

Lady in the Dark

Kurt Weill Edition, Series I, Volume 16

Edited by **bruce d. mcclung** and **Elmar Juchem**

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An experimental “musical play” that switches between straight drama and musical theater, *Lady in the Dark* is a landmark in theater history. Its original production, starring Gertrude Lawrence and Danny Kaye, opened 23 January 1941 and ran for 777 performances on Broadway, on tour, and then back again on Broadway. Yet the previously published vocal score is both incomplete and incompatible with the published version of Moss Hart’s book. Thanks to the scholarly efforts of Professor **bruce d. mcclung** and KWE Managing Editor **Elmar Juchem**, *Lady in the Dark* now exists in a path-breaking critical edition. Exhaustively researched, comprehensively documented, and impeccably notated with both scholars and performers in mind, the monumental two-volume full score is the first to present complete dialogue, lyrics, and music in a single publication. The new score corrects errors and resolves tensions between competing versions of music and text to document a single, performable score and thus raises the question of when this legendary but rarely revived show might return to Broadway or the West End.

Two lunches Hart and Weill took together were the catalyst to their collaboration. At the first, the author and composer decided they could not write a standard musical comedy. Firmly deciding what *not* to do led to a second lunch that lasted well into the evening, concluding (according to Hart) with a plan to do a “show in which the music carried forward the essential story.” Hart’s own life suggested the unusual plot; they would depict the process of psychoanalysis in which music portrayed the workings of the unconscious. Not long after, Hart telephoned Ira Gershwin to ask if he would write the lyrics; he agreed before hanging up.

In some ways a typical Broadway vehicle, the story centers on a female love interest pursued by multiple suitors. What’s atypical? First, Liza Elliott is the protagonist, editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine. Second, her struggle to choose among them is depicted in three fantastical dream sequences rooted in Freudian analysis. Liza’s crisis resolves musically when she recalls the lyrics of a childhood tune that has been haunting her anxious dreams. The song “My Ship”—which Weill and Gershwin composed first—serves as a leitmotif that unlocks a series of childhood memories, allowing Liza to make up her mind. Alternating with scenes of spoken drama, the music—as Weill later described it—formed “three little one-act operas.” Each details a dream sequence that is part of Liza’s therapy: the Glamour Dream, the Wedding Dream, and the Circus Dream. A Childhood Flashback and Finale bring the show to a close. Each dream scenario is an exercise in psychoanalytic free association, yet each is unified musically: all three contain the “My Ship” melody, a unifying

dance idiom (rumba, bolero, and circus march, respectively), and each spoofs a style of operetta. Rather than arias, *Lady in the Dark* features popular songs, including 32-bar AABA numbers such as “My Ship” and “Girl of the Moment.” Ira’s quirky humor comes shining through, especially in the Wedding Dream, where his lyrics invoke Wagner’s and Mendelssohn’s wedding marches: “It’s never too late to Mendelssohn, two hearts are at journey’s Endelssohn. Whate’er their future they must share it. I trust they Lohengrin and bear it.”

This show’s structure is unique, but editing any work of musical theater poses particular challenges. The text is always inherently unstable, responding to the exigencies of the moment—particular singer-actors, a specific director, designers, production staff, and conductor—who all contribute to a staging that is one of many possible versions. Scenes are reordered and cut, music is transposed and arranged, dialogue altered, orchestration adjusted. To fix a printed edition of such an elusive process, editors can take one of two approaches. One strategy is to have the edition convey a specific iteration of the script—how the text was realized at a certain time and place. Instead, **mcclung** and **Juchem** present the many texts of *Lady in the Dark*, offering a single, unabridged pathway through the materials of the show, enhanced by a 103-page Appendix that preserves alternate versions of some scenes and the musical sutures composed to heal cuts made at different stages of development. The result strikes a productive compromise between a score and a production toolkit, equally useful to the director seeking to create a performance and the scholar seeking to explore the work’s genesis. A conductor might lament the expansive layout that results in frequent page turns, but would undoubtedly praise two aspects of the score: the clarity and consistency of the notation, free of distracting dashed and bracketed editorial coding, and helpful footnotes that identify especially pertinent performance choices uncovered by the editors’ research.

