

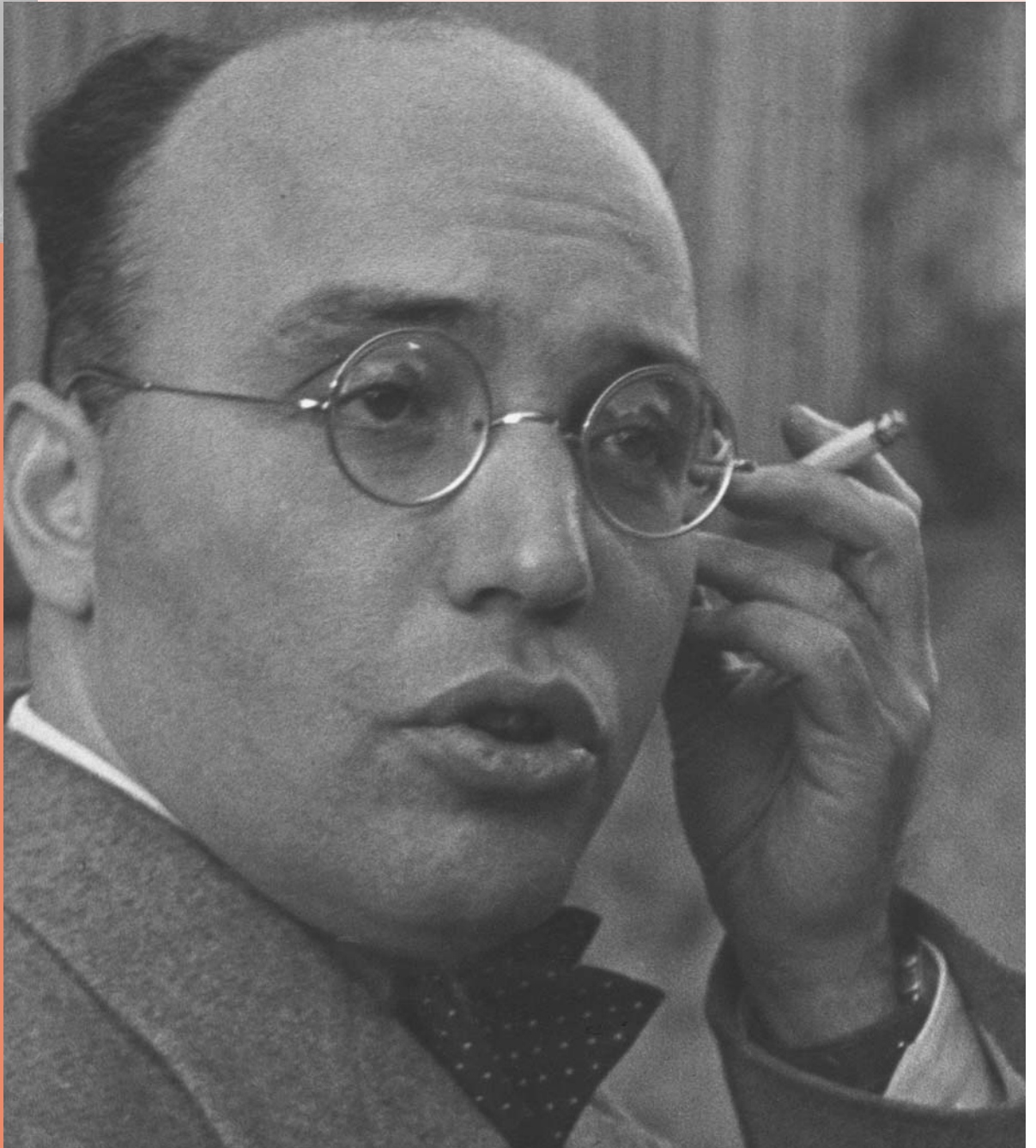
Kurt Weill

Volume 29

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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 photos: Posthumous painting of Mozart by Barbara Krafft (1819). Photo of Weill taken in Salzburg, ca. 1935. Photographer unknown.

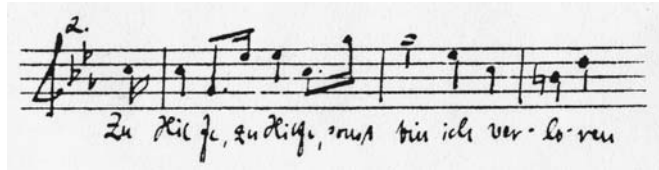
Changes to This Publication

Be on the lookout for changes to the *Newsletter* beginning with the Spring 2012 issue. We will continue to provide timely feature articles and reviews of important performances, recordings, and books. However, much of the news about Weill and the Foundation currently covered in Topical Weill will migrate to our web site (www.kwf.org), which will feature expanded news coverage starting early next year. The latest news will be covered in our periodic e-news bulletins as well—delivered straight to your inbox. We encourage *Newsletter* readers to visit the site often, and while you're there, take the opportunity to sign up for e-news. It's the easiest way to keep up with all the latest developments.



A still from a new documentary about Weill, *Sprich leise, wenn Du Liebe sagst: Kurt Weill Reloaded*. The film by Theo Roos will be aired in Europe on the German-language channel 3sat on 3 December 2011.

Note from the Editor



In March 1925, as he was orchestrating his own first opera, Weill copied out a number of musical snippets from Mozart's *Zauberflöte* to illustrate his write-up of an upcoming radio production of that opera—or *singspiel*, to be precise. Only a few weeks earlier, Weill had commented in a similar fashion on Mozart's other well-known singspiel, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and here he made a few remarkable observations that are worth pondering in light of Weill's subsequent career. "In Mozart's times," Weill writes, "Italian opera, *opera seria*, was the main thing. German language was used only for *singspiele*, harmless little pieces." But in Mozart's *Entführung* Weill sees a new development. Here the plot "forms a link to the thought of Rousseau and Lessing," and in the era of enlightenment "all of a sudden a harmless little piece brings with it one of the grandest ideas ever conceived for drawing nations together. . . . Musically it is a line-up of the most delicious arias, duets, and ensembles." If one were to describe the historical situation that Weill found himself in, it would be a bit clumsy to replace Italian opera with Wagnerian music drama and *singspiel* with *Stück mit Musik* (or musical comedy), and yet it would hint at the possible analogies.

Anything but clumsy is this issue's feature article by Stephen Hinton, who takes an in-depth look at Mozart's influence on Weill. The article is taken from a chapter of Hinton's forthcoming book, *Weill's Musical Theater: Stages of Reform* (University of California Press, May 2012), and I am pleased that we can preview this fascinating excerpt. Another highlight of this issue comes in the form of an interview with filmmaker Theo Roos, who has produced a new documentary on Weill, which the TV channel "3sat" will broadcast on 3 December 2011 in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The internationally acclaimed violinist Daniel Hope responded to our invitation to give a personal account of Weill's Violin Concerto, occasioned by the publication of the critical edition last year. Among the many reviews, two stand out in their coverage of German opera houses producing two of Weill's greatest American works, *Lady in the Dark* in Hannover and *Street Scene* in Dresden.

On a personal note, this issue will be my last as editor of the *Kurt Weill Newsletter*. It has been an honor to serve in that capacity for ten years, a time during which I had the pleasure of discussing, commissioning, editing, often translating, and laying out hundreds of reviews and articles from contributors all over the world. I am most grateful to all the authors for their pro bono work. None of the *Newsletter* issues would have looked as they did without the truly excellent support of my colleagues Dave Stein, Carolyn Weber, Brady Sansone, and recently Kate Chisholm. With this twenty-first issue as editor, I am passing the torch to the talented and experienced hands of Kate and Dave, who will give the *Newsletter* a long-anticipated "makeover." I shall remain with the Foundation and devote most of my energies to my capacity as managing editor of the Kurt Weill Edition.

Elmar Juchem

On the following pages, we present an excerpt from the forthcoming book by Stephen Hinton, *Weill's Musical Theater: Stages of Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press). The publication date is May 2012. The selection below is the first part of the book's two-part Coda; endnotes have been abridged. The publisher's link to the online catalog with a brief description is: <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520271777>

Mixed Genres and the Possibilities of Opera

by Stephen Hinton

In an article titled "Music Written for the Theater: A Summary of the Early Season," which appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune* on 13 November 1949, the composer and music critic Virgil Thomson eschewed the label *musical tragedy*. Instead he described *Lost in the Stars* as "a play with musical numbers, a *singspiel*." His reason for doing so: "It is not . . . either purely or chiefly a musical narrative." Even though one might take issue with Thomson's assertion that this and Blitzstein's *Regina* are plays in which "music is employed copiously but incidentally," his judgment seems fair enough. He does, after all, concede that "the composer's contribution" is "not quite so incidental" in Weill's case (nor is it in Blitzstein's either). As in his other plays with music, whether "Stücke mit Musik" or "musical plays," Weill's music resists conventional critical distinctions. For this reason, Thomson's alternate German description seems quite apt, given its connotation of works for the theater in which music's role is both substantial and indispensable, not merely "copious."

Yet the fact that the music alternates with spoken dialogue and is not entirely incidental to the drama is not the only reason Thomson's label seems well chosen. Granted, *singspiel* is a term generally applied to operatic works from the German-speaking lands of the late eighteenth century written in the vernacular. Applying this foreign term to a mid-twentieth-century musical performed on Broadway may seem culturally odd as well as anachronistic—a shock effect Thomson presumably intended his remark to have in some measure but one that, on closer inspection, proves to be hardly gratuitous or meaningless. The associations that emerge are several.

Thomson had touched on something that he would soon have occasion to discuss more extensively. Just five months after the above-quoted article, he published an obituary of Kurt Weill (one of the most incisive and insightful of any that appeared), praising not only the composer as "a master of musico-dramatic design" but also *Lost in the Stars* as "a masterpiece of musical application to dramatic narrative" and its score for twelve players as "Weill's finest work of orchestral craft." Again he brought up the connection to the eighteenth century: the "lighter wing [of American musical theater] has lost in Kurt Weill a workman who might have bridged for us the gap, as he did in Germany, between grand opera and the *singspiel*."¹

Following Thomson's cue, it can indeed be argued that thinking of *Lost in the Stars* as a latter-day *singspiel* rather than as a "musical tragedy" is an especially fruitful premise for appreciating Weill's last "play with music" and thereby understanding how it repre-

sented for him "the furthest advance in a direction which I laid down for myself in the early years of my life as a composer."

Balancing continuity and change in assessments of Weill's career poses a peculiar challenge. His own self-assessments stressed both of these aspects, drawing attention to his Busonian roots while at the same time "defining a new direction for musical comedy" (an expression he used to describe a rivalry with Richard Rodgers).² Whereas the critical literature on Weill, following the lead of critics such as S. L. M. Barlow and Harold Clurman, has been inclined to evaluate Weill's career in terms of a decline in originality and authenticity, Thomson's obituary furnishes a wholly positive example. A much-quoted sentence toward the end conveys how each of Weill's works for the musical theater was *sui generis*, the product of unceasing innovation: "But his output of new models—every new work was a new model, a new shape, a new solution of dramatic problems—will not continue." And so Thomson concluded: "Music has lost a creative mind and a master's hand."³ (Compare this eulogistic assessment with the negatively critical verdicts of Barlow and Clurman. In Barlow's judgment, Weill's earlier music came from "a man almost inflexibly remote from any other style but his own," whereas the American works wholly lacked the European works' "curious individuality." Clurman, in his review of *Lost in the Stars*, went so far as to equate Weill's later music with the "void" manifestations of mass culture.)⁴

According to Thomson's criteria, Weill's innovation and creativity, along with his mastery, are principally reflected in the sheer range of the "solutions" he explored: from one-act operas in German to full-scale dramatic musicals in English; from "epic opera" to prototypes of the so-called concept musical; from plays with music to musical plays; various works with dance, including a "ballet chanté"; several pageants, including a "circus opera"; a number of compositions that draw in different ways on the traditions of operetta; others that expressly serve the needs of amateur musicians; and on and on. Yet throughout his career, and behind all of this remarkable diversity, the *singspiel* idea offers a crucial point of origin on a number of levels.

In a quite basic way, it manifests itself as an ongoing commitment to the creation of mixed genres between spoken theater and opera written in the vernacular—the conventional understanding of the term. Furthermore, it is the *singspiel* tradition that serves as the exemplar of a popular, bourgeois form of musical theater born out of a spirit of artistic reform. (It should be noted here that in the late eighteenth century the term *singspiel* could also connote what we would normally classify as opera: Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*,

for example, a “commedia per musica,” as the first published libretto described it, was billed in German at its premiere in 1786 as “ein italienisches Singspiel in 4 Aufzügen.” This broader usage is consistent with the word’s origin as a literal translation of the Italian *melodramma*.) Yet the principal point of orientation for Weill is not the mixed genre as such or the association of that genre with Enlightenment culture so much as one German-language singspiel in particular, and the best known of them all: Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*. It is arguably to this work that Weill owed a lifelong debt more extensive and profound than to any other work of the entire operatic repertory.

