

THE THREEPENNY OPERA: THE SCORE ADAPTED

by Kim H. Kowalke

“Unfortunately the full score of the whole *Dreigroschenoper* is not available,” Universal Edition informed its United States agent, Associated Music Publishers, on 1 February 1952, after receiving a cabled request for it and the score to *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik* from Joseph Rosenstock, the music director of the New York City Opera Company. “We suppose it has been lost during the war,” explained Universal Edition (hereafter “UE”), “but all the theatres play this work with the piano direction.” The next day, however, UE sent a corrective cable: “Reduced orchestration *Wozzeck* airfreight dispatched 31 January stop Partitur *Dreigroschenoper* for Rosenstock sending air freight Monday.” The head of UE’s stage department then elaborated in a follow-up letter: “As you see from our cable, we are able to send it to you. This full score is Kurt Weill’s handwritten copy and very precious. We therefore ask you kindly to take care of it.” A week later the Vice President of Associated Music, Karl F. Bauer, informed UE that the score had been received and reassured its owner that it would indeed receive “special care.” Before that letter had reached Vienna, however, he reported that City Opera had postponed its production until fall. At the end of the month, Bauer offered consolation that the air freight charges might still be offset: “I have some new information about Kurt Weill’s *Dreigroschenoper*. Leonard Bernstein, a very gifted, young composer-conductor intends to give a performance at the Creative Arts Festival at Brandeis University this coming June. Of course, this is only tentative and, naturally, will not interfere at all with the proposed performance by the New York City Center Opera Company.” On 23 April Bauer confirmed plans for the world premiere of Marc Blitzstein’s new translation in a concert version at Brandeis but cautioned, “This, of course, will not be a performance of great importance.”¹

Ten years later Tams-Witmark Music Library commissioned an essay from Blitzstein to announce that it had acquired exclusive North American representation of his adaptation of the musical play, which had recently ended its six-year stint at the Theatre de Lys in New York after 2,611 consecutive performances, thereby eclipsing *Oklahoma!* as the longest-running musical in the history of the American theater. “I wish I had written *The Threepenny Opera*,” Blitzstein began. “But since I merely translated it into English and adapted it for American audiences,” he explained, “I can come right out and say freely that the work is a miracle.”² By then it had drawn more than 750,000 people into the 299-seat

house and had grossed more than \$3 million. The production had also set off a pandemic of stagings around the world, with the number of performances in the period 1957–62 surpassing the tally amassed during the initial outbreak of *Threepenny* fever in 1928–33.³ The New York cast’s sanitized album, the first of an off-Broadway musical, had sold a half million copies, and at least forty pop renditions of “Mack the Knife” had attempted to join the hit parade, collectively chalking up sales of more than ten million records. Bobby Darin’s “cover” recording—the 1959 “Song Hit of the Year”—alone had sold two million copies by 1961.

“I practically went to school to *Dreigroschenoper*,” Blitzstein recalled.⁴ “I remember that it had just opened in Berlin when I was a music-student there, the year being 1928. I instantly fell in love; I went again and again to see it, after a while I had it practically memorized.”⁵ “I can remember vividly its effect on me,” he claimed, “and my scandalizing my fellow-students at Arnold Schoenberg’s master-class at the Berlin Hochschule, when I sat at the piano and croaked in execrable German and a composer’s squeal the ‘Mack the Knife’ and ‘Jealousy Duet’ songs, just as Schoenberg himself was entering the room.”⁶ But in fact Blitzstein had left Schoenberg’s master class, and Berlin, in autumn 1927 and would not return to Europe until summer 1929. He was not, alas, in the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm during *Die Dreigroschenoper*’s first season, but rather in Philadelphia, delivering a series of ten lectures under the rubric “The Modern Movement in Music.” In the fifth, which was devoted to the German musical scene, Blitzstein described Weill as “an extraordinarily clever musician” who “hasn’t a thing to say in his music,” which “appears to me little more than drivel.”⁷ Blitzstein made no mention of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and appraised *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* as Weill’s best work to date. Only much later would he succumb to Threepenny fever, a telltale symptom of which Lotte Lenya vividly characterized in 1956: “Even now, anybody who passed through the Berlin of that period, and who comes backstage to see me at the Theatre de Lys in New York, twenty-eight years later, feels compelled to cry, ‘Of course I was there that opening night!’”⁸

Blitzstein and his friend Aaron Copland did attend a performance of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in Wiesbaden during summer 1929. Although he later recalled seeing three different productions in Germany, none seems to have altered his opinion of Weill. In January 1930 he wrote that “the

greatest thing I resent in him—not having expected more—is his total lack of cleverness. His idea of a ‘*Sonk*’ [song] is an outlandish mixture of German beer-drinking ditty and American ballad, accompanied *a la marcia* by jazz-band instruments betrayed into a Sousa formula.”⁹ When Blitzstein gave another lecture recital a year later, he still deemed *Die Dreigroschenoper* “not so good, a combination of Russian cabaret music and the sort of American bellowing baritone who sings ‘By the Shores of Mandalay.’” He then demonstrated the “Barbarasong” in a rendition he described as a “sort of imitation of the way Carola Neher in Munich or Roma Bahn in Berlin sang this particular song; it is also the new style of performance in Germany, French grace in combination with American nonchalance.”¹⁰

After Blitzstein returned to Europe, he renewed his attack on the “enormous and mistaken success” of Weill’s “super-bourgeois ditties . . . the dissolution of a one-time genuine article, regurgitated upon an innocent public, ready, perhaps even ripe to learn.”¹¹ In the March–April 1935 issue of *Modern Music*, however, he reported that he had recently met Weill in Paris and heard a private piano performance of a “huge oratorio spectacle,” which seems to be “his best score and also his most uneven.”¹² Weill reported this first encounter with Blitzstein rather differently: “An American musician visited me and asked me to play him some of [*Der Weg der Verheißung*]. He asked me if he might be permitted to work on the musical adaptation that an English translation would require. . . . I know Mr. Blitzstein too little to be able to judge whether he could do it. He seems to be more a writer-about-music [*Musikschriststeller*] than a musician.”¹³

