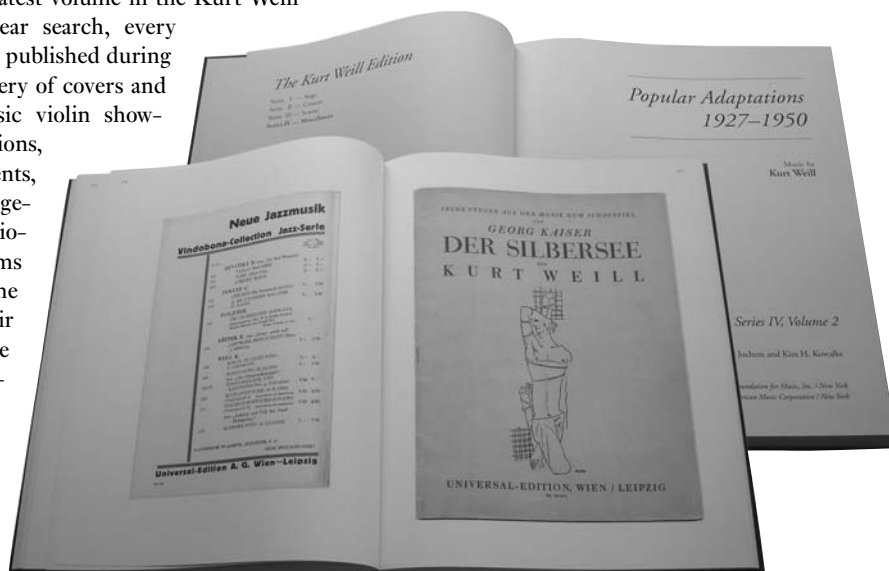
Can the Kurt Weill (or Weill/Brecht) model continue to represent a new form of music(al) theater any longer? Does it provide a still-useful template for a presentational theater in which closed forms, pop music, irony and alienation, music-hall or vaudeville tradition, politics, and the *Verfremdungseffekt* continue to play a role? A related issue here is whether the new music theater, as a successor to opera, will continue its avant-garde role as a class marker or whether it can recapture its function as a populist art form through its traditional association with pop music. At the moment, this issue seems to divide music theater in Western Europe (with its avoidance of pop music) from the American equivalent (pop music permitted in both the Weill/Brecht and experimental theater traditions and also around the edges of minimalism).

However, it can be said that *The Black Rider* represents a rare moment when the style of the contemporary off-Broadway musical, descended from Weill and his successors, reentered European music theater in an important and successful way. Whether this is a unique event—due to the offbeat talents of Wilson and, especially, Waits—or the start of something else remains to be seen.

Kurt Weill Edition Releases Long-Awaited Facsimile Volume: "Popular Adaptations, 1927-1950"

Collectors of sheet music, lovers of popular song, and scholars of pop music and musical theater will be fascinated by the latest volume in the Kurt Weill Edition. Thanks to a sustained, multiyear search, every known popular adaptation of Weill's music published during his lifetime is included in a full-color gallery of covers and its catalogue: workers' choruses, virtuosic violin show-pieces, sheet music, vocal gems and selections, polyglot songbooks, newspaper supplements, anthologies, dance band and choral arrangements. Particularly prone to physical deterioration and loss over time, some of these items have apparently survived only as *unicas*. The 176 covers tell a colorful tale all on their own, and each of the 38 black-and-white facsimiles is printed at full size and in original format. A magisterial essay by Charles Hamm, one of the foremost scholars of popular music in the 20th century, accompanies the illustrations and discusses each facsimile in detail. As none of Weill's theatrical works was available in full score, the publication is an essential volume in documenting how Weill's music was transmitted and received during his lifetime.

Kurt Weill Edition (Series IV, vol. 2): "Popular Adaptations, 1927-1950," edited by Charles Hamm, Elmar Juchem and Kim H. Kowalke (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music / European American Music Corporation, 2009), 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 15"; 326 pp. \$225 (\$175 for subscribers).



Books

Tonality as Drama: Closure and Interruption in Four Twentieth-Century American Operas

Edward D. Latham

Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008, xv, 221 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-57441-249-9

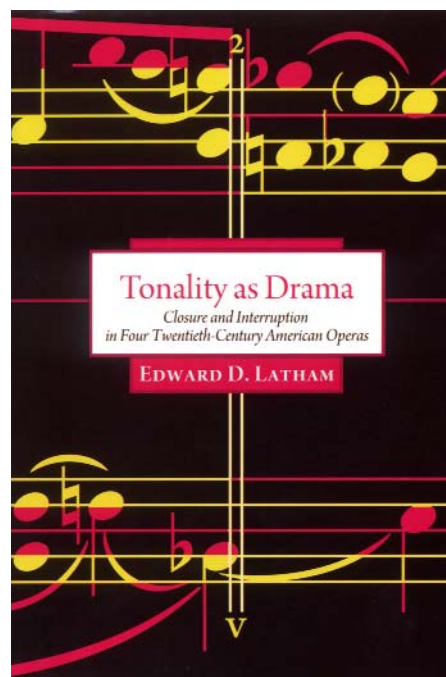
In this slim monograph, Edward D. Latham, assistant professor of music theory at Temple University, presents an intriguing methodology for the study of opera through an examination of four American operas: Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, and Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land*.

Latham's approach involves an appropriation of techniques associated with the Russian director and theorist, Constantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938), in particular, the latter's ideas about character motivation rather than other aspects of his teaching (such as the concept of affective memory, which came to represent Stanislavsky's work in the States by way of director Lee Strasberg's promulgation of "method acting"). As Latham explains, Stanislavsky analyzed characters by "scoring a role," a process by which he charted a specific character's goals not only for an entire play (the "superobjective"), but for each scene (the "main objective") and even each line (the "objective"). Availing himself of some additional refinements advanced by actress Uta Hagen, Latham adopts such related concepts as the "interrupted objective," the "beat objective," the "hidden objective," and the "subconscious objective."

At the heart of Latham's application of such ideas lies the observation that Stanislavsky's teleological and hierarchical formulations have a number of features in common with those of his contemporary, music theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935), the Russian director's "scores" being analogous to Schenker's "graphs." Can the study of opera benefit from combining these two methods?

Before embarking on his four case studies, Latham briefly considers the shortcomings of previous operatic scholarship found in the work of such theorists as Patrick McCreless, David Lawton, Roger Parker, Matthew Brown, and Rudy Marozzi, whose use of Bernard Beckerman's dramatic theories for his 1992 dissertation on Verdi anticipates the present author's more direct appropriation of Stanislavsky. However much he might shortchange the existing literature, Latham's zeal helps give his writing a certain vigor (he even suggests that his passion for singing endows him with certain advantages as a scholar of opera).