The Mozart paradigm formed the core of Busoni’s teachings, into which Weill immersed himself as a member of Busoni’s master class in Berlin in the early 1920s, with particular focus on an aesthetics of opera that his mentor defined negatively in terms of an aversion toward Wagner and positively as boundless, unconditional admiration for Mozart. Although we cannot know exactly what Busoni said about *Die Zauberflöte* to his students, we do know that he used it as a preferred model in his classes. In addition, he had his pupil Weill copy out his two-piano arrangement of the overture, which was performed by two former pupils, Egon Petri and Michael von Zadora, at Berlin’s Volksbühne on 10 December 1923; and Busoni’s two-hand piano transcription and arrangement of the scene from *Die Zauberflöte* with the “Armed Men” forms the last of his *Fünf kurze Stücke zur Pflege des polyphonen Spiels* (also from 1923).⁵

In his essay “The Possibilities of Opera,” a short treatise on the genre that appeared in several of his published writings, Busoni extols *Die Zauberflöte* as “opera *par excellence*” (*die Oper ‘schlechtmeg’*) and expresses his amazement that “in Germany at least it hasn’t been established as a signpost for opera.” For him it was “the only example” of an opera he could name that “comes closest to the ideal”—an ideal that his manifestolike essay attempts to circumscribe—“uniting instruction and spectacle, solemnity and entertainment, to which a captivating music is added, or rather above which the music hovers and which it holds together.” He quotes with approval Goethe’s characterization of the libretto as being “full of improbabilities and jest that not everyone knows how to reconcile and appreciate” as well as his exhortation “to concede that its author knew to a high degree the art of using contrast and of creating big theatrical effects.” Invoking “the miracle” that the music “draws near,” he singles out the “trial of fire and water” and the “two armed guards before the gates of the trial [who] issue their warning in the rhythms of an ancient chorale tune” (the same passage that he transcribed for the last of his *Fünf Stücke*).⁶

Busoni does not mention that the chorale in its entirety (not just the rhythm) dates back to Luther, an omission that seems quite surprising, given that another of Busoni’s idols, J. S. Bach, quoted it in two of his cantatas. One of the cantatas is “Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh’ darein” (the words of the Lutheran incipit); the other is “Schau, lieber Gott, wie meine Feind.” (In the *Fünf Stücke*, Busoni marks the “Corale,” as he calls it in Italian, with an asterisk, merely noting in both German and Italian that it is sung by “The Two Armed Men” in Mozart’s opera.) Not only is the chorale tune “ancient”; this whole section of the work is composed in the strict contrapuntal style—the “learned style” or *stile antico*, as it is sometimes called—that becomes quite common in Mozart’s later music alongside the more modern “gallant style.” In this scene of the opera, even if the Lutheran source as such is not explicit, the “old style” in general and the chorale quotation in particular serve as musical markers. Such markers, as Stephen Rumph has demon-

strated with reference to Mozart’s music, cannot simply be reduced to topics with fixed meanings; rather, “a topic assumes meaning only within an oppositional context.”⁷ Here, the strict contrapuntal style combined with the Lutheran tune creates a suggestive mix of order and solemnity, rationality and communal religiosity.

Weill would soon have occasion to write about Mozart’s work himself. Of the many operas covered in the previews and reviews he produced as music critic for the weekly journal *Der deutsche Rundfunk*, none received a more enthusiastic and reverential treatment than *Die Zauberflöte*. Echoing his mentor’s panegyric, he defends the libretto against the charge that it was “badly chosen,” quoting Goethe’s defense verbatim: “One needs to be more cultured to recognize the value of this libretto than to deny it.” For him, “the enchanting play of princes, gods and mysterious powers” deserves to be interpreted as “an allegory of a deeply religious idea . . . a statement of faith.” As he puts it, “The goal of all overcome dangers” is “not money, fame and honor, but admission into a brotherhood of believers, a temple of purity and altruism.” Furthermore, he recognizes the “unaffected symbolism” of “the fairytale opera” as “providing the suitable garb for the musical forms,” whether the music is “depicting the amusing joys and hardships of love experienced by Papageno” or “conveying with dramatic vigor Pamina’s trials.”⁸

Mozart’s singspiel had an enduring impact on Weill’s conception of musical theater, first and foremost as the cornerstone of a philosophy of opera that his teacher promulgated in the master class and that Weill then preached and practiced in his own way. Just as it more closely approximated his teacher’s ideal than any other single work, so it can be said to have similarly informed the pupil’s conception of the genre, which he described theoretically in terms of an *Urform*. Moreover, in order to elucidate the concept of *Gestus* that he introduced in his essay “On the Gestic Character of Music”—and that would become one of the central tenets of Brecht’s theory of epic theater as well—he drew on just two music examples: his own “Alabama Song” from the *Mahagonny-Songspiel* and Tamino’s opening aria (“Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön”) from *Die Zauberflöte*. And just as he would repeatedly acknowledge his teacher’s influence throughout his career, so he continued to cite the example of Mozart generally and *Die Zauberflöte* particularly as prefiguring the kind of popular contemporary theater toward which his own work aspired.

A return to eighteenth-century principles forms a common theme in Weill’s programmatic statements. “Opera found in the masterpieces of Mozart,” he wrote in 1936, “a new blend of speech and music where the drama justifies its right to existence in spite of the clear predominance of the music. It was the nineteenth century which brought the definite break.”⁹ In 1937, as he was beginning his career on Broadway, he went even further in defining his model: “Paralleling the subsidized product was a different kind of opera, reared on a far healthier basis as part of the amusement business by entrepreneurs who recognized and tried to satisfy the need of the masses for a music theatre. The artistic value of such operatic works is often underestimated, because they are popular, completely comprehensible, and have a direct effect on the public. Mozart’s *Zauberflöte* was written on commission and in collaboration with a commercial theatre impresario; it is an ideal example of the union of popular music and the highest degree of artistic power.”¹⁰ And seven years after that, around the time he was working on *One Touch of Venus*, he was even quoted as having said in an interview, “*The Magic Flute*, you know, was the first Broadway musical comedy.”¹¹ In his scribbled notes in response to Clurman he remarked that

“Mozart wrote *Magic Flute* for the ‘Broadway’ of Vienna of his time.”¹²

Insofar as Mozart’s work—or rather, Mozart’s work mediated through Busoni’s tutelage—inspired Weill to invent a whole series of new mixed genres, the debt remained one of creative appropriation. The “signpost for opera,” as Busoni called it, pointed in several directions. Far from representing a fixed formula for emulation, the prototype influenced the new genres in different ways and to differing degrees, from the earliest through the last works. Some aspects of that influence are more concrete and hence more obvious than others, of course. The spectrum ranges from almost literal quotation, via veiled allusion and parallels in dramaturgical design, to more general questions of aesthetic purpose and function.

To return to *Lost in the Stars* as an example, the parallels certainly go well beyond the hybrid of opera and spoken theater inferred by the mention of *singspiel* in Thomson’s review. One of the key similarities is the mix of high and low, serious and light, a chief cause of consternation for a number of the work’s critics. Even at the end of his career, the guiding compositional precedent remained *Die Zauberflöte*, the model par excellence of an opera whose plot as well as its music incorporates the dimensions of serious and light by integrating *seria* and *buffa* elements along with other stylistic markers, such as Baroque counterpoint and Lutheran chorales. Weill’s review of 1925 had specifically acknowledged such contrasting elements in Mozart’s opera by describing the “dramatic” music of Pamina on the one hand and the “amusing” music of Papageno on the other.

Another, related aspect that invites comparison is the religious one, highlighted by Weill both in his 1925 review of *Die Zauberflöte* and in his 1949 interview with Harry Gilroy about *Lost in the Stars*. For the twenty-five-year-old Weill, Mozart’s opera possessed validity as “an allegory of a deeply religious idea . . . a statement of faith.” “In general,” the 49-year-old Weill is reported to have said in rehearsals for *Lost in the Stars*, “the whole play has a Biblical tone that we hope the public will like.” Musically, the common denominator is the chorale. Although the chorale in *Lost in the Stars* is not a literal quotation from Bach, as it is in the Mozart, the chorus “A Bird of Passage” is couched in the style of a four-part hymn. The number’s concluding lines were even considered appropriate in their tone and sentiment to serve as the epitaph for Weill’s gravestone:

This is the life of men on earth:
Out of darkness we come at birth
Into a lamplit room and then
Go forward into dark again.

“Thousands of Miles,” which concludes *Lost in the Stars* following the chorale, is similarly hymnlike. Overall, Weill’s last work is one that aimed as much as any of his, and perhaps more than most, at “uniting instruction and spectacle, solemnity and entertainment,” to use Busoni’s characterization of the Mozartian ideal. *Love Life* does so, too, in its way. It may be less solemn than its successor, but its combination of “vaudeville” and conceptual “study” arguably derives from a common notion of mutually inclusive opposites. On a thematic level, an analogy to Tamino and Pamina’s rite of passage suggests itself at the end of the show when Sam and Susan face their own trial, symbolized by their tightrope walk.

These are just two works that can be cited from an entire oeuvre that reveals Mozartian traits in comparable ways. Other instances of chorales used as cultural markers are not hard to find. Probably best known is the one that concludes *Die Dreigroschenoper*, a work that

“gave us the opportunity to make opera the subject matter for an evening in the theater,” as Weill claimed.¹³ The finale, with its artificial happy end, is one such moment, drawing on the conventions of operatic recitative and religious chorale while pursuing an unconventional objective. Earlier in the same scene, the musical gesture of the three chords that punctuate the recitative in which Brown announces the Queen’s pardoning of Macheath could be construed as a direct allusion to the ceremonial music with which the overture to *Die Zauberflöte* begins and which recurs with symbolic significance during the rituals in the temple (Exx. 1 and 2).

Chorales appear in earlier works, too, for example those in the First Symphony and the String Quartet, opus 8, which, as Antony Beaumont points out, are not only related to each other but are quite similar to the chorale in *Die Zauberflöte*.¹⁴ Immediately following *Die Dreigroschenoper*, there are, in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* and in *Die Bürgschaft*, male choruses with their own “rhythms of an ancient chorale tune.”

The list of such allusions goes on: the quotation of Papageno’s aria “Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen” in the song “Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen” that Weill originally included in *Das Berliner Requiem* (a provocatively secular requiem); the near-literal quotations from *Die Zauberflöte* in *Der Silbersee* and that work’s bitterly allegorical “Wintermärchen,” announced already in its subtitle (i.e., not a “Märchenoper”).¹⁵ There is also the subversively ironic punning on the word *singspiel* in the title *Mahagonny-Songspiel*, which plays



Weill’s tombstone in the nondenominational Mount Repose Cemetery in Rockland County, New York. The inscription quotes the chorale “A Bird of Passage” from his last stage work, *Lost in the Stars* (1949), albeit with an engraving error. The note over “earth” should be a tied A♭, not a G. Photo: Irma Commanday

on connotations of the genre that Weill characterized in relation to Mozart's work as "the foundation stone of 'German' opera."¹⁶

On a more fundamental level, Mozart represents the paradigm of an opera composer whose use of a variety of idioms and registers juxtaposed with one another to meaningful dramatic ends challenges the notion of a unity of style.¹⁷ For all the historical distance between them, a close affinity exists between Mozart's predilection for the "learned style" in his mature works and Weill's shift to what he called "a perfectly strict, thoroughly responsible style" in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, *Der Jasager*, and *Die Bürgschaft*. For the composer of musical theater, cultivating such a style is not to be explained merely as an exhibition of handicraft and technical prowess, although it is that, too. Topical appropriateness and significance are decisive.

Style, according to this Mozartian paradigm, is a function of dramaturgy. It plays a pivotal role in the composer's "art of using contrast and of creating big theatrical effects," as Busoni described Mozart's approach to opera in *Die Zauberflöte*. While specific features of Weill's works for the musical theater either derive directly from or can be linked to this particular work in the ways described, its example as a model of "dramaturgical counterpoint" is among its most profound and enduring lessons. Citing Goethe, the same authority on which his teacher drew, Weill made an emphatic point of defending the libretto, whose alleged inconsistencies and rifts have often been declared weaknesses that needed to be explained away in terms of the text's origins in disparate sources. The result is a contamination of genre—in this case, the provocative mix of elements from fairy tale and ritual, comedy and tragedy, *buffa* and *seria*—that lends a remarkable, much-discussed, and variously interpreted richness to the layers of symbolic meaning in Mozart's work.