Later in the year in New York, Blitzstein met Hanns Eisler at the New School for Social Research and Bertolt Brecht during the Theatre Union’s ill-fated production of *Mother*. In December, when the League of Composers welcomed Weill with a concert of excerpts from his European stage works, Blitzstein seized the opportunity to compare “Brecht’s composers” and found Weill inferior to Eisler “in both temperament and knowledge”: “Weill is flaccid (he wants to ‘entertain’); Eisler has spine and nerves (he wants to ‘educate’).”¹⁴ Blitzstein also preferred Lenya’s performance to her husband’s music. Blitzstein’s wife, Eva Goldbeck, wrote on her program next to “Seeräuberjenny,” “Marc likes.”¹⁵ His published opinion was more explicit: “Lenja is too special a talent, I am afraid, for a wide American appeal; but she has magnetism and a raw lovely voice like a boy-soprano.”¹⁶

The following summer, as he himself was composing a new opera at “white heat” (in his words), Blitzstein attended Weill’s lectures on musical theater at the Group Theatre’s summer camp in Nichols, Connecticut, where Weill and Paul Green were hard at work on *Johnny Johnson*. Weill’s notes indicate that he used “a number of songs and scenes from *Die Dreigroschenoper* (in a bad translation)” to illustrate his “new type of musical theater.”¹⁷ As Blitzstein was discovering his own voice in *The Cradle Will Rock*, he came to appreciate Weill’s: “I have written some harsh things in the past about Kurt Weill and his music,” he stated in a preview of *Johnny Johnson* for *Modern Music*. “I wish now to write a few good things. He hasn’t changed, I have.”¹⁸ On opening night Blitzstein sent Weill a telegram: “We need your success in America.”¹⁹

Weill did not respond in kind the next year, after the Federal Theatre Project’s botched attempt to stifle *The Cradle Will Rock* assured it a celebrity and longevity it otherwise might not have achieved. After attending a performance during its three-month run at the Windsor Theater, Weill reportedly asked acquaintances, with characteristically dry wit, “Have you seen my new opera?”²⁰ (Of course, Blitzstein had already dedicated it to Brecht.) Although Weill also viewed, with some jealousy and disdain, George Gershwin and Richard Rodgers as trespassers on his own special field of endeavor (the serious musical theater), he saved his most wicked private digs for Blitzstein, whom he dismissed as a mere imitator: “I’m afraid they’ll steal my ideas,” he confided to Lenya in 1942 about *The Pirate*, a project intended for the Lunts, “and some louse like Blitzstein will get the credit.”²¹

Weill’s perennial conductor Maurice Abravanel, in attempting to tell Blitzstein how impressive he had found *The Cradle Will Rock*, unwittingly echoed Weill’s appraisal of Blitzstein’s talent as a composer: “Now if you could only write a libretto for Kurt Weill.”²² Blitzstein ignored Abravanel’s suggestion but did cast Lenya in the role of “The Suicide” in his radio song-play *I’ve Got the Tune* (1937). In 1938, in her nightclub act at Le Ruban Bleu, Lenya introduced the song “Few Little English” which he had written for her in Connecticut during July 1936.²³ She reported to Weill, “Marc seems to make a lot of propaganda for me in these circles.”²⁴ Although the Weills’ orbit of friends and collaborators then overlapped considerably with Blitzstein’s, especially near its left margins, Weill kept his distance from what Virgil Thomson dubbed the “Homintern” sector, where such homosexual Jewish leftist composers as Copland and Blitzstein were soon to be joined by the young composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein.

Bernstein, too, had seen *Cradle* in New York, and the following year he mounted his own production to cap his undergraduate career at Harvard University. Blitzstein attended and marveled at the professionalism of the student cast, whom Bernstein had rehearsed for just ten days and accompanied by memory at the piano onstage. Both sons of well-to-do Russian Jewish immigrant fathers, they had much else in common. Blitzstein recognized in Bernstein a younger image of himself, “brash and self-assured,” while Bernstein admitted that the older composer had immediately “seduced my soul.”²⁵ For the next twenty-five years they would remain devoted friends, with the protégé championing Blitzstein’s music while gradually overtaking him in the public eye. Although Blitzstein continually prodded Bernstein to become more engaged politically, Bernstein’s camaraderie tended toward the personal rather than the ideological. Two months after the performance of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Brandeis festival, he asked Blitzstein to be godfather to his firstborn child.

Between Bernstein and Weill, however, there is little evidence of direct contact during the 1940s. Bernstein noted in his diary, without comment, that while in Chicago in November 1940 he had seen Anthony Tudor’s Ballet Theatre production of *The Judgement of Paris*, which utilized instrumental arrangements of music from *Die Dreigroschenoper*.²⁶ Weill, in turn, heard Bernstein conduct his score for Jerome Robbins’s ballet *Fancy Free* in August 1944 in Hollywood, on a Ballet Theatre program that also included Tudor’s *Romeo and Juliet*. He told Lenya, “That much heralded *Fancy Free* is a phony. It has a charming idea and is, on the whole, rather fresh and amusing, but seeing it after *Romeo and Juliet* is like hearing ‘Oh what a beautiful morning’ after the Mattheuspassion.”²⁷ Ironically, when Blitzstein lectured in Philadelphia in October 1946 on the amalgam of popular and serious idioms in modern music, he illustrated his thesis with a song from *Die Dreigroschenoper* and a ballet sequence from *On the Town*. And in 1947, company members backstage after a performance of *Street Scene* overheard Bernstein mutter to no one in particular, “This isn’t worth *drei Groschen*.”²⁸