As for the case studies set forth in the last four chapters, Latham adopts the following method: He scores, using principal set pieces, the goals and objectives of the main characters from *Treemonisha* (Zodzetrick and Treemonisha), *Porgy and Bess* (Porgy and Bess), *Street Scene* (Sam and Rose), and *The Tender Land* (Martin and Laurie); he analyzes these set pieces à la Schenker, with observations about key, harmony, voice-leading, cadence, and form; he draws correspondences between dramatic and musical objectives



within each number; and finally, he graphs the entire background structure of a single character or, in the case of *Street Scene* and *The Tender Land*, the two romantic leads, again integrating musical and dramatic observations.

This latter project—charting an entire role—depends on two Schenkerian techniques discussed in the book's first chapter: permanent interruption and the multi-movement *Ursatz*. (The book's own structure proves a little wobbly here, as this discussion might have been more helpfully placed just before the four case studies, while another section of the opening chapter, "Strategic Tonality in Four Post-Wagnerian Operas," really forms a sort of conclusion, which is lacking altogether.) Permanent interruption refers to a break in the Schenkerian formal structure (*Ursatz*) that remains unresolved, as, for example, when a work begins in one key and ends in another; and the multi-movement *Ursatz* involves a single structure that unifies separated numbers or movements—in this case, numbers sometimes occurring rather far apart. The two-character background reductions further presume the integrity of a single structure that unifies music for two different roles.

Latham's integration of rhetorical and musical analysis within this Stanislavskian-Schenkerian framework can be gleaned from the following excerpt (pp. 82–83):

As he praises *Treemonisha*, Remus then appropriates Zodzetrick's C major and negates its potential to serve as support for an upper-neighbor to the original primary tone B by initiating E as local primary tone instead (mm. 115–31). Unlike Ned and Zodzetrick, Remus leaves no doubt as to his conviction and persuasiveness, reaching perfect authentic closure to $\hat{1}$ at mm. [sic] 131 via an explicitly stated $\hat{2}$ over the cadential dominant. Zodzetrick, off balance, is left to bluster ineffectually toward an evaded cadence in C minor (m. 138) before *Treemonisha* and Remus join forces and restore C major, banishing Zodzetrick from the stage with a strong perfect authentic cadence that concludes the number (m. 145).

Such analysis resembles traditional approaches to musical characterization based on key and harmony, but Latham's emphasis on voice leading represents an original contribution.

Latham's method poses a number of difficulties and limitations nonetheless, especially for the larger reductions. For one thing, the focus on set pieces forces to the sidelines much else—recitatives, ariosos, ensemble work, instrumental music, and in some instances dialogue—that bears on characterization. For example, Latham begins his analysis of *Porgy* with the arioso, "They Pass by Singin'," centered in C; but *Porgy* makes his entrance somewhat earlier, against his leitmotif in E, a moment arguably of greater dramatic import than "They Pass by Singin'." Furthermore, in the section between this entrance and "They Pass by Singin'," we learn about the swaggering, angry side of *Porgy*'s personality, all framed by a tonal center of E, which makes the move to C and the more vulnerable "They Pass by Singin'" more of a development than a starting point. One can trace this association of *Porgy* and a pitch center of E even further back, to the opera's prelude, which opens with music later identified with *Porgy*, not only at his initial entrance, but at his departure, also in E, at the work's end. This large framing in E seems to undercut Latham's fundamental point that the purportedly interrupted line of *Porgy*'s trajectory (from C to E) "reinforces the ambiguity built into the plot's ending" (p. 133).

Another problem concerns the more practical one of readership. Much as Stanislavsky intended his scoring of roles as an aid to individual actors and directors, Latham wants his work to assist performers and conductors. But whereas Stanislavsky's and, for that matter, Latham's scoring of roles appears readily accessible and relevant to performers, the musical analysis seems far less so. Latham himself admits near the very start of the preface, "for a number of reasons I had to cut the sections explicitly devoted to performance implications from the four analytical chapters in this book" (p. x). The lack of any actual score examples, as opposed to Schenkerian reductions, serves to make the book that much more theoretical and less accessible.

The book has a few other shortcomings. The historical introductions to the four operas seem gratuitous and, in the case of *Porgy and Bess*, with its reliance on Edward Jablonski, rather dated. Separate listings for books, articles, and unpublished materials make the bibliography unwieldy. And an unconscionable number of names, works, and organizations are omitted from the index.

But whatever the book's weaknesses, the animating idea of conflating Stanislavsky and Schenker should prove a singular and stimulating contribution to the field. How the author will develop his method in a promised book on the operas of Massenet, Verdi, and Puccini remains to be seen. In the meantime, this current effort is well worth a look.

Howard Pollack
University of Houston

Recordings

The Truth about Love

Frances Bourne, mezzo-soprano

Matrix Ensemble

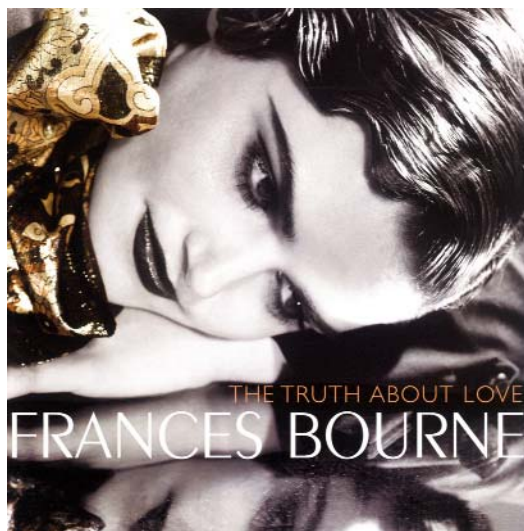
Robert Ziegler, conductor

James Holmes, piano

Sony 88697293432

This recording is unquestionably worth tracking down, as much for the interpretive intelligence of the performances as for the works themselves. Too many projects devoted to Weill that appeal to the spirit of cabaret prove inadequate, unsuccessful, or just plain untenable. The CD unites Weill's two French songs on texts by Maurice Magre with songs from *Marie Galante*, and adapted French versions of songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Happy End* as well as "September Song" and "The Right Guy for Me." The remaining works, *Four Cabaret Songs* of Britten (1937) and Martinu's *Three Songs for the Red Seven* (1921), remind us of the aesthetic polyvalence of two other representative composers of the twentieth century, a century in which music was ever mutating.

The texts of Britten's song cycle reveal the great flair of its lyricist, W. H. Auden. Auden's lightfooted muse finds the perfect complement in Britten's brilliance, as they create a hymn to carefree love and liveliness, alluding to a powerful lover's passion that has vanished ("Johnny" sounds like an echo of Holländer or of Weill in *Happy End*). Martinu's cycle dates from the early 1920s, the heyday of expressionism in German cabaret and a time when Friedrich Holländer was coming into his own. The work comes just before Martinu's move to Paris and reveals the central European heart of a composer who would soon enough join the intellectual scene that would provoke Weill's admiration only a few years later, during his exile. Around 1934, Weill, like Desnos, Cocteau, and Sanguet, was deeply impressed by Georges Neveux's surrealist play, *Juliette, ou*



La clé des songes; he even proposed a musical version to Neveux. Ultimately, Neveux chose Martinu, yet one more setback during Weill's frustrating sojourn in Paris.