Weill's own theatrical imagination positively thrives on the possibilities afforded by Mozart's example. Comparable contaminations, which are the rule rather than the exception in his musical theater, begin already with *Der Protagonist*, the precedent-setting first opera (which otherwise has little in common with the

singspiel), and continue through *Lost in the Stars*. (The connections between Weill's first stage work proper, the children's ballet *Zaubernacht*, and *Die Zauberflöte* certainly go beyond the "magic" of the titles, the appeal to children being only one of them.) Weill's inclination as an artist to savor the tensions between two distinct cultures or practices has its biographical basis in a defining experience of his whole life: "People like us," he confided to his brother at the age of nineteen, referring to their dual identity as German and Jewish, "are caught between two worlds."¹⁸

The application of "dramaturgical counterpoint" finds its most radical incarnation in *Love Life*, as suggested already. In *Lost in the Stars* the principle still obtains, however, both in how Weill conceives the "musical tragedy" as a singspiel along Mozartian lines and in how he confuses epic and dramatic moments. This latter aspect of the "experiment" creates unusual asymmetries, as discussed, that arose in part from Weill and Anderson's attempt to adapt Paton's novel to preexisting musico-dramatic material, in part from the need to accommodate specific production contingencies.

Yet the most controversial feature of *Lost in the Stars* that finds a precedent in Mozart is its ending. In their revision of the novel, Weill and Anderson turned Paton's note of muted, theologically grounded faith in the future into a symbolic overcoming of social differences. Like *Die Zauberflöte*, *Lost in the Stars* represents a commitment to a sense of "common humanity" which, as Weill stated, "everyone should learn."¹⁹ No less than all the musical influences, this idealistic trait comprises another essential link between Weill's musical theater and the Mozartian model, at least as Weill conceived of it.

In his appreciation of Mozart's work as the embodiment of an operatic ideal, Weill may have appeared to concur for once with Theodor W. Adorno, his erstwhile friend who had lent qualified support to earlier works of his, notably *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, but who would eventually become one of his sternest critics. In the article "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," written in



Example 1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, Overture (opening)

Recitativ

BROWN *f*

An - läß - lich ih - rer Krö - nung
On this her cor - o - na - tion

Example 2. Kurt Weill, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Drittes Dreigroschenfinale (Brown's recitative)

1938, when Weill was busy working on *Knickerbocker Holiday*, Adorno singled out *Die Zauberflöte* as an opera “in which the utopia of human emancipation and the enjoyment afforded by a *singspiel* couplet exactly coincide.” But how differently the two of them viewed the contemporary relevance of that ideal! Unlike Weill, Adorno saw that coincidence as a unique occurrence or “a moment by itself,” for “after *Die Zauberflöte* serious and light music did not allow themselves to be forced together again.”²⁰ Therein lies the fundamental difference in their respective aesthetic positions.

For the critical theorist Adorno, who subscribed to a negative dialectics of cultural history straddling the disciplines of philosophy and sociology, and for whom popular music functioned in modern society as a capitalist commodity and hence primarily as a tool at the service of the cultural industry, the world of *Die Zauberflöte* represented an almost Edenic condition, a state of affairs never to return on this earth. His utopia was backward-, not forward-looking. According to this gloomy and pessimistic worldview, subsequent history delineated a process of decline, an ineluctable fall from grace that brought with it an increasing and irreparable schism between “high” and “low.”

Weill may have paid homage to the same historical prototype as Adorno—after all, they shared common roots as middle-class German Jews from the same era with similar educational backgrounds—but his outlook was generally more optimistic, and also

more cosmopolitan. For him, “high” and “low” or “serious” and “light” were not mutually exclusive. Nor did he consider art that attempted to embrace a utopia of human emancipation as something that was incompatible with entertainment. Nor, indeed, did that entertainment preclude popular strophic songs. If Weill’s works teach us about “the common property of all music theater,” as Daniel Albright remarked, it is because they draw freely on the example of many composers, not just one, as the foregoing chapters have shown.²¹

Mozart’s work was not his sole source of inspiration. It was demonstrably the principal source, however. A product of Enlightenment culture, the *singspiel* still contained valid lessons to be absorbed by composer and audience alike. For the émigré musician who remained committed to the reform of musical theater in his adopted homeland, it represented neither an impasse nor an aporia, but a viable set of possibilities.

Stephen Hinton is Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University, where he teaches in the Department of Music. He also serves as the Denning Family Director of the Stanford Arts Initiative. His publications on Weill include *The Threepenny Opera* for the series Cambridge Opera Handbooks, *Die Dreigroschenoper* for the Kurt Weill Edition (edited with Edward Harsh), and Weill’s *Gesammelte Schriften* (edited with Jürgen Schebera). He is currently editing *Happy End* for the Kurt Weill Edition.

Notes

1. Virgil Thomson, “Kurt Weill,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 9 April 1950; reprinted in *A Virgil Thomson Reader* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 342–44.

2. Letter to Lenya, 18 May 1945, in *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, ed. and trans. Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 460.

3. Thomson, “Kurt Weill,” 344.

4. S.L.M. Barlow, “In the Theatre,” *Modern Music* 22, no. 4 (1945): 275–77, here 276; Clurman’s review, entitled “Lost in the Stars of Broadway” and originally published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* on 31 December 1949, is reprinted in *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 12, no. 2 (1994): 10–11.

5. See Tamara Levitz, *Teaching New Classicality: Ferruccio Busoni’s Master Class in Composition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 250.

6. Ferruccio Busoni, “Über die Möglichkeiten der Oper,” written in Berlin in August 1921 and first published in *Die Revue “Faust,”* 1 (1921).

7. Stephen Rumph, “Mozart’s Archaic Endings: A Linguistic Critique,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 130, no. 2 (2005): 159–96, here 191.

8. Kurt Weill, “Opern-Rück- und Vorschau,” *Der deutsche Rundfunk* 3, no. 11 ([15 March] 1925): 681–82; 3, no. 13 ([29 March] 1925): 809; reprinted as “Mozart’s *Zauberflöte* als Sendespiel,” in Kurt Weill, *Gesammelte Schriften: Mit einer Auswahl von Gesprächen und Interviews*, ed. and trans. Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera (Mainz: Schott, 2000), 230–35.

9. Kurt Weill, “The Alchemy of Music,” *Stage* 14, no. 2 (November 1936): 63–64.

10. Kurt Weill, “The Future of Opera in America,” *Modern Music* 14, no. 4 (May–June 1937): 183–88.

11. Julian Seaman, “Breath from Broadway,” *Cue* 12, no. 46 (13 November 1943): 16.

12. Notes for a response to Harold Clurman, published in *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 12, no. 2 (1994): 20. The manuscript belongs to the Weill-Lenya Papers, Yale University Music Library.

13. Weill, “Korrespondenz über *Dreigroschenoper*,” *Anbruch* 11, no. 1 (1929): 24–25; reprinted in Weill, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 72–74, here 74.

14. See Antony Beaumont, “Chamber Music: The Kurt Weill Edition, Series II, Volume 1” (a review), *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 23, no. 1 (2005): 13–15.

15. For an interpretation of Weill’s quotation from Papageno’s aria, see Anton Heuff, “Papageno in Potsdam: Kurt Weill’s Parody of Prussian Militarism,” *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 12, no. 2 (1994): 12–13.

16. Kurt Weill, “Opern-Rück- und Vorschau,” *Der deutsche Rundfunk* 2, no. 49 (7 December 1924): 2967–68; reprinted as “Opern im Rundfunk” in Weill, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 218.

17. In “Mozart’s Archaic Endings,” Rumph presents a critique that, he says, “questions the unity of Mozart’s style” (161).

18. Letter to Hans Weill, 27 June 1919, in Kurt Weill, *Briefe an die Familie, 1914–1950*, ed. Lys Symonette and Elmar Juchem (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2001), 234.

19. Harry Gilroy, “Written in the Stars: Composer Kurt Weill and Playwright Maxwell Anderson Air Views on Racial Harmony in Latest Collaboration,” *New York Times*, 30 October 1949.

20. Theodor W. Adorno, “Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 7 (1938): 321–56; reprinted in *Dissonanzen: Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), 14–50; the essay was published in English as “On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991). The translation here, which attempts as far as possible to preserve Adorno’s terminology, is my own.

21. Daniel Albright, “Kurt Weill as Modernist,” *Modernism/Modernity* 7, no. 2 (2000): 273–84, here 283.

LENYA

A “moment in history” (and a drink)

The year 1976 did not mark merely the Bicentennial of the United States, which was celebrated in part by a performance of Weill's *Ballad of Magna Carta* on 3 June in Washington D.C. (in the Capitol Rotunda, no less). That fall—exactly 35 years ago—a large exhibit on Weill and Lenya opened at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center on 15 November. As part of the opening



BEVERAGES

LENYA (an aperitif)

Napoleon Mandarin Tangerine
liquor

Kriter Brut sparkling wine

In a champagne flute glass (a Baccarat Dom Perignon, for example), pour one jigger of Napoleon Mandarin Tangerine liquor; fill with Kriter Brut sparkling wine, very chilled.

NOTE: Two years ago, I did an exhibition on the life and work of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. During the course of that exhibition, Ms. Lenya donated to our archives important manuscripts of Weill scores. We had a small yet elegant reception, serving only one cocktail which was created for that occasion and named “Lenya.” It is very much like the great singer in that it is slightly bittersweet, gentle but potent (even volatile) and is, in color, a light orange, the tint of her hair. It is a wonderful aperitif and should honor her with a wider audience.

Don Vlack, Director
The Museum of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center
New York, NY



ceremony, Lenya donated the holograph full score of Weill's *Die sieben Todsünden* to the library. It didn't make the news, but the exhibition also prompted lead designer Don Vlack to create an aperitif inspired by Lenya (and named in her honor). A few years after the exhibition closed, the recipe appeared in an obscure publication: *The Chrysler Museum Cookbook* (Norfolk, Va.: Gatling Print, 1980), p. 6.



Right: Lenya holding a “Lenya” at the exhibit's opening reception in 1976.

Top: Lenya in an interview, conducted at the gallery several days later.

Interview:

Kurt Weill Reloaded

On 3 December 2011, the German-language television station 3sat will air a new documentary about Weill by filmmaker Theo Roos. For the occasion, we interviewed him about his work in general and his latest project in particular. Television audiences in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland will be familiar with Roos's documentaries on philosophers and composers. As an author, Roos has published several books, most notably "Philosophische Vitamine."

You started out as a philosophy student. Why did you decide to become a filmmaker?

I've always been fascinated by thinking in images. Schopenhauer once described human coexistence with the help of an image—an image from a childhood trip he took with his father. One day, in Paris, he gazed through the window of a pet store and saw several hedgehogs that tried to cuddle up but kept poking each other instead. It's an image, or rather a complex metaphor, for the human longing for intimacy and its failure and frustration. When I wanted to capture philosophers on film, I always started out by looking for images.

Thus philosophy became sensual for me. Images helped me to free myself from the linearity of thinking and writing. I learned how to picture philosophical terms. The images offered new insights into philosophies. A montage of two images created a third one. Absorbing, staging, and splicing images expanded my understanding of philosophy. When I write about philosophy these days, I am mounting language like images in film. In addition, making films offers me the opportunity to meet philosophers—if they are still alive—in person. All of a sudden I found myself sitting across from Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Ricoeur . . .

Physical presence, the sound of a voice, gestures, the way people sit or walk can be more telling than writing. It is easier to tell a lie in writing because one can hide behind prose. Gestures and the sound of a voice cannot be manipulated as easily as language, unless you are a carefully coached politician using rehearsed, coded gestures. But even then, nobody who watches and listens carefully will be duped. Images have an immediacy, and they can unveil secrets. "He who has eyes to see and ears to hear," says Freud, "grows convinced that mortals can conceal no secrets. He whose lips are silent chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes through every pore." Or Nietzsche: "We are lying through our teeth, yet the face that we make speaks the truth nonetheless." Both Nietzsche and Freud are attuned to hidden gestures. I use them as important sources and inspirations for images.

A lot of your films are about musical subjects or at least deal with music. How do musical subjects fit into your interests as a director? What appeals to you about music and musicians?

"Man, it takes a long time to sound like yourself," Miles Davis writes in his autobiography. Sound is crucial. How does a philosophy sound? "Words are sound signals for specific clusters of sensations"—Nietzsche again—"and we don't understand each other merely by using the same words." We need to share similar clusters of sensations in order to understand one another.

