

Kurt Weill Newsletter

VOLUME 33

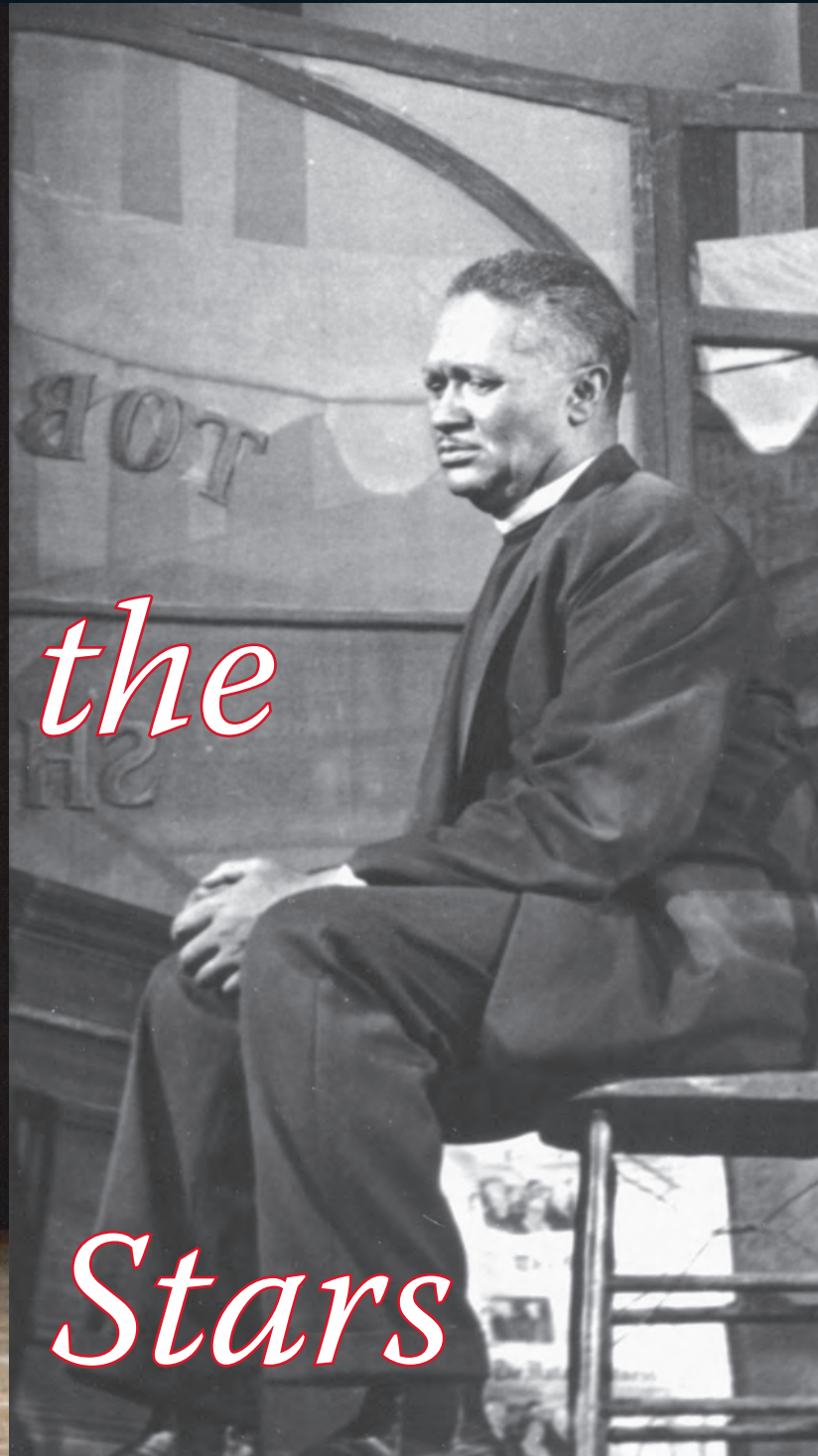
NUMBER 2

FALL 2015

Lost

in the

Stars



FEATURES

Lost in the Stars Goes to Washington

Dueling *Dreigroschen*-performances at the Salzburg Festival

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Cover photos: Left: Eric Owens as Stephen Kumalo, *Glimmerglass*, 2012. Photo: William Brown
Right: Todd Duncan as Stephen Kumalo, *Broadway*, 1949. Photo: George Karger

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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 (newsletter@kwf.org).

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UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

LoveMusik

Bluegrass Opera, Lexington, KY
13–15, 19–22 November

L'opéra de quat' sous

Opéra Éclaté
Olivier Desbordes and Éric Perez, directors; Manuel Peskine, conductor
Touring production in France, opening 28 November in Clermont-Ferrand, with performances in seven cities through 18 May

Die Dreigroschenoper

Theater an der Wien, Vienna
Keith Warner, director; Johannes Kalitzke, conductor
Principal cast: Tobias Moretti (Macheath), Florian Boesch (Mr. Peachum), Angelika Kirchschrager (Mrs. Peachum), Anne Sofie von Otter (Jenny)
13–30 January

Kolmen Pennin Ooppera (The Threepenny Opera)

Lappeenranta Kaupunginteatteri, Lappeenranta, Finland
Timo Sokura, director; Jani Pola, conductor
In repertory from 15 January through 30 April

Street Scene

Theater Pforzheim
Thomas Münstermann, director; Markus Huber, conductor
In repertory from 23 January through 10 June

Lost in the Stars

Washington National Opera, Kennedy Center
Tazewell Thompson, director; John DeMain, conductor
12–20 February

Der Zar lässt sich photographieren

Kurt Weill Fest Dessau
Doris Sophia Heinrichsen, director; Daniel Carlberg, conductor
28 February, 5 March

Symphony No. 2

Philadelphia Orchestra
Yannick Nézet-Séguin, conductor
8–10 April

L'opera da tre soldi

Piccolo Teatro, Milan
Damiano Michieletto, director; Giuseppe Grazioli, conductor
In repertory from 19 April through 11 June

The Seven Deadly Sins

National Symphony Orchestra, Washington, DC
Storm Large, Anna I; James Gaffigan, conductor
28–30 April

To learn about the many other Weill performances coming up around the world, view the performance calendar at

www.kwf.org

EDITOR'S NOTE

The *Newsletter* this fall looks forward and backward, Janus-like. Backward to last summer's Salzburg Festival, where Weill's music was heard repeatedly, though not always as he heard it himself. We hear from arranger Martin Lowe, who re-orchestrated the score of *Die Dreigroschenoper* for a production at Salzburg, and from HK Gruber, who conducted a concert performance of the original score. And we also look ahead to the return of *Lost in the Stars* in February 2016, as director Tazewell Thompson's landmark production, last seen at the Glimmerglass Festival in 2012, takes the stage at Washington National Opera. Several members of the cast and creative team kindly granted us interviews, which we present in distilled form. We are also fortunate to have Thompson's heartfelt meditation on the importance of *Lost in the Stars* today.

With co-editor Kate Chisholm's departure last spring, I have acted as editor for this issue. The show must go on even as we continue to work out staff responsibilities for producing the *Newsletter*. The work has been fascinating and rewarding, and I hope the results will be, too. I wish to thank everyone on the staff for their assistance in ways great and small: Elizabeth Blaufox, Veronica Chaffin, Elmar Juchem, Kim Kowalke, Harvey Rosenstein, and Brady Sansone. Most of all, I must acknowledge Natasha Nelson, who has provided invaluable help at every stage of the production of the current issue.

