Wide World of Weill

The Virginia Opera production of Street Scene completed its three-city run in Richmond 14 October 2018. Directed by Dorothy Danner and conducted by Adam Turner, Artistic Director of the company and the inaugural Kurt Weill/Julius Rudel Conducting Fellow, the cast featured two Lenya Competition prizewinners, Zachary James (3rd Prize, 2009) and Margaret Gawrysiak (2nd Prize, 2010). The Fairfax News enthused, “Weill’s challenging music, with all its shifting styles, was conducted brilliantly by music director Adam Turner.” Rising star Turner led a production of Die sieben Todsünden two seasons ago, and he will do it again in concert with the Buffalo Philharmonic and soprano Lisa Vroman on 17 January 2019. In September he teamed with another experienced Weill performer, soprano Ute Gfrerer, to present a cabaret program in Norfolk and Richmond.

On 31 August, Weill ambassador extraordinaire HK Gruber conducted the Swedish Chamber Orchestra in Weill’s Symphony No. 2 at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. Couldn’t make it? The complete concert—which includes two of Gruber’s works, Manhattan Broadcasts and Frankenstein!!—has been posted on YouTube.

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The Threepenny Opera (Berlin, 1928) and Happy End (1929), published a memoir in 1966 that continues to serve as an essential source of information about those legendary productions. (They were legendary for opposite reasons: the first an unforeseen triumph, the second an equally unforeseen flop.) The memoir has been reprinted repeatedly in Germany, most recently this year, but it has never been available in English until now. Translator Benjamin Bloch’s painstaking efforts have been published by Camden House under the title And the Shark, He Has Teeth: A Theater Producer’s Notes. Aufricht’s stories may not all be entirely accurate, but they are all entertaining, told with a sharp eye for detail and a firm command of irony. Now English-language readers can see for themselves.

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**Mackie Messer: Brechts Dreigroschenfilm**

*Mackie Messer: Brechts Dreigroschenfilm*—directed by Joachim Lang with Weill's music conducted by HK Gruber and starring a who's who of German actors—has made waves all over Germany this year. Following a world premiere at Filmfest München on 28 June 2018, the film had a star-studded red-carpet opening in Berlin on 10 September followed by openings in cinemas all over Germany on the 13th; in October it led off the German Film Festival in Paris. Originally conceived for television and partly funded by Südwestrundfunk, the film awaits its maiden television broadcast. The “making of …” film, *Mackie Messer auf dem Weg ins Kino—hinter den Kulissen des Dreigroschenfilms*, has already been shown on SWR and other German television networks. Lang’s film centers on the conflict between Brecht and the producers of G.W. Pabst’s 1931 film, *Die 3Groschenoper*, for which Brecht failed to meet the deadline to provide a script. He then filed suit against the producers and lost. (Weill also sued over control of his score as used in the film, and won.) *Mackie Messer: Brechts Dreigroschenfilm* attempts to imagine the film that Brecht conceived. Thus Lang’s film contains scenes and music from the stage version of Weill, Brecht, and Hauptmann’s *Die Dreigroschenoper*; those three also appear as characters, along with Lotte Lenya, Helene Weigel, and other historical figures. Some selections from reviews in the German press will help to convey the impact of Lang’s film:

“You can tell that Lang takes epic theater seriously by the way he has incorporated Brecht’s ideas about directing into his own vision. (He has taken a doctorate in Brecht studies, after all.) That’s why Lars Eidinger must speak entirely in Brecht’s own aphorisms, all of them carefully documented and appropriate to the situation. Considered as film dialogue, they come out very dry. Eidinger regularly tosses smug, conspiratorial glances at the camera—breaking through the fourth wall!—and then takes a drag on his cigar stub, as authentic as can be.

“Lang hasn’t just made a film of the *Dreigroschenoper*, he has set a film within a film. The frame story is the process of making the first film version of the stage hit, which was released in 1931 without Brecht’s blessing. His adventure ended in a lawsuit in defense of his rights as author. Lang combines the two events in an attempt to show the film as Brecht wanted it: opulent, critical, political. But it didn’t work out that way. Brecht’s artistic premises collided with the film company’s predictable desire to entertain, for all that Brecht had signed a contract with them.”