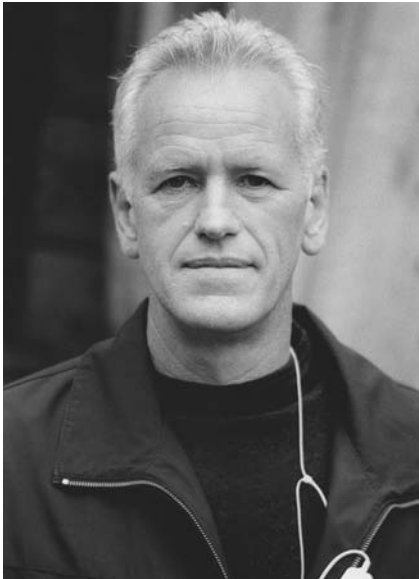
Sensations and emotions are acoustic signals. Sound makes them audible. To me, sound and image are philosophical dimensions. What's the sound of an image? Which image evokes what kind of sound? As a filmmaker I get to use sound and images in addition to words. I can add complexity to my work and get more across. And sometimes, during the editing process, an image or a sound becomes "magnetic" at its edges and pulls in another image, another sound. That can nudge the film in a different direction. To me, music, images and philosophy are closely intertwined. If Nietzsche is right when he calls music the "self-resounding of the profoundest loneliness," then I can hear it in Weill's *Die sieben Todsünden*. I can picture Weill quite vividly, as he sits in Louveciennes, near Paris, expelled from his home country by the Nazis, abandoned by his woman, who's gambling away his money in casinos on the Italian Riviera with a new lover, and Weill himself is in love with the wife of his friend Caspar Neher, but she is in Berlin—and then he composes this piece. There "it" sounds, by itself, as it were, the "profoundest loneliness" in the underlying melody, driven by the banjo's abrasive sound. That's where he sounds like himself. A human being transfigured into loneliness. I think it's remarkable that Weill kept his sound, given that nomadic life confronted him time and again with new musical environments.

You've made television documentaries about Haydn and Rossini. What is it about composers in particular that interests you?

With Haydn it's the waggish lightness of his music, his roguish smile as a composer that won me over right away. Like Mozart, he wanted to write "music for everyone." At age sixty Haydn became a "pop star" of sorts in London (and the toast of the town), after he had worked for thirty years in the service of Prince Esterházy—that's an unusual biography. And he never lost his humor, even when he was a guest of the King of England.

Rossini, too, composed music that everyone could grasp—wonderfully simple arias that are ear-catching. For a while he worked like a maniac, turning out one opera after another. He was a workaholic like Weill. But unlike Weill he made a decision and pulled himself away from the grueling machinery of opera production: he simply stopped composing for the public. His private concerts and salons in Paris are legendary. Rossini's works from the late, "pull-back" period are idiosyncratic and avant-garde. Yet he's also someone who sounds like himself regardless of subject matter. But he was clever enough to stop working himself to death. That probably saved his life.

A Rossini expert, collector, and aficionado asked me, after I had



interviewed him in Naples: “So now you have done Haydn and Rossini. Who could possibly follow—if any?” “Weill,” I replied. It’s a perfect fit! The common element linking the three is the attempt to write for a large audience. They were not afraid of being popular. They were popular without making compromises. Their works are captivating without betraying their complexity.

What were the origins of the Weill project? How did you get involved?

I received a phone call from one of the producers at 3sat, while I was working on the Rossini film. “Would you like to make a film about Weill?” I didn’t have to think about it for even a split second—of course I wanted to! The idea came from Daniel Fiedler, chief of programs at 3sat. Michael Kaufmann, the intendant of the Weill Fest in Dessau, had invited him to attend the 2010 festival. 3sat is really great that way. Weill gets a program slot because he wrote great music. And they didn’t hide him in the wee hours: *Weill Reloaded* will be broadcast on Saturday, 3 December 2011, at 8:15 PM—prime time!

What did you know about Weill before you started work on this film? Compared to your other subjects, was he easy or difficult to work on?

I didn’t know a whole lot. *Dreigroschenoper*, *Sieben Todsünden*, *Mahagonny* and a number of songs, some through performances of pop singers. I didn’t know anything about the early works, *Zaubernacht*, *Der Protagonist*, etc. And nothing from his American catalogue aside from a number of jazz standards. Weill is closer to me than Haydn or Rossini, so it was easier and felt more “natural” to juggle the material. And there is this wonderful thing about editing a film: When I run the material back and forth in the process of selecting footage, I get totally absorbed in the music. And the music merges with the images and makes an even stronger impression, really getting to the core.

You originally conceived this film as showing Weill’s life through Lenya’s eyes. As you went along, did you find that her perspective was valuable? Were you able to stick to that idea?

I think the film is greatly shaped by Lenya’s perspective. After I had read about Lenya, especially the fact that, after Weill’s premature

death, she decided to dedicate her life to the work of her late husband and started to collect all the music in disarray and scattered all over the world, I thought this might be the best angle for the film. And I was sold on the idea when I managed to convince Sophie Rois, the terrific Austrian actress, to lend her voice to Lenya. When I recorded her I was mesmerized and deeply touched by the way she delivered the lines. I still get that feeling when I see the film—and other people do, too. A magical moment. Shortly before she received my inquiry through her agent, she had listened to a CD of Weill’s. Coincidence?

How important is Lenya to an understanding of Weill’s life? Do you see her as someone who had a profound effect on him, or was she more of an incidental figure?

As Pamela Katz says in the film: Lenya was very important for Weill’s life and he for hers. Lenya respected his music and his way of working. The same holds true for Weill’s view of Lenya. They were supportive of each other’s work. Her nonchalant ways had a liberating effect on Weill. She came from a completely different background. He could hear it in her voice. The “other.” The unadulterated poetry of her life—life to the fullest in the eyes of the intellectual composer. Her background was proletarian, and she had a traumatic childhood. Their encounter was almost a collision, an intense attraction of opposites. I don’t want to resort to clichés, but somehow she grounded him and emboldened him to be what he was: a supremely gifted composer. Lenya’s influence on Weill was huge. And Weill offered Lenya continuity, something she had not experienced in her life up to that point. One can sense something of the tightrope walk that Lenya’s life was. Weill took her by the hand, providing stability for her traumatized, fragile self. Needless to say, the relationship wasn’t easy. Affairs on both sides, although it’s not always clear who was acting and who was reacting. “They can’t live together and they can’t stay apart,” says Kim Kowalke in the film.

Can you describe and discuss some of the recurring visual images in the film? What effects do they have? Which is your favorite?

There’s this view from Louveciennes onto Paris. One afternoon in June, I sat there with my cameraman, and we simply let the camera run for half an hour in time-lapse mode. Somehow that image attached itself to the music from *Der Silbersee*, in particular the lines: “Those who must go on will be carried by the silver lake.” I also like the tracking shots in Paris at night with the opening strains of *Sieben Todsünden*. This “self-resounding of the profoundest solitude” moved me time and again during the editing process. Also *Street Scene* and the nocturnal streets of New York. And *Kiddush* sank to my inner core. It epitomizes Weill’s Jewish background. “Bilbao-Song” became a new favorite of mine. Those terrific lines, “I don’t know if it would have brought you joy or grief, but it was fantastic, beyond belief.” Perfect material for the closing credits. And just before, as the film comes to an end, Chuck Cooper sings “Lost in the Stars” during a rehearsal for the *Encores!* production. Absolutely captivating—what a song!

You’ve used a lot of recent rehearsal and performance footage, from productions in both the U.S. and Germany. What did the variety of works and performance styles lend to the film? What did you have to go through to film so many different productions?

I was lucky to catch rehearsals for *Knickerbocker Holiday* and *Lost in the Stars* in January 2011 in New York. It was fascinating to see

how people stage Weill's American works in the U.S. It comes across as effortless, unpretentious. When I interviewed him, HK Gruber said that the cultural exchange needs to be intensified. We Europeans can learn a lot about performing Weill's American works, this unfussy way, a kind of "sex appeal." But Gruber senses also some European elements in Weill's American works, which tend to be glossed over in the U.S. I listen to such things with great interest. For my part, however, I lack the experience, I simply haven't seen enough performances that would allow me to engage in such subtle comparisons. — In Dessau we filmed *Zaubernacht*, *Der Protagonist* and *One Touch of Venus*. In Cologne we caught *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, in Gelsenkirchen we saw *Die sieben Todsünden*, and in Berlin we filmed another *Dreigroschenoper*. It's overkill, of course, and I have to be careful not to get inundated by the material. There's about forty hours worth of footage. I often follow the "magnetic energy" of the images and the music. Which frame needs to follow a certain image, sound, or topic? But of course you always have to consider the film in its entirety. And then there is the grieving process. In the extreme case it means: "Kill your babies!" That gets offset by the feeling when everything falls into place—I've been working as my own editor under an alias—and it generates this miraculous flow. Then of course it's all sunshine and I think I have the best job in the world. Simply let the material do its job and play with it! And on top of it the subject is Weill!

Were there any productions or locations you wanted to film but couldn't for some reason?

Unfortunately, we couldn't film the staging of *Die sieben Todsünden* at New York City Ballet with the singer Patti LuPone. That could have given us some great images. And the footage from Gelsenkirchen, the *Dreigroschenoper* in Cologne, and an evening of songs in Dessau didn't have the right energy, it didn't become "magnetic," and so it stayed out. Sixty minutes ain't forever. It's odd that no pop singer (Lou Reed, Marianne Faithfull, Nick Cave, Bob Dylan, or Patti Smith) agreed to talk about Weill. It's a shame, because legends Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra, but also Reed, Faithfull, and Tom Waits—to name only a few—have covered Weill songs. Even Dylan, whose music is deeply rooted in the American tradition, writes that Weill composed genuinely American songs. And he described how he was stunned by seeing the *Threepenny Opera* in the early 1960s. Now 3sat has programmed Larry Weinstein's film *September Songs*, in which pop stars cover Weill songs, to follow my film.

How would you situate your Weill film within the genre of composer documentaries? Have you made any innovations in this film that you want to mention?

It's difficult to assess one's own work. It's too recent, and I'm certainly the last to judge. The film's associate producers, Elke Schwenk and Maria Kasten, tell me that the Weill film is a significant step forward from the one about Rossini. Possibly Weill is "closer" to me because he is more of a contemporary, and I got to



know him through the filter of pop and jazz, which are closer to me than so-called classical music. But Weill suspended this division between "highbrow" and "lowbrow." For him, there was only "good music and bad music." Weill is closer to the music that I grew up with.

Most published commentary on Weill has to do with his work: musical analysis, how he composed, his ideas about music and theater, and so forth. How important was that aspect in making this film? What does the film reveal about his character and personality?

That played an important role, of course—Weill's musical development. In spite of all the changes in his life, he remained faithful to himself. There's only one Weill who, on both sides of the Atlantic, made his music in Berlin, Paris, and New York under different circumstances. He has this unbelievable energy to integrate new surroundings into his music and his everyday life. But why his early death at age fifty? Weill was able to listen to a new environment, even its traditions, and could absorb its idioms, but he didn't pay attention to his body or, as Pam Katz points out, to his feelings. He simply plowed ahead, ignoring the signs of a heart condition. Did he over-identify with his music? Music to him was more important than health! More important than Lenya? What drove him to compose, even when he became ill? Why didn't he dare to rest? Why didn't he pay attention to his needs? Those are questions that the film poses indirectly.

Now that you've spent close to a year working intensively on this project, what qualities of Weill, as a composer or as a person, stand out?

A polyphony that remains instantly recognizable. An ability to find his sound in the "other." A boundless energy to adopt and transform the alien. And a sensitivity for the underprivileged, the suppressed, and the persecuted.

Are there any specific goals you have for this film? What effects do you think (or hope) the film will have on viewers?

It would be great if they were to get a sense, no matter how slight, of the enthusiasm that I experienced during the process of making this film, be it listening to and reading Weill, conducting research, or shooting and editing. Then perhaps, at the end, they may end up humming a melody of Weill's . . .

Daniel Hope Takes a Look at Weill's Music with Solo Violin

Prompted by the publication of *Music with Solo Violin* in the Kurt Weill Edition, we have asked violinist Daniel Hope to discuss Weill's Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra and the cantata *Der neue Orpheus*. Hope has forged a distinguished international career as a virtuoso renowned both as soloist and chamber musician, and as an author, producer, and activist for causes ranging from climate change to recovering music composed by victims of Nazi persecution. His lengthy discography includes Weill's Violin Concerto.