Dave Stein

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

At the Second International Brecht Congress of April 1971, I called for a study of the various translations of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, which I believed would demonstrate the superiority of Blitzstein's. The Spring 2014 *Newsletter* has, at last, done just that, or at least given the reader a sampling of highlights to compare. It's important to note that Blitzstein translated "Seeräuberjenny" specifically for Lenya, keeping in mind the way she broke up the line, "Und das Schiff mit acht Segeln," into two parts. His "And the ship, the black freighter" not only preserves that caesura, but reproduces the scansion and even the main vowels of the original. No other translation does either, though Eric Bentley tried with "And the ship, a white schooner," which pales by comparison (if you'll pardon the pun). The literal "ship with eight sails," seen in Vesey and Manheim-Willett, awkwardly forces the last word to be mispronounced "say-uls." Feingold and Sams don't even try for the caesura, thereby diminishing the drama of the line.

In the accompanying chronology, the Jan. 1941 premiere of Blitzstein's *No for an Answer* is mentioned, noting that the opera failed "to take off." Unmentioned is the reason for that: The play's anti-war subtext caused the composer to withdraw the work when Germany invaded Russia in June of that year. There have been at least two important attempts at a revival: Circle in the Square in 1960, the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco in 2001. A definitive New York production is eagerly awaited.

Leonard J. Lehrman
Valley Stream, NY

February 12, 2016, Abraham Lincoln's Birthday, will bring an opera about another sort of emancipation to Washington, D.C., when Washington National Opera revives Tazewell Thompson's landmark production of Weill and Maxwell Anderson's *Lost in the Stars* at the Kennedy Center. Thompson first took up *Lost in the Stars* at Cape Town Opera in 2011 with a South African cast. This production, with a new cast, moved to Glimmerglass Opera in July 2012, where the staging took performers, audiences, and critics by storm. Washington audiences will see many of the same participants pick up where they left off in 2012. Producer Francesca Zambello; conductor John DeMain; actors Eric Owens, Wynn Harmon, and Sean Panikkar; and designer Michael Mitchell will all return, in addition to Thompson himself. We present interviews with all of them in this issue, along with newcomers Lauren Michelle (First Prize, Lotte Lenya Competition, 2015) and Manu Kumasi, who will play Irina and Absalom, respectively. In addition to answering our questions, Thompson has contributed a meditation on the meaning and relevance of *Lost in the Stars* today, and that is where we begin, followed by a gallery of voices and perspectives on *Lost in the Stars* that will illuminate this "musical tragedy" and whet our appetites for the WNO revival. The very latest as we go to press: The Guggenheim Museum's "Works & Process" series will host a presentation by Tazewell Thompson discussing the production, with performances by Lauren Michelle and other cast members, on 31 January 2016 in New York.

The Pathways of the Heart

by Tazewell Thompson

*"Not miles, or walls, or length of days,
Nor the cold doubt of midnight can hold us apart,
For swifter than wings of the morning
The pathways of the heart!
Over tens of thousands of miles."*

(from "Thousands of Miles," sung by Stephen Kumalo in Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's *Lost in the Stars*)

Lost in the Stars and *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the powerful novel on which it is based, have always touched me in deeply personal and meaningful ways. As I revisit these masterworks today, I find myself captivated by their prophetic voice and compassionate heart, even as I am saddened by the timelessness and relevance of their story.

I am an American of African descent. These works transport me back home to the land of my ancestors, connecting me to a people and a culture that is truly my inheritance and to a struggle I am all too familiar with here in the United States.

I first encountered the novel and the hybrid opera/musical in high school at the height of the tumultuous Civil Rights movement. Both my schoolroom and the world outside were filled with rage and outrage. Day after day, in every possible medium, I was confronted with accounts of beatings and horrific attacks from fire hoses and dogs; the bombing of a Black church leaving four young Black girls dead and twenty-two other students wounded; and the unjustified incarceration of my people. I saw, and felt, the humiliation of children denied the schools of their choice; I saw assassinations of ordinary and extraordinary martyrs of the Freedom Movement. As I witnessed contemporary events at home in the United States, I had no choice but to identify intimately with the injustices suffered by my brothers and sisters under the evil apartheid system on the other side of the world in South Africa.

On the one hand, since that time fifty years ago, there have been terrific advancements that ring happily in the heart and

deeply stir the soul: the Voting Rights Act; Women's Liberation; the LGBT revolution; the freeing of Nelson Mandela and the dissolution of apartheid; and the election of the first Black President of the United States.

On the other hand, today's multi-media headlines continue to attest that my country's legacy of racism, inequality, and injustice is all too alive and blatantly so: the mass incarceration of one million Black men and boys by an unjust criminal justice system; police shootings of unarmed Black people (mostly men); wholesale stop and search police tactics targeting Blacks amounting to racial profiling; the Supreme Court's gutting of the Voting Rights Act resulting in voter suppression that disproportionately strikes people of color; Black unemployment consistently double that of White, whether the economy is robust or sluggish; and neighborhoods in cities across the country where racial segregation in housing and schools is the rule, not the exception. In the United States today, racial polarization is as disheartening as it is monumentally universal. Blacks and Whites, viewing their country through the same telescope today, see a political, social, and economic landscape that is, well, black and white.

All the more reason, I believe, for all of us to return to *Lost in the Stars* and come to grips with a human story of hard-won reconciliation, compassion, understanding of the "other," forgiveness, and moral transformation. A story of different races and cultures painfully and awkwardly, yet willingly and hopefully, learning to live together.

It is a multi-dimensional, sensitively layered exploration of the social and political injustices of the apartheid system, the vicious cycle of crime and distrust of the "other" that this engenders, the loss of family ritual and tribal customs, and the corruption of the land. At its core is the mirror it holds up to the struggles of the deeply religious character Stephen Kumalo, whose faith in God, the very foundation of his life, is profoundly challenged. As he searches for his lost son, the injustice of the apartheid system strips away the very fabric of his heart and soul: his religion. He believes that God has forgotten him and that he is alone on the planet—lost out here in the stars.

For me, the heart and spine of this masterwork lie in the struggle of fathers and sons to recognize and know each other in a changing world, and for the fathers to really see how they will live in that world and deeply understand the South Africa of their sons. It is also, perhaps, a cautionary tale for each of us, so we may find a way to see each other for what we really are, maybe even learn to love those vastly different from us.

Francesca Zambello

Producer Francesca Zambello is Artistic and General Director of Glimmerglass Opera and Artistic Director of Washington National Opera. Her career as an opera director spans three decades, and she has several Weill performances to her credit as director and producer.

KWN: Does *Lost in the Stars* have to be done in an opera house?

FZ: It can be done anywhere; it's so powerful. What we brought to it was a big mixed ensemble and an enlarged string section, which added a level of gravitas to the work that I'm sure Kurt Weill would have been happy with.

KWN: How did audiences react at Glimmerglass? Did anyone come up to you after performances and say, "I'm glad you did this"?

FZ: Hundreds. Literally every person who told me, "I was skeptical about *Lost in the Stars*," said they were convinced, changed, transformed, transported by it.

KWN: Were you surprised by such a consistent reaction from so many people?

FZ: No, I believed in the piece from the beginning. It's a morality play, and it speaks to us so much more today. Racism is much more prevalent all over the world right now. We're in such a terrible backlash, and I cannot be a big enough advocate for this piece.

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to do it as a co-production with our colleagues in South Africa, and the South Africans in the cast brought an intensity that added another level. Of course Weill was speaking about the racial situation in America, but racism is a global issue.

KWN: In Washington, will there be any South African performers in the cast?

FZ: Yes. Now there are a number of younger South African kids studying in America, and several of them will work with us.