After he had conducted a revival of *The Cradle Will Rock* in December 1947, Bernstein directly challenged Weill’s near-exclusive claim to the domain of populist opera: “If I can write one real, moving American opera that any American can understand (and one that is, notwithstanding, a serious musical work), I shall be a happy man.”²⁹ When *Lost in the Stars* and *Regina* opened on Broadway back-to-back at the end of October 1949, it was Abravanel, not Bernstein, who conducted the music of Blitzstein, not Weill; Weill never forgave him for this “act of treason.” Returning by cab from a performance of *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* at the Metropolitan Opera Studio, Weill turned to his musical assistant as they passed the marquee for Blitzstein’s opera and said matter-of-factly: “He’s a better writer than a composer. I wish he’d stop trying to imitate me. Now he wants to translate *Dreigroschenoper*.”³⁰

But on at least one point Weill agreed with Blitzstein and Bernstein: *Die Dreigroschenoper* was a masterpiece. An American adaptation by a first-rate playwright of what he dubbed his “most valuable property” had

topped most of Weill's project lists after 1938, when he himself made a literal translation of all the lyrics and auditioned three of Ann Ronell's reworkings for Jed Harris, fresh from his Broadway triumph with Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. At this backers' audition, Blitzstein was an enthusiastic guest. Nothing came of it, however, nor of Weill's subsequent overtures to Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur to adapt the play. Finally, in 1945, Weill toyed with the idea of discarding Brecht's book altogether and starting over with a new adaptation of *The Beggar's Opera*, set in the Bowery around 1900 as a satire on Tammany Hall.

During work on *Regina*, Blitzstein showed producer Cheryl Crawford and Abravanel translations of several songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper* that he had been working on for some time. "I thought those translations were marvelous," Abravanel recalled, "and so I told Kurt and Lenya, and they immediately said, 'Don't mention that name. We don't want anything to do with him.'" ³¹ The conflicting accounts of Weill's subsequent change of heart, if indeed there was one, are hard to reconcile. Crawford claims that she drove Blitzstein out to Brook House to have Weill hear several songs: "He was impressed and gave Marc the rights to translate the entire work." ³² Blitzstein's own elaborate yarn of singing "Pirate Jenny" over the phone to a finger-drumming Weill, with an "excited" Lenya listening with approval on the extension, concludes with Weill exclaiming "Marc, do it all, why don't you? You do it, you're the one for it." ³³ In any event, nothing was formalized before Weill's sudden death. Blitzstein rode with Abravanel to Weill's funeral in April 1950: "Coming home, I was haunted by 'Solomon Song.' Soon I was translating still other songs and snatches. The thing was getting under my skin." ³⁴

A month later, in a lecture-recital at Brandeis titled "The New Lyric Theatre," Blitzstein performed his translation of "Pirate Jenny" publicly for the first time. ³⁵ (See the facsimile on page 145.) He spent June in Bermuda and returned with drafts of most of the other lyrics; "Anstatt daß," for example, started out in pencil sketches as the "Rather-Than Song," then became "Cancel That," before "Instead of" appeared on a typed page. Crawford moved forward with her production plans, reporting to Lenya in October that Brecht was favorably disposed and was sending his "latest version of the script." He would need only to see "the final adaptation for approval." "Then I got cold feet," Crawford admitted. ³⁶ The Korean War had heated up both the Cold War and the domestic hunt (led by the House Committee on Un-American Activities) for Communists, sympathizers, and "dupes." The motto "Where there's red smoke there's usually Communist fire" prefaced a volume published in June 1950 by *Counterattack* and titled *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*. Its list of the suspicious affiliations of 151 notables in the arts included many of Weill's former collaborators at the Group Theatre, as well as Langston Hughes, Burgess Meredith, and Olin Downes. Bernstein rated two pages; and although he had dropped out of the Communist Party in 1949, Blitzstein ranked second overall, with nearly four.

As Blitzstein turned his energies to his own *Reuben Reuben*, shortly after Weill's death Lenya renewed her acquaintance with George Davis, a former editor at *Harper's Bazaar* and *Mademoiselle* and a founding resident of that remarkable household on Middagh Street in Brooklyn Heights, of which Auden, Britten, Bowles, and Gypsy Rose Lee had all been residents in 1941. Within a year, he and Lenya married. Abravanel noted that "the Lenya legend did not begin until after Kurt's death, when she emerged from his shadow under the gentle guidance of George Davis." ³⁷ As he helped her work through grief and guilt, he persuaded her to perform again, for the first time since her disastrous reviews in 1945 for the Ira Gershwin-Weill operetta *The Firebrand of Florence*. Ernst Josef Aufricht, the producer of the original *Dreigroschenoper* in Berlin, mounted a "Kurt Weill Concert" at Town Hall in February 1951; the second half comprised a concert version of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, sung in German and accompanied by two pianos, with Lenya listed in the program as Polly but singing all of Lucy's and Jenny's music too.

A month later Blitzstein filed a version of the full script for copyright protection. He dedicated one of the earliest surviving copies to George Davis "with enormous gratitude," ³⁸ for it was Davis who finally convinced Lenya to let Blitzstein finish an American adaptation of potentially the most valuable property Weill had bequeathed her. She needed the money; Universal Edition had just paid the estate all of DM 90 for the European performances of *Die Dreigroschenoper* during the entire postwar period. And the appraiser of Weill's estate gave little reason for optimism; he could not "foresee any widespread market for any of his musical compositions." ³⁹ Soon Lenya was referring to Blitzstein's adaptation as "extraordinarily fine." ⁴⁰

Early in 1952 *Variety* reported that several Broadway producers, as well as the New York City Opera, were considering Blitzstein's version of the play for the coming year. Indeed, the City Opera announced that its spring season would include new productions of *Wozzeck* (the first performance in New York since 1931) and *The Threepenny Opera*. In February, however, McCarthyites led by the Austrian-born composer-critic Kurt List campaigned against this work by "Communist sympathizers," which, he asserted, "is completely out of place in our America of today." ⁴¹ Within a week the chairman of the board of directors of the City Center announced tersely that the production had been postponed until fall because of financial troubles. Subsequent announcements of the fall schedule made no mention of the piece. On 23 April the office of the president of Brandeis University issued a formal invitation for Blitzstein to participate in its Festival of the Creative Arts, offering travel and living expenses as well as an honorarium of five hundred dollars for his work on a concert version of *The Threepenny Opera*. ⁴²