Weill's Concerto was the centerpiece of the first recording I ever made, back in 1998. At the time no record company was willing to give me a chance, until Nimbus Records, a small independent British label, together with the conductor William Boughton, finally took an interest and offered to help. Of course, the label said, you will want to record the Tchaikovsky, or the Brahms. After all, it's your debut! How to explain to them that this impertinent 24-year-old preferred to opt, instead, for a concerto for violin and wind instruments? But I was adamant.

There is something about the Violin Concerto which has always provoked and fascinated me. Perhaps it is that singular struggle of a sole fiddler against a barrage of sound that neither blends with nor rejects the four strings—whatever its secret, the Violin Concerto certainly seduces both the listener and the performer. 1924, when the Concerto was composed, was a moment of exciting artistic and musical exploration when many composers found themselves faced with a very particular dilemma—to break completely with past traditions or use the past to look forward. In my opinion, Weill achieved both in this work. It was a fateful, paradoxical year in Weill's life, too. He met Lotte Lenya that summer, the woman he would marry eighteen months later, but at the same time he found himself immersed in tragedy with the death of his mentor, Ferruccio Busoni, on 27 July. I can sense an element of melancholy even amongst the jazzy and sarcastic rhythms which pulsate throughout the piece.

For me, the extraordinary thing about the Violin Concerto is the way Weill amalgamates so many styles and yet is able to find his own voice in a manner strikingly different from the music he had written up to that point. Technically the piece is a considerable challenge for any violinist, deploying a whole arsenal of pyrotechnics. A major influence in the Violin Concerto is undoubtedly Stravinsky, whose own Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments was completed in April 1924, only a month before Weill's Violin Concerto. And let's not forget the ghost of Mahler with those eerie trumpet solos in the *Cadenza* movement. With Schoenberg about to take over Busoni's composition class, it is hardly surprising that Weill wrote: "Before one can understand this music, one must have already digested with good intentions a portion of Schoenberg."

The violinist who did most to promote Weill's Violin Concerto, propelling it to widespread acclaim with more than a dozen performances all over Europe, was Stefan Frenkel. Frenkel had studied with both Adolf Busch and Carl Flesch in Berlin, and between 1924 and 1927 played a key role in the musical life in Dresden, performing many of the latest compositions of the day. He did Weill another favor in 1930 with an excellent transcription of seven pieces from *Die Dreigroschenoper* for violin and piano, which should be in every violinist's repertoire.

Der neue Orpheus was a real discovery for me, as I had known of its existence but never

studied it. Interesting, as in the Violin Concerto, is Weill's wish to create with *Der neue Orpheus* a new form of musical expression by combining elements of the very different stylistic worlds of operatic aria and chanson. Once again, Mahler's shadow infiltrates the music and, in this case, even the libretto, but Weill absorbs the sounds of cabaret music in a classical context which is breathtakingly direct. Several composers of the day had been influenced by jazz, such as Milhaud, Honegger, and Schulhoff. But for Weill, *Der neue Orpheus* represents, in my opinion, a real stylistic breakthrough.

This sumptuous new volume of the Kurt Weill Edition contains critical editions of both of these works. There is a superb introduction by editor Andreas Eichhorn, which offers fascinating insights. Perhaps the essay's single most valuable contribution lies in clearing up the one great question about the instrumentation for the Violin Concerto: how many double bass players are needed? Eichhorn shows that the definitive answer is four; finally, we have a specific conception of how the piece should really sound. The essay brings in thought-provoking historical material as well. One example comes from the U.S. premiere (1930), with Fritz Reiner conducting the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the concertmaster as soloist. Here the reviewer remarked, scathingly: "... not in years has any piece of modern music roused so much antagonism from a local audience." Even with the benefit of hindsight, it is hard to imagine such a reaction to a music that seems so exactly conceived and executed.

Along with the detailed historical analysis contained in the introduction, a 71-page critical report accompanies this new edition of "Music with Solo Violin," containing thorough notes on editorial decisions and equally thorough descriptions of source material. The critical report includes perhaps the most exciting feature of this edition for me, as a performer: a complete facsimile of the solo part used by Stefan Frenkel himself, with his bowings and fingerings entered in pencil. As Yehudi Menuhin once said: "I have always felt a peculiar frisson upon seeing for the first time the actual handwriting of a master composer, alive with its irregularities, its visible impulses, its detectable moments of ease and worry, of joy and despair. It leads one straight to the heart of the matter, to the mind of the man who wrote the composition." This new edition is an invaluable addition to the repertoire of countless violinists and Weill enthusiasts around the world, whoever wishes to keep this extraordinary composer alive in the hearts and minds of humanity.



Photo: Harald Hoffmann. Courtesy of Deutsche Grammophon

Recordings

Knickerbocker Holiday

Collegiate Chorale and soloists
American Symphony Orchestra
James Bagwell, conductor

Ghostlight Records 8-4450

Knickerbocker Holiday was the first musical I ever saw: in 1958, the ninth-grade class of Roosevelt Junior High School in Middletown, Ohio, produced it, and I was an eighth-grader in the audience. I have loved the show ever since. You can imagine my delight when I learned it would be given in concert, with a recording to follow. Apart from a CD containing an abridged radio broadcast with Walter Huston, some of the original cast, and soupy arrangements sounding nothing like Weill's originals, *Knickerbocker's* score has survived only through three songs, "It Never Was Anywhere You," "How Can You Tell an American?" and "September Song." So let's begin with the good news: *Knickerbocker Holiday* has finally received a full-blown recording, and there is much here to like.

Maxwell Anderson's libretto, set in New Amsterdam of 1647, presents a conflict between three different groups of people, each characterized by its speaking style. The council members, foolish relics of the past, speak in a turn-of-the-century "Dutch" vaudeville accent, perhaps best represented by the comedy of Weber and Fields. The second group, comprised of Washington Irving, the young lovers, and their friends, speaks in standard American, ca. 1938. Peter Stuyvesant and his army, the outsiders, speak in a stern, militaristic tone, resorting to charm only when necessary.

The actors do a good job with the corrupt town council, especially considering that their shtick, familiar to 1938 audiences, is no longer part of young performers' educations. Led by David Garrison as the heroine's father, these wonderful comic actors acquit themselves well, particularly in "Hush, Hush" and the rebellious "No, Ve Wouldn't Gonto Do It," a canon for soloists and chorus that looks forward to the "Catch Hatch" ensemble in *One Touch of Venus*.

Romantic leads Ben Davis (Brom) and Kelli O'Hara (Tina) sing well, together and separately, and approach their roles effectively. Davis has a fine baritone, and in dialogue he reminds me of a college football jock, which works better than you might think. O'Hara's lovely soprano has beautiful moments, particularly in the ballads, but her voice is light and her coloratura filigree in "Young People Think about Love" never satisfactorily cuts through the weight of the chorus. I would prefer a soprano with a bit more heft, like Barbara Cook in the original cast recording of *Candide*.

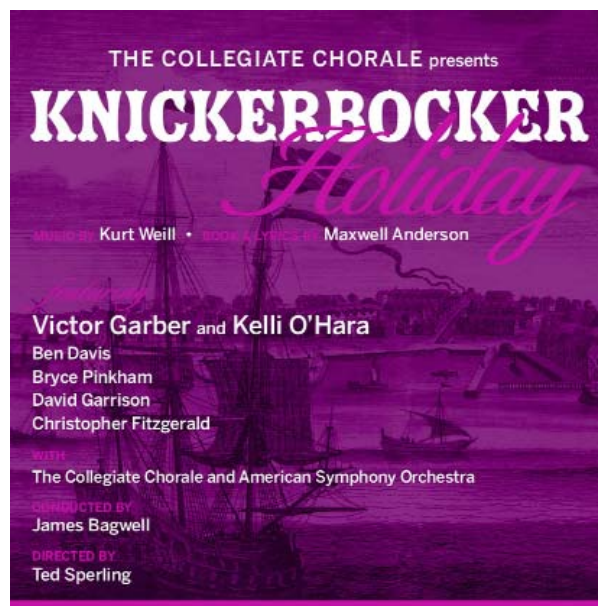
Bryce Pinkham makes a fine Washington Irving, particularly in the opening scene. For reasons I cannot fathom, he loses half of his Act II reprise of "There's Nowhere to Go But Up" to Davis, but this number is cursed in this recording: because of a cut in its first appearance in Act I, the wonderful Christopher Fitzgerald (Tenpin) loses about forty bars. Fortunately, the "Bachelor Song," cut during tryouts for the original production, is restored, giving Fitzgerald something to do before his big moment in Act II, when he serves as a witness to Stuyvesant's political shenanigans.

Victor Garber makes a valiant effort and has several good moments, but he's miscast as Stuyvesant. The cold, hard authority you hear in Walter Huston's recording is missing; when he sings, Huston punches the pitches, while Garber coozies up to them. One of the most chilling moments in the show is the Act I curtain, but it falls flat in this recording. The finale should begin small and build to a full chorus as Stuyvesant's army turns its guns on the population. At this point, at least, Garber shows some of the power and authority I miss elsewhere, but the chorus's polite performance weakens the climax. *Knickerbocker Holiday*, like its Gilbert & Sullivan model, demands a lot from the chorus, and the Collegiate Chorale sounds good but not particularly dramatic. The lyrics are not always clear, perhaps because the Chorale is larger than the musical material requires. Conductor James Bagwell keeps things moving at a good clip, but I'd like a lit-

tle more operetta *schmaltz* in the duets. While most of his tempi strike me as being absolutely right, the *Andante maestoso* in "All Hail the Political Honeymoon" might be a little too brisk, particularly in its reprise during the Act I finale.

The biggest problems with this recording result from relying on live performance rather than bringing the cast into the studio. A studio session would have eliminated unwanted noise from the audience, but more important, it would have provided the means to record every bit of Weill's music; the gaps in the score are the chief defect of this "complete" recording. Three numbers are missing entirely: two dances and the entrance music for Stuyvesant and his army. Then there are cuts within songs: forty-eight bars from "There's Nowhere to Go But Up," the instrumental coda to "Hush, Hush," the minuet within "The Scars," and two bars here and two bars there in the orchestra playouts. There may have been a good reason to cut the dance numbers for the performance, but why the recording? They are a significant part of Weill's score and deserve to be heard. In this day and age, it would have been simple enough to make the cut material available online as mp3 downloads, so listeners could assemble the complete score in iTunes. There is so much right on this disc that it's wrong not to have it all.

Larry Moore
New York, N.Y.



Books

Kunst und Leben: Georg Kaiser

Edited by Sabine Wolf

Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2011, 206 pp.
ISBN: 978-3-88331-174-6

Georg Kaiser had all the characteristics that make celebrities so intriguing. He left school early and went to Argentina for three years; only a few years later he became one of the most frequently performed German dramatists of his time. In 1920 his inability to handle money resulted in six months' imprisonment, leaving his family without provision, but by 1926 he was a member of the prestigious Prussian Academy of Arts. He was married with children, but during his years in exile in Switzerland from 1938 onwards his family was secretly supported by one of his lovers. In his plays Kaiser vigorously promoted the importance of ethics and morality—while his private life remained colorful from beginning to end. Perhaps tellingly, Kaiser himself stated in 1930 during a radio interview that all one really needed to know about a man were his dates of birth and death.

Kunst und Leben: Georg Kaiser considers Kaiser's life and work, focusing mainly on his reception by leading critics of the time. The volume accompanied an exhibition mounted in April and May 2011 by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. (The Academy houses the Georg Kaiser archive, which includes manuscripts, photos, and letters, amounting in all to some 70,000 items.) The book contains 139 images, most of them beautifully reproduced in color, that not only give the reader a taste of the exhibition but complement and amplify the prose: production shots, figurines, manuscripts, portraits, newspaper clippings, even a menu from Kaiser's 50th-birthday dinner in November 1928 (preserved by the critic Herbert Ihering).

The text is divided into three parts. In the first, and by far the longest, Sabine Wolf gives a richly documented chronological account of his life, highlighting both Kaiser's personal development and his emergence as a prolific and remarkably popular Expressionist dramatist. He established his fame with the play *Die Bürger von Calais* (The Burghers of Calais, 1912–13), which dealt with the individual's readiness to sacrifice his own life for society. It premiered in 1917, and in light of the First World War it presents a poignant theme, even if the pacifist undercurrent was hardly acknowledged at that time. This "new man" who gives himself up for the greater good was the Expressionists' answer to what was perceived as a lack of individuality within modern society. The play *Gas* (1918) combines the themes of violence and the omnipresence of machines, while the earlier play *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (From Morn to Midnight, 1912) showcases the corrupting forces of capitalism and within this system the role of Everyman, who

is neither better nor worse than the rest. Kaiser had a feel for the issues of the day, though critics frequently proved less enthusiastic than audiences. His popularity all over Germany until 1933 demonstrates, however, that he touched a nerve.

