

Kurt Weill Newsletter

VOLUME 39

NUMBER 1

SPRING 2021



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Kim Kowalke Considers Julius Rudel's Contributions to Weill Reception

Full Circle: Lenya Competition Prizewinners Return as Judges

Kurt Weill Fest Dessau's Artist-in-Residence Frank Dupree

Sins Are Always In: *Die sieben Todsünden* Fills Every Bill

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Cover images: A selection of photos from productions of *Die sieben Todsünden* during the 2020–21 season:

Top row, left to right: Lauren Michelle and Kate Lindsey at La Scala (photo: Brescia e Amisano), Stephanie Wake-Edwards and Jonadette Carpio at Royal Opera House (photo: Ellie Kurtz, ROH); Eli Kristin Hanssveen and Georgie Rose at Norske Opera (photo: Erik Berg). Middle row, left and center: Shelley Eva Haden and Wallis Giunta at Opera North (photo: Tristram Kenton). Middle row, right: Lindsey, Michelle, et al. at La Scala. Bottom row, left to right: Jonadette Carpio at Royal Opera House; Eva-Maria Westbroek at Dutch National Opera (photo: Sanne Peper); Anna Drijver at Dutch National Opera.

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Published twice a year, the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* features articles and reviews (books, performances, recordings) that center on Kurt Weill but take a broader look at issues of twentieth-century music and theater. With a print run of 4,000 copies, the *Newsletter* is distributed worldwide. Subscriptions are free. The editor welcomes the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for consideration.

A variety of opinions are expressed in the *Newsletter*; they do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. Letters to the editor are welcome.

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Great Strides for the Kurt Weill Edition

Last year, KWE personnel mounted an intensive effort to prepare critical editions of the play with music *Der Silbersee*, edited by Elmar Juchem, and Weill's symphonic music—*Symphonie in einem Satz* (Symphony No. 1), *Fantaisie symphonique* (Symphony No. 2), and the *Suite in E Major for Orchestra*—edited by James Holmes. While the volumes have not been printed, the scores have been completed and performing materials are available for *Der Silbersee* and both symphonies. By year's end, *Love Life*, edited by Joel Galand, will be published.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As the world looks longingly toward resuming something like normal life, the *Newsletter* contends with a spate of sin—*The Seven Deadly Sins*, that is, which has become the work of choice for so many opera houses this season. With scheduled productions rising and falling like dominos, it has not been easy to engage reviewers, but we have assembled text and photos to give the flavor of five productions of the *Sins*, along with reviews of four orchestral concerts in Berlin and two television documentaries.

During his centenary year, we embrace the occasion to honor musical titan Julius Rudel for his unstinting efforts to place Weill on America's musical map and make sure he stayed there. Then we turn to younger musicians and theater artists for their perspectives on Weill. We are profoundly grateful for Victoria Clark's memorial tribute to Broadway leading lady Rebecca Luker.

Don't forget: the Lenya Competition Finals take place live from New York on 28 August!

Dave Stein

Victoria Clark Remembers Rebecca Luker

Becca came into my life very near the end of her own, in the fall of 2018 when we cast her in a one-woman musical monologue called *Scaffolding* by Jeff Blumenkrantz, which I would be directing. That was the real beginning of a friendship that lasted until the end of her life.

Scaffolding is about a single mother who hides the diagnosis of her high school-aged boy's Asperger's from him, which eventually leads to the destruction of their relationship. It was emotional and gritty. Not typical soprano territory. But directing Becca was like having a long juicy lunch date with a girlfriend. Conversations and questions. She dared everything. She never settled. She came in on the first day of rehearsal with everything memorized. The score was challenging with 36 minutes of continuous singing. Jeff and I were amazed by her stamina and energy. What I hadn't known watching her onstage was what a willing and tireless collaborator she was. She gave me her trust and encouraged me to keep digging and exploring. She gave a thrilling performance that was brave, raw, and funny, and impeccably sung. I started to plot all the future projects we would work on together. Then in the fall of 2019, I received a call from Jeff asking me if I had heard about Becca. I hadn't.

I called her right away and she said she had been having trouble with her legs not responding well, and that she wasn't sure, but it could be serious. She told me not to worry, that she was fighting it and she was going to win. In the following months, as Becca's disease continued to worsen, so did my sister-in-law's cancer. At the end of March 2020, two weeks after Broadway shut down and the scheduled production of *Love Life* at New York City Center abruptly ceased, my sister-in-law succumbed to cancer. It wasn't until the summer that I heard that in spite of the raging COVID pandemic in New York City, there was a pipeline of close friends who were going to Danny [Burstein, her husband] and Becca's apartment to help care for her. I hesitated. With all of my grief already so close to the surface, could I be of any use to Becca or Danny? And selfishly I wondered if I could hold it together seeing my precious friend in a wheelchair unable to move freely. I decided to wait. I sent my love through other friends. I worked out of town briefly. I texted and called.

Finally in the fall, I summoned the courage to get on "the list." I went over to her wheelchair and knelt by her side and apologized for waiting so long to see her. I started to cry. She looked at me with determined blue eyes and said, "It doesn't matter. You're here now." She explained that no crying was allowed. Crying made everything harder. We decided to tell stories and laugh. Cackle, actually. Over the next few weeks, I gave her a pedicure,



brought treats for Danny, soup for Becca, helped her sip iced coffee, fed her, brushed her hair, held her hand, massaged her neck, anything she needed. As the disease progressed, she remained heroically strong and positive. She was side-splittingly funny. The miracle was that even while enduring excruciating suffering, Becca was taking care of me. Before I could say a word to her, she would always ask about my family, my husband, my son, what I was working on, ever the loyal and enthusiastic cheerleader. We talked about singing, theater, music, life. The irony of being so mentally sharp yet physically trapped. Eternally curious and thoughtful, she would thank me countless times in a visit. The last time I saw Becca was only a few days before she died. She had lost the ability to speak but being such a great actress, she could communicate with her eyes and her expression. I left her in the gentle care of Danny and two caregivers who were in the apartment that morning. And now it will be my privilege to say back to Rebecca what she so often said to others: Thank you, my friend.

Read Clark's unabridged tribute on our site: <https://tinyurl.com/3738aupk>

Rebecca Luker passed away from ALS on 23 December 2020. The Foundation's Board of Trustees has voted unanimously to establish an annual "Rebecca Luker Award" for an outstanding performance of a selection from the Golden Age of American musical theater by a finalist in the Competition, beginning in 2021. The award honors Luker's radiant performances in Golden Age musicals on Broadway and beyond. She served as a semifinals and finals judge three times each.