Bernstein had been appointed the Mann Professor of Music and director of the School of the Creative Arts at the university, founded in 1949 "as the first corporate contribution to the world of higher education by American Jewry." ⁴³ He lived in New York, but once every week or two he traveled to Waltham, Massachusetts, to teach two courses. To climax the university's fourth academic year and celebrate its first commencement exercises, Bernstein was asked to organize a Festival of the Creative Arts for June 1952, in order "to present a sustained and integrated inquiry into the state of creative arts today," ⁴⁴ including film, theater music, poetry, dance, creative writing, art, and jazz. The four-day festival would inaugurate the five-thousand seat open-air Adolph Ullman Amphitheater and feature such notables as Aaron Copland and William Carlos Williams. At the first session a panel discussion would precede the world premiere of Bernstein's opera *Trouble in Tahiti*, dedicated, of course, to Marc Blitzstein. *The Threepenny Opera* was scheduled for Saturday evening, on a triple bill with Stravinsky's *Les Noces* (with Phyllis Curtin as soprano soloist) and the American premiere of Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* "Symphonie pour un homme seul," both to be choreographed by Merce Cunningham.

The curious omission of Brecht's name from the advance program book, which promised the "*Threepenny Opera* by Kurt Weill, adapted and translated by Marc Blitzstein," may have been an innocent oversight, but the fact that just three weeks previous Lillian Hellman had defied the House Committee on Un-American Activities by refusing to testify may prompt another interpretation. As late as June 1955 *Top Secret* magazine, for example, would warn that "every time you play 'Mack the Knife' you're sending money behind the Iron Curtain. The knife in that song is really a dagger with which Brecht is stabbing people in the back." ⁴⁵

Blitzstein recruited the cast for *Threepenny*, all of whom were New York-based singers: David Brooks (Macheath), David Thomas (Peachum), Mary Krete (Mrs. Peachum), Jo Sullivan (Polly), Anita Ellis (Lucy), George Mathews (Tiger Brown), and Lotte Lenya (Jenny). While he rehearsed the soloists in New York and Irving Fine drilled the chorus in Boston, Bernstein assembled an instrumental ensemble, all players from the Boston Symphony Orchestra (except for the banjo player). Blitzstein rehearsed from a copy of the piano-vocal score published in 1928 by Universal Edition and cut and pasted up UE's musical materials

to make principal and chorus books. Although he didn't bother putting his translation into his own score, he jotted down incipits in several multi-strophe songs, rendered all titles in English, and added rehearsal numbers that conformed to those in the instrumental parts and the holograph full score.⁴⁶ Already at this stage he had decided to take two numbers away from Polly, giving "Pirate Jenny" to Jenny and the "Barbara Song" to Lucy. Annotations in his vocal score stipulating the transposition of each of Lenya's numbers correspond to those in the holograph full score: "Pirate Jenny" and "Tango-Ballad" down a minor third to A minor and C[#] minor respectively, "Solomon Song" down a whole tone to B^b major. Blitzstein also inserted additional tempo and dynamic indications, performance instructions, and changes to instrumentation, as well as many marginalia directed to Bernstein: "Lenny, Cue him!"; "Keep the Tempo!"; "Give upbeat, Lenny!" Virtually all of Blitzstein's jottings, with the exception of instructions too obvious for an experienced conductor, match annotations in Bernstein's hand in the holograph (some of which subsequently found their way, by mistake of the editor, into the study score published by Universal Edition in 1972). The text cues in Bernstein's hand in the holograph conform to the final words of the corresponding paragraphs in the typescript of Blitzstein's narration.

Although UE's piano-vocal score did not contain Mrs. Peachum's "Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit," Blitzstein intended from the outset to include it: it occurs as No. 8 in his handwritten "orchestra disposition" chart (see the facsimile on page 146), which itemized number-by-number the instruments each player was expected to cover, and as No. 12 on his list of microphone assignments for the musical numbers. Because sets of instrumental parts rented by UE prior to 1960 did not include the song, there appears in the holograph, in the upper-left corner of the first page of the ballad, a reminder to "extract." Bernstein made several changes to Weill's orchestration of it, and Blitzstein's heavily annotated copy of his narration (see the facsimile on page 147), which precisely matches what can be heard on the archival recording of the concert, indicates that the number was cut at a very late stage, probably during the dress rehearsal on Saturday morning. The narrated passage that was to introduce it underwent the usual handwritten revisions before being crossed out in its entirety.⁴⁷

Blitzstein's diagram for the stage setup shows that the soloists sat center stage and used one of two microphones, while the orchestra and Bernstein were situated stage right and Blitzstein, with his own microphone, stage left. His witty and concise narration, a product of drastic cuts in rehearsal, placed the action in lower Manhattan in 1870, as a new mayor was about to be inaugurated. The recording reveals that the audience, estimated by journalists to have numbered three thousand, was very much "with it"—laughing at Blitzstein's summary of the action; gasping at Lenya's line, "I kicked him in the teeth," in the "Tango-Ballad"; and guffawing at "Et tu, you brute" in the Caesar stanza of the "Solomon Song." The recording also attests that Bernstein and Blitzstein indeed remained remarkably faithful to the holograph full score, except that they unfortunately substituted an electronic organ for the harmonium and bandoneon throughout, as well as for some of the original exotic, "ad lib" passages for bassoon, flute, cello, and string bass.