Two brief articles follow this general overview. Heike Klapdor explains how Kaiser's drama *Gas* inspired—to a degree—Fritz Lang's science fiction film *Metropolis* (1927). The dramatist and the director shared a desire to depict the plight of the masses and the failings of those in power—including the engineers, whose machines cause catastrophes which in turn generate a new social awareness. At all times the corrupting force of capitalism looms large. What Kaiser put on stage, Lang transported to the screen. Their sense of a crisis of modern civilization fostered the urge to find solutions, even if these were at times radical or plain unrealistic. In light of this skepticism towards contemporary life, Frank Krause's analysis of Kaiser's decline in popularity forms a fitting conclusion. Krause proclaims the continuing potential of Kaiser's work, not least in his lesser-known plays. And he raises another still-relevant point: Kaiser's approach to the depiction of war remains of interest because he was concerned less with showing salvation than with the sheer destructive power of modern warfare.

For Kaiser, as for so many others, the year 1933 proved to be a personal and artistic turning point. His last play staged in Germany, *Der Silbersee: Ein Wintermärchen*, was written in collaboration with Kurt Weill; it opened just before the National Socialist assumption of power. The story begins with a group of desperate unemployed men robbing a grocery store. Their leader, Severin, steals a pineapple, which symbolizes social inequality, the opulence of the tropical fruit standing in stark contrast to the plight of the poor. The policeman who wounds Severin becomes his benefactor, once he understands the desire triggered by the pineapple. It is tempting to draw modern-day parallels: the impact of protest continues to make itself felt wherever unequal access to consumer goods echoes the grievances of Kaiser's post-World War One Everyman.

Kaiser's cure is utopian, and the solution, as the play's title clarifies, is bound by the particular logic of fairy tales; the possibilities open to individuals are limited by the structures of power. However, *Der Silbersee* is a revealing example if we take Frank Krause's suggestion a step further: Kaiser's plays may still appeal to an audience interested both in the historic dimension of Expressionist plays and in the relevance of his themes today. The frequent comparisons that are drawn between the late 1920s and the 21st century in terms of

economic instability and a general sense of crisis must renew interest in Kaiser's social criticism. That kind of translation from one period to the other may bring out the topicality of the past and an interest in what the critic Julius Bab labeled Kaiser's "games of ideas." Kaiser illustrates the mechanism of what have simplistically been termed "broken societies." In *Der Silbersee* this means that opportunists stay in power, but principled values remain a force to be reckoned with.

Finally, Kaiser is not larger than life. The contradictions that marked his personality do not necessarily endear him to audiences but make him all the more interesting for that.

Ulrike Zitzlsperger
Exeter University



Videos

Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny

Teatro Real, Madrid, 2010

Pablo Heras-Casado, conductor

Alex Ollé, Carlus Padrissa—La Fura dels Baus, directors

Andy Sommer, video director

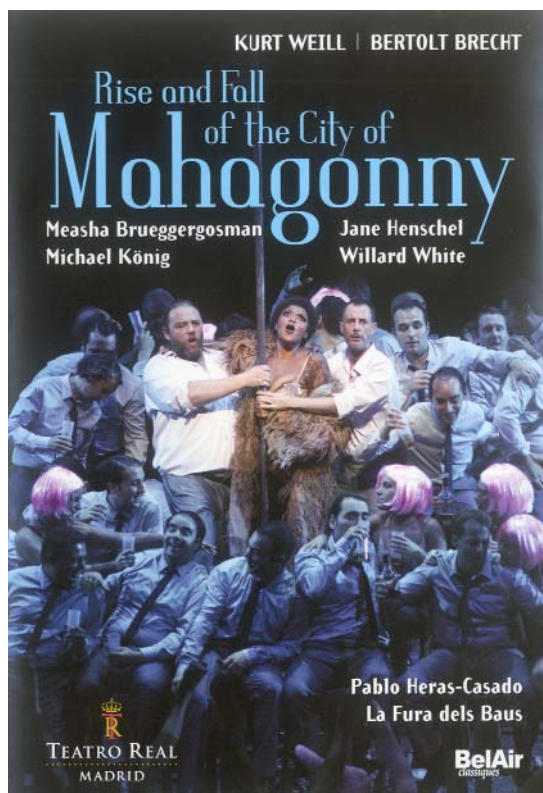
BelAir Classiques BAC067

Great works have to escape their creators, and the greater the work the more radical the escape. It is well known that Benjamin Britten and his circle violently disliked productions that strayed from the letter of the original stagings, and Wagner would scarcely recognize what is done to his operas nowadays, often with profit. And could Mozart and Da Ponte have foreseen the dark interpretations to which *Così fan tutte* would be subjected? Most productions of *Mahagonny* have stuck pretty closely to Brecht's scenario, but this Fura dels Baus staging from Madrid does not. The most significant aspect of it is that it brings the work firmly into the 21st century; no longer can it possibly be written off as a Weimar relic.

Just one instance from this contemporary-costume staging: amongst the girls of Mahagonny in the first act there is at least one boy. The "love" scene is almost too graphic for some tastes, staged inside the brothel rather than showing the queue outside (more effective to my mind), and nowhere is there any sense of ironic detachment or alienation; Brecht would not approve, though he might have enjoyed some of the graphic physical activity. The trial scene is staged as a circus, in an interesting but probably unintended anticipation of *Lady in the Dark* and *Love Life*. Jimmy is burned alive at the end, and the ensuing multiple processions are overwhelming—no expense spared in Madrid.

There is one especially provocative departure. The setting is basically a refuse dump. Trinity Moses and Fatty emerge from plastic sacks, Begbick from a discarded refrigerator. The hoisted Mahagonny

flag is a pair of frilly red panties. The first immigrants to Mahagonny are the poorest of the poor, but the four lumberjacks from Alaska enter in neat suits with collar and tie. Fake luxury is pasted over the rubbish in the first act—roll-up grass and a portable bar on wheels. But after the typhoon has passed, luxury is not restored: the rest of the opera is played amidst the refuse. Working out why is both time-consuming and, maybe, rewarding. Is the typhoon a metaphor for world war? Or for the banking crisis of three years ago, of which the world has taken as little notice as these inhabitants of Mahagonny? That crisis is with us still, alas. Hauptmann and Brecht's quip (from *Happy End*), "What is the crime of robbing a bank compared to that of founding one?" retains a certain resonance.



Students of *Konzepte* can have a fun time working this out, but if it represents an escape from Brecht, there is no escape here from the composer: the musical performance is absolutely first-rate. Heras-Casado adopts a muscular, full-blooded, sometimes violent approach to the score and the fine Teatro Real orchestra responds with a fat, impulsive sound. It is very different from the more detached, lyrical reading of Levine on the recently released

Met DVD, and just as valid. The chorus is excellent.

The cast could hardly be bettered. Jane Henschel has the forceful stage personality for Begbick and uses her warm mezzo to sing really lyrically when required, as when recalling her past love life. She is one of the most "well-rounded" Begbicks in my experience. Michael König's Jimmy, burly of figure and voice, makes a star turn of his third-act aria but, again, can sing softly and gently to entrancing effect. Willard White is a truly menacing Trinity Moses (his boxing match with Steven Humes's Joe is excitingly staged) and Donald Kaasch matches him in dramatic power as Fatty. In his double assignment as Jack and Toby Higgins—entirely different roles—John Easterlin proves a very resourceful actor. Is Measha Brueggergosman's Jenny a little too "operatic"? Her mezzo-colored soprano is certainly alluring, but she could make the words work harder for her. This production does not require her to deploy the essential innocence of the character—her near-pornographic taunting of Jimmy in "Wie man sich bettet" is the very opposite of innocent.

Some details about this determinedly multilingual release from a French company: the opera is sung to a Spanish audience in Michael Feingold's English translation (also used in the LA Opera DVD), which defies even operatic logic. Brecht's scene-titles are in Spanish, but given in English in the accompanying booklet. The "Crane Duet" is not included, which will worry few people, but there is an irritating cut of the second verse of Jimmy's first-act "Aber etwas fehlt" number—admittedly marked "optional" in the 1969 vocal score—which surely robs the scene of its dramatic weight, and certainly made me sit up in surprise.

Picture and sound quality easily meet today's highest standards. The Fura dels Baus production is as lavish as an opera set in a refuse dump can be, and Andy Sommer's video direction makes good use of close-ups—especially rewarding with this stellar cast. Here is a *Mahagonny* for today. I shall return to it often, and with pleasure.

Rodney Milnes
London

Performances

One Touch of Venus

Oper Leipzig

9 July 2011

Established in 1743 by private citizens, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra is considered Germany's oldest such orchestra, and it has long ranked among its best. In addition to a regular schedule of subscription concerts, the ensemble doubles as the house orchestra for Oper Leipzig—a unique arrangement, and a most fortunate one. To end the 2010/11 season, both institutions teamed up for a “Long Night on Broadway” that began with a concert performance of *One Touch of Venus* at the opera and ended with a symphony concert of works by George Gershwin and Leonard Bernstein in the Gewandhaus. The Leipzigers turned out in force, and both events were sold out.

For the orchestra, which is often associated with stellar interpretations of Mendelssohn (a reputation regained in the 1980s under Kurt Masur), *One Touch of Venus* was a first encounter with one of Weill's Broadway scores. Their rendition of the overture soon showed that the musicians enjoyed the unaccustomed task immensely, and it quickly became audible how intensely Stefan Klingele (until 2007 chief conductor of Bremen's opera and a much sought-after guest conductor at

major German opera houses since) had worked with both orchestra and singers. Weill's cleverly wrought fabric of strings and winds as well as the carefully designed changes of rhythm and tempo came out wonderfully, the softer passages especially revealing the orchestra's consummate musicianship, with “West Wind” marking a true high point. The singers, too, made no attempt to hide their joy in performing the music, which is not part of their regular diet. The performance corroborated a recent observation of singer-conductor HK Gruber: “There is a degree of boredom at opera houses. The standard repertoire often fails to inspire the highly polished singers, who are left out in the cold with their desire to try new things.”

The soloists deserve to be highlighted: British mezzo Claudia Huckle as Venus, Finnish-born tenor Dan Karlström as Rodney Hatch, and American Morgan Smith as Whitelaw Savory. Huckle, whose portrayal of Tatyana in the current production of *Eugene Onegin* had already made her the talk of the town, sang the Goddess of Love in a seductively beautiful red dress. Her great solo numbers (“I'm a Stranger Here Myself,” “Foolish Heart,” and “That's Him”) provided space for her remarkable voice to unfold, ranging from a subtle, lyrically longing *piano* to an impeccable *forte*—simply excellent! Equally convincing was Karlström's Rodney, whose duet with Venus, the famous “Speak Low,” garnered much-deserved applause. This reviewer's personal favorite, though, remains “West Wind,” beautifully rendered by Morgan Smith.

Two blunders, alas, marred the very enjoyable musical evening. First, the organizers advertised *One Touch of Venus* misleadingly as a “concert performance.” Usually that signifies a musical theater work performed complete in a concert hall without proper staging. Sometimes, when the work is dialogue-heavy, these sections are boiled down or replaced by brief connecting narratives that keep the audience informed about the action. But

none of that in Leipzig. The seventy-five minutes after the overture offered nothing more than a string of the most important musical numbers—no scene descriptions, dialogue, or explanations of any kind. (Oddly enough, the performance skipped a substantial ballet, “Forty Minutes for Lunch,” which many would have loved to hear in a performance by the Gewandhaus Orchestra.) As a result, the work as a whole, with all its intelligence and wit, fell by the wayside, and with it any of the songs' or ensemble pieces' dramatic connections (the synopsis took up a mere eight lines in the program). The numbers were sung in English with German supertitles, but even with visual aids the audience often had trouble following. Thus the composer Weill scored another success, with his masterly pieces lined up like a string of pearls, but the highly entertaining plot and the literary brilliance of his biggest Broadway success was lost on most of the audience, which was not familiar with the piece. Truly regrettable.