Fifty Fruitful Years: Julius Rudel and Weill

To celebrate the centenary of conductor and Foundation trustee Julius Rudel, Kim H. Kowalke explores the maestro's lasting impact on the performance and reception of Weill's music.

In April 2000, two days after the fiftieth anniversary of Weill's death, Julius Rudel conducted a performance of *Der Jasager* at the Japan Society of New York, prefaced by a riveting staging of its fifteenth-century source drama, *Taniko*, performed by the famed Tokyo ensemble Nohgaku-za. When repeated in Pittsburgh (stage director Jonathan Eaton's home base), the evening was hailed as one of the top three events of the season. At a surprise reception following the double bill's premiere at the Japan Society, I presented Rudel with the Kurt Weill Distinguished Achievement Award to honor forty-two years of barrier-breaking and standard-setting performances of Weill's music.

Fifteen years later the Foundation posthumously commemorated that performance legacy and his three decades of service as a trustee by establishing the Julius Rudel/Kurt Weill Conducting Fellowship, enabling talented younger conductors to assist maestros in preparing a performance of a work by Weill or Blitzstein. The first Rudel Fellow was Adam Turner, now musical director of Virginia Opera, who served as assistant and cover conductor for Washington National Opera's production of *Lost in the Stars*. His mentor, John DeMain, in turn had assisted Rudel at City Opera—a perfect demonstration of the maestro's inter-generational and continuing impact.

At the time of Weill's centenary in 2000, Julius was only the fifth recipient of the Distinguished Achievement Award. I had presented the first to Weill's one-time student and longtime conductor of choice, Maurice Abravanel, who had championed Weill in Germany, Paris, and New York, where he conducted most of Weill's Broadway musicals, but not, much to the composer's dismay, *Love Life* (1948) or *Lost in the Stars* (1949). Though Abravanel went on to conduct for four more decades, leading the Utah Symphony and the Musical Academy of the West and accepting

appointment as “Artist in Residence for Life” at Tanglewood, he all but abandoned his role as Weill's foremost living conductor. Rudel would assume that mantle of responsibility, gradually but steadily, starting in 1958.

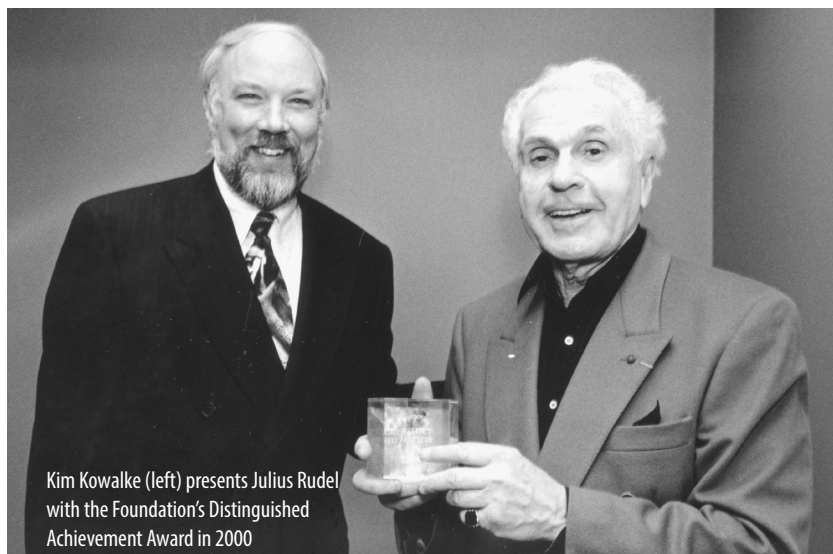
The seventeen-year-old Julius had emigrated to New York just three years after Weill. Having lost his father before Hitler annexed Austria in 1938, Rudel fled Vienna with his mother and younger brother. He supported the family with part-time jobs while pursuing a conducting degree at the Mannes School, awarded in 1942. The next year he joined the music staff of New York City Center Opera (as it was known at the time), first as an unpaid rehearsal pianist but soon taking on all manner of assignments; his conducting debut took place in 1944 with *The Gypsy Baron*. He continued making himself indispensable under Laszlo Halasz (1943–51), Joseph Rosenstock (1952–56), and Erich Leinsdorf, who lasted just one season. On the basis of his thirteen years with the company, but nevertheless a surprise choice, Rudel was appointed Principal Conductor and General Director in 1957. He would hold both posts longer than anyone in the company's history and launch the careers of a generation of American singers, directors, and conductors while staking out an identity and repertoire distinct from that of the Metropolitan Opera.

“I never got to meet Weill,” Rudel recalled in his 2013 memoir, *First and Lasting Impressions*, “yet I always felt a special kinship with him—and not just because we were both Jewish refugees from the German territories. We were both of the opinion that Broadway presented the wave of the future, the direction in which American opera was heading and the direction in which it *should* be heading.” Rudel had seen the original Broadway productions of both *Street Scene* and *Lost in the Stars* and considered them “two of the best examples of American opera.”

In his first season at the helm, Rudel inaugurated a five-week, Ford Foundation-funded celebration of ten American operas, including Kurka's *The Good Soldier Schweik*, Floyd's *Susannah*, Moore's *Ballad of Baby Doe*, and *Lost in the Stars*. This initiative to create a core repertory of American opera eventually encompassed thirteen works originally premiered on Broadway during the forties and fifties, including Blitzstein's *Regina*, which was revived and recorded in 1958, in a version more streamlined than City Opera's 1953 production. (Ironically, Abravanel's decision to conduct *Regina* on Broadway in 1949, instead of *Lost in the Stars*, which had opened the day before, had effectively ended his long professional relationship with Weill.)

Although New York's “people's opera” had already dismantled the color barrier in the 1945–46 season by casting Todd Duncan and Camilla Williams and crossed the opera/musical boundary when it produced *Show Boat* in 1954, *Lost in the Stars* was still a daring gamble. Premiered on Broadway in 1949 as a “musical tragedy,” with more dialogue than music, and requiring nearly equal numbers of black and white performers, it addressed racial inequality and segregation head-on. Julius conducted it himself in 1958, his first known performance of music by Weill. In 1972, as the first Artistic Director of the Kennedy Center, he selected *Lost in the Stars* to inaugurate a series of American stage works to be produced there. Twenty years later he recorded it, incorporating its two cut numbers, “Gold!” and “Little Tin God.” In 2008 he returned to the work with a staged produc-

PHOTO: WILLIAM W. IRWIN



Kim Kowalke (left) presents Julius Rudel with the Foundation's Distinguished Achievement Award in 2000



tion in Pittsburgh and Norfolk—at age 87, for what turned out to be his curtain call as a Weill conductor.