KWN: What aspects of the production at Glimmerglass did you think were especially outstanding?

FZ: I felt that musically we did the piece an incredible service by presenting it with such quality. Not only the leads but a big, powerful ensemble. I wanted the audience to hear the textures of that writing, vocal writing, with all the musical forces we could put behind it. The whole production was wonderful, and kudos to Tazewell Thompson, who directed. Dramatically and musically, it made people realize how important and seminal the work is.

KWN: What advice would you give to another producer who is interested in *Lost in the Stars*?

FZ: You've got to get a large cast of color. There are a lot of places that have a big pool to draw from—Atlanta, Detroit, other cities.

I'm grateful for the tools of opera and theater because they allow us to act as witnesses, testifiers, judge, and jury; where we can examine our constant struggles with pain, evil, and injustice; where we can aspire to hope, joy, freedom, and collective laughter; and rejoice, finally, in the human capacity for change.

Of course, you don't need to have as many people as we did. But if you've got the right people, do it.

KWN: What steps would you recommend to help *Lost in the Stars* be produced more widely?

FZ: Emphasize the fact that it's an ensemble piece. Aside from the four leads, two of whom are actors and two of whom are opera singers, you can fill it out with young people, older people, students. It can be done in universities and conservatories. We cast all the small parts from the ensemble. It's not a work that needs big production values; you don't need anything to do it, except the people. The power of the work totally rests on the performances.

I am frustrated that it's not more popular, and I don't understand it. Why isn't it done in England or Germany? It could be done in a lot of places. It has fantastic music. We made such a strong case for it.

KWN: Did you ever think about directing *Lost in the Stars* yourself?

FZ: I was actually going to direct it, and then I thought of Tazewell Thompson, who is a regular part of the Glimmerglass ensemble. He's African-American, and he really wanted to go to South Africa, so I thought we should ask him to do it. I was happy to step back into the producer's role.

KWN: Are there any other Weill works that you're particularly interested in? Of course you've done *Street Scene*...

FZ: I definitely want to revisit *Street Scene* for WNO and Glimmerglass. I love *Lady in the Dark*, which I directed at the National Theatre in London; I love *One Touch of Venus*. Just for fun I'd love to produce a concert of *Knickerbocker Holiday*. I'm more interested in American Weill, so to speak, than German Weill.

For me the two most socially relevant works in Weill's American canon, *Street Scene* and *Lost in the Stars*, need to be put out there in first-class productions as much as possible. Anybody who wants to do *Lost in the Stars* should definitely do it. One of the reasons I wanted to do this piece so much was that I have believed in it for years and wanted to get it on the boards, ever since I first encountered it 25 years ago.



PHOTO: STEPHEN VOSS



John DeMain

Conductor John DeMain has a long resumé in musical theater, with a specialty in American opera, and as an orchestral maestro. Currently Artistic Director of Madison Opera and Music Director of the Madison Symphony Orchestra, he spent eighteen years with Houston Grand Opera, where he conducted an award-winning production and recording of *Porgy and Bess*.

KWN: What drew you originally to *Lost in the Stars*?

JD: I had always heard that it had a very beautiful score but a mixed critical response. I love the music of Kurt Weill, having worked on *Street Scene* and *Threepenny*, and I was eager to explore his oeuvre.

Our journey at Glimmerglass ended with a piece that was deeply moving to performers and audience alike; everyone suddenly realized how powerful this piece is. I can't wait to try to find that magical result at the Kennedy Center.

KWN: How did you shape the work at Glimmerglass?

JD: Trimming the book, getting the musical numbers closer together, restoring two cut songs, "Little Tin God" and "Gold!" We changed the pacing of the piece, and the music became an equal partner with the text. Music goes where words can't. Keeping the script pared down to the minimum stimulated the imagination better, and the audience was literally on the edge of their seats from start to finish.

The original ending was a little bit Hollywood, a little soupy. We substituted a reprise of "Cry, the Beloved Country," which has a noble musical theme and also happens to be the essence of the work. What has just happened onstage is so *profoundly* moving—the coming together of the white man and the black minister and the white people entering the black church. The audience was sitting there audibly weeping, and I've never experienced that.

KWN: Can you discuss the challenges presented by a work that makes such great demands on the chorus?

JD: The chorus holds the piece together and conveys the message. First of all, you've got to have a great bass section because they carry a lot of melody. It's tricky music, but not terribly difficult if one takes the time to learn it properly. We did a lot of rehearsing to reach the point where the chorus could be free on their feet to do whatever the director asked of them. Each singer has to work hard, and it's also emotionally draining, because the message is so powerful. An opera company can make sure that the chorus is strong and gorgeous so you want to hear what they have to sing.

Sean Panikkar was the Leader in those big chorus numbers; his work is stunning.

KWN: What can you tell us about preparing the orchestra?

JD: I'm fascinated by this piece because Weill did not use violins. He chose the viola's darker color to take the lead, which works because the show is tragic in nature. I suggested augmenting the string section a *little* at Glimmerglass because we had a very powerful chorus. To stay true to Weill, I kept the original scoring when solo singers were on stage, but when the chorus was singing I used the extra string players for reinforcement. The original score called for 13 players, and we probably got up to 18 or 19 with the added strings. When you get the right balances you can make a small ensemble sound quite full.

KWN: What advice would you give to another conductor who is interested in *Lost in the Stars*?

JD: Keep the tone of the piece consistent. Placing "Cry, the Beloved Country" at the end helps do that. We cut most of the Entr'acte at Glimmerglass and played only a portion of the title song; that preserved the mood that left the audience devastated at the end of Act One and swept them straight into Act Two.

Respect the orchestration, because its colors are essential to the piece. Allow the jazz elements to come through. And make sure you've got time to get the chorus in tip-top shape. When the piece is *allowed* to be serious it has its biggest impact on the audience. Don't apologize for the dignity and tragedy of this piece but play it for all it's worth. Look for the drama in the music to complement the drama on stage. When you find that, the piece just soars.

KWN: You will be working with Adam Turner, the first Julius Rudel Conducting Fellow, and you yourself worked with Julius Rudel when you were a young conductor. What do you hope to pass on to him?

JD: Adam has grown up as an American musician conducting the whole range of musical theater, so he's very much like me. Weill's palette is pretty big and I think that you have to have a big palette yourself to conduct his music. We'll take a look at each number to find the right style.

More broadly, I want to pass on to Adam that theatrical vitality that Julius had. He was totally comfortable giving whatever the music demanded. His *Figaro* had nuance and expression in *every single* measure and his tempi were always alive and moving and never weighed down. He always brought great theatrical, as well as lyrical, vitality to his work. That made him a great conductor for Kurt Weill.

KWN: Do you have any final words?

JD: The collaboration with Tazewell Thompson was just terrific. His insights into the piece are genius. And I think that he gets big kudos for creating the success that we had.



Sean Panikkar as the Leader

PHOTO: KARLI CADEL/GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Michael Mitchell

Set and costume designer Michael Mitchell is resident designer at Cape Town Opera in South Africa, where he worked on Tazewell Thompson's first production of *Lost in the Stars* in 2011. He enjoys an international career as a theater designer and artist.

KWN: What is it like working with Tazewell Thompson? Has he had a lot to say about set and costume designs for this production?

MM: It has been an exciting journey for both of us. He has made me revisit the recent history of South Africa before and after President Nelson Mandela's release and evaluate it with a critical eye. Tazewell encouraged me to show the real African spirit of its people, traditions, and dress.

KWN: In what specific ways do your designs contribute to the production?