As a guide to the whole there is both an expansive introductory essay with a section on “Performance Issues” and a companion volume containing the edition’s Critical Report, which offers clearly written discussions of the edition’s sources, their valuation, general editorial issues—for example, the editors have consistently adopted conductor Maurice Abravanel’s penciled adjustments to orchestration and dynamics made during rehearsals—and detailed notes on each of the musical sequences. A defining feature of a critical edition, these notes identify the editors’ decisions that have led to the printed text. Ultimately, they allow the edition’s users to decide for themselves how to interpret its sources. All too often, such critical notes are rendered in cryptic symbols that resist comprehension; this edition is refreshingly direct and clear. Each section of commentary includes a prose overview addressing decisions made about sources, cuts, and alternate versions. Measure-by-measure notes follow in a clear table format and detail specific changes to the score, their rationales, sources, and effects. Once the reader learns the abbreviations used to identify sources, the commentary, written in complete sentences, is easily understood and free of exhaustive and distracting accounts of routine editorial adjustments—such as aligning slurs and dynamics—that can quickly clutter the page beyond usefulness. Helpful musical examples are included.

The editors’ collective experience profoundly benefits the final product. **Juchem** has worked on multiple Weill editions, and

mcclung has published extensively on *Lady in the Dark*, producing a 1993 article, a 1994 doctoral dissertation, and a 2007 monograph titled *Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical* (Oxford University Press). As a result, the edition is strengthened by an unusually broad range of sources, including the creators' drafts of both text and lyrics, musical sketches, hand-copied instrumental and choral parts, published scores, arrangements, correspondence, theater programs, cast recordings, interviews, memoirs, and scrapbooks. Remarkably, the working sketches and preliminary drafts of Hart's book, Gershwin's lyrics, and Weill's music all survive. All of these sources, rich in fascinating detail, inform the editors' work.

This first-ever full score edition of *Lady in the Dark* is a monumental work of scholarship and a milestone in the histori-

Lerner's *Love Life* Lyrics

Comment on *The Complete Lyrics of Alan Jay Lerner*, ed. Dominic McHugh and Amy Asch (Oxford Univ. Press, 2018) by the editor of *Love Life* for the Kurt Weill Edition, Joel Galand

Love Life is Weill's most "overwritten" stage work. Four complete numbers and three reprises were jettisoned by the time the show closed. Weill's piano-vocal rehearsal scores contain four additional, unorchestrated numbers. Sketches and drafts furnish over one hundred pages of further unused material, much of it fully texted, including the continuity draft for a through-composed scene ("Murder at the Museum") that Lerner called "a complete 20-minute opera bouffe." Small wonder that the *Love Life* chapter is the second longest in this comprehensive collection of Lerner's lyrics.

The editors' principal text (designated **L1**) is a script from Lerner's papers at the Library of Congress. It includes songs added in Boston (e.g., "Love Song"), reflects cuts introduced during rehearsals and try-outs, and matches the running order in the opening-night New York playbill; the authors label it "Broadway script." The main section of the *Love Life* chapter consists of all lyrics from **L1**, with footnotes cataloguing variants drawn from two other scripts, from Weill's fair copy piano-vocal scores, and from published sheet music. When a variant is so extensive as to constitute a different version, the authors provide it in the main text, directly after the **L1** lyric. For example, they provide two additional versions of "Is It Him or Is It Me?" The first is a metrically (and musically) similar pre-Broadway version. The second ("Where Do I Belong?") has altogether different text and music and appears only among Weill's sketches.

Following the main section, the editors add unused numbers. Some are from earlier scripts ("Susan's Dream," "There's Nothing Left for Daddy but the Rhumba," "You Understand Me So," "The Locker Room," and portions of "Murder at the Museum"), but the authors also draw on musical sources for lyrics not appearing elsewhere. "Csardas," "Love," and "Drinking Song" are from Weill's fair copies while "The Magician," "What More Do I Want?," and portions of "Murder at the Museum" come from Weill's sketches and drafts.