In 1959 Rudel included *Street Scene* in a second group of American operas at City Center. He recalled that it was “the runaway hit” of the 1959–60 season, but he didn’t conduct it himself until it was revived for three performances the following year. “It was beautifully directed by Herbert Machiz, who had been recommended to me by Lotte Lenya,” Rudel recalled. He then turned the baton over to others for revivals in 1963 and 1966. In his final season as General Director, 1978–79, he commissioned a new staging by Jack O’Brien and Patricia Birch and entrusted the podium to John Mauceri, who would subsequently introduce the piece to Scottish Opera, Lisbon Opera, and Opera Torino, each a national premiere. Rudel would conduct *Street Scene* only one more time—at Aspen in 2002.

Between these bookends of Broadway operas, Rudel showcased Weill’s European works: the first professional performances in the United States of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in German at City Opera in 1965 and twenty-four years later as musical director of a major Broadway production of a new English translation by Michael Feingold, directed by John Dexter and starring Sting as Macheath. After turning over his post at City Opera to Beverly Sills in 1980, Rudel’s final project there was a new adaptation of *Der Silbersee* by Hugh Wheeler and Lys Symonette, staged by fellow Foundation trustee Harold Prince, with Joel Grey starring in *Silverlake* (recorded digitally by Nonesuch before touring to Los Angeles).

As music director of the Caramoor Festival and Wolf Trap, Rudel conducted Weill’s Symphony No. 2 and then recorded it in 1989 with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra—only the third recording of the work. It has now, of course, become standard repertoire. Similarly, Rudel performed and then recorded, with the newly formed Orchestra of St. Luke’s, Weill’s challenging Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra, relatively unknown at the time, paired with a perennial favorite, *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. Coupling the two was characteristic of Rudel’s approach to programming, embracing the familiar and the new, the accessible and the daunting, throughout his long career in general and particularly in his catholic appreciation of Weill’s oeuvre.

That dedication was evinced perhaps most decisively and profoundly when Rudel accepted an invitation from the Spoleto

Festival USA to conduct the American premiere of *Die Bürgschaft*, Weill’s most ambitious, sober, and sobering opera. The significance of the production for Weill reception prompted the Foundation to highlight its premiere in May 1999 as the curtain-raiser for the two-season global celebration of Weill’s centenary. As staged by Jonathan Eaton at the Sottile Theatre in Charleston for only three performances, the production drew a remarkable rave from critic William Furtwangler: “a volcanic spectacle of music and drama rivaling the best Spoleto USA has ever offered.”

The fierce commitment of its principal cast, the Westminster Choir, and the festival orchestra comprising mainly young players convinced Julius, the Festival’s general director Nigel Redden, and me, as the Foundation’s president, that this landmark performance demanded preservation in the form of a recording. Julius’s son Tony and I scrambled to arrange for a six-hour session on a single day preceding the final performance. The now 78-year-old conductor galvanized and inspired the company of more than one hundred to capture the dramatic impact of a cast album but with nearly the polish of a studio production. The performance remains a key moment in the posthumous reception of Weill’s music, persuasively arguing in favor of the composer’s perennial reference to *Die Bürgschaft* as the benchmark against which he measured all his later works.

Having been invited by Lenya to join the Board of Trustees of the Foundation at the same time as Julius in 1980, I had the privilege of working with this remarkable musician for three decades. My first impression of him remains indelible: an “Old World” *elegance* of manner, appearance, conversation, and collaboration, combined with an always youthful *enthusiasm* for the new, the bold, the unfamiliar, the cutting-edge. When Julius retired as an active trustee, I asked him what had been his favorite moment in all the Weill he had conducted during the previous half-century. “The final scene of *Lost in the Stars*,” he answered without a second’s hesitation. “I could never look up at the stage because I’d fall apart and be unable to finish the performance.” Then I asked him if there was one Weill work in particular that he wanted to conduct but hadn’t. *Mahagonny*, he all but shouted. I inquired why it wasn’t part of the repertoire of some 150 operas he’d led during his long career. With a shrug of the shoulders and his trademark grin: “No one asked me!”

Online Resources:

Annotated catalogue of Rudel’s Weill performances and recordings:
<https://tinyurl.com/an8694bt>

Rebecca Paller on Rudel:
<https://tinyurl.com/4pm3fa6w>

New York Times obituary:
<https://tinyurl.com/tp3n2a9b>

Full Circle



An interview with Zachary James and Analisa Learning

This year, for the first time, Lotte Lenya Competition prizewinners served as coach/adjudicators of the semifinal round, virtual this year likewise for the first time. Zachary James (Third Prize, 2009) and Analisa Learning (Second Prize, 2007) sat down after the semifinals for interviews with Mike Gerard, from which their responses below have been adapted.

Q: How did you feel when you took your place for the first time as a semifinals judge?

AL: Just before the day started, I had a profound experience, realizing I had come full circle. It hit me as I recalled where I was when I did the Competition—still in college—and how it changed the trajectory of my career. Now here I am on the other side of the table hoping to be part of the contestants' journey and inspire them.

ZJ: I was excited about witnessing the work of the contestants and very aware of the gravity of the moment, honoring the legacy of the Competition and of Weill and Lenya, and having direct influence on an artist's future path—not things to take lightly.

Q: How did your own experience help you work with contestants?

ZJ: It made me aware that we're all in the same boat and I may very well be appearing onstage with some of these contestants next year. What the singers are asked to do—I shouldn't call them singers—*artists* are asked to do is unique among vocal competitions, but it's exactly what we have to do professionally. So I view them with great respect as colleagues and fellow artists.

AL: It gave me some perspective. I could understand what contestants were feeling when they came on the Zoom call, and I did everything I could to put them at ease so they could enter that creative part of their brain, rather than trying to get it right because they're in front of a judge. It also helped to understand the standards of the Competition from my own experience. That gave me extra insight into how to guide performers.

Q: What do you look for in a contestant's performance?

ZJ: I'm looking for a really developed inner life. I want the character to spring out of the person and I want it to be very personal and vulnerable, intimate and exposed. I want to see that they're bringing all of themselves to the character and building

from within. But along with that, a keen awareness of the story, atmosphere, environment, all of those things. That combination is what stagecraft is all about, and that grasp of the internal and external shows maturity as an artist.