**Triple Bill at Opéra du Rhin**

David Pountney directed a triple bill of *Mahagonny Songspiel*, Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, and *Die sieben Todsünden* at Alsace’s Opéra du Rhin in May and June 2018, with Lenya Competition winner Lauren Michelle as one of the soloists. A review excerpt:

“David Pountney gambled and won when he juxtaposed two composers with little in common. … Choreographer Amir Hosseinpour’s moves were instantly recognizable—pointing fingers, frenetic, repeated gestures—and Pountney made use of all the resources the stage afforded to avoid monotony. … From the moment she opened her mouth, Lauren Michelle was a delight to any music lover’s ear, producing warm, sensual tones. Lenneke Ruiten, known for singing Mozart, has a more acidic timbre, but she held her own against Michelle thanks to incisive diction. The two danced well when needed and were always on as actors, working hand in glove with the splendid dancer Wendy Tadrous … Under the precise baton of Roland Kluttig, the Orchestre Symphonique de Mulhouse sounded like a harsh jazz band for *Mahagonny* and a delicate chamber ensemble for *Pierrot lunaire*; for *Die sieben Todsünden* they were as smooth as you could ask.”

All translations by Elmar Juchem and Dave Stein.
Weill Festival in Buffalo

This season, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and University at Buffalo team up to present a Weill festival, part of which is the next installment of “Music Unwound: Kurt Weill's America.” The festival kicked off 11 October with a Weill and Blitzstein cabaret, “Change the World, It Needs It,” followed by a chamber concert featuring Weill’s String Quartet No. 1 and Blitzstein’s “Italian” String Quartet on 30 October. Maestro Adam Turner leads the Philharmonic in “Kurt Weill on Broadway” on 17 January, featuring Lisa Vroman and Hudson Shad singing The Seven Deadly Sins and selections from Weill’s Broadway shows.

Additional events include a student cabaret 19 November, a chamber concert titled “Degenerate Music: Weill, Eisler and Schoenberg,” 28 March, and several interdisciplinary lectures, symposia, and exhibits at the UB campus. The University at Buffalo Drama Theater wraps things up with The Threepenny Opera, in the new Simon Stephens translation, 2–5 May.

“Music Unwound” programming will likewise be presented to audiences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: “Change the World, It Needs It,” featuring Vroman and William Sharp, with pianist Shane Schag, on 13 February; and Der Jasager, 30–31 March.

In memoriam

We note with sadness the passing of three artists associated with Weill, Lenya, and Blitzstein this year:

Charlotte Rae (1926–2018), the original Mrs. Peachum in the off-Broadway production of The Threepenny Opera (1954), had a long, varied, and highly successful career on television and in the theater. Mrs. Peachum was one of her first professional roles. In 1955, she released a recording, Songs I Taught My Mother, that included two songs by Marc Blitzstein, “Modest Maid” and “Fraught.”

Two-time Tony winner Russell Nype (1920–2018), the original Leo Hubbard in Regina on Broadway, is remembered for his theater career, though he starred in film and television as well. Nype played Rodney Hatch in the 1955 television broadcast of One Touch of Venus on NBC (released on DVD as VAI 4568) and appeared with Lotte Lenya in “The Broadway Years of Kurt Weill,” broadcast on New York’s Channel 2 in October 1964.

Joe Masteroff (1919–2018) wrote the book for Lenya’s biggest Broadway hit, Cabaret, for which he received a Tony Award. In an interview, he remarked, “I thought of Lenya from the beginning for [the role of Fräulein Schneider], as I was writing it. We never thought of anybody but Lenya. And if, indeed, she had chosen not to do it, it would have been a great blow.”

Changing of the Guard in Dessau

The Kurt Weill Fest Dessau has announced that Jan Henric Bogen will be its next Artistic Director, beginning with the 2020 Festival. Currently, he is Deputy Artistic Director of Opera Vlaanderen in Antwerp and Ghent, and will remain in that role in tandem with his duties in Dessau. Bogen said of the appointment: “I am extremely happy and proud about my appointment as Artistic Director of the Kurt Weill Fest. Kurt Weill is for me one of the most intriguing figures of twentieth-century music. Almost seventy years after his death we are still confronted with many questions that had engaged him. During the next editions of the Weill Fest I want to raise some of these questions: What are borders? What is home? What is otherness? With Weill’s works at the core the festival will propose contemporary accounts of these topics. It will be my pleasure to continue and deepen the relationship between the Kurt Weill Fest and the Kurt Weill Foundation to create fruitful synergies.”