McHugh and Asch's work is thorough and meticulous. I only wish that their location and description of archival sources were more explicit. Especially vexing are citations of their other

ography of musical theater. The complexity of the task is masked by the clarity of presentation and a luxurious format that only a non-profit scholarly edition could envision or afford—an extensive introduction, fifteen photographic plates of original sources, a complete score, and an appendix of alternate scenes and revisions. Thanks to mcclung and Juchem, a landmark work has finally received the landmark edition it deserves. With any luck, a performance will soon follow. [And it will, 25–26 April 2019 in New York; see pp. 4–6.—ed.]

Mark Clague
University of Michigan

sources, **L2** and **L3**. **L3**, labeled "Pre-Broadway script (alternative)," is housed in Yale's Weill-Lenya Archive (WLA). They cite it for minor variants in "This is the Life" and for an extension of "My Kind of Night (Reprise)." The problem is that only one script in WLA includes "This Is the Life" (box 20, folder 338). Like **L1**, which it matches almost page for page, it reflects the New York running order and incorporates all try-out additions and cuts; it therefore contains only the final, abbreviated version of "My Kind of Night." **L3** is clearly not a pre-Broadway script. There is such a script at Yale (folder 337); it doesn't include "This Is the Life" but contains the extended "My Kind of Night" reprise. Thus, **L3** conflates two different scripts from the Yale collection. A similar problem plagues **L2**, identified as a pre-Broadway script from the Cheryl Crawford Papers in the New York Public Library, but which again seems to amalgamate two pre-Broadway versions, the other also found at NYPL. The authors draw on this source for "Murder at the Museum" and also for variants in "My Kind of Night" and "Women's Club Blues." But the latter two numbers replaced the first; I know of no script with all three. There exists a script among the Crawford papers that includes "Murder at the Museum" (Box 30, folder 1), but not its replacements. It would be easier to assess the editors' work if they provided more precise source descriptions.

Are there *Love Life* lyrics yet to be discovered? Lerner recalled finishing a complete draft four months into the collaboration (i.e., around 1 November 1947). If found, it might provide lyrics for three largely untexted numbers that survive among Weill's sketches ("Why is My Head Spinning Around," "There's Gonna Be a New Year for Baby," and "Mr. Right and Mrs. Dream"). I can add one little nugget. A script in Elia Kazan's papers at Wesleyan University from shortly before the New Haven tryout includes a strophe for Susan in the reprise of "I'm Your Man," which was ultimately rejected:

If you're looking for someone who's out on a tear,
I'm your gal! I'm your gal!
If you're looking for someone who just doesn't care,
I'm your gal! I'm your gal!

So gather around me, for this is the start,
The start of a New Year for me!
The old year is done with,
It's over at last!
I'm getting into the swim
And I'm getting in fast!

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

Hamburger Symphoniker
Jeffrey Kahane, conductor

27 May 2018

Following the sudden death last year of Sir Jeffrey Tate, who was originally to conduct the opera, Jeffrey Kahane took over. A better conductor could hardly be found for this work. His restrained, spare, yet precise gestures maintained strict tempi; with occasionally swinging but relaxed movements of his body he guided the orchestra, the eight exquisite soloists, and the marvelous Europa Chor Akademie Görlitz (rehearsed by Joshard Daus), as if following a taut, invisible thread through each episode of this story of a city robbed by greed of any sense of decency or inhibition.

The semi-staged performance with full orchestra in the Laeiszhalle stayed very close to Weill's own ideas. He recommended "very limited scenic elements" and wanted singers to group themselves so they would sound as if they were singing in concert without distractions caused by complicated stage machinery. That was exactly how it worked here. Director Peter Schmidt observed Weill's suggestions without betraying his own unique, matter-of-fact style. Scene titles and narration were shown on a large screen, so that all the circumstances and situations of Mahagonny and its denizens were explained from the founding through its meteoric rise and ultimate downfall. The projections even included original images by Caspar Neher, who designed the sets and costumes for the world premiere.

