

Der Silbersee

Die sieben Todsünden

Swedish Chamber Orchestra
Düsseldorf

18 November 2014

This program brought together two “established outsiders,” Weill and Milhaud: composers who have made a place for themselves in the repertoire but don’t appear often in symphony concerts. The pairing introduced an anti-Romantic mood into a generally conservative concert series, and the result was unfortunately a lot of empty seats, with the first rows completely deserted while the back of the hall was more crowded—which at least corresponds to Weill’s sympathy for society’s underdogs. But the combination of these two composers was very fitting, because they both satirize very effectively the more “respectable” compositions usually heard at such concerts.

The list of established outsiders should also include HK Gruber, whose unabashed embrace of all sorts of popular styles always kept him a little outside the heart of the contemporary scene. He took the Swedish Chamber Orchestra—which has made its reputation with brisk recordings of 19th-century symphonies—and its Weill-Milhaud program on a short tour of smaller venues in Sweden and southern Germany but also to the Vienna Konzerthaus. The first half of the program, consisting of two pieces by Milhaud that framed excerpts from *Der Silbersee*, displayed the orchestra’s brilliance in maintaining rhythmic precision within an overall impression of controlled chaos (especially in the faster sections of *Le boeuf sur le toit*); but the slow first pages of *La création du monde* with their distinctly “dirty” jazz intonation received one of the “cleanest” performances ever (with a beautifully played saxophone part followed by a wonderfully wild solo on the double bass).

The inclusion of excerpts from *Der Silbersee* marks another attempt to establish this little-known work in the concert hall, and the audience responded with redoubled applause when Gruber lifted the score itself into the air after the musicians took their bows. It probably qualifies as one of Weill’s most underrated works—there are a lot of candidates—given its importance as a link to the musical language of his Broadway shows (Weill adopts

a smoother, less biting tone in *Der Silbersee* that prefigures important facets of his American work). Gruber used the work to frame the concert since two more items from it (the Foxtrot and the Finale) were given as encores; in the first part of the concert the orchestra offered only the Overture followed by “Ich bin eine arme Verwandte” and “Cäsars Tod” sung by Angelika Kirchschrager. The orchestra took the overture very fast with shameless vibrato in the trumpet solo. Kirchschrager, with her operatic training, interpreted the two songs in a mood that was both more realistic and more affected than most popular singers. She graciously left the vocals in the last selection from *Der Silbersee* (“Der Bäcker backt ums Morgenrot”) to Gruber himself, who showed great wit and virtuosity, conducting the orchestra and commenting on the song with the very same gestures.

The main event was the second half of the program: *Die sieben Todsünden*, a work that presents notorious problems of vocal and instrumental balance in the concert hall. The palpable connection between all participants and their shared enjoyment of the work’s psychological depth made this performance stand out. Kirchschrager clearly decided not to highlight the difference between the two Annas that may in fact be only one personality. She presented the character neither as a first-person narration (so that there is one Anna speaking in two voices) nor as a supposed dialogue between two women (two Annas speaking with one voice), but managed to find a third way that allowed both an objective tone and an impressive depth and volume of interpretive shading.

The celebrated *a cappella* ensemble Amarcord took on the male quartet and created a deliberate contrast with Kirchschrager’s approach by playing their respective family members as four quite distinct personas (despite the fact that they are used to working as an ensemble). In “Sloth,” the Family seemed to make its initial statements too obviously ironic, but the strategy paid off in the movement given entirely to the quartet (“Gluttony”), when it became clear that they were playing down the oppressive aspect of the Family in favor of sharing a joke with the audience. The orchestra seemed to follow a similar trajectory: the more frivolous musical textures were not always fully realized, while the dissonant and more tragic textures—especially in “Envy”—had enormous impact. In other words, the concert kept on getting better, and a fine concert it was, producing so many moments of pure joy, visible again and again on the faces of all of the performers—and the audience.

Julian Caskel
Cologne



Kirchschrager

PHOTO: NIKOLAUS KARLINSKY



Gruber

PHOTO: JON SUPER



Amarcord Ensemble

PHOTO: MARTIN JEHNICHEN

“Braver Soldat Johnny”

Kurt Weill Fest Dessau

27 February 2015

Why? We haven't had a single chance in Germany to hear a performance of Tim Carter's splendid critical edition of *Johnny Johnson* (KWE I/13), and already a new symphonic orchestration pops up. Never mind that the original chamber scoring, with its prominent use of a Hammond Organ, defines the sound of the piece. Adding insult to injury, the new version was to be given in German. Haven't translated lyrics already strangled dozens of Broadway musicals at birth over here? And why a “new version”? I rather liked Green's book. And the final blow: a concert performance. Weill's “musical theater” in the format of a Mahler evening? Why bother?

My feelings were mixed, then, as I headed to the opening concert of this year's Kurt Weill Fest Dessau—mixed but leaning negative. My fears quickly subsided on two fronts: Bernhard Bettermann, who adapted the text and portrayed Johnny, had translated only the dialogue and left the lyrics untouched. And the program listed Bettermann as director, so the concert version actually turned out to be semi-staged. Instead of formal wear we got a host of costumes that could be changed quickly, a few props, and intelligently deployed projections of black-and-white films that supported the action and helped identify the characters, who were portrayed by six actor-singers (three men, three women). Only “Song of the Guns” couldn't recreate the original staging—a pity; Weill was justly proud of having actual cannons appear to sing the number. Singing and acting were done on book, which was understandable considering there would be but one performance, although entrances occasionally suffered when performers engaged in dialogue had to look down again and find their place.