AL: It's an overused word right now—authenticity. There's a reason it's overused. I'm looking for a story and a storyteller. I don't want to be distracted by a singer's technique; I want to find myself losing myself in their performance and then have to pull back and say, "Wait, remember you're judging this." If they can do that, it's very compelling.

Q: How important is it that contestants absorb coaching and judges' comments during the semifinal round?

AL: The more contestants can be in an open, collaborative frame of mind, the better they'll be at absorbing and trying on coaching. That's important because decisions are being made in these moments about who will move on to the finals. The talent level is extremely high and the margins between contestants are narrow; therefore, being receptive and flexible is a huge asset.

ZJ: Many times I've worked with simpatico directors, and our ideas go hand-in-hand. But other times you receive direction that doesn't necessarily jibe with what you're feeling. Then you have to be flexible, open to taking in ideas and marrying them to your own, even if your ideas don't end up in the final product. You have to be willing to experiment. With each contestant, I said, "Think of this as a workshop; we're just talking artist to artist. I want to hear about your artistic process. I want to try out some ideas."

Q: What can you say about the pros and cons of auditioning semifinalists via video rather than live and in person?

ZJ: On stage we can find moments to recalibrate, catch our breath, and prepare for the next moment. On camera, there is nowhere to hide. Artists now need to be simultaneously capable

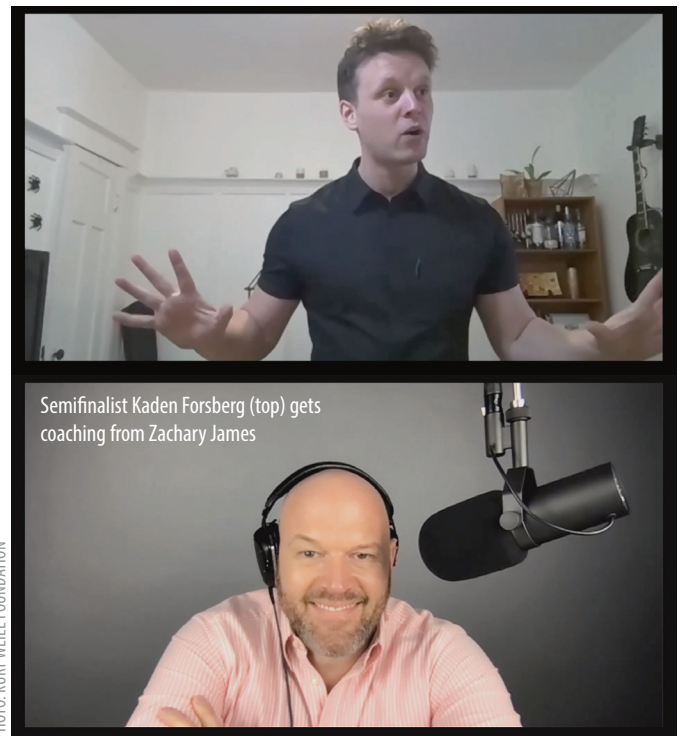


PHOTO: KURT WEILL FOUNDATION

From left: Competition staff Veronica Chaffin, Brady Sansone, Kim Kowalke



From left: Judge Analisa Leaming, semifinalist Victoria Okafor

of filling a large venue with their voices and presence, as well as handling the nuance, intimacy, and vulnerability of screen acting. This is not new, but the pandemic has sped up the collision of genres by forcing live arts to go virtual, and I think that will persist. The demands on the artist are greater than ever but incredibly exciting; they require diligence, focus, and craft which will make musical storytelling live on in more potent and accessible ways.

AL: I think it's a double-edged sword. Not having a live audience for the semifinals means you don't get the adrenaline, the energy, or the nerves. A lot of times those nerves serve us if we know how to harness them. But then again, there's more time. You can do some takes and look back and say, "No, I want to change all of that," and make another one.

Q: How does the Competition correspond to the "real world" of professional performance? How does it help prepare contestants?

ZJ: This competition absolutely nails it when it comes to what is expected of stage performers.

AL: By stretching their talents and showing them they have potential. Why not try to excel in the greatest range of characters and vocal styles, because that's going to expand your abilities. Get excited about repertoire you're not as familiar with. I don't think we can pigeonhole ourselves anymore; there are too many talented people everywhere you go. The Competition shows you what you're capable of and pushes you to learn and try new things. Maybe you're an ingénue who's realized "I can do character work," and that will double your opportunities. Or an opera singer who suddenly realizes, "Wait, I can sing and act a musical theater song with the best of them."

Q: Why is it valuable for young performers to study and learn Weill's theater works?

AL: The diversity in the repertoire, the range, the style, from things that sound like classic Broadway to the most operatic. You won't find such complex, lifelike characters in a lot of today's repertoire. That a character isn't just playing rage, isn't just playing love. All of these things are wrapped up in one. It's real life. That's why it's so thrilling to explore, because you are challenged in so many ways.

ZJ: You have to be a great actor and a great singer, both at once, to pull off Weill. His music is absolutely timeless, and the

stories are so important, now more than ever. I played Frank Murrant in *Street Scene* a couple of years ago. When we were going through the first reading of the libretto, I was struck by Murrant's speeches before and after he sings "Let Things Be Like They Always Was." People still say exactly this kind of thing; prejudice is very much alive. Rodgers & Hammerstein were applauded for talking about current events, racism, and domestic violence onstage for the first time. Weill was doing all of that and more.

Q: And what can they learn from Lenya?

AL: There is a rawness and a vulnerability to Lenya. If you just listen to the voice, you can hear how she paints a picture and there's no need for your eyes. We're trained to try to give a perfect performance and make everything so polished, but then you go listen to Lenya and it's not polished. It's raw, it's visceral, and it makes you want to listen.

ZJ: Has any better stage animal ever lived? It's what we all strive for—to be that commanding, that vulnerable, and that raw. One thing I brought up with several semifinalists was: There's so much more to it than singing pretty songs; you have to be ready to make an ugly sound when it's called for. That's what happens when you go deeper to discover how many layers there are to a character or scene, and that's what Lenya did.

Q: This year the Competition adds a new award in honor of the late Rebecca Luker, who served as a judge six times, including the 2020 semifinals. What can you say about her?

ZJ: What a phenomenal artist and an incredible loss to the community. I did *South Pacific* with her husband, Danny Burst- ein, so I know her work and her family very well. I'm glad to see all the many ways she's being honored around the world.