The refined and sometimes ironic way Weill mixed the dance over the abyss with the most varied musical forms—classical and jazz, kitsch and high art, *Sprechgesang* and grand opera, chorales, neighborhood pick-up ensembles, and street ballads—is absolutely marvelous. Jenny's famous "Alabama-Song" was sung by the terrific soprano Nadja Mchantaf as an erotically stimulating, unscrupulous blonde. It's no wonder that Jimmy Mahoney, the man behind every misfortune, fell for her. Michael König gave the role dramatic power and an oppressive, brutal honesty, which provoked both distress and enthusiasm within the audience. That goes for everyone in the cast, despite occasional unclear diction. A great evening for the orchestra, conductor, and all the singers. What a pity there was only one performance.

Monika Nellissen, welt.de (excerpt)
29 May 2018

Personal statement from conductor Jeffrey Kahane:

In 1927, Weill wrote to his publisher, "The piece we are going to create won't exploit topical themes, which will be dated in a year, but rather will reflect the tenor of our times For that reason, it will have an impact far beyond its own age." If there were any doubt about Weill's assessment, or the timeliness and freshness of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, it was dispelled at either end of the evening of 27 May, when I had the privilege of conducting a concert performance of the work, with the Hamburger Symphoniker and an extraordinary cast of young soloists led by Nadja Mchantaf and Michael König in the roles of Jenny and Jim, along with the outstanding Europa Choir Academy Görlitz.

I confess that I approached conducting *Mahagonny* for the first time with considerable trepidation, particularly in a concert performance, as I found it difficult to imagine how much of the piece would come across without the stage action. I have seldom been so happy to have been proven wrong. I found myself feeling and hearing the raw, visceral energy and startling originality of the music more powerfully than in a number of staged performances I have attended, a sentiment that was echoed back to me by a number of audience members.

The performance had a special resonance for me. It was the second time that I'd conducted a major masterpiece of Weill in the beautiful Laeiszhalle, the first being the Second Symphony in 2012 with the Hamburger Symphoniker. That concert took place within walking distance of the harbor from which my mother and her family sailed a few months after Kristallnacht in November 1938, when my grandfather was arrested, imprisoned, and briefly interned at Buchenwald. Returning to Hamburg to conduct another masterpiece by a composer whose story resonates in so many ways with that of my own mother was deeply moving—in fact, on more than one occasion during the performance I found myself on the verge of tears. But for all the gravity and almost unbearable power of the closing number of the opera, the evening ended with resounding laughter. As the capacity audience filed into the hall before the performance, they were handed American "play money" that looked almost exactly like one-dollar bills, but bearing the words "In Music We Trust" and a picture of the Laeiszhalle. As the cast and orchestra stood for the curtain calls, the audience, cheering lustily, spontaneously began throwing the "money" at the stage: a joyous and hilarious demonstration of a very different sort from the riot provoked by Nazi Brownshirts at the world premiere in Leipzig almost ninety years earlier.



PHOTO: HILBERT ARTISTS MANAGEMENT GMBH

Michael König



PHOTO: NADJAMCHANTAF.DE

Nadja Mchantaf

Der Silbersee

Theater Pforzheim

Premiere: 5 May 2018

Der Silbersee coincides with a profound transition not only in Weill's career but in world history as well. The first performances took place in February 1933 amidst the Nazi takeover, which violently abridged the work's reception history but earns it esteem today for acute political commentary in dangerous times. Musically, the score marks a shift from the song style of *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny* to a supposedly "softened" later style; this much-debated stylistic change cannot be attributed to the commercial pressures of Broadway, since its roots are already heard in this score.