In his detailed review of the event in *Musical America*, Cecil Smith noted that although "the festival was half-prepared, half-realized, and overambitious, its intentions were bright and its air of youthfulness was infectious." Although vindicated in his decision to showcase Blitzstein's work, Bernstein could not have been very pleased with Smith's comparison of Weill's opera (again, no mention of Brecht) to his own:

The defects of *Trouble in Tahiti* might have seemed less glaring if the festival week had not revealed the surpassing values of Weill's *Threepenny Opera*. . . . The Blitzstein text is a glorious success and should win a wide American audience for the *Threepenny Opera* if anything can. . . . All the rough-and-ready, seedy vigor of both the original Gay-Pepusch *Beggar's Opera* and Weill's cynical, post-World War I, Teutonic transmutation of it are faithfully and brutally preserved. The song lyrics border on the miraculous. . . . What success

The Threepenny Opera will have on the stage if, as is rumored, it is given a Broadway performance could not be inferred from this concert performance. Certainly it would need a different and more perceptive cast. Apart from Miss Lenya, who delivered her two songs with inflections and implications that reaffirmed her position as a great artist in the métier, nobody rose above the commonplace. It was the surest proof of the enormous strength of Weill's miraculously scored music and of Blitzstein's new text that the work carried so well at the hands of performers who were able to give it so little. Even Mr. Bernstein, at the conductor's desk, floundered conspicuously when he endeavored to keep along with Miss Lenya's incomparably flexible and idiomatic singing.⁴⁸

Hearing the archival recording now gives a rather different impression: despite the transposition of her numbers, Lenya is stretched beyond her upper limits; several others sing impressively and idiomatically; the instrumental ensemble seems tentative and ragged. A few of the lyrics still sound like literal translations and cry out for revision; the finale to act 2, for example, concludes, "Remember, if survive is what you would/ for once try being bad and you'll get good."

After Lenya's return from Boston, she informed Universal Edition that "the chances for a Broadway production are very good," although the "book still needs work." She then registered a complaint:

The original full score of *Die Dreigroschenoper* is in an incredible state: torn pages, smeared by whoever has conducted from it. Leonard Bernstein, one of our best conductors, just shook his head when he saw the score. I'm going to have it put in order now and then send it back to you. Under normal circumstances it's the obligation of a publisher to see to it that something like this doesn't happen.⁴⁹

One wonders if Lenya realized at the time that the grossest defacement of the score, other than the engraver's bold markings in the "Barbarasong" and "Salomonsong," was in fact almost entirely the work of Bernstein alone, for the concert at Brandeis seems to have been the only performance for which the holograph had been used up to that point. Lenya had a negative photostat of the score made before she returned it to Associated Music Publishers for shipment back to Vienna.⁵⁰

Just a few days after the manuscript had been dispatched, Associated urgently requested Universal Edition to send it back to New York as soon as it arrived, for Decca had agreed to record the work, provided the rights could be cleared and a cast recording of an imminent Broadway production would not preempt it.⁵¹ Sessions had been scheduled to begin on 17 October 1952 at the Pythian Temple, with Bernstein conducting a cast that would feature Lenya and Jo Sullivan repeating their Brandeis assignments; Broadway stars John Raitt and Burgess Meredith singing, respectively, Macheath and the Streetsinger/Tiger Brown; and Randolph Symonette (the Hangman in *Firebrand of Florence* and the standby Mr. Murrant in *Street Scene*) as Mr. Peachum.⁵² Although the cast had already started coaching with Blitzstein, the recording was canceled when Brecht's publisher in Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, which had recently taken over representation of dramatic rights from Felix Bloch Erben, refused to issue a license.

Although Bernstein had been quoted in the press as being prepared to conduct *The Threepenny Opera* on Broadway that season, it was his own *Wonderful Town* that won the Tony Award for Best Musical, 1952–53. Rumors of a Broadway production of *Threepenny* proved unreliable, as Blitzstein and Lenya reluctantly had rejected offers from Roger Stevens, Billy Rose, and other producers who insisted the show would have to be rewritten and rescored to conform more closely to conventions of the Broadway musical. Rose told Blitzstein that he was sure "*The Threepenny Opera* in English, properly adapted, can play for the rest of our lives—and beyond," but cautioned:

It is also my belief that the adapter and translator is on dangerous ground when, out of fake respect or fear of family censorship, he does a line-by-line translation of a piece in a foreign tongue which was written for another era and another set of people. The result, more often than not, is one of unbelievable characters mouthing unbelievable things. . . . You owe no more allegiance to the German librettist than he did to Gay.⁵³

Blitzstein refused to heed Rose's admonition to take more liberties with Brecht's text or to accept as an exemplar Oscar Hammerstein II's rewrite of *Carmen*. When no commercial producer would option the piece, Lenya and Blitzstein decided to grant the Phoenix Theatre the first production. After that possibility also fell through, Stanley Chase and Carmen Capalbo, two young employees in the story department of CBS Television in New York who had reserved the intimate but run-down 299-seat Theatre de Lys in Greenwich Village, came upon reviews of the Brandeis performance and managed to convince everyone that they could do the play just as it was.

All in all, Blitzstein's final pre-rehearsal script, with dialogue sharpened, lyrics polished, and the action restored to Victorian England, adhered to Brecht's original play more closely than his musical adaptation would conform to Weill's full score. On Berliner Ensemble stationery Elisabeth Hauptmann communicated Brecht's formal approval, and in 1955 Brecht himself wrote Blitzstein: "I consider your adaptation of *Die Dreigroschenoper* magnificent."⁵⁴ With the holograph now back in Vienna, Blitzstein based his revised orchestration on Lenya's photostat (now lost). Notwithstanding the program credit "orchestrations by Kurt Weill," and Blitzstein's claims to the contrary in the press ("in my adaptation I have not touched this great score"),⁵⁵ Blitzstein made a number of alterations beyond those called for by the growing number of transpositions that the cast required. Having constructed a number-by-number chart of the instrumentation in the original score, Blitzstein expanded the orchestra from seven to eight players, reduced the requirements for playing multiple instruments to the standard "doubles" covered by guidelines of the American Federation of Musicians, and reassigned the parts of the omitted instruments. Bea Arthur's near-baritone vocal range necessitated a new arrangement of the "Jealousy-Duet," and Blitzstein rewrote some of Macheath's lines to accommodate Scott Merrill's Broadway-baritone range. To compensate Polly for forfeiting "Pirate Jenny," Blitzstein penned new lyrics for the "Bilbao Song," yielding "Bide-A-Wee in Soho" for the stable scene.