120 Years Young: Lotte Lenya

18 October marked the 120th anniversary of Lenya’s birth. Sonia MacDonald’s tour de force vehicle, Lenya Story: Ein Liebeslied (written and directed by Torsten Fischer and Herbert Schäfer) opened that very day at Berlin’s Renaissance-Theater to standing ovations (see review on p. 16). It will continue in repertory through 13 January 2019. Producer Guy Livingston, who presented a radio documentary on Marc Blitzstein in 2016, has just completed a two-part series about Lenya’s life and career. The documentary was broadcast on Concertzender in the Netherlands on 12 and 19 October and is still available on concertzender.nl; plans for further broadcasts and streaming are in the works. Starting in February 2019, Oper Leipzig will revive its production of Love-Musik—the first in Germany—for the third season in a row. The Broadway show (book by Alfred Uhry, directed by Harold Prince) depicts the lives and careers of Weill and Lenya based on their correspondence; the Leipzig production has drawn acclaim from critics and audiences alike.

“Ruhrepos” Restarted

At the beginning of June 1927, just before their first joint work, Mahagonny Songspiel, hit the stage, Weill and Brecht received an offer to create an operatic homage to western Germany’s leading industrial region, the Ruhr. The pair visited Essen, spoke to dignitaries, toured the mines, and contemplated a revolutionary work that would somehow placate captains of industry while exposing their exploitation of workers. For reasons that remain unclear even today, the industrialists lost interest and Weill and Brecht went on to other projects. The “Ruhrepos” (Epic of the Ruhr) remains one of the great might-have-beens of Weimar theater.

Novelist and playwright Albert Ostermaier, winner of the Kleist Prize and one of Germany’s leading writers, decided to do something about it. He has created Die verlorene Oper: Ruhrepos, which premiered at the Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen on 13 June 2018. A straight play rather than musical theater, Ostermaier’s script not only gives an account of the failed project but tries to imagine the work that would have come out of it. On 31 January 2019, the play will be revived at Schauspiel Hannover with the same cast and creative team. The theater cites Ostermaier’s effort to “bind the past, present, and future of the Ruhr region to a new mythology through loosely structured dramatic scenes.”
Blitzstein and Foundation News

Cain World Premiere

Marc Blitzstein gets a belated world premiere when the MDR Sinfonieorchester performs his ballet score Cain (1930), conducted by Michail Jurowski at the Brucknerhaus in Linz on 28 February. The work was all but forgotten before the discovery of a second holograph piano score in 2016 spurred fresh interest; a newly engraved orchestral score and parts, prepared by Arno Lücker from Blitzstein's manuscript, will be unveiled for the premiere and then made available for future performances.

Cain was conceived as a thirty-minute “tragic ballet” based on the biblical story of Cain and Abel. In a 1930 letter to his sister, Blitzstein described it as “the best thing I have written in my career.” Yet his own high expectations—and praise from the likes of Aaron Copland, Nadia Boulanger, and Alfredo Casella—were not enough to bring about a performance; to this day, only excerpts have been given, and only with piano accompaniment. Nearly ninety years later, the work will be heard in full for the first time.

The Cradle Will Rock at Classic Stage Company

A new production of The Cradle Will Rock comes to New York’s celebrated Classic Stage Company for two full months beginning 19 March. Tony Award-winning director John Doyle will lead the production, with musical accompaniment provided by a single piano. Full cast information will be announced later this season; tickets go on sale 31 January.

Other Cradle news: Opera Saratoga’s cast recording (see review on p. 18) has been named “Disc of the Month” in the November 2018 issue of Opera magazine.

New Publishing Partner: BMG

As of 1 January 2019, BMG will administer Weill’s interest in the small rights of some of his European works in the U.S. and Canada. The deal gives BMG oversight of film, recording, and print rights and covers many of Weill’s best-known songs, including “Mack the Knife,” “Surabaya-Johnny,” and “Alabama-Song.”

Through this new partnership, BMG and the Foundation will collaborate on the shared goal of raising the profile of Weill’s music in popular culture through branding and popular usage. BMG CEO Hartwig Masuch said, “It is quite simply an honor for BMG to represent the Kurt Weill catalogue. It is also appropriate that BMG as a Berlin-based international music company should represent these historic works. It was in Berlin that Kurt Weill first met Lotte Lenya and it was in Berlin that Weill and Brecht most notably worked together. We look forward to working with the Kurt Weill Foundation to further spread the word about this extraordinary music.”