The new production at Theater Pforzheim tries to respond both to the historical moment and the musical settings. Weill's numbers typically combine self-sufficient song forms with recitative-like integration of spoken dialogue and are generally rendered effectively in this performance. However, Dennis Marr's delivery of "The Lottery Agent's Tango" fails to put across the satirical invocation of "Zins" and "Zinseszins" (interest and compound interest), because his voice flickers as much as his ostentatiously glittery costume. Philipp Werner (Severin) is satisfying in the traditionally operatic portions of the score, whereas Tomas Möwes (Olim) emphasizes pantomime and silent film (with a hint of *commedia dell'arte*, another huge influence on opera staging between the two world wars). Taken together, this creates a convincing distinction between the younger, more passionate character and the older, more grotesque one. Stamatia Gerothanasi embodies Fennimore both as shy "femme fragile" and as "femme fatale" whose talents are appropriated and misused by her aunt and other older authority figures. However, her rendition of the "Ballad of Caesar's Death," perhaps the core of the work with its strong political implications, suffers from somewhat unclear diction.

Stage director Thomas Münstermann's boldest stroke incorporates local residents into the performance, starting before the curtain rises. These amateur actors assemble near the theater as if for a political rally immediately before each performance, displaying slogans taken from the libretto. During the performance, the chorus and the locals wear the same (quite literally) "blue-collar" outfit. The interplay of the diverse forces onstage is possible thanks to a pared-down set, largely created by long white poles held by members of the ensemble, which they arrange in various formations to represent elements of the scenic design (which sometimes looks rather like a do-it-yourself Frank Gehry concert hall). However, the ensemble must create other aspects of the staging in the simplest, most fundamental way: They produce the murmuring of the river with their own mouths, and the gunplay near the beginning is indicated by shouts of "bang, bang." Such effects from children's theater (in the best sense of the phrase, and well-suited to the fairy-tale facets of Georg Kaiser's libretto) allow the audience to grasp the plot twists but sometimes turn a bit heavy-handed, as if designed to help people unfamiliar with "modern" staging techniques.

The orchestra, conducted by last-minute replacement Yonatan Cohen, turns out to be the weakest link. The balance between the collective and the individual that succeeds in the stage concept falls apart in the pit, where the ensemble's aggressive playing tends to overpower the voices. The problems are evident from the very first bars of the overture, when the drums nearly obscured the melodic line with its hints of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. The ballad of Odysseus tied to the mast is the most successful musical effort, because singer and orchestra work together to recreate the anxiety expressed in the score. The global musical concept combines brisk tempi with conventional local variations: For instance, the important line "Erst denkt man, es geht nicht, und dann geht's doch" (First you think you can't, then you find you can) from Severin's baker-song is emphasized through a quite traditional *ritardando*, which mimics the verbal meaning by going from hesitation to hurrying but seems out of place amid Weill's musical gestures.

This utterance, however, could be the motto for the entire production, which hits its stride only in the final scene where Olim and Severin are miraculously spared from drowning. The

staging combines the quasi-religious portrayal of Fennimore as an angel directing the action from above with ensemble members forming the frozen lake by lying on the stage (they are then covered by a big silver cloth). It makes for a beautiful and haunting image that found its parallel in the emphatic (and clearly, at least in part, non-ironic) musical setting. The Pforzheim production therefore culminates in an image of hope that serves as political commentary: whereas in Nazi Germany spring will turn into a long winter, in *Der Silbersee* the supernatural resurgence of winter restores hope for spring.

Julian Caskel
Cologne



Olim (Tomas Möwes) holds up a pineapple as the local actors form the set around him

PHOTO: SABINE HAWMANN

Lenya Story

Renaissance-Theater, Berlin

Premiere: 18 October 2018

To celebrate the 120th anniversary of Lotte Lenya's birth, the Renaissance-Theater hosted the homage *Lenya Story*, which opened exactly on her birthday. This musical play with a cast of two also pays due respect to the great composer and creator of musical theater, Lenya's first and second husband, Kurt Weill.

The set is elegant, consisting of a platform placed upon the stage, covered with snow in the first act and later with ashes, surrounded by white neon lights, with Lenya's name in big flashing letters overhead. The two actors, Sona MacDonald and Tonio Arango, play Lenya and Weill from the beginning of their relationship in 1924 in Berlin at the house of writer Georg Kaiser until Weill's sudden death in New York City in 1950. They rediscover and bring to life Lenya and Weill's turbulent but durable musical relationship over twenty-six years.