MM: I have tried to give an authentic South African look to the sets and costumes, which must be everyday clothes from the 1950s that show the class difference between the "Europeans and Non-Europeans," to adopt the terminology of apartheid South Africa. Some of the "African" costumes, which might be foreign to an American eye, are worn to this day by rural African men of an older generation coming to the city for the first time. The corrugated iron used to construct the set was the same material used to build the rapidly constructed mining towns in the goldfields for white mine management and black labor hostels.

There will be more work to do in Washington. The costumes will evolve to fit characters played by new people. We want to

retain the energy and spirit that we achieved at Glimmerglass and build on that.

KWN: How did you first encounter Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*? How did it affect you? How would you characterize Weill and Anderson's dramatic adaptation?

MM: I was in junior high school, working as a school librarian, and I came across *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which could be loaned only with special permission. (This was at the height of apartheid in South Africa with all its restrictions and censorship.) I removed the book, read it in a day or two, and returned it. It made me question everything about living in South Africa under an apartheid system. It changed my mind, if not my life.

Weill and Anderson focused on the major theme of forgiveness between the two highly disparate societies. The train journey from Natal to Johannesburg in Act One vividly captures the essence, unique color, and even the smell of South Africa.



Sean Panikkar

Tenor Sean Panikkar appears regularly at the Metropolitan Opera and other leading houses in the U.S. and Europe. He is a member of the vocal group Forte, a trio of operatic tenors originally featured on *America's Got Talent*. He played the (Chorus) Leader in *Lost in the Stars* at Glimmerglass and will take the same role at Washington National Opera.

KWN: You play the Leader, a character without a name, only a function. How would you describe the Leader?

SP: When I was first offered the role, I searched throughout *Cry, the Beloved Country* for the character and didn't find it. I realized that the Leader was created by Weill and Anderson to guide the audience in their reactions to the story, like a Greek chorus. In one sense, the Leader *is* the audience; I moved through the scenes like a fly on the wall, present but not part of the action. My costume, an off-white uniform, emphasized the Leader's invisible, ghostlike character. In another way, I was more like the director. Tazewell had me sweep my hands in strong, almost magical motions, as if signaling scene changes or moving the sets around. The Leader is neither black nor white, the only person on stage who can transcend racial and social divides.

KWN: Are you looking forward to the revival at Washington National Opera?

SP: Definitely. I felt like the whole cast at Glimmerglass was deeply connected to the emotional and physical side of the show, and I expect the same in Washington. I was overwhelmed to the point of tears at every performance. I was caught off-guard by my powerful emotional reaction to the show until I realized I was experiencing the scenes as a bystander.

KWN: What can you say about working with Tazewell Thompson?

SP: It was a joy. He brought out the best in us, and I appreciated his organization and creative process. He had a clear vision for the show, and that helped unify the cast.

KWN: In what ways does *Lost in the Stars* speak to you?

SP: My parents moved to the United States from Sri Lanka right before I was born, so much of *Lost in the Stars* resonates with my own family history: the poverty, the government restrictions, the unrest and fear.

While the show focuses on the racial and social divide in South Africa, another resonating theme is Stephen Kumalo's journey, in which his faith is shaken by so many terrible and disheartening events. It was poignant to watch Stephen struggle with his doubts. I marvel at the way the show layers deeply personal struggles with larger social issues, touching our hearts in so many different ways. We can't help but walk away from *Lost in the Stars* feeling overwhelmed.



PHOTO: KRISTINA SHERK



Manu Kumasi

Actor Manu Kumasi has been active in the Washington, D.C. area for several years, performing in several Shakespearean plays (including the title role in *Hamlet*) as well as more modern fare. He will play Absalom at Washington National Opera.

KWN: The character of Absalom in *Lost in the Stars* does not sing, despite being one of the protagonists. How will that affect your portrayal?

MK: I will also perform as a member of the ensemble, which gives me the opportunity to help define the world in which Absalom lives. That opportunity to help create Absalom's world (the people, the

sounds, the conditions, etc.) as well as live in it will definitely shape my portrayal and help me tell his story more fully.

KWN: What personal experiences have you had that will inform your characterization?

MK: There are many decisions Absalom makes to which I—and probably all of the readers of the *Newsletter*—can relate (e.g., leaving home to find myself and make my own way; making a bad choice that felt so right in the moment; choosing the hard road because it is the right road). And then there is the recently heightened awareness—on a national level and here in Washington—of current race relations, and that ties into the production, too. I aim to explore how Absalom's circumstances, decisions, and experiences apply just as much to our experience in modern-day America as in South Africa in 1949.

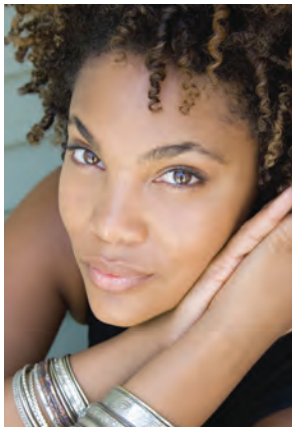
There are moments in the play when I naturally see myself in Absalom's shoes, or see his life as an alternate version of my life. Through Absalom's relationship with his father, his unborn child, his girlfriend, his family, and his surroundings, Weill explores one potential path for a self-determined young man. Weill takes us on that ride with Absalom as he makes life-affecting decisions. I look forward to sharing this experience with our audiences.

KWN: How will you prepare to play a role like Absalom?

MK: This will be my first musical and I'm looking forward to it immensely! Musicals require you to come in with a much stronger command of the text (both script and music) than straight plays. I will be off-book by the first day of rehearsal, and that will give me more freedom to explore the nuances of the script. I'm also looking forward to working with and learning from performers who are significantly more musically inclined than I am!

KWN: What can you say about working with Tazewell Thompson?

MK: His work shows a keen understanding of storytelling, and I strongly appreciate his eye as well as his humanity. The way in which he guides the actors and everyone involved in the production to create a unique and piercing experience for audience members is inspiring.



Lauren Michelle

Soprano Lauren Michelle has sung in opera productions throughout Europe. In 2015, she has performed at the Ravinia Festival, reached the finals in the Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, made her Carnegie Hall debut in *The Road of Promise*, and won First Prize in the Lotte Lenya Competition. She will make her U.S. professional debut as Irina at Washington National Opera.

KWN: What personal experiences have you had that will inform your portrayal?

LM: Definitely my trip to South Africa. I went in 2001, not long after the end of apartheid. I remember thinking, "Wow, this is what the States were like in the fifties." I

was standing in line, and people just cut in front of me as if I were invisible. But when they heard my accent, they said, "Oh, excuse me. I'm sorry." South Africa was beautiful and scary and wonderful. And this script captures all of that.

KWN: How will you prepare for *Lost in the Stars*?

LM: I want to go back to South Africa and stay in a shanty town. It's dangerous, but I really want to know what it's like; Irina talks about keeping the house clean, but there's dirt everywhere. Aside from that, I want to make sure I get the gestures right when she's talking to Stephen—an American would stand up straight, look at him in the eye and shake his hand, but that's not how you would

respect an elder in South Africa.

KWN: How do you see the character of Irina?

LM: I'm still discovering her, so it's difficult to describe. I really admire how she makes something out of nothing. That and being as compassionate as she can be in the midst of the unfortunate situations that she has to put herself in to survive. She has a quality of selflessness, too, though there's still a sense of self-preservation within that, because she's trying to stay alive. And she also has to stay good to her God. With these two things as her goals, her choices make sense.

KWN: One of the things that always strikes me about Irina is how submissive she is. Is that going to be a stretch?

LM: There is a layer of submission, definitely, but being submissive actually takes a lot of strength. You really have to be centered, and you can't slip. She's almost like a Zen master. That comes out in "Trouble Man." But as she interacts with everyone else she is extremely powerful.