Still, Bettermann's overall acting approach was as irritating as some of his staging devices were refreshing. Whereas the German title, “Braver Soldat Johnny,” points directly to Weill and Green's model (Hašek's novel *The Good Soldier Schweik*), Bettermann's Johnny lacked all of Schweik's likeable, seemingly lunatic traits. He was a zealot, an intimidating angry young man who curses and appears pushy even when he tries to flatter. Johnny told much of his story in retrospect, as a voice from offstage—the most substantial change to Green's book. During those passages, Bettermann lapsed too often into an unseemly tone more suited to a self-aggrandizing detective from a 1940s film than honest reporting. When he recounted his laughing-gas attack on the Allied generals, which almost ends the war, he began, “And then I pulled off this daredevil stunt...” It made him sound like the Old Hard Guy (though a pacifist) from the lyrics of “Johnny's Song.” Overacting wormed its way into other roles, too, as when Juliane Elting declaimed “Aggie's Song” in agitated speech, oblivious to Weill's melody (she sang just fine in the ensemble numbers), or when Mimi Fiedler drowned the ending of Minny Belle's “Oh Heart of Love” in sobs and sniffles. More amusing was Manuel Klein's delivery of “The Sergeant's Chant” in a patter reminiscent



PHOTO: ANDREA VOLLMER

Bernhard Bettermann (front row, second from right) and the ensemble recite “Johnny's Song.”

of Gilbert and Sullivan's “Modern Major General.” Best equipped to meet the vocal and dramatic challenges were Carla Fellingner (especially her portrayal of the Goddess and her delivery of “Mon Ami, My Friend” with a French accent) and the extremely versatile Tim Bettermann, who embodied, among other roles, Captain Valentine, the English Sergeant, and Dr. Mahodan.

Other modifications of the script included some minor cuts, condensed passages, or slight text expansions; a larger cut removed Scenes iv–v of Act I (the displaced songs found suitable contexts elsewhere). The ending flopped: after “Johnny's Song,” the lyrics were reiterated, only this time spoken by the ensemble in German rather than sung—a bang followed by a dull thud which eviscerated the finale.

And the expanded orchestration? It actually sounded terrific. Gene Pritsker's score sticks close to Weill's original and avoids the temptation to overwhelm it with a disproportionately large string section, although a shift toward a more symphonic sound is unavoidable and surely intended. Pritsker beautifully solved the problem of replacing the piano, and especially the Hammond Organ, with a variety of clever ideas rather than predictably handing those passages to the woodwinds throughout. The music still sounds like Weill and does its job as a wide-ranging and colorful component of the dramatic design. Headed by Kristjan Järvi, the MDR Symphony Orchestra performed the score with real gusto and a fine feel for its sound. Even the “Dance of the Generals”—although much richer than the original's ballroom sound—veritably swung. And Pritsker really pulled out all the stops for “The Battle” and the (disturbingly) patriotic and infectious first reprise of “Democracy Advancing,” both of which sound “orchestral” even in the original. It's too bad this production relegated all of the instrumental interludes to underscoring.

Good news, then, for those who cannot come up with a Hammond Organ: a symphony orchestra and Pritsker's scoring will do. My feelings are still mixed about the whole affair, but now they are leaning positive.

Markus Frei-Hauenschild
Gießen

Triple-Sec (Blitzstein)

Modern Art Ensemble
Konzerthaus Berlin

14–17 March 2015

In March 2015, the Konzerthaus Berlin presented Festival Mythos Berlin, a celebration of the Roaring Twenties that filled all four of its performance spaces with a variety of musical entertainments, ranging from music of Alban Berg and Hanns Eisler to German- and American-style jazz bands. The highlights of the festival included a concert performance of Weill's *Der Silbersee*, superbly conducted by Iván Fischer, and the European premiere of Marc Blitzstein's 1928 "opera-farce" *Triple-Sec*, which was paired with George Gershwin's 1922 "vaudeville opera" *Blue Monday*, orchestrated by George Bassman. Although both the Blitzstein and Gershwin had been premiered in the U.S. as parts of Broadway revues, the Konzerthaus presented them cabaret-style in a large multi-purpose space, the Werner-Otto-Saal, that had been turned into a nightclub for the festival. The organizers attempted to make the festival an immersive event by costuming the ushers and staff in 1920s garb, serenading patrons, and ensuring a plentiful supply of intoxicating liquids. The opera double bill, co-produced with the Komische Oper Berlin, was performed by the eighteen-member Modern Art Ensemble conducted by Los Angeles-born Evan Christ. The operas were directed by Tobias Ribitzki, a directing assistant at the Komische Oper, and performed in English by a young, mostly German cast.

The production turned both operas into cabaret theater by erecting a small stage in front of a false proscenium, with a working bar next to it, and seating some of the soloists at tables among the audience. Both operas draw on American jazz and have plots about erotic triangles, but otherwise are very different. The Blitzstein, with a pun-filled, absurdist libretto by Ronald Jeans, is a kind of Dada opera peopled with upper-class characters whose music is fast, satirical, and astringent, with rapid stylistic changes. The Gershwin, in contrast, with a libretto by Buddy DeSylva, is an elusive hybrid of melodrama and burlesque set in a Harlem basement bar and is an early example of the composer's already sophisticated jazz-inflected style. Ribitzki staged the pieces back-to-back with the same cast, which meant effectively transporting them back to jazz-age Berlin, a strategy that worked well with Blitzstein but became problematic with Gershwin

because *Blue Monday's* dramatis personae are African-American (it was premiered, as was the fashion in 1920s Broadway revues, by white actors in blackface). The all-white German cast did not wear blackface but the characters' unmistakably black argot sat uneasily on their tongues. To their credit, they seemed quite comfortable with Blitzstein's angular vocal writing, and although the words were sometimes muffled or drowned out by the band, the satirical comedy of manners in which the protagonists keep unaccountably multiplying (as a result of the audience's increasing inebriation) was suitably bizarre and unnerving.

Staging the two pieces without pause is jarring because their dramatic and musical languages are so dissimilar. Moving from Blitzstein's dissonant *Zeitoper* to Gershwin's more consonant, bluesy style proved disorienting, and *Blue Monday* seemed at once more alluring musically and more peculiar because of the piece's ambiguous tone. Formally, the opera is a tragedy that ends with the hero's murder, but the finale is so excessively melodramatic that it is difficult to take seriously (there were titters in the audience during the final scene). Yet the music is vintage Gershwin and clearly looks forward to his through-composed music theater, especially *Porgy and Bess*.

Under Christ's assured musical direction, the Modern Art Ensemble played spiritedly and idiomatically. German musicians and singers do not always take the measure of Broadway or jazz-inspired concert scores, and performances sometimes end up being technically impressive but stylistically under- or overcooked. The Modern Art Ensemble, however, knows how to swing and made the most of the sardonic brittleness of Blitzstein and the sinuous bluesiness of Gershwin. The young singers, however, were more erratic, despite their obvious dedication, be-

cause most seemed not to have been trained to use the English language for dramatic ends (the text was often incomprehensible) and their gestures toward African-American dialect in *Blue Monday* were ham-fisted, if unapologetic. Because both scores had originally been performed on Broadway, the pieces would have benefited from the cleaner diction and more communicative style of well-trained Broadway singers. Despite the jarring contrast between the pieces, it was a pleasure to see and hear experimental operas from the 1920s performed with such gusto in a cabaret setting by a band that had the full measure of both scores. Both operas provide a foretaste of their composers' later major works and, as presented at the Konzerthaus, remind us of the lively transatlantic exchange between the world wars that produced some of the greatest music theater of the twentieth century.