Though not billed as such, this had indeed turned out to be a musical as well as textual adaptation—so much so that Blitzstein had to prepare from UE's materials a new, heavily cued piano-vocal score and a much-modified set of parts.⁵⁶ Ironically, those renting musical materials from Tams-Witmark for subsequent performances of Blitzstein's American adaptation in North America would have access to a newly copied full score of his skillful solution to the problematic instrumentation of the original, while those in Europe who wished to perform the "authentic" version had to make do, operetta-style, with only a cued piano-vocal score to negotiate Weill's demand for seven players to cover twenty-three instruments. As a result, performances of Blitzstein's arrangement were often more faithful to the letter of Weill's original full score than those based on the original materials. So stunning a reversal of the assumed polarities—"authentic" versus "adapted," "work" versus "occasion"—between performance practice in European subsidized as opposed to American commercial theaters should discourage hasty generalizations about Weill's hybrid dramatic works and their idiosyncratic performance and reception history.

The premiere at the Theatre de Lys was set for 2 March 1954, the anniversary of Blitzstein's short-lived marriage in 1933 to Eva Goldbeck (1901–1936) as well as his forty-ninth birthday. "It also happens to be the late Kurt Weill's [birthday], which is why the astrologers still make money," he wrote to Mordecai Baumann, who had been born on that day too.⁵⁷ Reflecting Weill's posthumous clout as a successful composer of musical theater, Brecht's absence from the scene, and Lenya's authoritative presence, the production was again billed as "Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera*," with his name above the title and Marc Blitzstein's, in typeface of the same size and weight, just below it. Now, however, Brecht did receive credit for the "original text," sharing third billing with a redundant "music by Kurt Weill."⁵⁸ Problems delayed the previews until 7 March; the first performance lasted more than four hours, so after each

preview Blitzstein typed up a two-page list of dialogue cuts to be implemented the next night.⁵⁹ Although the cast worried that the theater would be picketed or that the FBI might close the production, the play opened on 10 March without incident, received mixed reviews, reportedly played to standees at every performance for twelve weeks, and closed after ninety-six performances because the theater had been previously booked by other producers for the summer and the entire next season. The production went into storage until September 1955, when it reopened at the newly refurbished Theatre de Lys and ran for more than six years, unleashing what Hans Keller described as a "torrential revival" of "the weightiest possible lowbrow opera for highbrows and the most full-blooded highbrow musical for lowbrows" that "swept right across our musical world, both European and American."⁶⁰

By the time the New York production closed in 1961, almost a decade after the landmark concert performance at Brandeis, Bernstein's own *Candide* and *West Side Story* had opened and closed on Broadway, confirming him as the leading composer of the "serious musical," a distinction that Weill had enjoyed and Blitzstein had coveted in the Forties.⁶¹ Blitzstein meanwhile had tried his translator's hand at parts of *Happy End* and finished a draft of *The Rise and Fall of the City Mahagonny*, an opera he considered the "crowning achievement of the Weill-Brecht collaboration and one of the giants of the century."⁶² The New York Philharmonic announced that Bernstein would conduct, as part of its three-week Spring Festival of Theater Music in May 1960, what would have been the world premiere of Blitzstein's version of *Mahagonny*, the American premiere of the opera, and the first post-war performance of the full musical text of the score. But by then Blitzstein had fallen out of favor with the heirs of Brecht, who had died in 1956 leaving administration of American rights in his works to his son Stefan. He persuaded Carmen Capalbo, who still hoped to mount a production of *Mahagonny* in an off-Broadway theater, to recruit the lyricist of *West Side Story* to replace Blitzstein on the project: "So I went after Sondheim, we met, he was flabbergasted, at that time he had never heard of the piece. He wrestled with it for a long time, but I knew what his answer was going to be. He didn't forget it though, because a few years later he wrote *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964). If you study that libretto, it's *Mahagonny*."⁶³

In 1959 Blitzstein, having been nominated by Virgil Thomson and seconded by Aaron Copland and Douglas Moore, was elected to membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters—an honor that had been denied to Weill in 1947 when Moore, then its President, refused to support Elmer Rice's nomination and Copland's second: "Weill has marvelous technique and impressive facility but heart and conscience I can't find anywhere."⁶⁴ When Blitzstein was murdered in Martinique in 1964, Bernstein wrote the commemorative tribute for the Institute; he also buried with Blitzstein any interest he might have had in performing Weill's music. Ironically, the Tanglewood Festival's seventieth birthday tribute to Bernstein in 1988 climaxed with Lauren Bacall singing "The Saga of Lenny," Stephen Sondheim's affectionately wicked account of the man who could never make up his mind what he wanted to be—a parody, of course, of "The Saga of Jenny" from Weill's *Lady in the Dark*. But all of this is, indeed, another story.