New Recording: Music for Solo Piano, 1918-63

A new album of Blitzstein’s piano music, performed by Leonard Lehrman, is due out from Toccata Classics (TOCC0438) in January 2019. The disc comprises twenty-seven tracks, many of them world premiere recordings, including Children’s Dances, an early version of the ballet The Guests, and selections from Cain.

The range of compositions show Blitzstein’s versatility and agility as a composer for the piano, from the larger showpieces such as the Piano Sonata, Scherzo: Bourgeois at Play, and Piano-Percussion Music, to smaller intimate works composed for family celebrations (Innocent Psalm—for the Bernstein Baby, Slow March—for Kit’s Wedding, Wedding Piece for Stephen & Joyce).

Blitzstein at the Proms

Two songs by Marc Blitzstein highlighted a recital program at this summer’s BBC Proms in London. Mezzo-soprano Wallis Giunta, accompanied by pianist Michael Sikich, gave a recital titled “Lunch with Lenny: Bernstein and Friends” at Cadogan Hall, 27 August, which included Blitzstein’s “Modest Maid” and “Stay in My Arms.” Giunta’s recent performances of Weill’s The Seven Deadly Sins have earned acclaim, and she was hailed for her renditions of these two numbers. A reviewer from Bachtrack.com said of Giunta’s performance, “[I]t was the Blitzstein songs that really shone: the tender ‘Stay in My Arms’ was sung with an opulent tone that suggested that Giunta is destined for bigger romantic operatic roles, and the utterly hilarious ‘Modest Maid,’ about a Victorian maid with an oversized sex drive.”

Mid-Year Grant Recipients

Professional Performance Grants
American Symphony Orchestra, New York, NY, Four Walt Whitman Songs
Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, String Quartet No. 1, The Seven Deadly Sins
London Symphony Orchestra, Symphony No. 2

College/University Performance Grants
University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, Vom Tod im Wald
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Der Jasager
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, Happy End
University of Toronto, Street Scene

Collaborative Performance Initiative
University of Maryland, 2018–19 Kurt Weill Festival
Lenya Winners on Stage

Following another landmark year, the Lenya Competition begins its third decade of identifying the next generation of rising music theater stars. At the 2018 Competition, the Foundation awarded $99,000 in prizes, bringing the total distributed to young singers to over $1 million in awards, prizes, and grants throughout the twenty-year history of the contest. Audiences around the world can share in the excitement: For the third year in a row, the finals will be broadcast worldwide via live stream. Tune in to watch 13 April 2019, 8:00 PM (EST), at https://www.esm.rochester.edu/live/kilbourn/. In the meantime, here are recent highlights from the careers of some past winners:

Lauren Michelle (1st Prize, 2015) was featured on the cover of the November 2018 Opera magazine as Natasha in War and Peace at Welsh National Opera.

Analisa Leaming (2nd Prize, 2007), is playing Irene Molloy in the national tour of Hello, Dolly! starring Betty Buckley.

Brian Vu (1st Prize, 2016), reprised his appearance as Riff in West Side Story when Francesca Zambello’s production came to Atlanta Opera earlier this season; he plays Moralès in Carmen at San Diego Opera, March 2019.

Richard Todd Adams (1st Prize, 2004) starred as Don Quixote in Man of La Mancha at John W. Engeman Theater, Northport, NY, September through November.

Lucas Meachem (Lys Symonette Award, 2002) performs at several major opera houses this season, including two roles at the Metropolitan Opera—Marcello in La bohème, and Robert in Iolanta. He sings the role of Sam on a new recording of Bernstein’s A Quiet Place with Orchestre symphonique de Montréal.

Nicole Cabell (Lys Symonette Award, 2002), was a “richly expressive” (New York Times) Bess in Porgy and Bess, English National Opera, October 2018, a production which is scheduled to arrive at the Met next season.


Talya Lieberman (3rd Prize, 2016), performed the roles of Tzeitel in Anatevka, and Dorothy in Der Zauberer von Oz at Berlin’s Komische Oper, November 2018.

Cooper Grodin (Lys Symonette Award, 2010) played Ali Hakim in Oklahoma! at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts in September and October 2018.

Maren Weinberger (2nd Prize, 2013) takes the lead role of Leslie in Companionship, a new opera by Rachel J. Peters, which receives its world premiere at Fort Worth Opera, 1 May.

Megan Marino (3rd Prize, 2012) returns to the Met this season as La suora infermiera in Suor Angelica in November, and as Laura in Iolanta in January.