AL: We did *Where's Charley?* together at New York City Center Encores! That was my first job in New York City. I had been a huge fan of hers, so it was really important for me to meet her and find out that she was just like everybody else. She really took me under her wing. She was a guest on my podcast, she came and saw me in *The King and I*, and I exchanged e-mails with her until a month before she passed. When I saw that they decided to give an award in her name it was extremely moving. It's such a beautiful way to honor her legacy.

Q: Final thoughts?

AL: One of the reasons I want to work on Broadway is that I want to perform at the highest level. I want to be challenged to stretch myself and collaborate with the most creative people, and I got to do that in the semifinals. I was collaborating with incredible artists, we were making great music together, telling great stories together. It's really cool.

ZJ: I don't know of any opera singers who wouldn't also like to be on Broadway or straddle genres. Many do it only after achieving a certain level of success in opera. This competition brands artists as versatile and capable of handling diverse repertoire and multiple genres from the outset of their careers. That's incredibly valuable.

Weill Inspires a New Generation

The young pianist and conductor Frank Dupree has come a long way in a short time. Noted both as a classical soloist and as a jazz artist, he is attracting attention for leading orchestras as well. As the current Artist-in-Residence at the Kurt Weill Fest Dessau, Dupree gave the opening concert in February 2021, featuring Weill's *Intermezzo*, his lone composition for piano solo, and has more programs on tap when the Fest resumes in August. Inspired by his mentor, HK ("Nali") Gruber, Dupree has undertaken an intensive engagement with Weill's music as performer and arranger. He has kindly shared his thoughts on Weill, Dessau, and the world of music with us.



PHOTO: SEBASTIAN KÖHLER

On Gruber and Weill

My first encounters with Nali's music were his piano concerto, which I heard in Berlin with Emanuel Ax as soloist, and a recording of the trumpet concerto ("Ariel") conducted by my teacher Péter Eötvös. I loved both pieces, and I will play the piano concerto at some point, now that Manny Ax has given me permission. In 2017, I was invited to play Antheil's Jazz Symphony with the Essen Philharmonic, and it turned out Gruber was conducting. The performance was amazing because when he conducts, the stage—in fact, the entire auditorium—is on fire. His tempos never drag, and there's no time to think; you have to jump in and stay with him or you're lost. I wanted to do a Weill song as an encore, and we picked "Song of the Rhineland" (I grew up just a ten-minute bicycle ride away from the Rhine). That was the first time I played Weill in a classical concert.

The next time we performed together, with the Hagen Philharmonic, we changed roles. I conducted, and he sang several Weill songs. Next February, I'll play the Gershwin Concerto as he conducts; in the other half of the program, he will sing the solo part of *Frankenstein!!* and I will conduct. So we'll switch roles in the same concert.

Nali has told me a lot about Weill, and I've gained a feel for how to interpret his music from him: Sometimes really free, but always with attention to the text, so that the music follows the words. Like every German, I already knew the *Dreigroschenoper*, and I knew songs from the jazz repertoire, too. I listened to Nali's

concert in Sweden in April, where he did both Weill's symphonies. And that's another dream of mine, to conduct the symphonies. They are such great music, and they don't get performed enough. They should be heard much more often.

On Weill's *Intermezzo* (1917) for Piano Solo

I found this piece through Google—seriously!—after I was named Artist-in-Residence at Dessau. It was a complete surprise to me, because I knew nothing about it. In places it already sounds like Busoni—the musical language is already tending in that direction—but the work is still very Romantic. (At that time, Weill was studying typical Romantic piano repertoire like Brahms and Chopin.) What's interesting about it is the way the melody is composed. You can really sing this melody, but it's not very pianistic. It feels like there is already a band and a singer implicit in the piece. Most of the time, the right hand is doing both melody and chords (harmony), which creates the impression that there are actually several different instruments in different octaves. Playing this piece is a lot like playing a piano reduction of a work composed for a larger ensemble.

The published score is full of slurs, dynamics, and other markings that force an interpretation on the performer. I didn't feel like I really understood the piece until I saw the original manuscript in the composer's own handwriting.



Of course I wish Weill had written more for the piano. I would love to have more original compositions to play! But I'm very happy to have an opportunity to arrange his music. A slight example: Weill's "Algi-Song" is mostly a foxtrot for piano solo, followed by a short song. I rewrote the vocal line for trumpet and added a bit of slide whistle, and we performed it in Dessau. And I've made a similar arrangement of "Berlin im Licht" for trumpet. I have another project for the summer, arranging the *Suite panaméenne*—instrumental pieces originally composed for *Marie galante*—for Bartók's ensemble, two pianos and percussion.

Kim Kowalke asked me to arrange the Symphonic Nocturne from *Lady in the Dark* for trumpet and piano, after he heard my transcription of *An American in Paris*. My dream is to create a program of eighteen songs by George Gershwin that he arranged himself for piano solo combined with eighteen songs by Kurt Weill that I will arrange for piano solo. Right now I'm in the research phase, collecting songs for this project. I plan to rely heavily on Weill's American musicals, and I want to find songs that are not well known. I'll write down the arrangements, but there will be room for improvisation!

On Performing at the Kurt Weill Fest Dessau

One of my last concerts before the shutdown was at the Kurt Weill Fest Dessau in 2020. The former Intendant, Jan Henric Bogen, had asked me to perform with my jazz trio. We played a number of songs—just normal jazz. Then he said, "I think you are the right person to be Artist-in-Residence in 2021." That was all there was to it. He found out that I do both jazz and classical and asked me. The Fest is a very important destination for German jazz musicians. Till Brönner, the top jazz trumpeter in Germany, played there in 2018. Thomas Quasthoff, who is known as an opera and *Lieder* singer but is also a jazz artist, has done the Kurt Weill Fest. It's special because of the variety of music performed there—not just classical, not just jazz. Because of that, I see it as an example for festivals in the future.

It was wonderful to play a complete program in February. There was no audience, of course, and we had a film crew there to stream the concert, but I played as if there were a live audience and spoke between numbers—no retakes. I designed the program to be parallel with Weill's life; it started with the Intermezzo from 1917, then Hindemith, a German contemporary, followed by the German-American George Antheil, and finally Gershwin's *American in Paris* (of course, Paris was one of Weill's destinations).