This album should be heard as a record of Weill's striking contributions to French culture, which had already faded by the time "September Song" (rendered as "J'ai peur de l'automne") became a hit in Left Bank cabarets after the war. Frances Bourne's character-driven approach to these songs works so well because of a successful compromise between lyricism and psychological restraint. "Complainte de la Seine" offers an instance of thoroughly controlled, meditative delivery, in which Bourne makes us admire the power of her different registers. In the same way, she imbues "Je ne t'aime pas" with a natural eloquence. James Holmes makes an attentive and inspired partner.

Bourne renders smoothly and artfully the rather old-fashioned lyrics of André Mauprey, who translated songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Happy End* in 1930 and helped make them successful in Paris. (They were hits for Marianne Oswald, Lys Gauty, Florelle, and other singers.) Bourne's version of "Solomon Song" leaves us hanging on every word. She properly avoids affectation; her primary concern is clarity of diction, and this allows her characterizations to develop convincingly. She is well supported by the effective accompaniment of the Matrix Ensemble, which is thoroughly at home in this repertoire. She avoids the kind of expressionist pathos that so many cabaret singers adopt, harking back to Marianne Oswald, which so many listeners find intolerable (recall that Weill himself had no use for Oswald's singing style). Unlike Mauprey, composer Michel Vaucaire preferred to translate lyrics less literally, and thus produced much more effective versions. In "J'ai peur de l'automne," for example, Vaucaire (now remembered, if at all, only as the co-author of Piaf's "Non, je ne regrette rien") neatly captures Maxwell Anderson's nostalgia.

"Youkali," embellished with a spectacular introduction in Robert Ziegler's arrangement, plays out its cheerful rhythm without any stumbles. In this song, as in "J'attends un navire," which closes the album, Bourne displays all of her brilliance.

**Pascal Huynh
Paris**

Performances

Lost in the Stars

*Theatre Three
Dallas*

Premiere: 14 May 2009

Today Kurt Weill is mainly remembered for *The Threepenny Opera*, but in his lifetime he was best known for the musicals that he wrote after he immigrated to America in 1935 and retrofitted himself as a Broadway songsmith. Yet none of them has been successfully revived in New York, and Theatre Three's production of *Lost in the Stars*, Weill's 1949 musical version of Alan Paton's novel "Cry, the Beloved Country," is one of the few full-scale staging of that show to be seen anywhere in the past two decades. I wondered whether a 60-year-old musical about life under apartheid would make sense in the 21st century, but *Lost in the Stars* proves to be a fresh and compelling piece of work that is long overdue for another chance on Broadway, after its brief revival in 1972.

Stephen Kumalo (Akin Babatunde), the hero of *Lost in the Stars*, is a Zulu preacher whose faith is put to the test when his well-meaning but weak son (Cedric Neal) turns to crime and accidentally kills a white man in the course of a botched burglary. What follows is a tragic but ultimately hopeful tale of reconciliation, which doubtless explains why *Lost in the Stars* vanished from sight for so long—American audiences didn't hold out much hope for South Africa in the '70s and '80s—as well as why its optimistic denouement rings truer today. More to the point, Weill's richly expansive score is one of the best things he ever wrote for Broad-

way, while Maxwell Anderson's parable-like text is a bit stiff in spots but otherwise very effective.

Jac Alder has staged *Lost in the Stars* on a rough-hewn set of his own design, a multi-tiered cubist-style structure made of plywood and corrugated iron that skillfully evokes the tumbledown shanties of Johannesburg. The unevenly sung production, accompanied by two pianos instead of an orchestra, doesn't carry quite enough musical guns to do full justice to Weill's near-operatic score, but everyone in the cast, Mr. Babatunde in particular, acts with hot conviction, and the lengthy dialogue scenes leave nothing at all to be desired.

Theatre Three, one of Dallas's oldest and most solidly established companies, deserves high praise for breathing life into a once-admired, now-forgotten show that I'd never seen or hoped to see on stage. Such ambitious acts of artistic reclamation have been known to bear surprising fruit. Might *Lost in the Stars* turn up on Broadway one of these days? Here's hoping—ardently.

**Terry Teachout
New York**



James Jarvis (Terry Vandivort) and Stephen Kumalo (Akin Babatunde) reconcile at the end of the play. Photo: Linda Harrison

Videos

Der Kuhhandel

David Pountney, director
Christoph Eberle, conductor
Volksoper Wien

Phoenix Edition 803

A highly personal review

The silver disc had barely arrived when I slipped it into the player, but my haste appears to have caused a glitch in my video system; only the audio track came through, no video. Rather than fumbling with the cables and equipment, I simply listened to the whole thing from beginning to end. For the first time ever: the entire *Kuhhandel*. Alas, it wasn't all joy, as I had trouble understanding most of the sung lines—a rather troubling sign because I've known and loved the work for more than forty years.¹

Ever since Manfred Kelkel of Heugel told me about *Der Kuhhandel* in 1967, I have tried to stage the work: first at Theater am Gärtnerplatz in Munich, where I was working at the time; later, in Dortmund, I managed to infect Intendant Gert Omar Leutner with my enthusiasm, and we attempted to arrange a staging there. The state of the manuscripts required some alterations in the texts—brief passages where either lyrics lacked music or music lacked lyrics—although only a small portion of the work was affected. In my efforts to establish a performable version, I corresponded extensively with the librettist, Robert Vambery, and I met him and his charming wife twice for a day of intensive work in Frankfurt. I also traveled to London twice for several days, each time to work with David Drew on the all-important restoration of the score.

I admired Drew's knowledge of the manuscripts and sketches, his skill and analytical mind. But the greatest contribution was that of Christopher Shaw. He orchestrated all the numbers that were not scored by Weill himself. Even though I'm hardly competent to judge, I found them excellent in style and sound. When I submitted all these reworked passages to Vambery, he

promised to survey the proposed revisions. But he never seemed to get around to it. Then, suddenly, he withdrew his original libretto and submitted a new, "final," anti-pacifist version. He insisted on replacing the American arms dealer, Leslie Jones, the initiator of the intrigue, with an agent bearing the fused name "Chao" and giving him the last word: *Der Pazifismus der Schwächeren ist die beste Kriegshetze* ('The pacifism of the weak is the best war-mongering'). We could not accept this, however, because it was a posthumous reversal of Weill's original intention. Thus Dortmund had to change its season schedule and cancel various contracts, for instance with Marie Daveluy, a Canadian singer, whom I remember as the best Jenny I ever saw (Heidelberg's *Aufstieg*, 1962), mostly because she was an excellent singer of Mozart (Susanna, etc.). With all of our efforts wasted, I feel worst about the late Christopher Shaw. I had the approval of Lotte Lenya, who frequently reiterated her satisfaction with our version.