Maria Failla (Lys Symonette Award, 2012) joins the ensemble of the Cats national tour launching in January.

To keep up with our 100+ laureates, visit the Winners’ Gallery at www.kwf.org/LLC

Kurt Weill/Lotte Lenya Artists at CLOC

The Foundation sponsored two Kurt Weill/Lotte Lenya Artists at the College Light Opera Company in Cape Cod, MA, this summer. 2018 Lenya Competition semifinalists Mark Hosseini and Abigail Benke took key roles in several of the company’s nine productions. Hosseini impressed audiences as the Pirate King in Pirates of Penzance and Judge Turpin in Sweeney Todd. Benke took the title roles in La périchole and Iolanthe and the lead role of Mabel in Pirates.

Mark Pearson, Artistic Director of CLOC, said, “College Light Opera Company, America’s premiere training ground for young artists, was delighted to have two Lotte Lenya Competition semifinalists this season. Mark and Abigail proved themselves invaluable workhorses for the nine-show season, taking on many leading roles. In addition to shining in principal roles, Mark and Abigail were equally valuable as members of the ensemble, providing leadership and support for their thirty colleagues over the eleven-week program.”
UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

Der Jasager
Staatstheater Braunschweig
Christoph Diem, director; Alexis Agrafiotis, conductor
2, 9, 19 December

Four Walt Whitman Songs
Barbican Centre, London
Ian Bostridge, tenor; Sir Antonio Pappano, piano
5 December

Lenya Story
Renaissance-Theater Berlin
Torsten Fischer, director; Sona MacDonald, Lenya
18–22 December, 7–13 January

Street Scene
Theater Münster
Hendrik Müller, director; Stefan Veselka, conductor
22 December, 12 performances through 25 May

Weill Songs
Staatkapelle Berlin and Till Brönner Orchestra
Lahav Shani, conductor; Till Brönner, trumpet
30–31 December

Weill Songs
Antwerp Symphony Orchestra
Philippe Herreweghe, conductor; Florian Boesch, baritone
5–6 January

Four Walt Whitman Songs
Kölner Philharmonie
Ian Bostridge, tenor; Julius Drake, piano
7 January

Suite aus der Dreigroschenoper
Toronto Symphony Orchestra
David Robertson, conductor
10, 12, 13 January

Weill Songs
New York Festival of Song
The Juilliard School
17 January

Zaubernacht
Ensemble Musikkollegium Winterthur with Figurentheater Winterthur
Pierre-Alain Monot, conductor
26 January

Die sieben Todsünden
Stuttgarter Ballett
Anna-Sophie Mahler, director; Stefan Schreiber, conductor;
Louis Stiens, choreographer
2 February, 9 performances through 30 March

LoveMusik
Oper Leipzig; Musikalische Komödie
Cusch Jung, director; Christoph-Johannes Eichhorn, conductor
22 February; 12, 29 March; 17 May

Symphony No. 2
London Symphony Orchestra
Lahav Shani, conductor
28 February

Cain (Blitzstein)
WORLD PREMIERE
MDR Sinfonieorchester
Michal Jurowski, conductor
28 February

All-Weill Wind Concert
University of Maryland
Andrea Brown, et al., conductors
1 March

Symphony No. 2
Anhaltische Philharmonie Dessau
Markus L. Frank, conductor
7–8 March

Symphony No. 2
Orchestre de Chambre du Luxembourg
Roland Kluttig, conductor
10 March

The Cradle Will Rock (Blitzstein)
Classic Stage Company, New York
John Doyle, director
19 March – 19 May

Violin Concerto
Nashville Symphony
Giancarlo Guerrero, conductor; Jun Iwasaki, violin
5–6 April

Zaubernacht, Mahagonny Songspiel
University of Maryland
5, 7, 9, 11 April

Street Scene
University of Maryland
12, 14, 17, 20 April

Lady in the Dark
MasterVoices and Orchestra of St. Luke’s
Ted Sperling, director and conductor
25–26 April

Street Scene
Oper Köln
John Fulljames, director; Tim Murray, conductor
28 April, 8 performances through May 16

Violin Concerto
Tonkünstler Orchester
John Storgårds, conductor and violin
5–7 May

Four Walt Whitman Songs
Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks
Thomas Hampson, baritone; Mariss Jansons, conductor
Herkulesaal
16–17 May (18 May at Meistersingerhalle Nuremberg)