The original plan was to play several concerts in February and March, but this year most of the concerts won't take place until August and September, and one concert has to be held over until next year. This summer we'll do more jazz improvisation—music from *West Side Story* and a lot of Weill songs, as well as music from *Porgy and Bess*, because Weill thought it was such a great example of American music theater. The last concert will pair Bartók and Weill, both refugees, and I'll mix in a little of my own story as well.

I want Weill to be represented on every program at the Kurt Weill Fest. So we have to go beyond simply inviting more singers to perform Weill; we have to make the most of the instrumental music as well.

Jazz and classical music are different genres but are very close; audiences that like Tchaikovsky and Bernstein also like Miles Davis and Oscar Peterson. I listen to Horowitz; then I listen to Art Tatum. It's all just wonderful piano music. We need to open our minds. Jazz musicians listen to Debussy, for example; they all love Bach. There is a great chance here for all of us to come closer together. We are still divided, but it feels like it is really changing with my generation. I don't see why we should close our borders! We are quite good at that in Germany ...

Jazz for me is composing in the moment; Wolfgang Rihm once said that composing is the slowest form of improvisation. Chick Corea composed piano concertos, and there's a symphonic version of *Spain*. Corea improvises when he plays these pieces, but Mozart and Beethoven did exactly the same thing. The orchestra establishes the melodies and chords, and the soloist can take off from there. I was trained to follow the music, play every note as written, never change legato to staccato. But why shouldn't we be open to different ways of playing? For me, music is more than reproducing notes on the page, pressing the A key because there's an A notated in the score. That is not making music; that's what a player piano does. I want to be a human being who really expresses the music.

Weill interests me because a lot of his music is "in between." You can play it in a classical or jazz manner. You can do variations in different styles, and Weill has the best material for that. He didn't write jazz *per se* but a lot of his music lends itself to that treatment. He had a very unique language, a mix of rhythm, harmony, and melody, always with a strong rhythmic base, that you find in his music and nowhere else.



PHOTO: SEBASTIAN KÖHLER



The Kurt Weill Fest Dessau 2021

The Fest normally centers on Weill's birthday, 2 March; this year, a much reduced program of five livestreamed concerts took place from 26 February to 2 March, featuring Frank Dupree, Katharine Mehrling, Jasmin Tabatabai, and others. The "WEILLDigital" streaming format, introduced this year for the first time, has been a success; spectators "visited" from all over Europe, the U.K., the U.S., Canada, and Australia in numbers comparable to what organizers would expect from the same number of live concerts.

Live performances, many held outdoors, are expected to resume during the second half of the Fest, from 28 August through 5 September. The festival administration notes, "live events at the Kurt Weill Festival will still be our main focus," but plans are in place to continue streaming programs as well. The full program will be announced shortly; check kurt-weill-fest.de for updates.

Sins Are Always In:

Die sieben Todsünden Fills Every Bill

The 2020–21 season has seen a remarkable “stream” of productions of Weill and Brecht’s *Die sieben Todsünden*; while some houses have managed to accommodate live audiences, many companies have chosen to display their performances on video, either live, taped, or both. The proof of the unconquerable adaptability of *Die sieben Todsünden* lies in this plethora of productions. From this season’s bounty, we offer tastes of five different conceptions of the work: Norske Opera in Oslo, Opera North in Leeds, Teatro alla Scala in Milan, the Royal Opera House in London, and Dutch National Opera in Amsterdam. All of these companies have mounted performances under unprecedented constraints and come up with promising innovations.

Die sieben Todsünden (with Gianni Schicchi)
Norske Opera
Oslo, Norway

Streamed stage performance, 26 March –
 9 April 2021
 Brückner-Rüggeberg arrangement

Director: Hanne Tømta
 Conductor: Ingar Bergby
 Choreographer: Georgie Rose
 Anna I: Eli Kristin Hanssveen
 Anna II: Georgie Rose
 Family: Rhys Batt, Martin Hatlo, Magnus
 Staveland, Håvard Stensvold

Anna I (Eli Kristin Hanssveen) and
 Anna II (Georgie Rose)



Anna I (Eli Kristin Hanssveen)
 and Anna II (Georgie Rose)



Anna II (Georgie Rose)



Anna I (Eli Kristin Hanssveen) and
 Brother (Martin Hatlo)



PHOTOS: ERIK BERG

The Seven Deadly Sins
Opera North
Leeds, U.K.

Streamed stage performance, 21–23
 November 2020
 Orchestration for 15 players by HK Gruber
 and Christian Muthspiel
 Trailer available on Opera North site

Director: Gary Clarke
 Conductor: James Holmes
 Livestream director: Jonathan Haswell
 Anna I: Wallis Giunta
 Anna II: Shelley Eva Haden
 Family: Nicholas Butterfield, Stuart Laing,
 Dean Robinson, Campbell Russell
 English translation: Michael Feingold



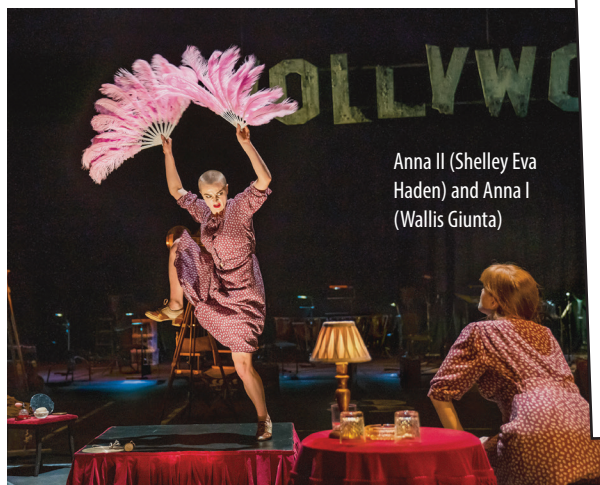
PHOTOS: TRISTRAM KENTON

From the theater:

“This new production is set in the 1930s and is full of cultural and political references of the time—the films of Charlie Chaplin, the Dying Swan of Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova and the ‘grotesque pantomime’ of German cabaret dancer Valeska Gert.

“The set, designed by George Johnson-Leigh, takes its inspiration from an abandoned film studio—a metaphor for the USA at the time, which was in the middle of the Great Depression. Each ‘sin’ is contained within a ‘sin box’ painted on the floor, with a corresponding city, year and objects assigned to each.

“The family play the part of German immigrants in exile (somewhat mirroring Kurt Weill’s own life), and as such are homeless—forced to stay in the ‘no man’s land’ space between the sin boxes. Social distancing between the performers has been carefully and cleverly woven into the choreographic landscape.”



