

## MAHAGONNY-SONGSPIEL

by Bert Brecht and Kurt Weill  
original version (1927)  
restored and edited by David Drew

with notes for stage production assembled and amplified from the following sources:

- 1) composer's original manuscript orchestral score dated Mai 1927, Berlin-Charlottenburg, and written in black ink on 78 p.p. Beethoven-Papier Nr. 37 (24 linien) 14' x 10'
- 2) pencilled additions to (1), in conductor's hand, made with the composer's approval for the 1934 production of Mahagonny in Paris
- 3) composer's pencil sketches for 1927 version
- 4) composer's typescript notes for the production of the opera "Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny"
- 5) the published vocal score (UE 9851) of the opera "Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny"
- 6) the ink manuscript (125 p.p., 12 linien) in copyist's hand of a piano reduction of the 1927 Mahagonny-Songspiel held by Universal Edition, Vienna. This reduction is not the work of the composer
- 7) the photographed sheets of a version by Hans Curjel combining the Mahagonny-Songspiel with sections of the opera "Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny". This version was made in 1950
- 8) information received from Mr. Maurice Abravanel, pupil of Kurt Weill, who conducted the Mahagonny-Songspiel in Paris and London
- 9) correspondence between Kurt Weill and his publishers, Universal Edition, Vienna
- 10) finally, the entire notes have been closely scrutinised by Mrs. Lotte Lenya Weill-Davis, who has clarified innumerable points of interpretation

For assistance in the above matters, I am profoundly in debt to Dr. Helmut Wagner and Mr. Stephen Harpner, both of Universal Edition. We are also very grateful to Frau Helene Brecht-Weigel who instituted a thorough search of the Bertolt Brecht-Archiv, Berlin, for any material relating to the original production of the Mahagonny-Songspiel. Unfortunately, no such material could be found.

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The composition of the Mahagonny-Songspiel followed the completion of Weill's opera-buffa "Der Zar läßt sich photographieren" (libretto by Georg Kaiser). It was the result of a commission for a stage work to be presented at the 1927 Festival of New Music at Baden-Baden. The commission had actually been for a 1-Act opera, but since Weill had already written three of these, he decided on a different formula. He had just read the five Mahagonny-Gesänge published by Brecht in his "Hauspostille", and he suggested to Brecht that these poems be made the basis of the new work. Brecht agreed, provided a scenario, and wrote an epilogue to the poems, forming the Finale as it now stands. The production was designed in collaboration with Caspar Neher, and marked a crucial turning-point in the careers of both Brecht and Weill.

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## MAHAGONNY-SONGSPIEL

(Das kleine Mahagonny)  
von Bert Brecht und Kurt Weill

### Personen:

Charlie . . . Tenor  
Billy . . . Tenor  
Bobby . . . Bass  
Jimmy . . . Bass  
Jessie . . . Soubrette  
Bessie . . . Soubrette

Alle sechs in uniformen, smokingartigen Anzügen, mit breiten Schultern, weiten Hosen und kleinen steifen Hüten. Extras:

Stage-hands in uniform

### Scenery:

None. All that is required is a platform like a boxing ring, covering only so much of the stage as leaves room for the orchestra, which should also be on stage, in full view of the audience, and preferably on a second, lower platform (see diagram). Behind the main platform should be a screen, on which should be projected pictorial designs (see note on PROJECTIONS). In some prominent place on one side of the stage should stand a large frame holding the placards (see notes on TEXTS) which may be moved by hand, or by means of a roller-sheet.

## Stage props:

Tables, chairs, a bar, a moon (to move across screen) and placards for the protest marches in Finale

## Orchester-Besetzung:

2 Violinen  
2 Klarinetten in B (eine davon auch Bassklarinette in B)  
2 Trompeten in C  
1 Altsaxophon in Es  
1 Posaune  
1 Klavier  
Schlagzeug (mit 3 Glocken: C, D, G)

## MAHAGONNY-SONGSPIEL

### Part 1 : Prologue

- 1.) Chorus "Auf nach Mahagonny"  
Orch: Kleiner Marsch
- 2.) Duet "Alabama Song"

### Part 2 : Das Leben in Mahagonny

- Orch: Vivace
- 3.) Chorus "Wer in Mahagonny blieb"  
Orch: Vivace assai
  - 4.) Chorus "Benares Song"  
Orch: Choral
  - 5.) Chorus "Gott in Mahagonny"  
Orch: Furioso

### Part 3 : Finale

- 6.) Chorus "Dieses ganze Mahagonny"

Playing time: ca. 35 minutes

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## SYNOPSIS

### Part 1: Prologue

- 1.) Four men arrive with travelling cases, and sing of their intention to travel to Mahagonny, where everything is beautiful.
- 2.) Two girls enter. They too are disillusioned with their old world, and hope to find material happiness in Mahagonny.