KWN: We'd like to get a little more specific about Irina's two big numbers, "Trouble Man" and "Stay Well." How do they work for you vocally?

LM: The songs seem simple, but that's deceptive, because when you add the emotion and turmoil, you have to go into overdrive. I'm trying to look at the whole scene and the whole piece, not just the arias. I'm working on what goes on around them so it's not just "And now we start singing the song." The dialogue is just as important as the arias. When I'm reading the script and working on the dialogue, I'll speak the aria just as if it's just text.

KWN: Does that also help you find the right emotions when you're singing?

LM: Absolutely. Because then you say, "Oh, that's why he had the music turn this way or turn that way. It makes sense that the rhythms are written like this." Weill knew how to get the emotion

he wanted, and he *always* lets the words shine. I never have to figure out how to put the text over when I'm working on his music.

KWN: In what ways does *Lost in the Stars* speak to you?

LM: There's something very interesting about the theme of fear. It's a motivating force for Irina, and she's right at home in scary situations. I'm really looking forward to exploring the different faces of fear in Irina and the other characters and also in the larger society.

As I'm engaging with racial issues raised by this piece, so many different emotions are coming up. They haven't really crystallized into anything, because it's so deep-rooted. I don't have a lot to say on that front, but I'm fully aware that it's there.

Eric Owens

Bass-baritone Eric Owens has become a fixture on the world's stages, performing with leading opera companies and orchestras all over the U.S. and Europe. He is known for taking roles in modern operas that require powerful acting along with a powerful voice. He will play Rev. Stephen Kumalo at Washington National Opera, as he did at Glimmerglass.

KWN: Does the role of Stephen Kumalo remind you of any other roles that you've played in your career?

EO: No, because there's so much dialogue. I knew going into *Lost in the Stars* that I had to bring a different game of theater acting because I didn't want to sound like an opera singer doing straight theater. But when I said the words out loud I could tell if it sounded genuine. The whole process was amazing for me and it left me wanting to do more straight theater. Actors have this wonderful freedom because the music doesn't decide how much time you're going to take on one particular sentence. But it's an incredible responsibility, too, because with a word you're going to change the perception of an entire scene. I learned so much from Wynn Harmon, who's a real veteran actor.

KWN: What was it like working with Tazewell Thompson?

EO: That was amazing. He's such a theater animal, and he's a big part of the reason I had such a great experience. It was such an organic, collaborative process. I can't tell you how much it tickles me that I get to do this again with most of the same people. We can hit the ground running and explore even deeper what any given moment in the work means.

KWN: We'd like to ask you about two specific moments in the show. The first one is the closing of Act One with the song "Lost in the Stars." We'd like to explore how you were able to have this devout minister question his faith so deeply at that moment and make it part of the organic character that you were developing.

EO: We worked a lot on that. Not to think of it as a number in Act One, but as a continuation of the story. We searched and searched for the right feeling. For example, there's a moment where I say "Little stars, big stars." On "Little stars," I gestured towards where Absalom had exited, as a question mark. And then I looked up to the sky on "big stars," and put my hand on my chest as if to say, "Am I a big star?" We had to find those little nuggets in the text and music to craft that story of questioning the faith and make it ring true.

KWN: The other moment, as you may have guessed, is the ending, which was such a shattering moment in the Glimmerglass production. Can you talk about how you were able to make that into such a *coup de théâtre*?

EO: We changed the script at the end, which was controversial because many people came to the performance who had seen *Lost in the Stars* decades ago on Broadway, and they said, "You changed the ending. Why did you do that?" I would say, "We wanted it to feel more real, to show that this moment didn't instantaneously create two wonderful friends. This was a starting point for the work to create that friendship." It's the end of the show, but it's also a beginning.

KWN: But we have to believe that Mr. Jarvis really has gotten over this terrible—

EO: No, because he hasn't. But he's willing to go down the road of reconciliation. And it starts with a very powerful moment at the very end, when they're together, on their knees. That's the position of being close to God, even as they are both asking whether or not God is there. They have solidarity in grief, and they also want the world to be better starting with their own hearts.

KWN: Final question: What does *Lost in the Stars* have to do with America in 2015?

EO: When it premiered in 1949, during another period of discord and unrest in the U.S., the idea was to tell our own story by telling a story of a far-off land. And they used the medium of "entertainment" to trick people into getting the point. With any art, you hope it holds up a mirror so people can start to see themselves. Anything that can teach the history of this planet in a way that'll get us to learn something is worthwhile—and if it has to be done through song and dance, so be it. *Lost in the Stars* continues to tell that story of a very imperfect world. We're not post-anything. We're in the thick of it every moment of every day.



PHOTO: DARRIO ACOSTA

Wynn Harmon



Actor Wynn Harmon has played leading roles in nearly every major U.S. regional theater, in addition to appearing on Broadway and in opera houses. A regular at Glimmerglass, he portrayed white landowner James Jarvis, the father of the murdered man, in *Lost in the Stars*, a role he will take up again at Washington National Opera.

KWN: Can you explain how *Lost in the Stars* works on the audience?

WH: It takes the audience on a deep and moving journey, which begins with the initial inspiration that caused Alan Paton to write *Cry, the Beloved Country*. He was living and working in the environ-

ment that inspired it, so he's writing about what he knows, not what he imagines. And perhaps that same inspiration ignited Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's creativity. I believe that continuous inspiration, which is about forgiveness and the injustice of a country that's so beautiful and so out of balance, worked all the way through from the beginning—from Paton, through Anderson and Weill, to all of us at Glimmerglass—and finally made the magic that we realized with the audience.

KWN: It's a musical but your character does not sing or have very many scenes. Can you talk about the challenges that poses as you try to put across the character of James Jarvis?

WH: It's a much more important character than it would seem, because the story is about the two worlds going towards each other to find forgiveness. Jarvis can't hold onto his son, but he comes to understand a little bit about what he was fighting for. At the end, he is sitting with Stephen, who's about to lose his son. His empathy has expanded greatly.

KWN: Originally the finale was a reprise of Stephen's song, "Thousands of Miles," and that was changed at Glimmerglass to a reprise of "Cry, the Beloved Country." Can you describe how you and Eric Owens worked together to make that ending so powerful?

WH: I have such great respect for Eric as an artist and a person. That scene was an offering that we gave each other, baring our souls. And because what we were experiencing was so painful

on both sides, I think that we just offered it truthfully from our response to that initial inspiration. It was certainly deeply felt by everyone involved in the production. We were all embracing and embracing each other after the performance; all we wanted to do was connect with the people that shared it. I would call it sacred.

But it wasn't just Eric and me. To have both the white and the black choruses come and sit in the church with us was beautiful inspiration on Tazewell's part because I think the story is ultimately hopeful about forgiveness. It's not just that these two people can work it out between themselves, but maybe these two communities can also work it out. We had great support from the orchestra, too; John DeMain is a wonderful maestro, and he encouraged them to play with emotion.

KWN: Have you had any other experiences onstage that were so powerful?

WH: Never. After the show, many audience members felt the need to tell us some personal thing about their lives or about forgiveness, or just how surprised they were at how moving the story was. I'm always hoping there will be universal moments that everyone connects to in the cast and in the audience.

KWN: You will be taking the same role next February in Washington. What do you hope the audience will get out of that production?

WH: The minute the music starts I can imagine the beauty of that place so clearly in my mind, and it sets everything in motion. So *music* is extremely powerful in appealing to our hearts and not our brains. I'm very excited that all the work that we've done—the sensations, the memories, the emotional richness of that experience—live in us still. The intensity has stayed with me. Every time I talk with Sean and Eric, no matter what we're working on, we always say, "I can't wait to do *Lost in the Stars* again." My hope is the audience will find that same inspiration that traces all the way back to the initial inspiration.