Anna II (Shelley Eva Haden) and Anna I (Wallis Giunta)

From reviews:

“Wallis Giunta made Anna I a shrewd, somewhat cynical woman, trying to make her way as best as possible in a man’s world. The mezzo-soprano had all the necessary tone colours at her disposal and thanks to her convincing delivery every word of Michael Feingold’s translation was intelligible and vital to our understanding of the Anna I-Anna II dichotomy. Shelley Eva Haden flung herself about gymnastically to chart Anna II’s increasingly frenetic downward spiral.”

Jim Pritchard, *Seen and Heard International*, 24 November 2020

“HK Gruber and Christian Muthspiel’s new orchestration ... keeps the work’s spice and edge whilst bringing a new clarity to the score with the reduction to 15 performers. For all the work’s origins as a sort of cabaret ballet, the music in it includes recycled elements from Weill’s symphonic works and Gruber and Muthspiel’s reduction brilliantly massages everything down to [fifteen players] without too much loss. James Holmes conducted with some point, the bouncy dance numbers had an edge to them, so that the whole piece felt the right mix of fun and danger.”

Robert Hugill, *Opera Today*, November 2020

“The set (George Johnson-Leigh) is sparse, involving seven fixed, oblong stages equipped with minimal props, for example a small table and lamp signifying a cabaret show. Other props are also simple, including a park bench and a few wooden chairs. Mike Lock’s lighting scheme becomes critical, and is efficiently implemented.”

Richard Wilcocks, *Bachtrack*, 23 November 2020

**Die sieben Todsünden (with
Mahagonny Songspiel)
Teatro alla Scala
Milan, Italy**

Streamed stage performance, 18–25
March 2021
Original orchestration

Director: Irina Brook
Conductor: Riccardo Chailly
Stream director: Amalda Canali
Anna I/Bessie: Kate Lindsey
Anna II/Jessie: Lauren Michelle
Family: Andrew Harris, Elliott Carlton
Hines, Matthäus Schmidlechner, Michael
Smallwood

From the director:

“Mahagonny is the ultimate no-man’s land, a symbol or a Shangri-La that connects different worlds. I have linked the two pieces so as to make a strong social eco-statement about desperate characters stuck together on a dystopian island at the end of the world (Mahagonny), all centered around two penniless girls who have wandered through America, living off the streets, trying to make a buck or two.

“I decided to use a unit set, a crumbling bar on an island in the midst of a sea of plastic bottles, to represent the world in the wake of an environmental catastrophe. The two sisters have survived but are traumatized, probably drunk or drugged, engaging in conversations with other adventurers and revealing some of what has happened to them in a series of flashbacks. Anna II is simply too traumatized even to speak. ... This is opera in a world where there is no future.”

From reviews:

“Kate Lindsey’s voice, facial expressions, gestures and delivery of the words were so compellingly integrated and powerfully projected that one succumbed entirely to the character’s vehement, disillusioning narrative, in which the ‘seven deadly sins’ Brecht refers to tell us more about the subjective perceptions of the characters themselves than about moral absolutes. ... Though described in the score as a ballet-chanté, there was relatively little choreography, but soprano Lauren Michelle as Anna II used her highly expressive body to help us understand the character’s largely silent, pill-swallowing subservience to her dominant sister as they make their way depressingly from one U.S. city to another.”

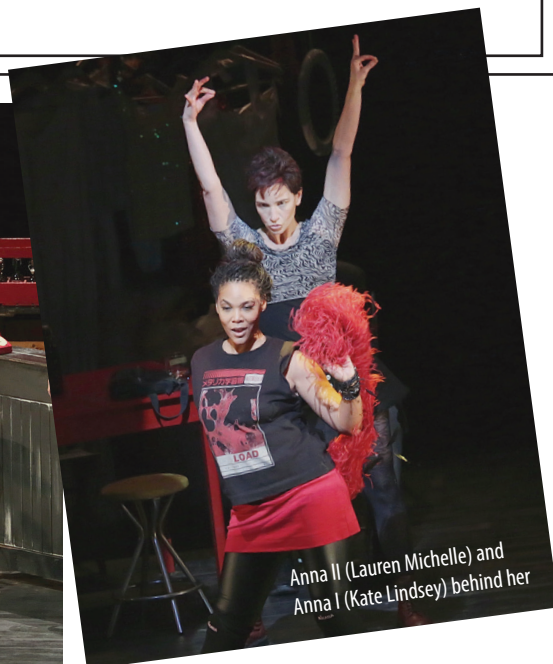
Stephen Hastings, *Opera News Online*, 17 March 2021

“Riccardo Chailly and the La Scala orchestra play [Weill’s music] energetically while revealing the harmonies and rhythms in the score in great detail. Irina Brook’s production condenses the stage into a small living area with sparse, cheap-looking furniture and a lot of hard liquor. It places the family firmly as trailer trash, aided by projected black-and-white video of an actual trailer which evokes 1930s silent cinema. It’s simple enough, but there are plenty of effective devices, like the change in Anna II’s costume from tutu (as she hopes to become a ballerina) to feather boa (as she becomes a dancer of quite a different sort). All this ... made this performance into a visceral experience, a real triumph.”

David Karlin, *Bachtrack*, 19 March 2021

PHOTOS: BRESCIA E AMISANO TEATRO ALLA SCALA

From left: Actor (Martin Chishimba), Brother (Michael Smallwood), Anna II (Lauren Michelle), Father (Matthäus Schmidlechner), Anna I (Kate Lindsey)



Anna II (Lauren Michelle) and
Anna I (Kate Lindsey) behind her

Anna II (Jonadette Carpio) in foreground during Gluttony scene; Blaise Malaba, Egor Zhuravskii, Filipe Manu, Dominic Sedgwick in background

PHOTOS: © ELLIE KURTZ ROH 2021



From reviews:

“Turning a filmed performance into a performance about voyeurism and the invasion of privacy in the social media age, Kettle invites us to watch the spectacle of female physicality—to contemplate bodies and how we police them, gender and how we essentialise it. It’s difficult to watch.”

Alexandra Coghlan, *inews.co.uk*, 12 April 2021

“Aspiring star Anna I is Stephanie Wake-Edwards, her fruity mezzo-soprano full of scope; Anna II is Jonadette Carpio, who dances Julia Cheng’s loose-limbed, frenetic choreography vividly. Anna I stays in her dressing room, a brightly lit box, and there’s a lovely moment when we find that the set, designed by Lizzie Clachan, is not oriented as we think. The cameras capture Anna I’s dwindling confidence as she binge-eats and finally washes down pills with whisky; Anna II’s anger rises in counterweight as each attempt to succeed is crushed, whether by a predatory photographer, danced by Thomasin Gülgeç, or by the four male singers who repeatedly undermine Anna in chorus.”