David Savran
Berlin



Double vision: The protagonists multiply in Blitzstein's "Triple-Sec."

PHOTO: STEPHAN PRAMME

Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny

Royal Opera House
London

Premiere: 10 March 2015

This first night was anticipated with great interest, impatience even. Covent Garden was one of the few great opera houses—along with La Scala—that had never staged *Mahagonny*. But there is no escaping the fact that it was a great disappointment, with serious problems of musical direction, casting, and production.

One of the more positive aspects was the new translation commissioned from Jeremy Sams. In line with the production team's insistence in their interview in the Fall 2014 *Newsletter* that *Mahagonny* "is about now," Sams's new version was less literally faithful than previous translations, using today's syntax without betraying Brecht's original, which is essentially poetic rather than dramatic. It was punchy, direct, clear, confrontational; best of all, it never sounded like a translation.

Mark Wigglesworth is a distinguished musician, soon to become music director of English National Opera, for which he has conducted several works successfully. Not everyone would agree with his approach to this score, which apparently sought to establish Weill as a composer central to the "respectable" German musical scene of the 1930s. His overall pacing was very deliberate, and from a surprisingly slow "Alabama-Song" onwards he chose dangerously leisurely speeds for the songs. *Mahagonny* is as much about the power of melody as *Carmen*, but these melodies plodded, and never "sang." Ironically, the moments when the score sprang to life were those with the stage band led by the virtuoso pianist Robert Clark in the "Maiden's Prayer" episode and the brothel scene. Here, we were listening to Weill as he was, not the Weill the conductor wanted him to be.

Designer Es Devlin's concept was rightly launched with the traditional broken-down truck, which in the course of the evening gradually expanded into a stage-filling ship's container with multiple apertures. Its surface also served effectively as a screen for projections. Director John Fulljames earned his Weill stripes with a highly successful, tightly focused touring production of *Street Scene* back in 2008. In contrast, his staging of *Mahagonny* seemed debilitatingly diffuse. To the inter-scene announcements (splendidly spoken by the former Royal Shakespeare Company actor Paterson Joseph) he added his own projected comments of dubious relevance on such matters as climate change and the falling price of oil. Fulljames might have done better to concentrate on some *Personenregie*; Brecht's (and Weill's) characters are far more than the mere stereotypes that emerged here—especially

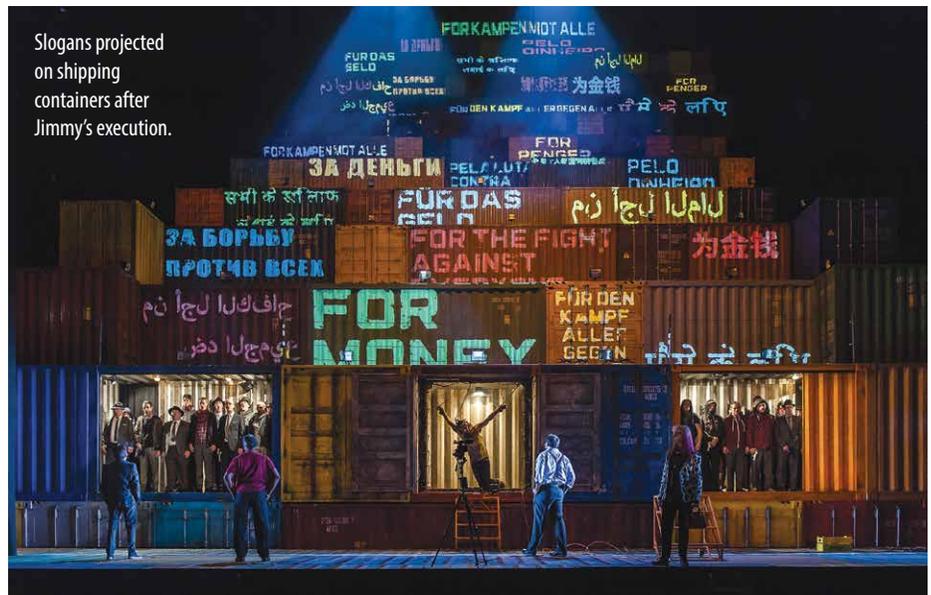


PHOTO: ROH. PHOTO BY CLIVE BARDA

in the case of Christine Rice's beautifully sung but dramatically bland Jenny. Who was this girl? Compare and contrast with Measha Brueggergosman's riveting performance for La Fura dels Baus in Madrid.

Sometimes the direction caused problems for the singers; in other cases the casting choices were at fault. Kurt Streit, a distinguished Mozartian in earlier days, sang Jimmy cleanly and clearly, but tradition demands a rather more robust tenor sound. Like Rice, he was not allowed to develop any sense of character. Darren Jeffery had the same problem. He sang strongly as Bank-Account Bill, but the character remained a blank, although he is almost the most interesting in the whole work. The same could be said of Peter Hoare, wasted as Fatty: in happier circumstances he's a most inventive performer. Anne Sofie von Otter as Begbick promised much—at least the role would be sung rather than shouted and snarled. But either she was unwell, or she has lost power in the lower register; she was forced to use a microphone in the Trial Scene to avoid inaudibility. Jeffrey Lloyd-Roberts was outstanding as Jack. His healthy tenor makes him a potential Jimmy.

Two inexplicable miscalculations struck me most forcefully. The *Freischütz*-parody quartet for the lumberjacks is one of opera's great entrance numbers. Here it was delivered upstage with the singers confined in one of the container's apertures rather than at the footlights—and it went for absolutely nothing. Second, there were no processions in the finale, as specified. Instead, each group was individually lit in one or another aperture, sacrificing any sense of a community on the threshold of dissolution.

The production elicited only scattered, occasional applause as it progressed, and the auditorium started to empty while the curtain calls were still going on. The response afterwards was even more depressing. Reviews in the UK press were unenthusiastic when not openly hostile. Many blamed the work itself as outdated and irrelevant in today's world—the absolute opposite of the production team's credo, "it's about now"—though surely one of the first requirements of a critic is to be able to distinguish between a work and its staging. In a word, this enterprise did the composer few, if any, favors.