A few years later, I encouraged Schott to buy the rights from Heugel, and they hired the late Lys Symonette to edit the score (Shaw's reconstructions were not used, as new ones were commissioned from Robert Dennis). But Peter Hanser-Strecker's contract with Vambery contained a clause that prohibited publication or performance of the original version. Vambery's revisions trivialized the prologue that had been written for the London performance in 1935 by deleting the conquest of the New World and its accompanying atrocities ("They shot the native men and seized their women, burnt their crops and started there and then a new and better government").

Much later, I managed to persuade Harald Banter to try out *Kuhhandel* at Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR). Early preparations included a meeting with Kim Kowalke in Cologne, where we discussed the problems; ultimately he decided against a version untrue to Weill's intentions. Hence WDR performed *Kuhhandel* only as a fragment, and to avoid problems with Vambery, I stayed out of this production altogether, which was eventually released as a CD on the Capriccio label.

Enough about my personal involvement. Let's consider the work's beginnings. Weill, having fled to Paris just weeks after the Nazis' rise to power, had a number of good contacts among musically progressive circles in France, and he managed to sign a favorable contract with the publisher

Heugel. But that country's musical theater, especially one situated between entertainment and progressiveness, had little room or little to offer. His ballet *Die sieben Todsünden*, sung in German, remained an exotic one-off, and his German works, aside from *Dreigroschenoper* and *Jasager*, failed to take the stage in France (an expanded version of *Mahagonny Songspiel* was also given in Paris in 1932). Weill composed incidental music and a couple of memorable tunes for Jacques Deval's *Marie Galante*, but he doesn't seem to have made any effort to get involved in the still respectable Parisian operetta scene (where André Messager, Arthur Honegger, Reynaldo Hahn, and Albert Roussel had been working). It appears that Weill, at that point, still hoped to return to the German-language theater. His renewed contacts with Vambery, nine years his junior, who had been dramaturg at Theater am Schiffbauerdamm from 1928 until 1933, led to the *Kuhhandel* project. In January 1934 Weill and Vambery began work on the operetta, tentatively entitled *Die Verlobung von Santa Maria* (The betrothal in Santa Maria). On 19 April 1934, Weill reported to a friend, the dramaturg Hans Curjel (then at Zurich's Corso Theater): "It is an excellent libretto, drawing on the best tradition of operetta, but far removed from Viennese operetta-trash. . . . I have already set the lyrics for twelve musical numbers, which have turned out brilliantly." But another project, *Der Weg der Verheißung*, along with difficulties in finding a suitable venue for the premiere, delayed progress until the spring of 1935, when a contract for a premiere in London was signed. The English-language adaptation altered little in the book, but the musical numbers underwent substantial changes. Some were cut, others newly composed (or adapted from *Marie Galante*) or reworked. On the plus side, the changes also brought a large choral introduction with a Brechtian flavor.

The libretto's compelling structure, which Weill had shaped in large part, made room for a variety of musical forms, which range from simple songs or *couplets* via true ensembles (terzettino, quartet) to complex finales, or from a reminiscence theme to simultaneous scenes; it also provided occasions for a play within a play, folkloristic effects, mass scenes, "high society" and "hoi polloi," buffoonery bordering on satire, hypocrisy, real human emotions, and almost biblical succinctness and morality. To be sure, the book appeals to any number of frequently encountered themes and

character types (including some Brechtian ones), but these interact within a perfectly crafted, convincing, and entertaining dramatic structure. And most of all we find clear-headed social criticism and satire. No surprise, then, that Weill came up with such a profusion of musical ideas, an abundance of catchy melodies and musico-dramatic gestures that he placed in large-scale compositional contexts, where they interact, undermine, or intensify each other. The work really is an operetta, and Weill was dead-on when he wrote to Curjel “that it takes up the best traditions of operetta, which have been buried alive for decades.” It is a sort of modern *Offenbachade*, a successful, rich, and compelling piece of musical theater.

The English adaptation, *A Kingdom for a Cow*, was met with faint praise by both audience and critics and amounted to a failure. When the production closed after a mere three weeks, Weill took it as a rejection of his work, at least in this form. He never took up the work as a whole again but borrowed freely from its score for the next decade in his musical theater and film scores. World history during that same decade caused the work to seem less relevant, as the fascist threat rendered naïve pacifism obsolete. Weill’s works composed between 1934 and 1936, *Der Kuhhandel*, *Der Weg der Verheißung*, and *Johnny Johnson*, are probably the most convincing of all the works of musical theater that call for pacifism, but there’s a reason why precisely these works have not made the cut in the ongoing Weill renaissance of recent decades. A logical explanation is the personal fate of the authors and their friends who barely escaped the German extermination machinery, which could not be stopped by pacifism but only by force. It was not until 1994 that Theater Bautzen staged the work in Symonette’s adaptation. The Cold War having come to an end, the very old librettist, who attended, had allowed a return to the work’s original message. I missed this production, and I wish I had missed a wrong-headed production in Dessau, six years later, where the dispute between the two Caribbean states was staged as one between East and West Germany.

In 2004, David Pountney staged the work for the Bregenz Festival in a co-production with Leeds-based Opera North and the Vienna Volksoper, where the production was captured on DVD for Phoenix Edition. To be blunt, I wish the disc never had been distributed, as I consider it a sab-

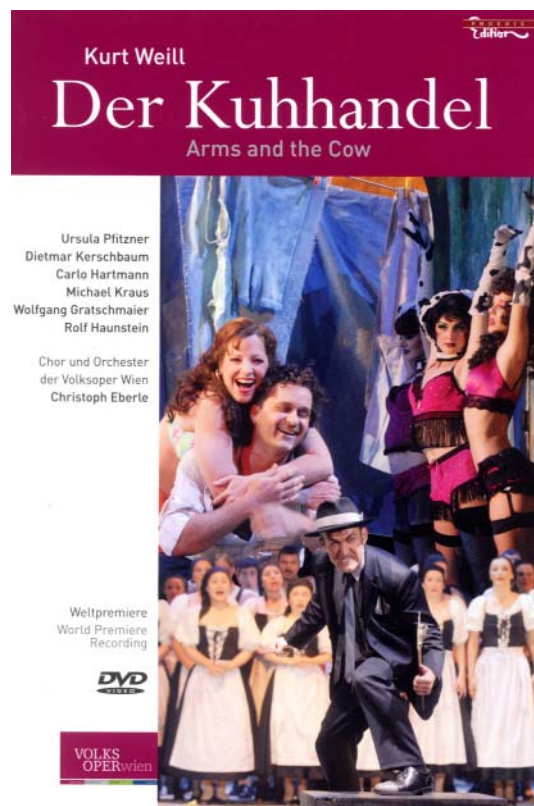
otage of the work. Of course, a staging can go wrong, but it shouldn’t then be circulated. And it doesn’t hurt when standard repertoire such as *Dreigroschenoper* or *Aufstieg* is worked against the grain every now and then, since it might reveal new facets. But instead of respectfully rehabilitating a work maltreated by history, Pountney degrades it to an old joke devoid of any and all wit. None of the characters undergoes development or arrives at any insights. Juanita (Ursula Pfitzner) must reveal right from the bucolic beginning that she will become a leading light in Madame Odette’s establishment. Mr. Jones (Michael Kraus) barks constantly in unintelligible American-German. President Mendez (Carlo Hartmann) and General Conchas (Rolf Haunstein), staged as an idiot and as a rigid puppet respectively, should display at least a tiny degree of dignity and authority, so that their corruption and thirst for power become believable. Ximenez (Wolfgang Gratschmaier), who also doubles as the bailiff, has been robbed of all the shady ambiguity that surrounds a “gray eminence.” In the midst of all those caricatures, Juan (Dietmar Kerschbaum) appears to be the only human being, despite a dramatically one-dimensional role.