### Part 2: Life in Mahagonny

- 3.) The four men enter, smoking and drinking. They complain of the high cost of living in Mahagonny, and play a game of poker.
- 4.) The men and the girls meet in a bar in Mahagonny. Life in the city has not come up to expectations. They wish to go somewhere else - Benares for instance. But they open their newspapers and read that Benares has been destroyed.
- 5.) One of the men, Jimmy, plays the symbolic role of "God" in Mahagonny: symbolic not so much of divine authority, or even of guilty conscience, as of man-made authority. That is to say, "Man creates his gods in his own image". The other inhabitants of Mahagonny threaten the "new" arrival, and he, after questioning them, orders them to Hell. But they say that they are already there.

### Part 3: Finale: Revolution in Mahagonny

- 6.) Protest marches are staged in Mahagonny, and the city goes up in flames: the plunderers are plundered. As the curtain falls, one of the girls tells the audience that there is no such place as Mahagonny.

## PRODUCTION NOTES - GENERAL

- a) The production should have an air of great casualness, and yet at the same time, great intensity. All artificial stylisation, and especially dance choreography, is to be avoided. The movements of the stage-hands may be in full view of the audience, and there is no need for a curtain, though one can be used if required. If the work is to be given in places other than regular theatres or concert-halls, this has the advantage of emphasising a certain affinity with the mediaeval travelling theatre. FOR MAHAGONNY IS A TOTENTANZ.
- b) Note by composer: Jede Annäherung an Wildwest- und Cowboy-Romantik und jede Betonung eines typisch amerikanischen Milieus ist zu vermeiden.

PART 1 : PROLOGUE

Nr. 1 : Auf nach Mahagonny

- A 1 Before the music begins, a man enters the stage from one side and slowly crosses to the other. He stands in front of the platform, with his back to the audience. He searches in his hip pocket, draws out a gun, and fires it in the air. Immediately after the shot, the music begins.
- A 2 With the first note of the music, a bright green moon rises slowly from one corner of the back-cloth. The man crosses to the other corner and pulls a cord: this releases the sheet carrying the first text (T 1)
- T 1 FÜR DEN FORTBESTAND DES GOLDENEN ZEITALTERS - and reveals the second text beneath (T 2)
- T 2 AUF NACH MAHAGONNY
- A 3 Action: four men, Charlie, Billy, Bobby, and Jimmy enter slowly, travelling cases in their hands. They look around.
- P 1 Projection nr. 2: SCHIFF AM PIER
- A 4 The men pause in front of the platform.
- P 2 Projection nr. 2: MAHAGONNY IN BAU
- A 5 The men start to mount the steps to the platform, in the order of the voice-entries (Jimmy, Charlie, Bobby, Billy).
- A 6 All four men are standing on the platform, and spotlights are directed on them as they sing.
- P 3 Projection nr. 3: SCHIFF
- A 7 One of the men points to the sign "Auf nach Mahagonny", and the others react with coarse hilarity. At the trumpet solo ( 9 ) they pick up their travelling cases and leave in single file.
- A 8 The men leave the stage.
- T 3 Text: OH MOON OF ALABAMA

Nr. 2 : Alabama Song

- A 9 The theatre is dark except for the green moon.
- P 4 Projection nr. 4: DIE HAIFISCHE
- A 10 Spotlight on Jessie, who appears from one side of the orchestra pit and goes to the centre of the stage, singing as she walks. She carries an orange, and between her phrases she bites. By the end of the introduction ("verse") she has reached one corner of the platform.
- A 11 Jessie sits on one corner of the platform, hands on knees, face in hands.
- A 12 Jessie leans back, hands linked behind her head and legs stretched forward.
- A 13 Bessie appears, carrying a small travelling bag. She is unnoticed by Jessie.
- A 14 Bessie picks up her case, and moves to the centre of the stage in front of the platform.
- P 5 Projection nr. 5: MÄNNER UND MÄDCHEN
- A 15 The two girls sit back-to-back on the case, facing half-front. As they sing the refrain in canon, Jessie smokes a cigarette and Bessie attends to her toilet. At the end (if there is no repeat) or during the repeat, they pick up their belongings and leave in the direction of Mahagonny. Lights out.