Rodney Milnes
London

Behind the Lines

Anna Prohaska, soprano
Eric Schneider, piano

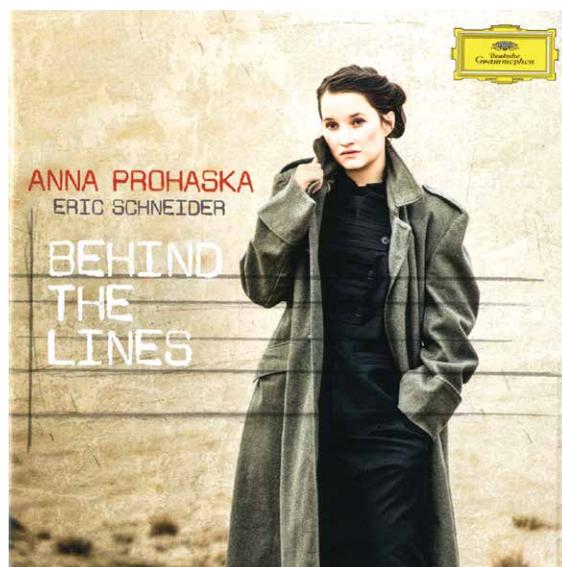
Deutsche Grammophon 479 2472

Anna Prohaska's *Behind the Lines*, a centennial tribute to World War I, details the joys and sorrows of soldiers and their loved ones in a variety of homecomings, including death. An imaginative and deeply committed artist, the young Anglo-Austrian soprano and the superb pianist Eric Schneider present men and women both as participants and observers in bold and original interpretations that juxtapose dissimilar languages and styles. A romantic song by Rachmaninov blends with a sorrowful 17th-century Scottish lament, while ironic snippets by Hanns Eisler come crashing into a hauntingly delicate Renaissance lute-song. Liszt's "Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher" details the mournful reflections of a female warrior, while Mahler's "Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen" dreamily alternates fantasy and reality in the words of a ghostly soldier returning to his love, in one of the disc's strongest interpretations. Two of Weill's *Four Walt Whitman Songs* conclude the often gut-wrenching journey.

With a sweet, clear voice Prohaska probes each song honestly. In "Die Trommel gerühret" ("Beat the Drum"), an excited young girl longs to follow her sweetheart into glorious battle, a vision of glamor and camaraderie belied by Beethoven's boisterous yet empty piano writing. Eisler's "Kriegslied eines Kindes" captures the same giddy excitement, and Prohaska gleefully shrieks, "My mother is going to be a soldier!"

Three songs by Charles Ives snap the listener from a romantic notion of battle directly into World War I with John McCrae's evocative poem beginning "In Flanders fields the poppies blow / between the crosses, row on row." Here, as throughout the recital, Prohaska shows great care with text along with thoughtful, unfussy responses to the meaning as well as the sensuality of words. Her Yankee accent is spot on, and she caresses or hammers the lines as needed, especially in the dreamy "Tom Sails Away." In the musical and textual blur of hymn tunes and marches, memories and loss, the distinctive outline of "Taps" distantly details the line, "today in freedom's cause Tom sailed away / for over there, over there!" From this site-specific song group, Roger Quilter's 1921 setting of Shakespeare's "Fear No More the Heat o' the Sun" emerges as a harmonically luscious counterpart to Ives's stark reality. In spite of its nihilistic text "Golden lads and girls all must, / as chimney sweepers, come to dust," the song's central placement in the recital brings special point and powerful consolation.

The tone of the recital makes a sharp about-face with Eisler's desolate, bitter "Panzerschlacht" ("Tank Battle") and "Die Heimkehr" ("Homecoming"), both on texts by Brecht. The wilderness of Michael Cavendish's 1598 "Wandering in this place" is reflected in the lonely warrior of Franz Schubert's "Kriegers Ahnung." Prohaska tackles this song, often the purview of gruff baritones, with a lean, sinewy sound that emphasizes the music's strange harmonies and the text's wistful memories. She links the final "Gute Nacht!," uttered to the soldier's remembered love, to the



opening of the next song, "Ellens Gesang I," with the comforting solace of its opening line, "Raste, Krieger! Krieg ist aus" (Rest, warrior! Your war is over). Once again Prohaska and Schneider's confidence is evidenced in a leisurely tempo that brings focus to the gentle consolation of the text, and positions the piano's galloping motives as shadowy dreams.

Kurt Weill responded to the United States' entry into World War II with settings of poems by Walt Whitman, putting his popular, Broadway sensibility into art-song clothing that is distinctive and effective. Rarely tackled by female vocalists, two of these songs conclude the program, in powerful and highly personal interpretations.

Whitman commands "Beat! Beat! Drums! / Blow! Bugles! Blow!" in a rousing refrain, like an officer shouting at his troops. No one escapes the martial call, as the force of these instruments affects scholars, bridegrooms, peaceful farmers, sleepers and lawyers alike, drowning out the sounds of prayer, as well as the voices of children and mothers. Ralph Vaughan Williams's 1936 choral response is forceful and ominous, while Weill's is fervently patriotic, at least on paper. Prohaska and Schneider take a bitter, ironic stance that highlights the bombast and harks back to their reading of Beethoven's seemingly simple "Die Trommel gerühret." Schneider hammers out Weill's open fifths relentlessly, while Prohaska spits out the commands like harsh, horrible warnings.

Weill's sensual, lazy take on "Dirge for Two Veterans" draws the listener into Whitman's world of glistening moonbeams, while bugles and drums—images and sounds that have permeated this recital—lead a procession to "a new-made double grave." Son and father, slain together in battle, are buried in a vivid, heart-breaking scene. The performers bring out the futility of the now painfully recollected rat-a-tats and trumpet blasts with reined-in rage, and they delicately limn the consolation, acceptance, and forgiveness of the final verse with deep feeling.

Judith Malafrente
Yale University

A shorter version of this review appeared in the December 2014 issue of Opera News; this expanded version appears here with the permission of its editors.

The Partnership: Brecht, Weill, Three Women, and Germany on the Brink

by Pamela Katz

New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2015. 470 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-385-53491-8

It's no surprise to learn that Pamela Katz is a successful screenwriter. She may not have total command of musical or literary history, and she may not, as her scatter-gun title suggests, be sure of her ultimate focus, but she sure as hell knows how to tell a story.