There’s no insight for the audience, either; even if *Der Kuhhandel* is not a *Lehrstück*, it is not a dull and dulling entertainment. If only we were entertained! Musically the production is fine; the cast and orchestra led by Christoph Eberle don’t exactly sparkle, but their performance is absolutely professional, at least with regard to the musical text. The verbal text, however—and here I’m finally coming full circle—remains unintelligible, not only for the audience. If this were just an acoustical problem, one could alleviate it by turning on the (carelessly rendered) subtitles. But Pountney ultimately bears responsibility for the general unintelligibility, because he didn’t trust the original. Granted, Vambery’s rather verbose dialogue has to be cut. But Pountney had Reinhard Palm create some new texts with some pseudo-topical jokes, so President Mendez, for example, can call himself a “single parent” (needless to add that the role of his son, Bimbi, and his song have been cut).

Weill at his best always made a point of choosing the best writers to work with, he always shaped the dramatic structure, and he always displayed an infallible sense of the stage when he set texts to music. Bottom line: though he was not the most important composer of concert music during the last century, he was the most important one working in the field of musical theater in the broadest sense. Even a neglected work like *Der Kuhhandel* makes this clear. Partly due to Vambery, it remains one of Weill’s best stage works and the best operetta written in the past century. So when do we get to see at least a passable production?

Josef Heinzelmann
Mainz

1. Results of my enthusiasm were my entry on *Der Kuhhandel* in *Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters* and the article “Kurt Weill im Exil: Pazifismus oder Defätismus? Drei verdrängte Werke 1933–1937.” In: *Das (Musik)-Theater in Exil und Diktatur: Vorträge und Gespräche des Salzburger Symposions 2003*, Wort und Musik: Salzburger akademische Beiträge 58, eds. Peter Csobádi et al. (Salzburg: Anif, 2005), pp. 436–52.



Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

*Hungarian State Opera
Budapest*

Premiere: 21 February 2009

In the five years since Hungary joined the European Union, it has been particularly hard hit by massive government corruption resulting in a disastrous financial breakdown. Social services and pensions taken for granted since the days of Communist rule are being threatened with cutbacks or elimination; public works projects have halted midway, making Budapest a transit nightmare; tourism is down; and the stability of the forint is in grave doubt.

Meanwhile, the Hungarian State Opera soldiers on. Obviously the company could not continue as it had for many decades. In addition to giving an opera or ballet performance almost nightly between September and June at the historic opera house on Andrásy útca, as many performances were given at the massive Soviet-era Erkel Theater, which when I last visited was in such disrepair that the odor of the backed-up plumbing system permeated the theater and seats were literally threadbare. Over 1,000 people were on the payroll, many of them older singers and orchestra members who hadn't performed in years but still collected full salaries and benefits. With the

pressure to meet a certain rate of economic growth to adopt the euro as its currency (which has now been postponed indefinitely), things in Hungary had to change.

When it came to the opera and ballet, a government study announced that over half the members of an average audience consisted of foreigners and that less than two percent of Hungarians attended the theater, so its budget would be cut accordingly. With a virtual revolving door on the administration of the company, things finally began to settle down with several major changes starting around the beginning of 2007 when Lajos Vass became the general director: the Erkel (which seats over 1,000) would be closed indefinitely; the much-smaller (300-seat) Thalia Theater, a stunning, exquisitely-maintained Art Deco jewel box around the corner from the opera house, would be used for Mozart and smaller-scale operas; the web site became available in English; non-performing personnel were laid off; the company is gradually switching to a *stagione* system, in which only one or two operas are performed at a time, and the houses are not used every night; and for the first time in the company's history, a marketing staff was hired to generate corporate sponsorship and arrange special performances and festivals with international guest stars at elevated prices (*Ring Cycles* with international casts will be given in June).

Internationally renowned conductor Ádám Fischer has assumed the position of general music director, Gábor Keveházi continues successfully to run what is now called the Hungarian National Ballet (until recently known as the Hungarian State Opera Ballet), and Balázs Kovalik, a direc-

tor on the verge of an international career (he makes his debut at Munich's Bayerische Staatsoper next season) is the new artistic director. No less than eleven new productions are on the schedule for the current season, from Minkus's *La bayadère* to an evening of Balanchine, from Handel's *Xerxes* to two operatic world premieres.

While I have not appreciated Kovalik's abuse of *Regietheater* tactics in his *Fidelio* and *Eugene Onegin*, I must applaud his choice of a wide-ranging and adventurous repertoire, which this season included a new *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (performed in Hungarian as *Mahagonny városának felemelkedése és bukása*) at the Thalia. At the fifth of eight performances, 12 March 2009, I was somewhat surprised to find the house sold out and the audience enthusiastic: my experiences with 20th-century opera in Budapest—even Bartók—have often been dulled by a lack of audience interest and enthusiasm.

Director and set designer János Szikora and costume designer Zsuzsa Tresz have blessedly avoided any references to the Bush Doctrine, or any other politics not inherent in Brecht's text. The show is played very close to the libretto, and the contemporary interpolations are often hysterically funny. Burlap panels curl up to reveal a rundown barroom. It could be Minnie's saloon in *La fanciulla del West*, or a place in Greenwich Village yet to be gentrified. Begbick and company make a spectacular entrance when their car crashes through the rear wall. The situation is surveyed, and the founding of Mahagonny declared. Soon, a cash register is hooked up, as is a flat-screen TV showing sports. And, of course, a makeshift stage (outfitted for pole dancing) for Jenny and the girls. Tímea Papp's choreography is raunchy, deliberately cheesy, and fun: clad in the skimpiest of lingerie and fluttering oversized fans, they simultaneously slap their asses on the word "lost" in "Alabama-Song." ("Alabama-Song" was performed in English with a Hungarian translation in the program; "Benares-Song" was performed in Hungarian with the original pidgin English in the program.) The male chorus peers into the bar from the windows far upstage.