PART 2 : DAS LEBEN IN MAHAGONNY

Nr. 3 a : Wer in Mahagonny blieb

- T 4 Text: DAS LEBEN IN MAHAGONNY
- A 16 Stage-hands carry a table and four chairs onto the platform. (They must begin the moment the two girls leave at the end of the Alabama Song.)
- A 17 The lights come up, and the four men enter, smoking, chewing tobacco, spitting, swigging liquor.
- A 18 Jimmy mounts the platform and sits in one of the chairs, his legs on the table.
- A 19 The other men follow him.
- A 20 The three men sit down one after the other, each putting his legs on the table in synchronisation with one of the three sforzando chords.

Nr. 3 : Wer in Mahagonny blieb

- P 6 Projection nr. 6: MAHAGONNY IN BAU
- A 21 Here, and more violently at the repeats of this section, the men knock their heels on the table in time with the strong accents of the music.

P 7 Projection nr. 7: MAHAGONNY IN BAU

A 22 Billy takes his legs from the table, draws a pack of cards from his trouser pocket. The other men move their legs, the cards are shuffled, and from 24 are dealt.

P 8 Projection nr. 8: MAHAGONNY

A 23 Bobby wins the game and receives the money from the others. The game continues, with obvious signs of cheating.

A 24 Charlie raises a card quietly but triumphantly, on the second syllable of "gewinnen". The other men casually throw their cards on the table, and, from 28, they make gestures of resignation. At the cadence, one bar before 29, they suddenly become motionless, as if forming a tableau for a photograph. All lights out. When the light goes up again, they are seated once more with their legs on the table, and they sing, bouche fermée, with a kind of menacing lyricism.

Nr. 4 a : Orchestra

A 25 The men stand up and make themselves inconspicuous, while the stage-hands enter and erect an improvised bar at the back of the platform, with high stools and wicker chairs.

P 9 Projection nr. 9: ZWEI MÄNNER

A 26 Reddish-yellow light.

A 27 Jessie and Bessie appear slowly, look around in great boredom, and then make their way to the "Bar". They sit at the high stools.

Nr. 4 : Benares Song

P 10 Projection nr. 10: DAS LEBEN IN MAHAGONNY

A 28 The four men enter, and collapse into the armchairs. At some appropriate point (e. g. one bar before 34) they pick up newspapers and begin to read. For the most part they are entirely hidden behind their papers, but occasionally the papers are lowered, and the men stare ahead in despair. The girls examine their cocktail glasses. At the final return of the three-note plaint (two bars before 40) all six turn a page simultaneously.

P 11 Projection nr. 11: ERDBEBEN

A 29 All but Jimmy drop their papers, and, leaping from their places, gather round Jimmy and read over his shoulder as they sing.

A 30 The lights gradually lower as everyone disconsolately makes their way back to their seats. But they remain standing. At the double bar there is a general pause and all the props are quickly lifted off the platform, or pushed to the back. The pause must be very short.

Nr. 5 a : Orchestra

A 31 Low green light on stage. All six, with Jimmy in the middle, stand motionless at the back of the platform, staring out at the audience. At bar 9 after 43, a light comes up slowly on Jimmy. Gradually he pulls the front of his hat down over his face, and turns his collar up.

T 5 Text: GOTT IN MAHAGONNY

(This sequence may be inverted if found preferable.)

P 12 Projection nr. 12: GOTT IN MAHAGONNY

A 32 The two girls walk to the front of the platform, one to the left corner, the other to the right.

A 33 The men begin to walk forward, Jimmy two or three paces behind, and still with his collar up and his hat down.

Nr. 5 : Gott in Mahagonny

A 34 They all stop, the other men still in front of Jimmy as he sings. They listen nonchalantly, with their heads on one side and hands in pockets. During the following exchanges they become increasingly uneasy, and Jimmy-Gott increasingly more aggressive, until he orders them to Hell. Jimmy-Gott may push his hat a little higher at each interrogation.