We are scarcely settled in our seat before we are swept along in a huge opening tracking shot following Weill from his flat to Schlichter's Restaurant, where he met Brecht for the first time. The camera, having panned around Weill's cramped flat and lingered on his "perfectly ironed" clothes, takes us outside, where "the light would momentarily blind him before he could focus on the Schloss Charlottenburg across the street" (3, 5). By now we are beyond conjecture and into docudrama. "His pace quickened with every step...He would have seen many of the...crippled soldiers still filling the sidewalks" (8). Even the weather is obliged to fit the scenario. It must be warm enough to melt the butter stored on the windowsill, but cold enough for his eyeglasses to fog up as he enters Schlichter's. He takes them off and replaces them, only then seeing a painting of Brecht and next to it, the man himself. It's Kurt and Bert, the movie—and it's the differences between the protagonists that come through loud and clear. This sort of thing: "Weill's large and Brecht's small deep-set eyes met in celebration of the spark between them. The contrast of the composer's properly ironed shirt and the poet's creased leather jacket..." (28).

But there lies the difficulty of this rather schematic approach. The telling of the tale requires us to dwell on the dialectic, but as in all creative alliances, it is where the partners agree that the art is made; where they disagree is merely what drives them apart. To be fair, Katz admits this one sentence later. "Surface appearances were nothing compared to the artistic alliance they so quickly forged" (28), but by then her carefully orchestrated meeting of opposites has lost some of its power. For there is no drama in their meeting; they are hardly Livingstone and Stanley. The only surprise is that as busy professionals in a vibrant artistic community they hadn't met sooner. The book really comes to life later, in the chapters devoted to *The Threepenny Opera*. Katz doesn't have to create any drama when narrating the creation of a drama—she

transforms the chaos and contumely of rehearsals into a hair-raising *tour de force*, horribly familiar to anyone who has spent long, uncertain nights in darkened theaters. Unforgettable details zing out at you. Half the writers in Berlin dropping in to give their two- (or three-) pennyworth. Mackie Messer shooting up in his

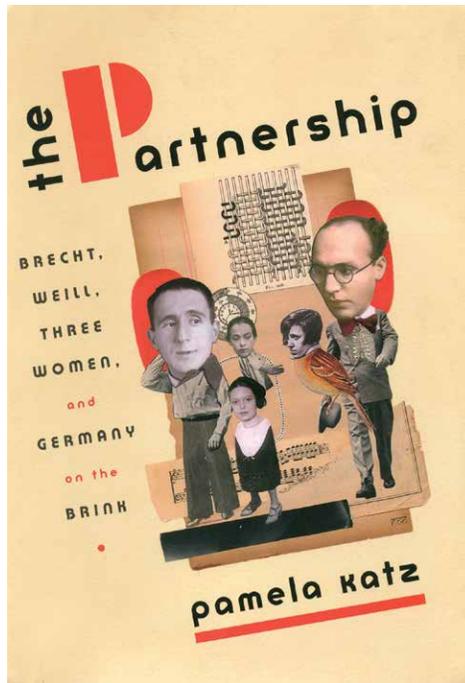
dressing room. Helene Weigel being dissuaded from careering around the stage as a crippled beggar. Beautifully told, and all the better for eschewing the "he must have felt" style of the opening chapter.

And the three women of the title? Katz emphasizes the unsentimental pragmatism they all shared, so it's a shame that her prose turns breathlessly romantic when they take the stage. Did Weigel really "listen for the squeak of the iron door" (68) on Brecht's return? And can't we do better than "madly in love" and "exploded with jealousy" (83)? These women's domestic and professional set-ups, after all, could hardly have been less clichéd. Elisabeth Hauptmann, for instance, says categorically, "Go to Brecht if you need to know how to write"—a lesson she learned at some cost, not just financial. This is not the book to unpack the tortured authorship issues made even more complicated by John Fuegi's assaults on Brecht, but Hauptmann's hand is all over the Weill collaborations, from the Eng-

lish-language poems of *Mahagonny* to much of *Threepenny*, *Happy End*, and the germ at least of *Jasager*. Katz hasn't much new to say about Lenya, though her deliciously acid turns of phrase are always welcome. The "bigamous" Brecht described as a family man "but with two Christmas trees" (85), or the very personal comments about Hauptmann's physique, still raise a wry smile.

Where then did Brecht and Weill truly converge? Katz correctly points out that a common enemy (capitalism, Nazism, Pabst) often bound them together, but that is more a political bond than a creative one. For me, her account of *Seven Deadly Sins* hits on the theme that underpins their collaboration, particularly their masterpiece, *Mahagonny*: a deep, dark strain of the melancholy of not truly belonging to any place, class, or institution, and the need to be somewhere else, even if that place is imaginary or merely a memory. It might be Mahagonny, Alaska, Louisiana, or a pirate ship waiting in the bay, but we feel its harmonic and poetic pull at the very heart of the art they made together. And that handshake, that spark, as Katz puts it, made magic.

Jeremy Sams
London



The Lenya Competition Comes of Age

As the Lotte Lenya Competition turned 18 this year, it was clear that it had left any adolescent growing pains behind and matured into adulthood with a strong identity and clear sense of purpose. At the 2015 Finals, held on 18 April in Kilbourn Hall of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, every finalist knew exactly what they needed to do to be competitive as they presented their four selections ranging from opera/opera-etta to contemporary musical theater, including a piece by Weill. Their consistently high level of talent, versatility, and preparation made for an extraordinary day of performances and a smashing evening concert. It also made it extremely difficult for the judges to choose just three top prize winners.

Three veteran judges, with a combined total of 17 times judging the Competition, made up the panel: three-time Tony Award nominee Rebecca Luker, British opera and musical theater conductor James Holmes, and Rodgers & Hammerstein President and American Theatre Wing Vice-Chairman Theodore S. Chapin. The initial pool of 225 contestants from 17 countries was narrowed to 28 semi-finalists; they auditioned on 13–14 March in New York City, where they were adjudicated and coached by Judith Blazer and Andy Einhorn. Fourteen proceeded to the finals.

The finalists presented their complete programs before the judges and a nearly full house during the daytime round. The traditional evening concert drew such a large crowd that the house manager had to open the doors early. By 7:30 pm the hall was more than half full; it was packed by the time the concert began at 8:00. Each finalist performed two selections, chosen by the judges, and they introduced their numbers from the stage. The concert was electric. Many locals who attend the Finals year after year thought it was the best one ever. At its conclusion, Foundation President and Competition founder Kim H. Kowalke announced the prizes.