Tazewell Thompson



Director Tazewell Thompson has forged a career in the theater remarkable for its variety. As a director, he has led productions of operas all over the world; he has also directed any number of plays. As a playwright, he has been commissioned by several theaters in the U.S. He serves on the Board of Trustees of the Kurt Weill Foundation.

KWN: What drew you originally to *Lost in the Stars*?

TT: I knew it through my introduction to the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* in high school. That same senior year in chorus we sang several selections from *Lost in the Stars*. As a member of

the drama club, the oratorical society, and the debate team, I was deemed a good candidate to narrate the connecting passages be-

tween musical selections. For years I knew more than half the score of *Lost in the Stars* and how the songs fit within the story.

KWN: Has your opinion of the work changed since then?

TT: Most definitely. My respect and love for the work have grown deep and wide. It is the one work of theater that I will never tire of directing. It needs to be presented to audiences now and always.

KWN: Maxwell Anderson's book has not always been treated kindly by critics. What is your judgment of it?

TT: I've encountered this derision, and it's a mystery to me. Mr. Anderson occupies the highest order in the pantheon of great American playwrights. He has fashioned a magnificent libretto from Paton's novel; captured, so beautifully, the essence of the tragedy and heartbreak as well as the yearning and hope of a people caught up in a hopeless and unjust apartheid society. The book scenes are organic and natural to each of the characters' situation and challenges. His lyrics are incisive, personal, powerful, and memorable. Anderson's lyrics together with Kurt Weill's music gave us "Trouble Man," "Stay Well," "Cry, the Beloved Country," and the classic "Lost in the Stars." Anderson won a Pulitzer Prize for drama, but his part in *Lost in the Stars* is his crowning achievement.

KWN: What revisions did you make at Glimmerglass?

TT: Cutting and rearranging dialogue. Inserting dialogue from the original production. The restoration of two songs, "Little Tin God" and "Gold!," that were cut before the premiere.

KWN: How did the restored songs enhance the piece?

TT: "Little Tin God" is a song I gave to John Kumalo, the rebellious brother of the Reverend Stephen Kumalo. The song mocks his brother's faith and also is a song of self-determination; it made for a great introduction to that character. "Gold!" is a rousing song and dance depicting the dreams of poor black South Africans working in the mines who have gold right in front of them but can never get their hands on it. The song added another dimension to the complex use of ensembles in this work.

KWN: Does the fact that several important characters (e.g., Absalom, Jarvis) don't sing create problems for the director?

TT: Not for me. I understand why these two characters—the murderer and the father of the one who is murdered—play out their emotional journey through speech. In the original production Absalom and Jarvis did not sing. In my production Absalom sings with the ensemble until his character is introduced. Jarvis sings with the full company at the top of Act Two: "The Wild Justice."

KWN: How do you approach the casting of *Lost in the Stars*? Is there a certain kind of singer or actor you look for, or particular qualities of voice and gesture?

TT: Above all: Strong dramatic singers, gifted in jazz, blues, opera, and musical theater, able to express deep emotions through song. Performers also need a good sense of humor. Must move well and be ready to move into the shoes of another culture. Good at dialects.

KWN: What changes (if any) do you envision for the revival at WNO?

TT: Perhaps more dance or movement.

KWN: At Glimmerglass, a reprise of "Cry, the Beloved Country" took the place of the original ending, a reprise of "Thousands of Miles." Will you retain the revised ending in Washington?

TT: YES! It is so right and very effective.

Editor's Note: The Glimmerglass production made several significant changes to the score and script of *Lost in the Stars*. The changes were intended, for the most part, to restore the original intentions of the authors, and they were made with the express permission of the publisher and rights holders.



James Jarvis (Wynn Harmon) comforts Rev. Stephen Kumalo (Eric Owens) during the final scene of *Lost in the Stars* at Glimmerglass. Photo: Karli Cadel

Salzburg Festival 2015

Last summer, the Salzburg Festival featured Weill's music on several fronts. The opening concert, conducted by HK Gruber, consisted entirely of Weill, with instrumental excerpts from four works, and soprano Angela Denoke gave a cabaret evening filled with the music of Weill and selected Weimar songwriters. But the biggest news was a one-time "experiment," in which *Die Dreigroschenoper* was staged under the title *Mackie Messer: Eine Salzburger Dreigroschenoper*, with the score newly arranged by Martin Lowe. One condition of licensing this performance, set by the publisher and the Kurt Weill Foundation, was that the original version be presented in concert (again conducted by Gruber). In these pages, we offer in-depth interviews with Lowe and Gruber and reviews of the two versions of *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

The Orchestrator: Martin Lowe

An Interview with Wolfgang Schaufler of Universal Edition for the Newsletter, 10 August 2015

Martin Lowe has been a force to be reckoned with in musical theater for two decades as conductor and orchestrator. He has conducted numerous shows on London's West End, including Caroline or Change, Jerry Springer: The Opera, and The Full Monty. He also served as music director for the film version of Mamma Mia!, based on songs by ABBA, and as orchestrator for UK productions of Wolves in the Walls and Once in a Lifetime. More recently, Lowe won Olivier, Tony, and Grammy Awards for his orchestrations for the musical Once, and he was music director for the Salzburg Festival's production of Jedermann. His latest project: musical supervision and vocal arrangements for Tori Amos's new musical, The Light Princess.

KWN: Who are your biggest musical influences?

ML: My mum played Gilbert & Sullivan on the piano to put me to sleep when I was a baby, so that's almost in my DNA. Growing up, I was obsessed with ABBA, and I listened to the early Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals; then I discovered Sondheim and *Sweeney Todd*. My taste became more experimental when I discovered Kate Bush, Laurie Anderson, and Philip Glass.

KWN: How did you first get acquainted with Weill's work?

ML: When I was a student, I became quite interested in Brecht's plays. Then the National Theatre in London did *The Threepenny Opera* with Tim Curry, in 1986. That was the first Kurt Weill show I ever saw. That was a real eye-opener, because I'd only looked at Brecht with the music missing. That production of *The Threepenny Opera* unlocked it for me.

KWN: Did you know who Weill was before then?

ML: Obviously, I knew some songs: "Mack the Knife," "Lost in the Stars," and I probably knew the "Barbara-Song." Harmonical-

ly it was worlds away from what I was comfortable with, whether it was playing Beethoven or listening to ABBA. All of a sudden I realized there was another way of harmonizing a melody, and that fascinated me.

KWN: What appeals to you about *Threepenny*?

ML: The fact that we're still investigating this piece. Political theater, or agitprop, doesn't age well, because it's so urgent in the time it's written. But the stuff about bankers got a round of applause when we did the dress rehearsal. They wrote a political piece in the twenties, and nearly a hundred years later, it still speaks to us.

KWN: Has your work on *Threepenny* changed your judgment of it? If so, how?

ML: Everybody told me when I started work on it that it's quite a problematic piece of theater; now I see why. The structure is very unconventional. The rhythm of the piece is very uneven, and I think you have to be a very skillful director to make the scenes move at the right tempo and bring out what the piece is actually about.

KWN: Is there a production or recording of *Threepenny* that you consider superior or especially interesting?

ML: The recording I kept listening to—I don't know whether it was superior, but I saw it and loved it—was Phyllida Lloyd's production at the Donmar Warehouse in 1994. I loved Jeremy Sams's translation and found it really inspiring. He took the bull by the horns and used contemporary language and situations. So when I got stuck, I would listen to that for inspiration.