Erica Jeal, *The Guardian*, 12 April 2021

“Director Isabelle Kettle demonstrates an apt command of Brechtian stagecraft in a made-for-streaming production that makes a virtue of in-vision cameras from the outset ... It’s not just the fourth wall they break down, it’s the whole edifice. Thence to some signposts: a smartphone to confirm an updated milieu; a mirror through which Wake-Edwards sees and hears her alter ego (Anna I sings; Anna II dances); a framed photo to prompt Anna’s memories of family whose members invade her physical space with their imagined presence. Despite such convolutions, the drama is made clear and the score (in a reduced orchestration) is superbly delivered.”

Mark Valencia, *Bachtrack*, 11 April 2021

Die sieben Todsünden (with Mahagonny Songspiel)
Royal Opera House
Jette Parker Young Artists Program
London, U.K.

Streamed stage performance, 9 April – 9 May 2021

Orchestration for 15 players by HK Gruber and Christian Muthspiel

Director: Isabelle Kettle

Conductor: Michael Papadopoulos

Choreographer: Julia Cheng

Stream Production Coordinator: Kit Withnail

Anna I: Stephanie Wake-Edwards

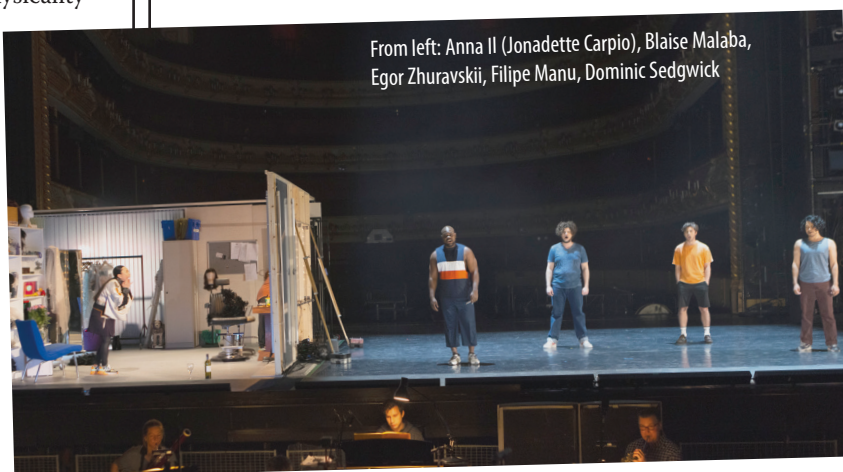
Anna II: Jonadette Carpio

Bessie (Mahagonny Songspiel only): Kseniia Nikolaieva

Dance artist: Thomasin Gülgeç

Family: Blaise Malaba, Filipe Manu, Dominic Sedgwick, Egor Zhuravskii

From left: Anna II (Jonadette Carpio), Blaise Malaba, Egor Zhuravskii, Filipe Manu, Dominic Sedgwick



From the theater:

“This production has been created with streaming in mind, building the filming element of the piece into the viewing experience while drawing on choreographer and movement director Julia Cheng’s background in hip-hop, contemporary dance and physical theatre. *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *Mahagonny Songspiel* depict a crisis of femininity and a crisis of masculinity respectively.”

Director Isabelle Kettle: “Brecht and Weill’s radical collaborations are such rich material through which to explore the crises of contemporary culture that have been exposed in recent years, and in bringing together this team of extraordinary artists, I hope to honour their spirit of innovation and critique.”

**Die sieben Todsünden
Dutch National Opera
Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Part of the Opera Forward Festival
(OFF)**

Livestreamed stage performance, 18
March 2021
Original orchestration
Trailer available on DNO site

Director: Ola Mafaalani
Conductor: Erik Nielsen
Livestream director: Marc de Meijer
Anna I: Eva-Maria Westbroek
Anna II: Anna Drijver
Family: Peter Arink, Marcel Reijans, Erik
Slik, Michael Wilmering



Anna I (Eva-Maria Westbroek) and Anna II
(Anna Drijver) face the camera

PHOTOS: © SANNE PEPPER

From reviews:

"Director Ola Mafaalani has created an absorbing and completely cinematic version of the opera for the Opera Forward Festival. A combination of stationary and handheld cameras along with handheld lights provides a pictorial variety of perspectives and expressionistic framing as the action flows smoothly throughout the space, mostly snaking through and around the orchestra at floor level. ... The male quartet representing the family sings from the balcony during Sloth. ...

"Anna I afforded Eva-Maria Westbroek the opportunity to display her voice's mezzo warmth, an alluring contrast to her character's cool detachment. Anna Drijver maintained the Louise Brooks helmet hair and Weimar make-up of both sisters' first appearance through much of the action. Choreographed movement was less a factor in bringing her character to life than the eyes and expressions caught by the camera. Her gradual disintegration was poignant; the final reveal of her real face and hair, the naked acknowledgement of the destruction necessary to build the dream house. ...

"Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, winner of the 2020 Booker Prize, recited a poem written specifically for this production as a curtain raiser." Kevin Wells, *Bachtrack*, 19 March 2021

"Generally the two Annas are filmed with one in sharp focus and the other blurred and hazy. Anna I sings and is usually in the foreground, while Anna II dances and emotes. The camera work makes a number of effects possible: causing much of the stage set to disappear; making a connection between the modern, satirical world of the cabaret and the results achieved by Andre Joosten on a white canvas; and forcing the spectators to experience raw emotion.

"The Rotterdam Philharmonic and Erik Nielsen were in perfect accord under his crystal-clear direction, which granted room to breathe to all nine movements, each conceived in its own dance idiom that gives every musician in the orchestra a chance to shine." Thibault Vicq, *OperaOnline*, 19 March 2021

From the theater:

"In the satirical music theatre piece *The Seven Deadly Sins*, star soprano Eva-Maria Westbroek and renowned actress Anna Drijver embody two sides of the same young woman. In seven American cities, they come into contact with the seven deadly sins. Direction is in the hands of stage director and former director of the Noord Nederlands Toneel Ola Mafaalani. During the performance, designer André Joosten will make a live painting inspired by Bertolt Brecht's text."