After making an intense vocal and dramatic impression on the judges and audience in both the afternoon and evening rounds, Lauren Michelle, of Los Angeles, won the \$15,000 First Prize. She performed a powerful, wide-ranging program consisting of “My Own Morning”

from *Hallelujah, Baby*, “Denn wie mann sich bettet” from *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, “I’ll Be Here” from *Ordinary Days*, and a heartwrenching “My Man’s Gone Now” from *Porgy and Bess*. During the daytime round, the audience burst into cheers and extended applause after her deeply moving set, and when the hall fell silent again, a chorus of teary-eyed spectators were dabbing their eyes and blowing their noses.

When Lauren was announced as the First Prize winner, the crowd jumped to its feet and the standing ovation continued as the remaining finalists joined the winners on stage, in recognition of an extraordinary evening of exceptional performances from everyone. Lauren recently made her Carnegie Hall debut in *The Road of Promise* with previous prizewinners Justin Hopkins and Megan Marino, and is representing the United States in the 2015 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World contest. She will reprise her stunning performance of “My Man’s Gone Now” on 8 July when she makes her Ravinia Festival debut in a Chicago Symphony concert of *The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess* with Brian Stokes Mitchell and Nicole Cabell (Lys Symonette Award, 2002), conducted by Bobby McFerrin.

The judges awarded two Second Prizes of \$10,000 each to Robin Bailey, of London, U.K., and Jordan Davidson, of Philadelphia, N.Y., and two \$7,500 Third Prizes to Adam Fieldson, of Lincoln, Neb., and Michael Maliakel, of New York. They all impressed the judges with their exceptional singing, engaging performances, and well-designed programs. Bailey stood out for his vivid characterizations, intelligence, and riveting rendition of the Prologue from Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia*. Davidson led the audience on a journey from laughter to tears with a charming “She Loves Me” and a heartbreaking “Take Flight” from *Allison Under the Stars*. Fieldson dazzled with a seductive “Lotteriagents Tango” and a show-stopping “At the Fountain” from *Sweet Smell of Success*. Maliakel impressed with his grace and

subtlety in “When the Air Sings of Summer” and “Love Song” coupled with a hilarious version of “Deli” from the revue *newyorkers*.



The 2015 top prize and special award winners, clockwise from top: Lauren Michelle, Michael Maliakel, Briana Silvie Gantsweg, Florian Peters, Robin Bailey, Talya Lieberman, Jordan Davidson, and Adam Fieldson.

PHOTOS: MADINE PHOTOGRAPHY

The judges also presented three discretionary awards. Lys Symonette Awards for Outstanding Performance of an Individual Number (\$3,500 each) went to Talya Lieberman, of Queens, N.Y., for her brilliant “Non, monsieur mon mari,” from *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and to Florian Peters of Köln, Germany, for a fantastic “Bilbao Song” from *Happy End*. Briana Silvie Gantsweg, of Brooklyn, N.Y., won the inaugural \$3,500 Carolyn Weber Award for creative programming and sensitivity to text-music relationships. The Weber Award was established to honor longtime Foundation director Carolyn Weber on the occasion of her retirement in 2014. Weber joined the Foundation in 1998, the first year of the Lenya Competition, and played a crucial role in its development, nurturing young hopefuls and past winners and helping refine the unique focus of the contest.



First Prize winner Lauren Michelle (in white) with judges (l to r) James Holmes, Rebecca Luker, and Theodore S. Chapin.

PHOTO: MADINE PHOTOGRAPHY

The extraordinary level of talent prompted the Foundation—represented at the Finals by Kowalke and Chair of the Board Ed Harsh—to award a record amount of total cash and prizes. In addition to the five top prizes and three special awards, they decided on the spot to double the amount the remaining finalists would receive to \$2,000 each. Those awards went to: Anthony Heine- mann, of St. Louis, Mo.; Carter Lynch, of Bethesda, Md.; Katherine Riddle, of Annapolis, Md.; Jim Schubin, of Colorado Springs, Colo.; Annie Sherman, of Los Angeles; and Christine Cornish Smith, of New York. The Foundation

distributed a total of \$85,500 in prizes, an increase of 32% over last year. Since the inception of the competition, the Kurt Weill Foundation has awarded more than \$700,000 in prize money to outstanding young performers and continues to support previous winners with professional development grants.

Lenya Winners on Stage

Katie Travis (Lys Symonette Award, 2014) is starring as Christine in the National Tour of *The Phantom of the Opera*: “A delight throughout. Never does Travis overplay her character’s naivete and she hits her notes with an addictive soprano that floats in the perfect space between airiness and warmth” (*Buffalo News*); “You could have heard a pin drop during Katie Travis’ (Christine) beautiful presentation of ‘Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again’” (*Gaston Gazette*); “Her pure, powerful soprano gives you chills” (*News-Press*, Fort Myers, FL).



Katie Travis as Christine with Chris Mann as The Phantom.

PHOTO: MATTHEW MURPHY

portrayal. . . . Morgenstern sings magnificently” (DC Metro Theater Arts).

Lauren Worsham (2nd Prize, 2009) was Magnolia in *Show Boat* with the New York Philharmonic: “Lauren Worsham is excellent” (*New York Post*); “Her girlish pertness persuad[es] us that this naïve young woman would fall so hard so fast” (*New York Times*). She also reprised the role of Lisa in David T. Little’s *Dog Days* at Fort Worth Opera and LA Opera: “The star of the show is undeniably Lauren Worsham. Worsham herself embodies David Little’s marriage of opera and rock. . . . Her acting during the ‘Mirror, Mirror’ aria was by the far the most touching moment” (*Opera Pulse*).

Arlo Hill (2nd Prize, 2014) performed a weekly solo show of Frank Loesser songs at New York’s Metropolitan Room: “The charismatic theater singer Arlo Hill aimed for the bull’s-eye. . . . Mr. Hill showed that he could dance as well as sing as he glided across the stage in his version of ‘Once in Love With Amy’ . . . Balancing his charm was the sense that nothing escapes Mr. Hill’s notice” (*New York Times*).



Lauren Worsham as Lisa with John Kelly as Prince in *Dog Days*.