P 13 Projection nr. 13: MAHAGONNY

A 35 The three men turn upon Jimmy threateningly, yet quietly and without overt violence.

P 14 Projection nr. 14: HOTEL ZUM REICHEN MANN

A 36 The girls, who throughout this scene have been standing in their respective corners, run up to Jimmy and knock his hat off, and the men push him towards the back of the stage.

A 37 Jessie runs back to the platform and shouts her text.

A 38 The projection screen becomes clouded.

T 6 Text: AUFRUHR IN MAHAGONNY

A 39 All stage lights out. The six characters leave the platform.

P 15 Projection nr. 15: AUFRUHR

- A 40 In the darkness, the stage-hands enter and take away the furniture. Their movements must combine with those of the men to suggest the dramatic situation.
- A 41 Red light on orchestra.

### PART 3 : FINALE

#### P 16 Projection nr. 16: REVOLUTION IN MAHAGONNY

##### Nr. 6 : Finale

#### P 17 Projection nr. 17: (.....?.....)

- A 42 First demonstration march. The four men and two girls with the placard FÜR DAS SCHRANKENLOSE LEBEN move slowly across the whole stage and up onto the front left of the platform.
- A 43 Four men, with the placard FÜR DAS GELD come up from the orchestra pit, and follow the course of the previous procession.
- A 44 Third procession, headed by Jessie and Bessie (who had left the platform at a convenient moment beforehand) bears the placard FÜR DIE WAHRE LIEBE, and follows its predecessors. The platform is now full.
- A 45 Fourth procession, with the placard FÜR DIE GERECHTE VERTEILUNG DER ÜBERIRDISCHEN GÜTER marches on and stands between the platform and the orchestra. All the company stand facing the audience.
- A 46 General pause, then lights slowly out (except for lights from above and below on Jessie) as everyone except Jessie turns into profile, and the placards with them. Jessie remains facing the audience. Everyone else remains motionless and in semi-darkness until the end. As she speaks, Jessie raises her arms in a gesture embracing the whole audience.
- A 47 The moon slowly sinks, and Jessie gradually lowers her arms, as she speaks her last words.

### PROCESSION PLACARDS

Photographs of the original Baden-Baden production show more than the four placards noted above, i.e. GEGEN DIE CIVILIS, FÜR DIE STERBLICHKEIT DER SEELEN, FÜR DEN IRDISCHEN LOHN, FÜR DIE NATÜRLICHE UNZUCHT. Note also that the opera "Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny" has quite different placards for this scene, and these might well be substituted.

### TEXTS

The following texts are essential : 1.) FÜR DEN FORTBESTAND DES GOLDENEN ZEITALTERS. 2.) AUF NACH MAHAGONNY. 3.) DAS LEBEN IN MAHAGONNY. 4.) GOTT IN MAHAGONNY. The other two may be dispensed with, and in the case of "OH MOON OF ALABAMA" this is especially advisable.

### PROJECTIONS

- 1.) LANDSCHAFT
- 2.) MAHAGONNY IN BAU
- 3.) SCHIFF
- 4.) DIE HAIFISCHE
- 5.) MÄNNER UND MÄDCHEN
- 6.) MAHAGONNY IN BAU
- 7.) MAHAGONNY IN BAU
- 8.) MAHAGONNY
- 9.) ZWEI MÄNNER
- 10.) DAS LEBEN IN MAHAGONNY
- 11.) ERDBEBEN
- 12.) GOTT IN MAHAGONNY
- 13.) MAHAGONNY
- 14.) HOTEL ZUM REICHEN MANN
- 15.) AUFRUHR
- 16.) REVOLUTION IN MAHAGONNY
- 17.) (.....?.....)

This is merely a list of the projections used (so far as can be ascertained) in the first production of "Mahagonny". The list may not be accurate, and certainly should not be regarded as binding. Certain of Caspar Neher's sketches for the projections have been reproduced in books or magazines (e.g. Nr. 1, Nr.3, Nr.4, Nr.5, Nr.11, Nr.14) and all the available evidence suggests that by no means all the projections listed above are essential. Numbers 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 2, 6 could probably be dispensed with.

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16.VII.59