Notes

1. Correspondence between Associated Music Publishers (AMP) and Universal Edition (UE) was conducted in English; the dates of the letters, in the order cited, are: 4 February 1952, 11 February 1952, 14 February 1952, and 28 February 1952. The originals of AMP's communications and carbon copies of letters from UE are now in the UE archives at the Wiener Stadtbibliothek; photocopies of both are held by the Weill-Lenya Research Center (WLRC), New York [series 30/box 12/folder 29]. The correspondence is quoted by permission of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music and Universal Edition.
2. Marc Blitzstein, "On *The Threepenny Opera*," *Musical Show*, October 1962, 2.
3. Universal Edition's log of licenses for hire material (original held by UE; photocopy in WLRC [series 30, box 12, folder 4]) includes 130 entries for 1928–33, only 20 for 1934–52, and 106 for 1957–62; however, the later period far surpassed the earlier one in total number of performances, as several major productions tallied eight performances per week. Also, UE's statistics for the later period do not include any stock and amateur productions of the Blitzstein version in the United States. Reverberations of the New York success were far-reaching, with productions opening at the Théâtre de l'Empire in Paris in 1955, and, in the following year, at both the Royal Court Theatre in London (directed by Sam Wanamaker, designed by Caspar Neher, and conducted by Bertold Goldschmidt) and the Piccolo Teatro in Milan (directed by Giorgio Strehler). In 1960 the Berliner Ensemble mounted its first postwar revival of the work—again at the Schiffbauerdamm, directed by Erich Engel.
4. Marc Blitzstein, "On *Mahagonny*," *Saturday Review*, 31 May 1958, 40 (also published in *The Score*, July 1958, 11–13).
5. Blitzstein, "On *The Threepenny Opera*," 2.
6. Blitzstein, "On *Mahagonny*," 40.
7. Blitzstein, ["Notes for Lecture #5"], Marc Blitzstein Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; quoted by Eric A. Gordon, *Mark the Music: The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 40–41.
8. "August 28 [sic], 1928," foreword to Bertolt Brecht *The Threepenny Opera*, trans. Eric Bentley and Desmond Vesey (New York: Grove Press, 1964), xiv; first published as "That was a Time" in *Theatre Arts* 40, no.5 [May 1956], under Lotte Lenya's byline but written by George Davis, based on interviews with Lenya and Elisabeth Hauptmann.
9. Blitzstein to Stella Simon, 28 January 1930; quoted by Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 55. George Antheil claimed to Lenya that he had "introduced Marc to Weill's music, defended it": "I owe much to Kurt—without, I think, ever having imitated him as slavishly as did, for instance, Marc Blitzstein. I shall never forget—and perhaps Kurt would not have thanked me for it—that it was I, at 23 Barrow Street, N.Y., in 1930, who played *Mahagonny* and *Dreigroschenoper* for Marc—who, then, didn't like them, but loved them three months later" (Antheil to Lenya, 15 October 1953, WLRC [series 43]).
10. Blitzstein, [Lecture Notes, 4 February 1931], Marc Blitzstein Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; quoted by Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 64.
11. Marc Blitzstein, "Popular Music—An Invasion," *Modern Music* 10 (January–February 1933): 101.
12. Marc Blitzstein, "Theater-Music in Paris," *Modern Music* 12 (March–April 1935): 132–33.
13. Weill to Rudolf Kommer (Max Reinhardt's assistant), 15 January 1935, Weill/Lenya Archive at Yale [series IV.A, box 47, folder 8]. "Ein amerikanischer Musiker namens Blitzstein war bei mir und hat mich gebeten, ihm einiges von dem Werk vorzuspielen. Herr Blitzstein hat mich gefragt, ob er ev. bei der musikalischen Adaption der Übersetzung mitarbeiten darf. . . . [Ich kenne] Herrn Blitzstein zu wenig, um beurteilen zu können, ob er das kann. Er scheint mehr Musikschaffsteller als Musiker zu sein."
14. Marc Blitzstein, "New York Medley, Winter 1935," *Modern Music* 13 (January–February 1936): 36–37.
15. Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 115.
16. Blitzstein, "Medley," 37.
17. Kurt Weill, "What Is Musical Theatre?" Notes for a Lecture to the Group Theatre, Yale [series VIII, box 68, folder 17]. (The typescript is undated; the lecture was given on 27 July 1936.)
18. Marc Blitzstein, "Weill Scores for *Johnny Johnson*," *Modern Music* 14 (November–December 1936): 44. On 22 June 1936 Blitzstein had written to Weill: "I should like to consider the possibility of performing your *Anna-Anna* [*Die sieben Todsünden*] next season in a small series of chamber-operas. Would such a performance interest you? . . . I should greatly appreciate the opportunity of examining the score; I have heard of the work only through reviews, and your own comment." (WLRC [series 40])
19. Telegram from Marc Blitzstein to Kurt Weill, 19 November 1936, Yale [series IV.B, box 48, folder 20].
20. Minna Lederman, "Memories of Marc Blitzstein, Music's Angry Man," *Show*, June 1964, 18.
21. Weill to Lenya, 20 May 1942, *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, Kim H. Kowalke and Lys Symonette, ed. and trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), no. 296. The project in question was S. N. Behrman's adaptation of Ludwig Fulda's play *Der Seeräuber* as *The Pirate* for production by the Playwrights' Company, to star Alfred Lunt and his wife, Lynn Fontanne. Eventually it opened on Broadway without Weill's collaboration, and when filmed in Hollywood it included songs by Cole Porter.
22. Quoted by Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 330.
23. The holograph score of "Few Little English" was among Lenya's papers at the time of her death; it is now held in the Weill/Lenya Archive at Yale [series III, box 46, folder 1].
24. Lenya to Weill, 12 May 1938, *Speak Low*, no. 209. "Marc scheint ja in dieser Gegend für mich wirklich Propaganda zu machen."
25. Humphrey Burton, *Leonard Bernstein* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 52.
26. *Ibid.*, 87.
27. Weill to Lenya, 12 August 1944, *Speak Low*, no. 344. Later in the year *On the Town*—the dramatic expansion of *Fancy Free* into a Broadway musical by Jerome Robbins and George Abbott—lured featured dancer Sono Osato away from Weill's *One Touch of Venus*.
28. Lys Symonette, interview by author, 3 April 1991.
29. Leonard Bernstein, "Me Composer—You Jane" (14 January 1948), in *Findings* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 129.
30. Lys Symonette, quoted by Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 342. When Blitzstein had asked him to conduct *Regina*, Abravanel inquired, "Why not Lenny?" "Lenny would be great for a first performance," Blitzstein answered, "but not after that. He couldn't stick to the tempi and keep the show fresh; he'd become unhappy doing it eight times a week" (p.330).
31. Maurice Abravanel, interview with Donald Spoto and Lys Symonette, 1985.
32. Cheryl Crawford, *One Naked Individual* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), 213.
33. Marc Blitzstein, "Threepenny Opera Is Back," *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 March 1954.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 345–6.
36. Cheryl Crawford to Lenya, 12 October 1950, WLRC [series 30, box 3, folder 1]. See also *One Naked Individual*, 213.
37. Maurice Abravanel, quoted by Donald Spoto, *Lenya: A Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), 191.
38. This copy is preserved in the Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 36, folder 14].
39. Affidavit by Max Dreyfus, 20 May 1951, WLRC [series 30, box 3, folder 5].
40. Lenya to Leon Kellman, 25 March 1952, WLRC [series 42, box 2, folder 2]. In a letter to Alfred Kalmus (3 September 1954, WLRC [series 42, box 2, folder 3]), Lenya compared Blitzstein's translation with Bentley and Vesey's: "Their version seemed to Kurt stilted, flavorless, the lyrics unsingable, the score quite distorted. . . . Blitzstein's is, above all, wonderfully *singable*, probably because Marc himself is a composer, and theatrically most effective, because Marc has had long experience in the theater."
41. Kurt List, "A Musical Brief for Gangsterism," *New Leader*, 4 February 1952, 26. Excerpts from this article are reprinted in Kim H. Kowalke, "The *Threepenny Opera* in America," in *The Threepenny Opera*, ed. Stephen Hinton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 103–4.
42. Clarence Q. Berger to Blitzstein, 23 April 1952, Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 35, folder 6].
43. Program booklet for the "Festival of the Creative Arts," Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass., 12–15 June 1952, [11].
44. *Ibid.*, [3].
45. Quoted by Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 396.
46. Blitzstein's annotated piano score is in the Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 36, folder 1; the Streetsinger/Tiger Brown/Mounted Messenger part is in box 35, folder 11].
47. Both Blitzstein's typescript of the narration and his handwritten orchestra disposition chart are in the Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 36, folder 8]. A tape recording of the Brandeis performance is in the WLRC [series 110].
48. Cecil Smith, "Brandeis University Sponsors Arts Festival," *Musical America* 72 (July 1952): 7, 22.
49. Lenya to Ernst Hartmann (Universal Edition), 8 July 1952; original in the UE archives at the Wiener Stadtbibliothek, photocopy in WLRC [series 42, box 1, folder 24]. Translation mine. "Die Aussichten für eine Broadway Production sind demzufolge sehr gut. . . . Die einzige Schwierigkeit ist das Buch und an dem muß er noch arbeiten. . . . Die Original Partitur der D.G.O [ist] in einem unglaublichen Zustand. Zerrissene Seiten, verschmiert bei [sic] wer immer daraus dirigiert hat. Leonard Bernstein, einer unserer best Conductors [sic] hat nur den Kopf geschüttelt, als er die Partitur sah. Ich lasse sie jetzt in Ordnung bringen und sende sie zurück. Unter normalen Umständen, ist das die Pflicht eines Verlages dazu su [sic] sehen, daß so etwas nicht passiert."