Blunder number two: Given the lack of spoken texts or explanatory notes, which already goes against the conventions of a “concert performance,” the Leipzigers added insult to injury when they made feeble efforts to stage some of the musical numbers (contrary to their own program notes). Using the vast stage, they built three platforms that became narrower as they ascended towards the back, all connected by a show staircase, and the performers appeared in clichéd costumes, with some sets hinted at. But it didn't stop there; they went so far as to introduce some choreography, ranging from a few rhythmic steps and movements by the main soloists to “disasters in dance” during some of the ensemble scenes. The result was old-fashioned at best, but mostly just embarrassing. No surprise, then, that the program did not list any “credits” in that department. The use of the Opera's Youth Chorus represented a low point: although their singing was agreeable, their movements were reminiscent of a gymnastics class in costumes.

And yet, even though the capacity audience was left clueless about the plot and the stage business, they visibly enjoyed Weill's music as well as the performance by both the Gewandhaus Orchestra and the singers. Applause followed every number, and at the end they cheered uproariously.

Jürgen Schebera
Berlin



Savory (Morgan Smith) and Venus (Claudia Huckle). Photo: Andreas Birkigt

Performances

Die sieben Todsünden

Central City Opera
Central City, Colo.

Premiere: 9 July 2011

If one is familiar with the complex origins, shaping forces, and revivals of *Die sieben Todsünden*, it will come as no surprise to fans of Central City Opera that the Colorado producers opted to emphasize the operatic over the terpsichorean character of this ballet chanté. A fine classical singer, Peabody Southwell, sang Weill's original (high voice) notes for Anna I without a trace of Lotte Lenya's distinctive cabaret style, but with sustaining richness and accurate pitch. The family quartet was smartly executed by tenors Norman Reinhardt and Philippe Pierce (who had sung Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* just an hour before), baritone Robert Gardner (a veteran of New York City Opera, Knoxville, and Aspen), and bass Andrew Harris, appropriately grotesque in his drag role as Mother but quite traditional (and competent) in vocal terms.

Anna II was danced by Sarah Tallman, a seven-year veteran of Ballet Nouveau Colorado. Her poised classical movements were fitted into the narrative of the piece, sometimes slightly hindered by the other five dancers who moved about, changed costumes on stage, and mimed a variety of non-singing roles, as lovers, fellow actors, animals, oppressors, and victims. No other trained dancers appeared on stage in any capacity, thus obviating any efforts to recreate Balanchine's original choreography. The two Annas, unlike the original actors of 1933, Lenya and Tilly Losch, bore no physical resemblance to each other, blunting Edward James's original idea that the Annas might artistically represent two aspects of the same person. (According to Brecht's libretto, they "share a single past, a single future, one heart, and one bank-book.")

But while dancers were in short supply in Central City, there was certainly no shortage of Brechtian alienation. His famous disdain for middle-class materialism and selfish behavior was fully realized in the grim tone of this production. The

curtain opened on the family members, dressed in drab costumes and aligned across the darkly lit stage in front of a surrealistically tilted facade, representing the beginning of their as yet unfunded house. More house panels are moved into place as the Annas earn and send home money, doggedly progressing through seven American cities.

One might imagine that the ravages of a recent hurricane or perhaps the traumas of those who survived it were implied by the twisted semi-representational "little house by the Mississippi in Louisiana." However, references to Hurricane Katrina or anything else in recent New Orleans history were precluded by director Ken Cazan, who explicitly named the scene as "post-WWII rural southern Louisiana," a move consistent with the temporal concept of the other two short operas that completed the triple bill (*Les Mamelles de Tirésias* and *Gianni Schicchi*), which were also set in the late 1940s.

As Anna I sings and Anna II dances the Prologue, one family member picks his nose. The relatives unceremoniously hustle the girls away from home, and they begin conning suckers out of their money, once aroused from their initial *sloth*. Then they hightail it to Memphis, the next big city with wider opportunities for profit. In scene two, Mother doubles as a buxom stripper who shows Anna how to please ogling male audiences with her gyrations and so avoid her sinful *pride* in dance as an art form. And so it goes. The final tableau, following the Annas' seven-year odyssey and return to Louisiana, features the family quartet as couch potatoes facing the audience, their eyes glued to a television monitor downstage right. The bench on which they sit is formed by the backs of the two Annas next to each other on their hands and knees. Message clear. Indeed, the family obviously embodies a group of morally and emotionally stunted individuals, poor white trash in the parlance of the 1940s, who see nothing wrong with cruelly exploiting the talents of their daughter(s) for their own creature comforts. Their sententious "prayers" to Mammon are delivered in immobile tableaux, as deadpan close-harmony chorales.

Costume designer Alice Marie Kugler Bristow and scenic and projections designer Cameron Ander-

son deserve kudos for their inventive use of space and material. CCO music director John Baril conducted the excellent orchestra confidently and competently. Weill's score is admired for its integration of instrumental colors, distinctive mixed-mode harmonies, and popular dance rhythms. Its recurring melodic motifs knit the nine scenes together thematically, while the solo soprano contrasted with the male vocal quartet lends another level of musical texture and color. It is easy to see that this work deserves the attention it has received in modern times. Central City's company did well by the music.

Despite a certain amount of visual confusion on stage, owing to the blocking and costume changes among the mimes, the overall performance was effective. The audience, having been provided with excellent German-language singing, accurate English supertitles, a brief synopsis of the story in their programs—one or two sentences devoted to each sin—and a fairly clear representation of the action, seemed to like it. At least they applauded enthusiastically at the close.

Thomas Riis
University of Colorado



Anna I (Peabody Southwell) embraces Anna II (Sarah Tallman). Photo: Mark Kiryluk

Performances

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

*Vlaamse Opera
Ghent and Antwerp*

Premiere: 21 September 2011

Flanders Opera, with its two theaters in Antwerp and Ghent, is now one of Europe's more enterprising smaller houses, and it was therefore not surprising that Intendant Aviel Cahn decided to entrust his new production of the Kurt Weill/Bertolt Brecht *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* to that *enfant terrible*, the Catalan Calixto Bieito. *Mahagonny* is, on the face of it, an obvious choice for "Bieito treatment," but one wonders whether Cahn can have been satisfied by the vulgar outcome—though the good burghers of Ghent, on this first night of the new season, seemed to be more than satisfied. Apparently they had been warned by the media what to expect, but even so their enthusiasm indicated that, assuming it was Bieito's aim to do so, his production had failed to shock or disgust—which is what Weill and Brecht intended, and achieved, when their opera was receiving its first per-

formances in early 1930s Germany. Perhaps it is now almost impossible to upset modern-day western audiences and, therefore, the thing to do with an opera such as *Mahagonny* is to serve it up as a salacious, downmarket show.

The evening gets off to a good start with the Widow Begbick, Fatty, and Trinity Moses lost in a thick fog as they try to restart their truck's useless engine before deciding to found their "city of nets" given over to easy living. The mist then clears to reveal a stage crammed with camper vans which occupy the full width, height, and half the depth of the stage, leaving a severely limited space which Bieito then fills for the rest of the performance with an excess of non-stop activity, not to speak of regular incursions into the auditorium by various cast members. Indeed so much is going on it becomes difficult to keep track of the main thread of the plot or to identify the whereabouts of the characters. As so often in his productions, Bieito is apparently obsessed by sexual activity, nudity (or suggestive near nudity) and, on this occasion in the brothel scene, by mass masturbation as the men await their turn—following which a group of them urinate on Joe's dead body after he has been killed by Trinity Moses in the boxing match. Worst of all, after the tender scene when Jim, condemned to death for his inability to pay his debts, bequeaths his Jenny to Bill, this last of the original four lumberjacks forces Jenny against the proscenium arch for an unpleasantly urgent five minutes of sex.

The problem with scenes of simulated sex is that they inevitably distract from other more significant aspects of any opera (or play) which aims at being something more than a titillating, sexy romp, and *Mahagonny* is certainly far more than that; its main thrust is, after all, to satirize the behavior of people who have embraced an unfettered, materialistic way of life where, it is implied, capitalism allows them to do as they want in accordance with the "du darfst" (anything goes) motto adopted by the Mahagonnians. Sex and its easy satisfaction would clearly be an important aspect of such a society but it is not the overwhelmingly only one, as Bieito's production so relentlessly suggests.

Amidst all this rampaging mayhem the chorus and orchestra, directed by Yannis Pouspourakis, make their rhythmic most of Weill's syncopated, jazz-influenced score—saxophones, accordion, banjo and bandoneon well to the fore—and the cast do their uninhibited best dramatically and vocally. The three city founders, Leandra Overmann's Begbick, Erin Caves's Fatty, and Claudio Otelli's Trinity Moses give good enough performances, though forced by the production to be playing less obvious roles than usual as masters of the city. John Daszak's firm-centered tenor and committed acting are ideal for the key role of Jim, and Noemi Nadelmann's strong soprano gives a splendid lead to her sextet of whores for the famous "Alabama Song." Amongst the smaller roles, William Berger's Bill stood out, his fine, tawny baritone a particular pleasure.

And so, yet again, a *Mahagonny* production fails to do justice to an opera which many critics now consider to be one of the most significant of the twentieth century. Admittedly, it is not easy to stage—how should it be cast, which version to choose (with or without the "Crane Duet," for example, which is omitted on this occasion), how to deal with Brecht's deliberately dispassionate scene introductions (here done partly by an announcer, who also takes part in the action, and partly by a girl who holds up mostly illegible notices before some of the scenes). Above all, how does a director get the balance right between Brecht's rather uninvolved libretto and Weill's more emotional score? Bieito's superficial production is certainly not the answer.

**John McCann
London**



Scene from Act II of the Vlaamse Opera production. Photo: Annemie Augustijns

Performances

Street Scene

*Semperoper
Dresden*

Premiere: 19 June 2011

One of Europe's most eminent opera houses, Dresden's Semperoper presented *Street Scene* for the first time on the same stage that premiered Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra*, and Weill's *Der Protagonist*. *Street Scene* was presented in German, translated by Stefan Troßbach, directed by Bettina Bruinier, and conducted by Jonathan Darlington. Like most German directors, Bruinier opted for a high-concept production with a distinctively contemporary feel. Despite some typically German idiosyncrasies, her *mise en scène* penetrated to the anguished heart of the piece while developing several ideas and tropes—such as the near-ineluctability of a tragic inheritance passed from one generation to the next—that are implicit in the opera. At the same time, Bruinier, along with her designer, Volker Thiele, underlined the contemporary relevance of the piece by creating a set composed of a 1980s-style apartment building with a large lobby and eight apartments above it. The exterior of each apartment was covered by venetian blinds that served as a screen, onto which were projected what looked like cells from the interchangeable blocks of anonymous, Soviet-era apartment houses one passes walking to the Semperoper through the rebuilt city of Dresden. They thus manage to re-historicize *Street Scene* by using the stifling, melting-pot tenements of Weill, Rice, and Hughes's 1947 New York to evoke the poor, working-class neighborhoods

of a new Germany struggling with an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Italy, Turkey, and other parts of the world.

Even as they point up similarities between 1940s New York and 1980s East Germany, Bruinier and Darlington focus on clarifying and heightening the emotional trajectory of the Maurrants' fatal triangle and the abortive love of Rose and Sam. By the end, five lives have been devastated, and all the while it is painfully clear that working-class tenement life rolls on, day after scorching day. With the great Semperoper orchestra at his command, Darlington drew a spirited, if not always perfectly idiomatic performance. But clearly he had coached the wind players to deliver, when required, a wailing, jazzy sound, and he managed Weill's frequent changes of tone and idiom with aplomb. For certainly one of the great challenges of *Street Scene* for both stage and music director is to find the unity in a score that deliberately juxtaposes a great range of musical vernaculars, from bebop to *verismo*. Indeed, one of the most daring aspects of Weill's "Broadway opera" is its self-conscious appropriation of both popular and operatic conventions, all the while developing themes and leitmotifs in a manner closer to Richard Wagner than Richard Rodgers. At first blush, Weill simply links motifs to characters, like Wagner, but his expansive musical dramaturgy elaborates and deepens their associations and meanings so that they encompass situations, desires, and finally, dreams that belong not to one character alone, or even

to a couple, but to the community. Darlington's architectonic sense exploited the rich underscoring and Weill's development of motifs to give *Street Scene* the dramatic coherence and urgency it requires.