KWN: How did you get interested arranging the score of *The Threepenny Opera*? Was it something you had thought about for a long time?



Martin Lowe

ML: Not at all. I got offered three different productions of *The Threepenny Opera* within a six-month period, and Salzburg was the third one. They asked if I would like to conduct it. I said, “There’s no point, because I don’t speak German, and I can think of twenty conductors who could do it better. However, I’m fascinated by doing new arrangements of old songs. I would be interested in that.” And they said that’s very difficult, because they have to deal with the publisher.

I have had a strange relationship with *The Threepenny Opera* over the years. The first interview I ever had for a professional musical director job was for a production in London, when I was 21. I didn’t get the position, but that forced me to learn the show very quickly. I’ve seen it every five years or so since then. I didn’t have a great desire to do it, but it feels like the universe was conspiring to make me.

KWN: What is your judgment of Weill’s original instrumentation? Do you see your version as an improvement or simply as an alternative?

ML: Of course, it’s an alternative. I think the original is brilliant! What I think is fascinating, if I’ve got this correct, is that Weill orchestrated for the musicians who were available to him, which is why you have funny doublings. I decided to do the same thing and ask the entire band for the Salzburg Festival’s production of *Jedermann* (which I orchestrated) if they’d also like to play for *The Threepenny Opera*. Most of them said yes! But I definitely wanted to do something different, because you can always hear the original.

KWN: What have you sought to achieve with your new orchestration? What would convince you that it is successful?

ML: It’s not for me to say whether it’s successful or not. I like the fact that Kurt Weill wrote songs that used the dance idioms and styles of 1928. So when the play came out, the music felt very contemporary, even though the show was set ninety years before that. I wanted to give the audience the same experience, seeing a show with a contemporary score.

KWN: How will your orchestration contribute to the audience’s experience?

ML: My dream is that when the audience hears these songs, it should feel like meeting an old friend that they haven’t seen for a long time—but the old friend has some new clothes and a great haircut. I really want them to sit up and say, “I didn’t know they could sound like this.” I’d like them to be pleasantly surprised, and maybe a bit amused.

KWN: What considerations stood out as you were preparing your orchestration?

ML: I wanted to make sure I gave every song its own personality and not repeat myself. I wanted it to feel like there were twenty songs that could have come from twenty different places. So I gave myself very clear references for each song. In the end, some of my ideas overlapped and kept recurring, because I quite liked them.

KWN: But here you differ dramatically from Weill, no?

ML: Yes and no. Weill’s definitely dealing with the music of the time in which he’s writing. But within that, he’s got a tango number, he’s got a ballad, he’s got a foxtrot—so even in the music of

the day, he’s dealing with sub-idioms. I would like to think I was doing the same thing. I’m trying to make it contemporary, but I’m also doing a swing number, a lounge number, a minimalist number, a Hollywood number, etc.

KWN: Aside from the melodies, are there any features of Weill’s score that you’ve sought to preserve?

ML: The harmonies. As a conductor, I’ve worked on a lot of new musicals where I’ve had to bring in an orchestrator, and sometimes they decide it’s their job to re-harmonize the show as well. I find that quite offensive. The harmony is embedded in the melody. I never wanted to dismantle that, because I thought it was fundamental to the audience having a relationship with Weill’s music, although there are a few moments when I removed the harmony completely.

KWN: Weill and his successors have, with occasional exceptions, maintained a policy that his stage works, *The Threepenny Opera* in particular, should be performed in his original scoring. Does that policy make sense to you? Why do you think that your orchestration will be more attractive to audiences today?

ML: I’ve never thought my version would be more attractive; it’s just an alternative, really. The issue is the language that we use and whether we really consider this an opera. If you go see *Madame Butterfly* anywhere in the world, you’ll hear the same orchestration, because that’s how opera houses and impresarios have decided to do it. My world is musical theater, and we put on shows depending on what’s available. Jonathan Tunick’s orchestration for *Sweeney Todd* is staggeringly good, if not perfect. But there’s 29 or 30 players in the orchestra. Now in commercial theater, even in subsidized theater, that’s become almost impossible to afford. So either you never do *Sweeney Todd* again, or you commission a reduced orchestration. Often, it has to do with economics, but in this case I was led by the size of our theater, the Felsenreitschule, which is huge. I don’t think it’s outrageous to say this might not be a bad time to have a big orchestration to suit this venue. That’s not to say the original wouldn’t be great.

It’s called *The Threepenny Opera*, but there’s only an hour of music and two hours of text, which makes it quite hard to classify as an opera. I just think it’s a great piece of musical theater. For that reason, there’s an argument—not a perfect argument—to revisit it musically, rather than imposing opera house rules.

KWN: You used some new interludes, right?

ML: Generally, scene change interludes are the first things that you need to redo for a revival of a musical. The venue, the director’s approach, the costumes, the scenery, the pacing are all new. I used Kurt Weill’s music, but I wanted to make it unique to this particular production.

KWN: Weill composed some interludes, and they’re published in the Kurt Weill Edition. You did not use them, you created your own. Is that right?

ML: I didn’t always need music where the interludes appear in the Edition, but I did need music at other points. If this were a new musical, and they said we need music during a scene change, the composer would write something. We don’t have the composer, but we do have the tunes.

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KWN: Have you been influenced by the fact that this is the prestigious Salzburg Festival?

ML: Yes. I would be silly if I didn't look at the venue, think about the *Threepenny Opera*, and try to make the best production I can for Salzburg, because there's nothing like it in the world. It's overwhelming. I'm doing a show at the Edinburgh Festival in a small venue, and I have a band of three and a cast of six, and that's exactly as it should be for that show and that venue.

KWN: This is defined as an "experiment," but was it in your mind that this production might go to the Big Apple?

ML: I'm so grateful that the publishers agreed to it, because I never thought I would be permitted to do this. I told all my friends, "I'm trying to do this version of *Threepenny Opera*, and I've got these crazy ideas, and it's never going to happen." And now it's happened. For the moment, that's enough. Of course I'd like it if the production went on to greater things; I've been working on it for two years! I'd like more people to hear it, but that's not for me to decide.

The Conductor: HK Gruber

An Interview by Wolfgang Schaufler of Universal Edition for the Newsletter, 12 August 2015

HK (Nali) Gruber is not only one of the world's most popular contemporary composers and leading conductors, he is also one of the greatest exponents of Weill's music working today. From his breakthrough as a composer with *Frankenstein!!* (1978) for chaussonnier and orchestra, he has produced a number of acclaimed works: concertos for Yo-Yo Ma, Evelyn Glennie, and Håkan Hardenberger; orchestral works including *Dancing in the Dark*; and dramatic works including *Gloria: A Pig Tale* and *Der Herr Nordwind*. His most recent stage work is an opera based on *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald* (*Tales from the Vienna Woods*), a work that author Ödön von Horváth once hoped Weill would adapt for the musical stage.

Gruber's work as conductor has contributed every bit as much to the musical scene. Known for his interpretations of Kagel, Maxwell Davies, and Eisler, he has collaborated extensively with Ensemble Modern. His essential Weill recordings with Ensemble Modern include *Berlin im Licht* and *Die Dreigroschenoper*. By his own estimate, he has conducted *Die Dreigroschenoper* well over 100 times.

KWN: Who has influenced you most as a composer or conductor?