50. A positive photostatic copy of the full score, which includes all of Bernstein's and Blitzstein's markings presently in the holograph, is held by the Library of Congress [M1500.W42D7 case], a gift of Ralph Satz, 2 August 1962. Almost surely made from Lenya's negative photostat, it includes several additional markings in pencil in the finale to act 1.
51. In fact, the score was never sent back and has remained in Vienna ever since.
52. Blitzstein's handwritten financial projections for the recording are in the Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 36, folder 8]: "4 orch sessions (15 min. of recorded music apiece) \$1800; chorus (1 session) \$680; 7 soloists (@ \$300) \$2100; 7% total royalty for Raitt and Bernstein (who would be contractor = \$82.50 for each session). Total \$4580."
53. Billy Rose to Blitzstein, 3 December 1952, Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 35, folder 6].
54. Brecht to Blitzstein, 14 June 1955, Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 35, folder 6]. "Ich halte Ihre Bearbeitung der 'DREIGROSCHENOPER' für grossartig. . ."
55. Blitzstein, "Threepenny Opera Is Back."
56. A complete set of rental orchestral material matching in all respects the version of the script performed at the Theatre de Lys and a "piano-conductor score"—with annotations (some in Blitzstein's hand) in black, red, and blue pencil, and blue ballpoint pen—are held in the WLRC [series 10/D7, folder 4].
57. This letter, dated 26 February 1953, is quoted by Gordon, *Mark the Music*, 344.
58. In a letter to Peter Suhrkamp of 11 November 1953 (Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 35, folder 6]), Blitzstein's agent, Leon Kellman at William Morris, proposed an equal division of royalties among Brecht, Weill, and Blitzstein: "Although the work of Mr. Brecht is highly respected in America, I think I should point out that perhaps the chief value of *Die Dreigroschenoper* for America is due to the Weill music and Kurt's great reputation in this country." Brecht rejected the proposal, arguing that in no case could Weill's share be more than 25 percent, though he would gladly give Blitzstein 30 percent.
59. These lists of cuts are in the Marc Blitzstein Papers [box 36, folder 8].
60. Hans Keller, "The New in Review: *The Threepenny Opera*," *Music Review* 17 (May 1956): 153.
61. In a 1962 interview, Lenya asserted, "I think surely Leonard Bernstein knows every note of Kurt Weill, and he is the closest to Kurt Weill, taking up where he left off at his death." (David Beams, "Lotte Lenya," *Theatre Arts* 46 [June 1962]: 18.)
62. Blitzstein, "On *Mahagonny*," 40.
63. Carmen Capalbo, interview with Donald Spoto, 7 March 1986, WLRC [series 60].
64. Douglas Moore to Elmer Rice, 24 March 1947, Harvard Theater Collection [bMS/Thr 380 (172)], transcription in WLRC [series 47].