The key to this affectionate two-hour production is of course the great music of Kurt Weill, played by a tight-knit and precise quartet led by musical director and pianist Harry Ermer, who knows how to swing and has a good grasp of Weill's musical inventiveness. For the most part it sounds rather like a greatest hits collection from *Die Dreigroschenoper*, *Mahagonny*, and the Broadway shows. Unforgettable evergreens like "Surabaya - Johnny," "Alabama-Song," and "Mackie Messer" flare up again and again in the manner of leitmotifs. Sona MacDonald, the Viennese actress and singer who grew up in the U.S., interprets the evergreens in her own very personal way. She does not look or sound like Lenya. Instead she gives her performance a hint of the refinement and glamor of grand opera or a chic nightclub. To my taste, a down-and-dirty touch or an imperfection in the singing would be welcome here and there.

The script by director Torsten Fischer and set designer Herbert Schäfer is based largely on the correspondence of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya, published under the title *Speak Low (When You Speak Love)*. It covers the stations of their lives, tracing biographical high and low points in their separate and mutual careers and, more generally, the difficult times they lived in.

Of course, the script explains Lotte Lenya's poor childhood in Vienna, her hunger for men, her first engagements in Zurich and her move to Berlin, where she met Brecht and made it big playing Jenny in *The Threepenny Opera*. It portrays Weill, the shy intellectual Jew from Dessau, as a man in black with glasses and without hair. Berlin-born and Vienna-based Tonio Arango shows Weill mostly as a driven composer who doesn't care too much if the world goes crazy around him. But Weill is the sidekick here. Lenya takes center stage.

The show does not make much of the disagreements between this oddly matched but loving couple who married in 1926. "She gave voice to his music. He gave music to her voice." As simple as that. Yes, this red-haired woman in a black dress and red leather coat is a vamp, but she seems unaffected somehow by the hardships of her life with Weill, whether during the ups and downs of the Roaring Twenties, or by political upheaval



Lenya (Sona MacDonald)
and Weill (Tonio Arango)

PHOTO: © MORITZ SCHELL

throughout their time together. They divorced under pressure in 1933—the year Weill and Georg Kaiser's *Der Silbersee* was closed down after harsh protests from the right-wing media in Leipzig, Magdeburg, and Erfurt. Yet the rupture of civilization that occurred when the Nazis came to power, which took a toll on Weill and his career, is only mentioned, not explored, in the script. The same goes for his struggle with Hollywood studio bosses over his innovative film compositions after the pair fled to the United States in 1935. He remains a hardworking man there, yet he enjoys luxuries like champagne and cigars, while Lenya is relegated to a typical housewife role after they remarry in 1937—before she gets jobs as a nightclub singer and a Broadway actress.

The play doesn't end with Weill's sudden death but presents two more husbands (also played by Arango) as well as Lenya's success in the James Bond film *From Russia with Love* and her triumph as Fräulein Schneider in *Cabaret*. In the script's most moving scene, she recalls Weill by singing "Speak Low" from his Broadway musical *One Touch of Venus*.

This elegant and stylish musical play, coproduced with the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna, will help spectators to remember and revive the distinctive character of Weill and Lenya's work together—even though MacDonald's renditions of the songs sound nothing like Lenya's.

Ute Büsing
Berlin

Regina

Opera Theatre of St. Louis

Premiere: 26 May 2018

Opera Theatre of Saint Louis scored an immense success with its production of the three-act edition of Marc Blitzstein's *Regina*. Although his epic reinvention of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* was seriously compromised for its world premiere in 1949, the restoration was not completed until 1990. Scottish Opera gave the world premiere of that version edited by my student, Tommy Krasker, and myself.

Seeing the St. Louis production as an audience member was an exhilarating experience. It would be disingenuous to say I agreed with many of the cuts taken, but I understood the reasons for them. The St. Louis production made a convincing case for the work, and its success became national news. In that sense, it was a triumph for Blitzstein. It is well known that Lillian Hellman hated every aspect of the opera that diverged from her play. Blitzstein wanted to place the Hubbard family—a white southern family struggling to return to an era that Margaret Mitchell famously said was “gone with the wind”—in the context of a new generation in which racial equality and truth trumped the closed and corrupt world of business. Blitzstein used music as the central metaphor of change and empowerment.