PHOTO: JAMES MATTHEW DANIEL

Jacob Keith Watson (2nd Prize, 2012) is playing Amos Hart in the National Tour of *Chicago*: “Taking a marginal character and endearing him to the audience. . . . requires bringing the character truly to life. Watson does this with sweet panache. His rendition of the overlooked, lovable loser’s anthem, ‘Mister Cellophane,’ becomes one of the best performances of the night” (*New Orleans Times-Picayune*).

Natalie Ballenger (3rd Prize, 2014) sang the role of Kitty on a recording of Victor Herbert’s *Orange Blossoms* (Albany Records) with the Light Opera of New York: “The admirably clear-voiced Natalie Ballenger exhibit[s] the essential appeal that every Herbert heroine possesses” (*Opera News*).

Doug Carpenter (1st Prize, 2013) is playing Billy Kosteki in the National Tour of *Dirty Dancing*: “A couple of terrific singers shine: Doug Carpenter . . . belts a gorgeous ‘In the Still of the Night’” (*Washington Post*); “[An] awe-inspiring powerhouse” (*PhillyNow*).

Ariela Morgenstern (2nd Prize, 2008) starred in *Next to Normal* at Baltimore Center Stage: “As the afflicted housewife Diana Goodman, Ariela Morgenstern is a formidable presence, commanding the stage confidently, taking the audience from the brightest hope to the deepest despair and then back again. It is a searing

Erik Liberman (2nd Prize, 2005) played Clopin in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at La Jolla Playhouse and Paper Mill Playhouse: “The central performers, including Erik Liberman as the wily Gypsy chieftain Clopin, leader of the more up-tempo gay-Parée numbers, have fine voices” (*New York Times*); “Delightfully lithe and energetic” (*Talkin’ Broadway*).

Analisa Leaming (2nd Prize, 2007) made her Broadway debut in the company of *On the Twentieth Century* with Kristin Chenoweth and Peter Gallagher.

Matthew Grills (1st Prize, 2012) will play Tobias in *Sweeney Todd* with San Francisco Opera in September 2015.

David Arnsperger (2nd Prize, 2010) will play the title role in *Sweeney Todd* with Welsh National Opera, conducted by James Holmes, in October-November 2015.

Foundation News

Stratas Receives Opera News Award

Soprano Teresa Stratas, whose lustrous singing career spanned forty years and most of the world's leading opera houses, received her due at the tenth annual *Opera News* Awards at the Plaza Hotel in April. The black-tie gala honored Stratas along with Piotr Beczala, Ferruccio Furlanetto, Sondra Radvanovsky, and Samuel Ramey. Joseph Volpe, longtime General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera, lauded Stratas as he presented her award: "Teresa Stratas was a unique performer in the history of the Met, and the world of opera. This is not nostalgia talking. Once she was onstage, she completely transformed herself in character. Teresa has always been a total stage animal, as knowledgeable in all aspects of the theater as she is in singing and acting."

Ms. Stratas sang Jenny in the Met's premiere production of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in 1979, at which time Lotte Lenya declared her the pre-eminent interpreter of Weill's music. She has proven it since through numerous performances and recordings; her disc, *The Unknown Kurt Weill* (Nonesuch), introduced a number of Weill songs that now are widely popular. Her association with the Foundation has been every bit as productive. An honorary member of the Board of Trustees, she was an early supporter of the Lotte Lenya Competition and served as a judge nine times, a record she shares with Ted Chapin (no other judge comes close). In April, Ms. Stratas donated to the Foundation both a portrait of Lenya painted by Russell Detwiler and a framed photo and autograph of Weill given to her in 1979 by the director of *Aufstieg*, John Dexter. Both pieces now hang proudly in the Foundation's conference room.

Weill Tribute at the Obies

The sixtieth presentation of the Obie Awards for Off-Broadway theater on 18 May 2015 honored Weill and *The Threepenny Opera*, which won the very first Obie for Best Musical in 1956, the year after it re-opened at the Theater de Lys (now the Lucille Lortel Theatre) in Greenwich Village. The revolutionary production of *Threepenny* gave an entrée both to Weill/Brecht and Off-Broadway theater as cultural forces in the U.S. Marc Blitzstein's successful translation proved for the first time that American audiences were capable of embracing Weill and Brecht's work. *Threepenny* was one of the first smash hits Off-Broadway, which offered an adventurous alternative to more mainstream (and expensive) fare uptown. It attracted enormous press attention, much of it reverent, and set a record at the time with a run of 2,611 consecutive performances from 20 September 1955 until 17 December 1961.

During the awards ceremony, Mary Beth Peil (who played Mrs. Peachum in the Atlantic Theater production last season) delivered a tribute to Weill and *Threepenny*, and Michael Cerveris (who played Weill in *LoveMusik* on Broadway in 2007) treated the audience to a rendition of "Mack the Knife."

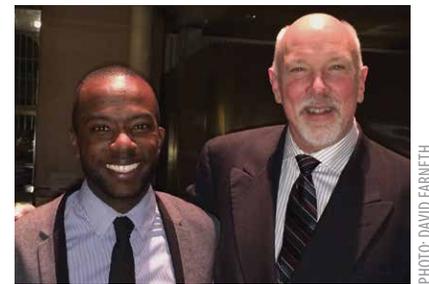


Teresa Stratas at the 2015 *Opera News* Awards, viewing a 1978 cover photo of herself in *The Bartered Bride*.

Kurt Weill Fellowships - Round 2

Two years ago the Foundation inaugurated a new program, the Kurt Weill Fellowship, in collaboration with the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation. The Fellowship offers opportunities to early-career directors and choreographers to observe or assist a master director or choreographer on a production of a work by Weill or Marc Blitzstein. Two aspiring directors observed important U.S. productions of *The Threepenny Opera* in 2014 (see the Spring 2014 *Newsletter*). This year, SDCF arranged for actor-director Shaun Patrick Tubbs to travel to London, which marked the first time SDCF

has ever sent an observer abroad. He was involved in preparations for the Royal Opera House production of *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, directed by John Fulljames (see review on p. 17). Tubbs reports, "I was given so much insight into the intelligence and fearlessness of Weill to create work that pushes to the very core of societal conventions and values. This opportunity also allowed me to see how Weill directly influenced the American musical stage with his use of American music styles and typically dramatic stage conventions to move the story along... I feel confident that I can further explore the vast world of opera and the work of Kurt Weill in a way that will both give respect to a piece's original intent and yet still breathe fresh ideas and connections into it."