As if costumed by an Alaskan thrift shop, the lumberjacks perform a soft-shoe using their axes as props. San Francisco, seen burning on the TV, is quickly changed to a soccer game, and whiskey is \$20 a shot.



The four lumberjacks make their entrance. Photo: Vera Éder

Jimmy and Jenny get acquainted over cigarettes, barely looking at each other, although he persuades her to take off her panties. Whiskey drops to \$19 and eventually \$12.

“Die ewige Kunst” is brought to Mahagonny with a granny-type piano teacher banging away at the out-of-tune spinet as a little girl in white tutu and toe shoes dances for an audience of gentlemen in tuxedos, who periodically cover their ears. Flutes of champagne are served on trays by little boys on roller skates. People are seen leaving in droves as news of the impending hurricane is announced, its advance shown on the TV. Only Jenny and the lumberjacks are left. The threat of the hurricane gone, the men rip off their bowties and a huge banquet table is brought in for the first of the vignettes of life in Mahagonny, performed as a parody of “The Last Supper” with Jimmy breaking bread and serving wine.

For the whorehouse scene, an extremely adept young woman clad only in a G-string and heels does a pole dance and the men line up in front of a curtain, only to reappear moments later, pants around their ankles. The boxing scene is totally straightforward. When Jimmy, drunk, commandeers the pool table to sail away, the whores sway their arms in wave patterns as the chorus makes whooshing sounds.

After his arrest, Jimmy’s great monologue is sung in almost total darkness, lit briefly by an angel sweeping by on roller



Begbick (Bernadett Wiedemann) and Jenny (Anna Herczenik). Photo: Vera Éder

skates who blesses him. For the trial, Trinity Moses acts like a music hall master of ceremonies, as Jenny, drunk, lies passed out clad in widow’s weeds. When Jimmy and Jenny sing their final duet, it is from opposite sides of the stage. When they both exclaim “Kiss me!” they approach each other but pass without touching. Jimmy gives Jenny to Billy. Workmen enter and cover Jimmy with white canvas and drag him downstage. Business returns to normal in Mahagonny’s “Poker-Tisch-Salon.” The opposing sign bearers stomp rhythmically through the finale, eventually tossing their banners onto Jimmy’s body. Far upstage, the newest citizens of Mahagonny peer through the window.

Having literally grown up with the Brückner-Rüggeberg recording of *Aufstieg*, attended almost every Metropolitan Opera performance of it between 1979 and 1995, and witnessed, among others, Ruth Berghaus’s production in Stuttgart, Peter Zadek’s in Salzburg, and Harry Kupfer’s in Dresden, I can’t help but notice a tendency to create casts of singers in their prime mixed with comprimarios or, especially in the role of Begbick, over-the-hill mezzos who screech and yowl the role.

The level of singing in Budapest was revelatory. I have never heard an *Aufstieg* with voices of such consistently high quality, down to the smallest role. There was, too, the luxury of hearing the original orchestrations in a 300-seat house, and Gergely Kesselyák’s conducting was taut and compelling, the orchestra strident when called for, but unusually gentle in the opera’s few intimate scenes. With a chorus

of 18 men, the sonic balance was a marvel. “Gorgeous” is not a word I would usually associate with *Aufstieg*, but here it was: unabashed beauty.

A true heldentenor, Attila Wendler poured out streams of vocal gold as Jimmy, raising gooseflesh with his alternately tender and thrilling delivery of Jimmy’s aria. Completing the superb quartet of lumberjacks were Tamás Busa as Billy, Krisztián Cser as a particularly sweet-but-sonorous-voiced Joe, and Zsolt Derecskei as Jakob Schmidt (here called Jack O’Brien). Anna Herczenik, a full-voiced lyric soprano, was a sexy, multifaceted Jenny. Scene stealers both, László Beöthy-Kiss and János Tóth as Fatty and Moses significantly helped raise the overall musical quality in roles often barked.

Worth the trip to Budapest was the Begbick of Bernadett Wiedemann. Here is a young woman whose powerhouse voice is so deep and resonant she verges on being a contralto (she specializes in Verdi’s great dramatic mezzo roles like Azucena, Eboli, and Amneris). Taking total command from the moment she stepped onto the stage, Wiedemann caused all memories of Astrid Varnay, Helga Dernes, Anny Schlemm, Gwyneth Jones, and various others to disappear: it was like hearing the role for the first time. With a perfect cast in a virtually perfect production, Wiedemann was perhaps just a little more perfect.

Larry L. Lash
Vienna



Jimmy (Attila Wendler) with one of the Girls of Mahagonny. Photo: Vera Éder

Performances

The Firebrand of Florence

The Collegiate Chorale
New York City

12 March 2009

A paradox haunts *The Firebrand of Florence* that goes back more than six decades to the work's premiere. The score Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin wrote for the show contains an embarrassment of riches; the show itself failed to impress.

Opening to mixed reviews in March 1945 and closing forty-three performances later, *Firebrand* proved the most ill-fated venture of Weill's Broadway career. (He summed up the experience in one word: "Ouch!") As a commercial entertainment it was over-produced (by Max Gordon),

ploddingly directed (by John Murray Anderson), and generally miscast (especially the role of the Duchess, given at Weill's insistence to his wife, Lotte Lenya). As a cultural enterprise it was also poorly timed: set in Renaissance Florence and based on the intrigues of Benvenuto Cellini, it offered an impish look at an imagined history to audiences in the midst of real history unfolding as World War II wound down in Europe and President Roosevelt died suddenly during the show's run.

Even as a creative endeavor in its own right, *Firebrand* seemed strangely at odds with itself in structure, style, and tone: its libretto, a sentimentalized reworking by Edwin Justus Mayer of one of his satiric plays; its Gershwin lyrics, self-absorbed and sly in a musical comedy vein; its music, sufficiently romantic and sustained to justify billing the show as a "Broadway operetta." For Weill it was nothing less than a "real opera for Broadway," though he expressed himself in those terms only in private. Indeed, *Firebrand* bears the traces of Weill's idea of a *Zwischengattung-Stück*—a piece deliberately situated

between genres—if in more ways perhaps than he intended.

None of this is news, of course. What *is* news is that, after a hiatus of sixty-four years, *Firebrand* finally enjoyed its forty-fourth complete performance in New York. To be sure, this did not signal the start of a full-scale revival of the piece for an open run. This performance was strictly a one-night affair. It also took place in a concert hall rather than in a theater, under the auspices of The Collegiate Chorale, a distinguished vocal ensemble ever on the lookout to perform new or neglected repertoire in which the chorus plays an important role. (With its extended musical scenes as well as its full-throated songs and ensembles, *Firebrand* offered both chorus and soloists some rather juicy parts.) Clearly the aim of this semi-staged concert version was not to rescue *Firebrand* from Broadway oblivion so much as to breathe fresh life into its score.