If a three-act *Regina* transforms *Foxes* into an operatic epic, rather than a drawing room drama, it also creates challenges for any stage director and set designer. *Regina* requires a virtuoso of planning and persuasion, as director James Robinson proved to be when he had the Act I dinner party take place upstage while Birdie sang her “Music! Music! Music!” aria downstage, and therefore allowed the following scene to be brought downstage, too. He also elicited brilliant performances from the cast. The St. Louis auditorium is a challenge, with almost half the house

watching the singers from the side. However, that brought us closer to the action: in addition to brilliant singing, the physicality of each performer, their reactions to each other—indeed, their eyes—made what could be a hothouse melodrama into riveting drama. Yes, it will always be a potboiler, but so is *Tosca*.

The costumes by James Schuette were perfectly balanced with the drama. Allen Moyer's unit set made for a certain prevailing mood, rather than the myriad views of the South that the libretto requires. Blitzstein's music goes with scene changes and when there are none, it tends to feel as if this were the composer's fault. Putting the three-person salon orchestra onstage for their parody of Gottschalk was terrific but could not act as the interlude for a set change, since there was none. What was worse was having the trio then disappear for the rest of the act, leaving the grand piano and the music stands onstage, thus losing Blitzstein's brilliant and ironically genteel background music to the nefarious and truly ugly goings-on downstage. Instead, there was dialogue without music, making it seem like Blitzstein had suddenly reverted to the play. Cutting the polka (which is followed by a waltz and a gallop) makes it look like Blitzstein threw a couple of dances into Act II, Scene 2, as opposed to making three onstage dances the weight-bearing walls of its architecture. Similarly, cutting the next musical number, Jazz's charming “Chinkypin,” makes it feel like Blitzstein's expansion of the Hellman play was arbitrary. The white characters onstage are meant to notice the adorable black child who is “peekin' in” on the party. They are converted from their racism by improvised music and the pure innocence of an adorable child. Regina's ice-cold interruption, “Refreshments, everybody,” brings everyone (audience included) back to the reality of her world.

Susan Graham was as great a Regina as anyone could imagine—beautiful, complex, and lethal. The vocal demands of the part are vast, especially in the first act, and she managed the terrifying—and unaccompanied—high C at the end of Act II with ferocity. The Birdie of Susanna Philips was brilliant, though she was directed to be too drunk before her aria in Act III. The audience laughed with each glass of elderberry wine. It should not be funny. Michael Day (Leo) was as good as anyone could be in that role. Ben (James Morris) and Oscar (Ron Raines) were perfectly balanced, with Ben the demonic, cheerful boss and Oscar the weak and angry kid brother. Christopher Irmiter was a profound and moving presence as Horace, the failed *deus ex machina* in a wheelchair.

Amplification all around (sound design by Michael Hooker), which will always be controversial, helped the audience to understand every word of this opera in English. The supertitles were projected only for sung words, but that created confusion when someone asked a question (no title) and the reply was sung (title). While I understand the intent, it turned out to be distracting.

The orchestra played wonderfully and the musical direction by Stephen Lord was both dramatic and flexible, beautiful when needed, heartbreaking for its climaxes. *Regina* is a long opera and its arc was clear from start to finish. That was the triumph of Mr. Lord.

John Mauceri
New York



Oscar (Ron Raines), Regina (Susan Graham), and Ben (James Morris)

PHOTO: KEN HOWARD

The Cradle Will Rock

Saratoga Opera Cast Recording

Bridge Records 9511 A/B

My first recording of *The Cradle Will Rock* was the Theater Four cast album (1965); I had already seen that production, directed by Howard da Silva (Larry Foreman in the world premiere). Its blazing theatricality stunned me. Da Silva directed it so that the acting functioned both on a parodic and a naturalistic level; the fourth wall felt porous, recreating some of the immediacy of the original production in 1937. It was as if the audience occupied the same space as the actors; the drama was immediate and enveloping.