Shaun Patrick Tubbs with Foundation President Kim H. Kowalke at the opening of *Mahagonny*.

Kurt Weill/Lotte Lenya Glimmerglass Young Artists



The Kurt Weill Foundation and the Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, NY, launched an exciting collaboration last summer: The Foundation provides an annual sponsorship for the Kurt Weill/Lotte Lenya Glimmerglass Young Artist, granted to a talented singer who has previously reached the finals of the Lotte Lenya Competition. We're pleased to announce that Maren Weinberger (2nd Prize, 2013, pictured) will receive this summer's sponsorship; she will perform in *Candide* (Ensemble) and cover Papagena in *The Magic Flute*. Ben Edquist (1st Prize, 2014), last summer's recipient (he played Jigger Craigin in *Carousel*), returns to Glimmerglass's Young Artist Program in 2015 as Papageno, also in *The Magic Flute*.

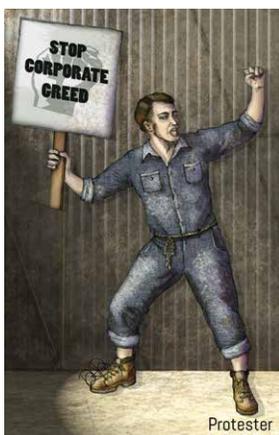
An Experiment in Salzburg

This summer's Salzburg Festival will be the site of a musical and theatrical experiment. The publishers and rights holders of *The Threepenny Opera* have agreed to permit a new orchestration of the Weill-Brecht masterpiece by Tony, Grammy, and Olivier Award-winner Martin Lowe (*Once, Jedermann*); dialogue and lyrics will remain the same. To avoid confusion, the work will be presented under a new title, "Mack the Knife—A Salzburg Threepenny Opera." The rescored version has been authorized for performance only in Salzburg; Weill's original orchestrations remain available for licensing.

Festival director Sven-Eric Bechtolf remarked, "By adapting the immortal melodies of this wonderful composer afresh, we will attempt to transport the sonic environment of his remarkable score from the dance band idioms of the Twenties of the last century to the sonorities of the second decade of our own." Bechtolf will co-direct the fully staged production with set designer Julian Crouch; eight performances are scheduled at the Felsenreitschule between 11 and 27 August. In order to convey the full range of Weill's epoch-making achievement, the Festival will also host a concert performance of the original version of the score by the Ensemble Modern, led by today's foremost Weill conductor, composer and chansonnier HK Gruber. Opera star Angela Denoke's recital, "Life in the Cities: Kurt Weill and His Time," rounds out the Weill festivities on 22 August.

The Cradle Will Rock Featured in Opera America's Director-Designer Showcase

The winner of Opera America's 2015 Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Showcase is in. Last fall, forty teams submitted production concepts for selected American operas that included visions for staging, scenery, props, costumes, and required personnel. A four-member team headed by director Alison Moritz was named one of four finalists. After the finalists presented their work to an audience of producers on 7 May in Washington, D.C., Moritz's team (known as the "Libertine Committee") was declared the winner for their theoretical staging of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*. Moritz insisted on treating *Cradle* as a contemporary work, "not a footnote in the history of 20th-century theater or dated agitprop." Fully worked out set, costume, and lighting designs complement the director's vision: "We propose a staging using modern, functional, and unpretentious tools to emphati-



Costume design renderings by Dina Perez for a protester and Mr. Mister in *The Cradle Will Rock*.

cally and forcefully cut through artifice and tradition in order to ask big questions."

The Showcase gives aspiring directors and designers an opportunity to work out a complete staging concept under the tutelage of an experienced mentor, with the goal of connecting successful teams with producers. In 2013, director Walker Lewis led the winning team with a proposed staging of Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*; Lewis has gone on to direct *The Threepenny Opera* at Amarillo Opera in Texas. We welcome the Libertine Committee's interest in Blitzstein's best-known work. After a successful concert performance of *Cradle* at *Encores! Off-Center* in 2013, the time is ripe for a full staging.

2015 Grant Recipients

Sponsorships

American Theatre Wing, New York, NY. Support for a segment of the 2015 Obie Awards highlighting Weill's contributions to Off-Broadway and Broadway and showcasing *The Threepenny Opera*.

The Collegiate Chorale, New York, NY. *The Road of Promise* U.S. premiere performances and recording.

Glimmerglass Festival, Cooperstown, NY. Kurt Weill/Lotte Lenya Young Artist.

National Music Theater Conference, Eugene O'Neill Theater Center,

Waterford, CT. Support for the participation of three composer/librettist teams and orchestration mentors in the 2015 conference.

Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation, New York, NY. For two Kurt Weill Fellowships for early-career directors to observe rehearsals for *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* at Royal Opera House, UK (John Fulljames, dir.) and *Lost in the Stars* at Washington National Opera, DC (Tazewell Thompson, dir.).

Washington National Opera, Washington, DC. For a Julius Rudel Conducting Fellowship, enabling a young conductor to observe and assist a maestro in preparation and performance of a work by Weill or Blitzstein. The inaugural fellow will observe on *Lost in the Stars* (John DeMain, cond.).

Professional Performance

Kurt Weill Fest, Dessau, Germany. *Mahagonny Songspiel* and *Royal Palace*.

Lyric Stage, Irving, TX. *Lady in the Dark*.

Royal Opera House, London, UK. *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*.

The Continuum Ensemble, London, UK. *Mahagonny Songspiel*, *Das Berliner Requiem*, Violin Concerto, op. 12.

The John F. Kennedy Center/Washington National Opera, Washington, DC. *Lost in the Stars*.

College and University Performance

American Youth Symphony, Los Angeles, CA. Symphony No. 1.

College of Wooster/The Ohio Light Opera, Wooster, OH. *One Touch of Venus*.

Edward Said National Conservatory of Music/Palestinian Youth Orchestra, East Jerusalem. Symphony No. 2.

Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA. *Street Scene*.

Roosevelt University/Chicago College of Performing Arts, Chicago, IL. *Mahagonny Songspiel*.

University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI. *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*.

Travel and Research

Christopher Lynch, Ellettsville, IN. Research on operatic production techniques in the 1930s and 1940s and the influence of Broadway operas such as *Street Scene* on the Metropolitan Opera's Mozart Revival.

Marida Rizzuti, Turin, Italy. Research on the film music of Weill, Blitzstein, Stefan Wolpe, and Hanns Eisler.

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