Utilizing Joel Galand's work on the show's materials, published as the first critical edition of a Broadway musical by the Kurt Weill Edition in 2002, the performers



Cellini (Nathan Gunn) and Angela (Anna Christy) at the microphones in the foreground, with other soloists and The Collegiate Chorale seated behind them. Projections designed by Michael Clark. Photo: Erin Baiano



Victoria Clark as the Duchess. Photo: Erin Baiano

succeeded mightily. Ted Sperling led the New York City Opera Orchestra in a buoyant rendition of Weill's (and Ted Royal's) orchestrations in a pit created specially for the occasion. Theater audiences have by now become inured to the sound of a fairly small number of instruments beefed up by electronic amplification in most Broadway pits. So it was a rare treat to hear an orchestra of over thirty musicians (more than half of them string players) playing Weill's music not just splendidly, but as he wrote it, in the rich acoustical ambience of the newly refurbished Alice Tully Hall.

On the stage, baritone Nathan Gunn (Cellini) and soprano Anna Christy (Angela, his model and paramour) headed a stellar cast. What a pleasure to hear these roles sung by vocalists from the Metropolitan Opera—singers who could act rather than the other way around. Gunn portrayed the Renaissance rogue with winning charm, balancing braggadocio with lyrical finesse. Christy captivated with her vocal sparkle and fluidity as the ingenue beloved of both Cellini and the Duke. Two stars more at home on Broadway took the main comedic parts. Soprano Victoria Clark (the Duchess of Florence) brought her musical-theater savvy to the oversexed aristocrat, approaching the role as a singing actress. Baritone Terrence Mann (the

Duke) adopted a zanier spirit—"a cross between France's Louis XIV and the Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*," he said. He was not always up to the vocal standards of a cast that boasted exceptional singers even in minor parts, such as mezzo-soprano Krysty Swann (Cellini's maid) and bass Roosevelt Credit (the hangman). Notable too was David Pittu, a character actor with a keen sense of comic timing; he played four different roles, switching easily from one to another throughout—a tour de force.

With so much attention lavished on the score, the performance—like earlier concert versions in London (2000), Vienna (2000), and Dessau (2005)—underplayed both the book and the lavish staging of the original Broadway production. This might have been a saving grace, given what we know now: a case of less is more. Instead, it proved a

complicating factor even as it sought to place the score in a context at once meaningful and playful. To flesh out the truncated script, director Roger Rees wrote new material that filled in the gaps between the numbers. He also narrated, making good use of his ingratiating gifts as an actor. At one point the Duke confessed in song that, while he created poems on the names of women in order to win their favors, he could not find "A Rhyme for Angela." Rees later proposed one, going Gershwin one better, when he considered the cause of a malaise afflicting Cellini in Paris, far from the very lady back in Florence whose name couldn't be rhymed: "Is he sick? Is it glandular?" On the other hand, to make up for the skeletal staging and lack of sets, images appeared on a screen above the performers that projected the playfulness of their performance, often through visual puns. While Angela sang of Cupid as "The Little Naked Boy," for instance, the screen showed the statue of quite another little naked boy, a denizen of Brussels almost as famous as

Cupid perhaps, but otherwise occupied: Manneken Pis.

Such ploys amused. They also raised more questions than they answered. Did they not actually show a mistrust of *Firebrand* by using the concert format to frame the work with a certain archness that made it more palatable to a modern audience? Or were they at bottom true to the spirit of a work that Weill planned as a satiric operetta rather than a romantic one—all the more so since the satire here was really more clever than pointed, lacking a target other than perhaps the work itself?

Firebrand is fraught with paradoxes. How one performs it today in a way that both respects so fraught a work and makes it meaningful to current sensibilities remains a problem. This performance, for all its many merits, did not quite solve it. Until one comes along that does, *Firebrand* may well remain a musical largely for connoisseurs likely to relish its brilliance if not its smartness.

Larry Stempel
Fordham University



Nathan Gunn and Anna Christy. Photo: Erin Baiano

Performances

Knickerbocker Holiday

Toronto Operetta Theatre

20–22 February 2009

For nearly three decades now, attending Weill events around the world as president of the Foundation has been the most enjoyable and informative fringe benefit of the position. After the centenary flurry ten years ago, I had finally managed to visit productions of every one of Weill's full-blown dramatic works, except for three. I, of course, harbor no hopes of ever viewing *Railroads on Parade*, and I wish I could say that finally seeing *Marie Galante* (in New York last November) was worth the wait. That left only *Knickerbocker Holiday*. Though infrequently performed, it's far from the most obscure of Weill's stage works, but somehow I had never found an occasion to see it. So in February I volunteered to make the three-hour drive from Rochester for the last of three performances by the Toronto Operetta Theatre in the 497-seat Jane Mallett Theatre.

Hitting only a few snow squalls coming off Erie and Ontario, I arrived a bit early for the matinee. I was surprised to read in the program that this was the Canadian premiere (and also the spurious assertion that the piece "had not been seen professionally since its premiere in 1938"). A note from the company's General Director Guillermo Silva-Marin claimed that "*Knickerbocker Holiday* transcends six decades of social, cultural and political truths, to sound as if composed today for our ears, our minds and our hearts. . . . Its relevance to today's political, economic and social upheaval seems almost prophetic." A bit hyperbolic, I thought, having retained no such impression after last reading Anderson's script while still in graduate school at Yale in the 1970s.

My pre-performance perusal of the remainder of the booklet set off other alarms. Though billed as "Canada's pre-

miere professional operetta company," the cast of *Knickerbocker* included only five members of Actors' Equity (Irving, Roosevelt, Brom, Tina, and Stuyvesant). And the twenty performers listed here had been considerably downsized from the sixteen principals, thirteen chorus members, four soldiers, and an unspecified number of "Algonquins" that had populated the original production. The seven Councilors were today to be merely a gang of five (and then only with elevation to membership of jailer Schermerhorn and General Poffenburgh) and the string section of the orchestra reduced to one on a part. And there was more than one hint that the current economic crisis would be manifest in the physical production too. I steeled myself for a long afternoon—assuming I'd make it past intermission.

The full house greeted conductor David Speers warmly, but the orchestra

the first of tax-evading cabinet nominees and overnight bailout millionaires. The jokes did indeed seem as if they had been written yesterday.

So did the metadramatic narrative and framing devices Weill and Anderson had utilized to tell their story through Washington Irving's mediating voice. Director Silva-Marin made the historical author's intrusions into dramatic events, which in turn occasioned colorful transformations onstage—not least the belated and gradual appearance of period costumes for everyone. How could I have failed to notice that *Knickerbocker* anticipated by a half century techniques of storytelling used in *Into the Woods*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, and *Assassins*? What a wonderful moment when Irving and his hero Brom join in duet to answer "How Can You Tell an American?"!