German directors often have difficulty directing American musical theater not only because of a relative unfamiliarity with the style but also because they tend to see the tropes of American musicals in larger-than-life terms. It is as if in directing a Broadway musical, they want to make it stand in for and emblemize an entire national culture. This desire sometimes persuades them to make choices that strike an American eye as being almost parodistic. Bruinier's propensity for this kind of overstatement led her on several occasions to stage pantomimes or dance sequences that were fascinating and sometimes startlingly insightful but that tended to steal attention from the music and lyrics. The most inappropriate was her elaborately choreographed "Ice Cream Sextet," which featured what for many contemporary Germans remain the principal icons of the United States: the Statue of Liberty, Ronald McDonald, Santa Claus, an astronaut, a football and a baseball player, and a cowboy and Indian. The fantasy sequence struck this American spectator as being obvious and superficial, if amusing, but more important, as upstaging and merely recapitulating—without deepening—one of Weill's most original inspirations. More successful were the elaborations of the memories and hopes of Anna and Frank

Maurrant in each of their arias, which shed a distressingly harsh light on tenement dwellers' living conditions and mores. For each, Bruinier rolled the lobby out of the apartment building on a wagon and rolled in rooms inhabited by younger, identically-dressed doubles of Anna and Frank, moving among people with wolf-heads, whose costumes were nearly indistinguishable from the monochromatic, Op-Art wallpaper. These



Mrs. and Mr. Fiorentino (Roxana Incontrera and Aaron Pegram) in the "Ice Cream Sextet," with the Statue of Liberty in the background. Photos (2): Matthias Creutziger

hallucinatory sequences allowed Bruinier to illuminate and intensify the tragic history of generations of lonely, hungry people, trapped in identical lives and identical apartments, in which they have become so objectified that they are barely distinguishable from the wall-paper. But these scenes, too, tended to draw attention away from each singer's fine performance.

I dwell on these problematic episodes less to upbraid Bruinier for slighting the text than to point out how deeply—and theatrically—she has considered its meaning and historicity. Although Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* was almost twenty years old in 1947, Weill, Rice, and Hughes changed little of substance, finding, just three years before the publication of David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, that the play had acquired a new veracity in the age of post-war anomie. So, too, Bruinier has underlined the historical analogy between the postwar and post-Soviet eras in order to dramatize what is arguably *Street Scene*'s primary concern: the terrible and unalterable disparity between the social reality of the working class and their hopes and dreams. Bruinier and Darlington realized that Weill and his collaborators manipulate musical theater conventions to convey this concern, both capitalizing on and critiquing these conventions' traditional functions and meanings. Their staging of the faux-Rodgers and Hammerstein number, "Wrapped in a Ribbon and Tied in a Bow," was at once sweet, silly, and ironic, while "Wouldn't You Like to Be on Broadway?" was staged as a quasi-Busby Berkeley fantasy sequence, with rows of chorus girls sitting on a flight of black stairs, holding round signs with letters stamped on them and looking like a giant typewriter keyboard. When later flipped over, the letters spelled out Harry Easter's enticement: "B-R-O-A-D-W-A-Y S-T-A-R." "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed," meanwhile, was performed in English as a kind of citation of a popular American dance number. When Mae and Dick started to dance, they ripped off their clothes to reveal superhero costumes underneath (another somewhat puzzling nod to U.S. pop culture clichés). They were then joined by two similarly



The final tableau, with some venetian blinds serving as projection screens while others are opened to reveal children dressed as their parents.

dressed couples who, in the tradition of the *Oklahoma!* dream ballet, took over the strenuous, acrobatic dance.

Bruinier and Darlington's *Street Scene* emphasized the characters' memories and fantasies in order to elaborate the work's ambitious theatricality and to illustrate both the prospect and impossibility of escape. They succeeded in this project by putting together a first-rate design team and a fine ensemble of singing actors. As Anna and Frank Murrant, Sabine Brohm and Markus Marquardt (Semperoper company members) had the required vocal heft, and they looked and acted convincingly the parts of working-class people on the losing end of life and love. Marquardt skillfully played up Frank's violent demeanor without turning him into an out-and-out villain. But the real stars of the evening were the Chilean-born Carolina Ullrich as Rose and the American tenor, Simeon Esper, as Sam. Young and good-looking, with fine lyric voices, they made their mutual love palpable and turned "Remember That I Care" into a passionate declaration. The *fortissimo* dissonances of the opening never sounded more wrenching, while the yearning, lyrical duet (with its tender chromaticisms and echoes of Walt Whitman's elegy, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd") was heartbreaking in its intensity. Bruinier wisely chose to stage the scene simply, before the deserted black stairs

whose very vacancy signaled both the force and the hopelessness of their love. In the second act, Bruinier rejected melodrama in staging the murder and Frank's surrender, gave the Nursemaids' "Lullaby" its requisite sting, and underlined the terrible separation of Rose and Sam, the two characters with the best chance of not simply repeating the past. And the *mise en scène* intensified the tragedy by finding a scenic analogy for Weill's recapitulation of the work's opening: the venetian blinds parted to reveal the children in their apartments dressed as miniature versions of their parents.

In many respects, the Semperoper *Street Scene* illustrates German lyric theater at its best. Eschewing naturalism for a deeper, richer, more theatrical and dream-like idiom, it wrestles with *Street Scene*'s historicity while rediscovering its power and contemporaneity. It reminds one that opera in Germany is not, as it is in the United States, a museum piece, but a vital, relevant, critical art. Despite my quibbles, it represents a welcome reimagining of Weill's music theater in the land of his birth, which reveals his "Broadway opera" to be the masterpiece he always knew it to be.

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Performances

Lady in the Dark

Staatsoper Hannover

Premiere: 15 October 2011

Even before the show opens, the closed curtain depicts the play's subject matter. A large black-and-white portrait of a woman's head, one half positive, the other negative, represents the split personality of the evening's protagonist, Liza Elliott, who runs a fashion magazine as a tough boss but dreams of being the object of every man's desire. With the help of a psychoanalyst she discovers that dreams actually hold the key to her problem. Her renunciation of feminine qualities goes back to a childhood trauma, the moment when she first learned to see herself as plain and unattractive—an ugly duckling. Even though the psychological interpretation no longer appears as fresh as it did in the 1940s, topics such as “increase in anxiety attacks” or “lack of women in executive positions” made the news (again) very recently in Germany. Thus Liza appears to us as a true contemporary—except perhaps for the fact that she smokes.

Prior to Staatsoper Hannover's premiere production, only three German cities had made their stages available for *Lady in the Dark* (Kassel in 1951, Lübeck in 1976, and Freiburg in 1983). Such restraint probably comes out of a long “cherished” distrust of Weill's American works, which now has given way to a new curiosity that smacks of a treasure hunt. Hannover's staging may very well fuel this awakening interest. On the other hand it is by no means an easy task to stage this work, which defies categorization, because its structure—a straight play interrupted by three substantial, self-contained musical units—is anything but ordinary. And both Moss Hart's book and Weill's score combine elements of serious and entertaining theater. In a nutshell, *Lady in the Dark* does not deliver what audiences, at least in Germany, expect of a musical. Hence the piece might be better off in an opera house than in a venue presenting Broadway shows.

In any event, *Lady* is in good hands at Staatsoper Hannover, which pulled out all the stops. A number of roles were cast from the opera's roster of singers: Roland Wagenführer (Kendall Nesbitt), Christopher Tonkin (Randy Curtis), and Mareike Morr (Elinor Foster) sang dependably, acted vividly, and really seemed to enjoy their tasks. For the demanding part of Liza, the Opera engaged Winnie Böwe. This turned out to be a smart choice, as



Liza (Winnie Böwe) at the office, joined by her colleague Maggie Grant (Kerstin Thielemann).

Böwe is trained both as an actor and a singer, and she is familiar with Weill's music, having performed in *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Happy End* (audiences in Hannover can catch her again this season as Eliza Doolittle in the Staatsoper's production of *My Fair Lady*). The opera house's resources also include a chorus and a dance ensemble, which show to their fullest advantage. Melissa King's inspired choreography makes dance an integral part of the dream sequences, and the ensemble received a well-deserved extra round of applause at the end. The Niedersächsisches Staatssorchester acted as pit band; conducted by Mark Rohde, the opera's First *Kapellmeister*, it delivered a solid and energetic performance. The fact that the Staatsoper respected the show's original structure paid off: *Lady in the Dark* begins without an overture, but an entr'acte follows the intermission. The director cleverly launched into the second act even before the entr'acte ended, when the orchestra struck up the melody of “Saga of Jenny.”

So far, each of the three German-language productions has generated a new translation, and Hannover also decided to commission one. Roman Hinze's German rendering occasionally employs colloquial turns and phrases (such as “Blau ist heute angesagt”—blue is the color of the day), just as Ira



The Wedding Dream turns into a nightmare. Liza (Winnie Böwe) surrounded by the entourage. Photos (3): Jörg Landsberg

Gershwin, author of the lyrics, liked to do. But fortunately this new version eschews superficial updating or allusions to contemporary events. Exceptions to the rule are well-chosen; for instance, when Hinze turns the “soapbox,” which Liza requires as a pedestal to deliver “One Life to Live,” into a “microphone” that she wants to sing into. Matthias Davids, an experienced and skilled stage director of musicals, takes a similar approach. His staging of the action framing the dream sequences avoids chronological references—it could be set anywhere between 1941 and 2011. The colorful costumes designed by Judith Peter recall 1940s fashion, sometimes 1960s, but one could easily don Liza’s grey business suit and walk into a modern-day office. The choreography, too, stays vague in its mixture of historical styles. For example, the unaccompanied society dance, which forms the backdrop for the story of young Liza’s first brush with love, uses everything from jitterbug to twist. By keeping the time of the action vague, the staging averts the risk that the piece may appear dated.

The dream sequences are a director’s dream, of course. They offer a fantastic playground for all kinds of fantasies, and Davids uses this opportunity to the fullest in his playfully surreal, yet carefully conceived staging that creates a web of cross-references. The show’s challenges lie in the spoken scenes, where *longueurs* must be avoided (successfully so in Hannover with fast-paced action), and in the transitions moving from “reality” in and out of the dreams, which have to be somehow plausible as the spoken scenes shift to music. Heinz Hauser’s set design plays a crucial role here. A gigantic cover of the fictitious fashion magazine *Allure*, of which Liza is the editor, separates stage front from the back. Blurbs on the cover such as “How to get flawless skin today” appear in reversed lettering, which almost suggests that the story that we see onstage is actually run in the magazine. A large rectangle that has been cut into the cover’s center opens onto a contrivance of a tilted, transparent screen with a mirror placed behind. This “window” is used in any number of ways. At first, Liza lies down on a couch behind the see-through screen, and the audience can see her in the mirror. Paying homage to the Freudian original, a large rug with lush oriental patterns covers the couch. The smoke that has just risen from Liza’s cigarette gathers behind the screen and signals the beginning of the first dream. The couch, by the way, mutates toward the end, when Liza

begins to understand the cause of her condition, into an absurdly oversized piece of furniture, and her childhood traumas—represented by Liza as a child and by Ben Butler, the object of her teenage crush—emerge from beneath gigantic pillows.

Each of the dream sequences gets to have its own color. The Glamour Dream is all in blue (as called for in the script), and in this dream the “window” serves as the canvas for Liza’s emerging portrait that eventually becomes distorted as all eyes are turned to it. But the “window” also intensifies the dances as it doubles the dancers in the mirror, or as some dancers appear behind the screen as grotesque shadows in a silent film. Dressed in white gowns and suits, the graduating class of Mapleton High quite literally introduces ghosts of the past into the second sequence, the Wedding Dream. Clad in equally sumptuous white gowns, the wedding entourage sports long red gloves that exude an atmosphere of vague menace, which becomes manifest at the dream’s end, when the group corners Liza like a flock of vampires.

The Circus Dream’s frivolous black and red is perfect for the staging’s most spectacular idea: a gigantic Barbie doll posing as the Goddess of Justice, holding out her bra on a hanger in lieu of a scale. The panties that have fallen to her knees serve as a pulpit from which Daniel Drewes (as Russell Paxton/Ringmaster) leads the trial. He descends from the “pulpit” to deliver the evening’s showstopper, “Tschaikowsky,” which the corps de ballet accompanies with humorous gestures. The number receives an immediate encore (at possibly record-setting breakneck speed), only to be fol-



The Goddess of Justice looms over the trial scene. Bottom left: Charley (Fabian Gerhardt) and Liza. The Ringmaster (Daniel Drewes) presides over the trial at right.

lowed by Böwe’s energetic delivery of “Saga of Jenny,” which marks the next high point.

Lady in the Dark’s happy ending is a perfectly acceptable nod to the genre. True, it’s a bit odd that, of all the suitors, Liza picks her macho colleague Charley Johnson (played by Fabian Gerhardt), who is after her job as well. But the staging leaves vague exactly how they will share power in the future: both try to push each other gently out of the boss’s chair.

The audience in Hannover applauded long and enthusiastically and received another encore of “Tschaikowsky” in return.

**Gisela Maria Schubert
Hameln**

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