Yet that recording lacked a crucial element: Blitzstein's orchestrations. Little did we know how much we were missing! Thanks to this revelatory recording, now we do. The scoring conveys two levels of satire, directed not only at the capitalist system but at the musical theater tradition itself—a “double entendre” unavailable in the piano-only version. The orchestra lifts *Cradle* from cabaret into the realm of *Singspiel*. When the Gent talks to Moll after her opening ballad, the clarinets come in with a thirties swing sound which segues into a send-up of an Irving Berlin musical comedy vamp. When the Dick tells the Gent to “melt,” you hear a smear on the muted trumpet. Prefacing Yasha and Dauber's paeon to “the rich,” a few trumpet shakes suggest the Moulin Rouge but then break into a rousing Rombergian operetta march with cantabile strings and brass punches. Elsewhere we hear hints of *L'histoire du soldat*, take-offs on Gilbert and Sullivan, and a Hawaiian guitar used not merely for backbeats but in portamento to add sardonic humor to “Honolulu.” The finale, with its thrilling faux-Verdian quartet of singers and speakers, boasts a tin-pan Berlioz sound, ingeniously capped by a clarion trumpet emitting triple-tongued bugle calls. The abundant, telling stylistic parodies suggest that the wrong performance tradition was launched at the legendary piano-only premiere.

Blitzstein's orchestral enhancement of the text enriches serious moments as well. As Gus and Sadie sing a tender duet about expecting their first child, a soft bass drum ostinato taps out a suggestion of the baby's heartbeat (and their own hearts, beating for each other), punctuated by a jarring minor ninth *sforzando* bass sting on the piano prefiguring their demise which was not audible on the previously released 1960 City Opera recording, the last time the full orchestrations were performed. One reviewer of that 1960 production criticized Blitzstein's orchestrations as in-

sufficiently elaborate. But clearly the composer deliberately chose to keep the texture thin and doubled the vocal line throughout so singing actors' words could be heard. A comparison of the CD release—a semi-tone high throughout—of the 1960 broadcast (reviewed in the Spring 2016 *Newsletter*) with the 2017 Bridge recording is instructive: In “Nickel Under the Foot” the string section is much larger and schmaltzier on the City Opera recording, yet you can detect sardonic coloristic touches like the harmon-muted trumpet only on the Opera Saratoga recording, while the strings are barely audible.

Cradle's scoring has been criticized for its slavish emulation of Weill's Berlin sound and instrumentation, and much of Moll's music and a few other bits are lifted harmonically from *The Threepenny Opera* (particularly “Pirate Jenny”). But when I heard Reverend Salvation's hymn, with its pseudo-Handelian continuo sitting on top of a deliberate reminiscence of Peachum's “Morning Anthem,” it dawned on me that Blitzstein was not only paying homage to Weill, he was gently ribbing him. This recording points up more clearly than ever how durable and catchy the melodies are in *Cradle* despite their non-strophic structure and unexpected sinuous turns that mark changes of mood (in the manner of a good operatic aria). The haunting descent from the supertonic to tonic triad (E major to D major) in “Moll's Lament” lingers in my ear.

Who better than John Mauceri to bring this score to life? There is no finer or more knowing champion of American musical theater, and he guides the youthful cast and orchestra with a sure hand through a highly idiomatic, *echt* Blitzstein performance. The

tempos are a bit more expansive than on most earlier versions, but that does nothing to dampen the high spirits. All the performers are fine; Mrs. Mister (Audrey Babcock) and Ella Hammer (Nina Spinner) come off especially well on this recording. The recording engineers have opted for a balance that brings presence and definition of the orchestra to the fore without obscuring the singers, an impressive feat. (Curiously, the acoustic piano part sounds tinny and unresonant, almost like a digital instrument—the credits mention a “piano/keyboard” player.) The booklet contains the complete libretto and excellent notes by Mauceri and Howard Pollack. Blitzstein himself tells the story of the premiere on a bonus track.

Opera Saratoga and Bridge Records have rendered an important service to musical history and created an essential contribution to the discography—as well as a thoroughly enjoyable listen.

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