HKG: As a composer, Stravinsky, my main god, Alban Berg, Hanns Eisler, and Weill. In the mid-sixties, Kurt Schwertsik and I developed "MOB art" with the goal of simplifying musical language so that even uneducated people would understand what we were doing. This brought us directly to Kurt Weill, who was able to simplify without losing complexity, so that was a very big influence for me—not his style, because I never imitated him; that would have been suicide. It was his backbone. I like Boulez a lot because systematic thinking is very important for me. My music is very well constructed. The conductors: for me Lenny Bernstein was always the best, most interesting conductor of the twentieth century, besides Boulez.

KWN: How did you first become acquainted with Weill?

HKG: My real discovery of Weill began the day I signed a contract with Boosey & Hawkes in 1986, because the director of new music was David Drew. I knew even then that Weill had suffered more damage than any other Jewish composer in Germany. Most people thought, "Weill? That is *Schmiere*"—superficial party pieces.

My first Weill production was a CD called *Berlin im Licht*. David was looking to record a mountain of completely unknown works: *Bastille-Musik*, *Frauentanz*, several songs, and he wanted me to do it with Ensemble Modern. I said to them, "Everybody thinks the *Dreigroschenoper* proves Weill was just a composer of light music. But beneath the melodies you hear a structure made by a symphonic composer. We will work out the counterpoint, the inner voices, make it precise, and make no compromises—work it out like Harnoncourt works on Beethoven."

When I went on tour and gave radio interviews, they would play "Berlin im Licht" to introduce me. So Weill became my calling card all over the world. It was a big success for Ensemble Modern also, which was mostly known as a hard-core, avant-garde ensemble. But I wanted to produce evidence that hard-core and whatever core Weill is share a common denominator called music!

KWN: Are there any works you haven't taken up that you would like to?

HKG: I've always dreamed of doing *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. There is not a single good recording available. Only the Ensemble Modern and ideal casting—a Jimmy Mahoney who can hold a high C, and a Jenny who can sing the coloraturas in "Moon of Alabama"—can do justice to it. Next I would like to produce American Weill, from *Firebrand* and *Lady* and so on.

KWN: Now let's turn to *Die Dreigroschenoper*. How would you describe the relation between music and text?

HKG: Brecht did not like *überhitzte* [overheated] music. Whenever Weill sets a text, he always considers that we have to understand each word, so the music is not al-



HK Gruber. Photo: Jon Super

lowed to be too busy, but the structure must be complex. Every song has music beyond the melody, in the rhythmic patterns. The patterns give you the impression of dance, drive, and sex appeal, and they allow the text to express itself. But Weill's patterns are never hot; they are just like in minimalist music, or in Schubert songs. Since Weill is a full-blooded musician, he never can resist a very lyric inner voice to go with the tune and the rhythmic pattern. A countermelody the audience doesn't really hear, but take it out and they will miss it. Take *The Seven Deadly Sins*. This is for me one of the principal examples of how a text can be transported by music that has tears in its eyes. He gets that effect with lots of strings and with the inner voices. The text in the *Sins* has a lot of passages where Brecht is full of *Inbrunst* [fergency], and there Weill borrows from sacred music. It retains the fervency of the sacred function that it had before, as in Bach's music, but now it conveys Brecht's message.

KWN: In *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Weill relies heavily on popular dances and dance band idioms of the Twenties. How does that affect your effort to find the right tempo or to determine which instruments to bring to the forefront?

HKG: The instruments in the forefront you can see in the score. The tempo comes from experience. It helps if I've heard a tango when I conduct the "Zuhälterballade," but on the other hand, Weill is borrowing tango elements and using them for his own ends. That number is probably the most beautiful tango of the 20th century, and Weill was the best tango composer of the 20th century, next to Piazzolla. "Zuhälterballade" is a very dangerous thing: if you take it too fast, it's murder, because the inner voices cannot breathe. Make it as slow as possible. Another element which leads to the right tempo is of course the text. The singer must be able to pronounce the text so that the words come through.

KWN: How would you characterize the influence of *Die Dreigroschenoper* on 20th- and 21st-century musical theater? How has Weill's *Klangbild* influenced composers who came after?

HKG: *Threepenny Opera* is an organism in itself, but the orchestra of *The Threepenny Opera* is very much influenced by Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*. The idea of seven musicians who played 21 instruments, or of having two or three instruments in the lowest and highest registers, a bass instrument and a soprano instrument—nothing in between—we already know from Stravinsky. So what is the message for composers after *Threepenny*? Look at the sound Weill made with his little dance band before you decide to work with a ninety-piece orchestra. The *Threepenny* orchestra is a beggars' band that makes us think we're hearing a big opera, like Puccini. It's just a small orchestra, but they bring out thousands of overtones. A *Klangbild* made with cheap means brings out a rich color that isn't cheap at all. Another example is the *Schlusschoral* at the very end. We only have the melody and the inner voice and the bass, which is synchronized with the melody—nothing more. Once I took apart the *Schlusschoral* in a concert. We played the melody, then the bass, and the inner voice, which is triplets, then the triplets with the melody, and so forth. Then we played the whole thing. The audience couldn't believe there was no organ, because of all the overtones.

KWN: Ever since 1928, theaters have (with or without permission) wanted to alter Weill's score. In your experience, are other theatrical works commonly treated this way?

HKG: I never had this experience with another composer.

KWN: Why do people want to do that?

HKG: Many theaters have only three or four musicians, and it is possible to reduce the music to a smaller ensemble. You cannot make the same colors, but if you make an intelligent transcription, including piano because you can pick up a lot of notes with ten fingers, you can play the music with four musicians. The inner voices will be there. Or, it would be possible to blow up the *Threepenny* orchestra to eighty musicians. We make the inner voices louder, and we have to be careful to maintain the balance and make the relationships among the different voices the same. We can make it louder, but we can't make it more transparent.

I don't like many of the jazz arrangements I've heard, where you have just the melody and not a single reminder of the original harmonies. The accompaniment makes the tune richer, too. "Moritat" has six stanzas. Starting with the third, you have variations in the accompaniment for each one. Each strophe has something new and different. This is genius. The audience does not recognize why the song gets more interesting from stanza to stanza. The tune is not all there is; it's the composition, tune plus infrastructure.

KWN: Have you ever heard an arrangement of *Die Dreigroschenoper* that you liked?

HKG: Not a single one. I've also heard many performances with the original orchestration that I didn't like, because the musicians and conductor didn't work hard enough in rehearsal. If you think this is light music, and you have an easy job, then you are in the wrong place. If you think it is complicated like Beethoven's late quartets, or a Bach fugue, you're on the right track.

I have my suspicions generally about arrangers. They think it's just sexy tunes, dance music from the Twenties. So we transpose it into more contemporary dance music world of our day. Doesn't work. If you listen to the Palastorchester playing dance music of the Twenties, it's surprising how sexy this dance music can still be if it is played with intelligence. So it is not necessary to bring the sound of the *Threepenny* orchestra into our time.

Weill himself arranged his own music a few months later when he composed *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. He doesn't throw out a single inner voice; it's all there. If we work out the structure of the *Threepenny* score in the original orchestration, the result would convince us that the piece does not need to be brought into our time to be understood. We still understand Mozart...

KWN: There will always be people who feel a need to go back to the original, like the Bach revival in the nineteenth century. The original is always more powerful to the educated ear, and no one can touch that power. Jacques Loussier's recordings of Bach are stupid, but they do not destroy Bach. You cannot destroy Bach, you cannot destroy Mozart, and you cannot destroy Weill.

HKG: It is a big problem in our neoliberal society that things that do not make money have no value. That's very dangerous because it promotes musical vandalism. We must train performers, reviewers, and teachers to respect the authority of the score.

KWN: Maybe we're naïve to believe in the power of the original.

HKG: I think we have to be naïve. We also have to have some weapons.