As Brom, Dale Miller out-performed everyone else onstage, including, unfortunately, Amy Wallis, who was not up to either the acting or vocal challenges of Tina. But the entrance of David Ludwig's Stuyvesant lifted the production to a higher level of both dramatic and musical accomplishment. His was, in fact, a performance fitting for a "premiere professional operetta company."

Overall, this wasn't really a professional-level production—more like good community theater. But under these circumstances, where adversity again mothered invention, it didn't seem to matter. It was an earnest, straightforward reading of the complete script and score, performed without apology and with abundant affection. The audience loved it as much as the performers seemed to. As I was driving home, Irving's (Anderson's) self-admonition echoed in my thoughts: "If it's funny enough, it will be read; if it's good enough, it will endure." I now realize that *Knickerbocker* is both.

Kim H. Kowalke



Tina (Amy Wallis) and Stuyvesant (David Ludwig). Photo: Gilberto Prioste

indeed sounded scrappy, less like a Broadway band than a cut-rate wedding one. The eight-member female ensemble, dressed in an odd assortment of basic rehearsal black, managed to establish very little with the Gilbert & Sullivan cleaning chorus "Clickety-Clack." It was now all too clear that sets, costumes, lighting, and props would be rudimentary. Could I just slip out unnoticed? But the "Entrance of the Council" changed my mind, as the audience (and I) responded to each of Irving's political jibes, particularly his description of the Council's "intolerance of any corruption—in which they had no share." I couldn't determine if the Canadians were finding localized references in "Hush Hush"—beyond what would resonate across the border in the wake of the last days of Bush/Cheney and

Performances

Der Silbersee

Theater Augsburg

Premiere: 23 January 2009

Those inclined to avoid the brouhaha surrounding a new, sold-out staging of Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina* at Munich's Bayerische Staatsoper—which thankfully triggered another round of discussions in the newspapers about Pfitzner's Nazi affinities—traveled to Augsburg this winter. From the Bavarian capital, which likes to think of itself as a cultural powerhouse, Augsburg might seem a backwater. But such centralist fantasies turn out to be treacherous (if not delusional), for Germany's federal landscape produces a cultural variety that makes for many pleasant surprises. With only a fraction of Munich's money at its disposal, Theater Augsburg, under the leadership of Juliane Votteler, has recently shown the ability to develop an innovative season schedule and then deliver intelligent and exciting stagings. Moreover, the theater has begun to acknowledge Bertolt Brecht, the city's not-so-favorite son, by regularly staging works from the 1920s—not only *Die Dreigroschenoper*, as the theater also staged Max Brand's *Maschinist Hopkins* in 2005. The weekend that brought us the premiere of *Der Silbersee* also offered a new production of Brecht's play about revolution, *Trommeln in der Nacht* (1919), which marks the beginning of Weimar-era theater.

Der Silbersee, on the other hand, marks the end, and, paradoxically enough, it also could be considered a “late work” of Weill's, though he was only thirty-two. Unlike any other work, *Der Silbersee* represents a culmination of developments in Weimar Germany's musical theater, which Weill had shaped in great part and with breathtaking speed ever since the composition of *Der Protagonist* (1924–25). Weill's collaboration with Georg Kaiser came full circle with *Der Silbersee*, and it created more distance between him and Brecht, whose political course diverged considerably from Weill's with *Der Neinsager* and the Berlin production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. Kaiser's language, plot, and characters, piercingly concise and

loaded with powerful imagery, match those of Brecht, but they don't aim for a cool, sometimes cynical analysis of society; instead, Kaiser makes individuals—with their fears and hopes, their cowardice and courage—the heart of the matter. The utopian final image of a frozen lake in summer signifies the quiet victory of compassion over egotism. At the same time, however, *Der Silbersee* is a post-romantic (winter's) fairy tale that remains in the realm of imagination and illusion, and indeed in the realm of theater. Nowhere does the play promulgate the idea of immediate political change (or changeability) or suggest that the events on stage should be transformed into real-world political action (as Brecht attempted). *Silbersee*'s indirect, parabolic message dissolves all manifest historical references into something universal.

Weill responded remarkably with his music: it is thoroughly of its time and yet timeless. An underlying tragic tone permeates the variety of styles and models, lending the work an extraordinary degree of unity. Historical connections—especially the Mozart of *Zauberflöte*, but also Handel via the nonchalant yet artful contrapuntal design—are not just invoked but brought up to date. As is well known, Weill and Kaiser spoke of a *Zwischengattungs-Stück* between play and opera. Thus Weill's music holds a peculiarly touching ambivalence, oscillating seemingly without strain between the serious and the popular realm, with borrowings from his earlier works. Especially in the choral passages, Weill achieves classical perfection, as it were, transcending the New Music's turn toward the monumental around 1930 with a new round of moving simplicity.

Given its musical and dramaturgical prerequisites, *Silbersee* is a tough work to stage. It requires both singers and actors, and the orchestra needs to shift quickly between different styles. The work's performance history has seen some (unhappy) compromises: the dialogue sacrificed to the music or musical unity destroyed in favor of a revue format. The Augsburg staging—a remarkable team effort by Kevin John Edusei (musical director), Manfred Weiß



Olim (Martin Herrmann) with Severin (Michael Suttner). Photo: A. T. Schaefer

(stage director), Birgitta Lohrer-Horres (costumes), Timo Dentler (set design), Karl Andreas Mehling (choral director), Dimas Casinha (choreography), and Ralf Waldschmidt (dramaturg)—does justice to both aspects, supported by a fabulous cast led by the splendid acting and singing of Martin Herrmann (Olim) and Michael Suttner (Severin). The peculiar historical situation of the piece emerges on two levels: conceptually, by blending Kaiser's allegorical approach with the techniques of “Brechtian” epic theater; in terms of content, by subtle yet unmistakable allusions to the historical context of 1933. Thus the stage action becomes truly compelling and maintains a high level of tension that never slackens—all this without any overtly didactic or annoyingly moralizing undertones of *Regietheater*. The staging relies fundamentally on the use of seven movable platforms that abrogate traditional stage mechanics, creating fascinating dialectical connections between orchestra, chorus, and performers. The set could be interpreted as a device for “defamiliarization” but also as a call for new means of communication freed from conventional hierarchies. At the end, when Olim and Severin set out across the silver lake, they stand on a ramp leading away from the stage directly into the audience, thereby calling into question the gap that separates us from the fairy tale. And just how far the reality on stage might be mirrored in society can be deduced from a praiseworthy lobby exhibition about the Augsburg theater under the Nazi regime. Thus artistic and historical responsibility unite as one. Those who must go on will be carried by the (Augsburg) silver lake.

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