

THE LOTTE LENYA COMPETITION *at Fifteen*



FEATURES

A New Road: Creating *Die Verheißung*

Geoffrey Block on the critical edition of *Johnny Johnson*

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Cover photo: Judges congratulate winners during the awards ceremony at the 2013 Lotte Lenya Competition.
Photo: Granny Cart Productions

EDITORS' NOTE

The Lotte Lenya Competition has reached its fifteenth anniversary, and there is much to celebrate: a significant increase in entries over last year, semi-finalists from five continents, and a record \$61,500 in prizes. (A full report on this year's Competition appears on p. 22.) Several special events and activities (see list at right) mark the anniversary, from gala concerts and a public radio series to a recording release and a documentary film. Seven past prize winners took part in this year's Kurt Weill Fest; two events are reviewed in this issue. Our feature article chronicles the growth and progress of the Competition since 1998, with extensive commentary from winners and judges.

Another dramatic development this year: Weill's massive Biblical epic, *Der Weg der Verheißung*, has been refashioned as a concert work, *Die Verheißung*, or *The Road of Promise*. Ed Harsh, who previously edited the stage version for performance, undertook the daunting task of turning it into an oratorio; the premiere at Anhaltisches Theater Dessau as part of the Kurt Weill Fest met with an enthusiastic welcome from audiences and critics. Harsh discusses his labors in "A New Road: Creating *Die Verheißung*," and Giseler Schubert reviews the performance. David Savran looks in on January's Kurt-Weill-Woche in Berlin, Rodney Milnes attends an all-Weill orchestral concert in London, Foster Hirsch gives the lowdown on Ethan Mordden's new biography of Weill and Lenya, and Geoffrey Block offers an in-depth discussion of the latest volume of the Kurt Weill Edition, *Johnny Johnson*. We round out the issue with news from this season's Weill festival in Cincinnati and a glance at some recent recordings.

Kate Chisholm and Dave Stein

Lenya Competition 15th Anniversary Events & Activities

Winners at the 2013 Kurt Weill Fest

James Holmes, British conductor and Weill expert, conducted seven past Lenya Competition winners in three different concerts at this year's Kurt Weill Fest in Dessau. The opening gala, *New York, New York: Kurt Weill and Friends on Broadway* (see review on p. 13) featured Richard Todd Adams (2004), Maria Failla (2012), Analisa Leaming (2007), Michael McKinsey (2003), and Jacob Keith Watson (2012). The concert with the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz was repeated in Mainz and Ludwigshafen. James Benjamin Rodgers (2007) and Jacob Lewis Smith (2011) joined Leaming to perform Weill's folk opera *Down in the Valley* and his five songs from *Huckleberry Finn* (see review on p. 14) as well as an evening of Broadway songs. Rodgers also sang Weill's *Four Walt Whitman Songs* in Dessau and Leipzig with the MDR Sinfonieorchester and conductor Garrett Keast.

Premiere Recording of *One Touch of Venus*

Past winners Lauren Worsham (2009), Michael McKinsey, and Jacob Lewis Smith participated in a major event in Weill history: the first-ever complete recording of *One Touch of Venus*. Under the baton of James Holmes, they sang supporting roles alongside Broadway luminaries Melissa Errico, Brent Barrett, Ron Raines, Victoria Clark, and Judy Kaye (Clark and Kaye have also served as Competition judges). The CD will be released by JAY Records in October 2013.

Symphony Space Gala

In celebration of the *Venus* recording, New York's Symphony Space will open its season on 7 October 2013, the 70th anniversary of the show's opening on Broadway. The evening will be a star-studded all-Weill concert featuring studio cast members and a half dozen past Lenya Competition winners. Check kwf.org in the fall for details.

Public Radio Series

WXXI's Peabody Award winning program *Fascinatin' Rhythm*, hosted by Michael Lasser, set the stage for the 2013 Competition by celebrating Weill's music in March with a three-part series on Weill. *Kurt Weill, American* is being made available as a special package to public radio stations nationwide.

Lenya Competition Documentary

Last, but not least, the Kurt Weill Foundation is producing a short documentary on the Lenya Competition to share its story with the wider world. The documentary—part of which is being filmed during this year's events—will illuminate the unique nature of the Competition, the success of its past winners, and its impact over fifteen years. Look for it on our website (www.kwf.org) in December!

IN THE WINGS

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

The Cradle Will Rock

Encores! Off-Center, New York City Center
Sam Gold, director; Chris Fenwick, music director.
10–13 July

The Firebrand of Florence

Staatsoperette Dresden
Holger Hauer, director; Andreas Schüller, conductor.
25–27 October, 5–6 November, 18–19 December 2013;
28–29 January, 4 March, 26–27 April, 6 and 11 May 2014

70th Anniversary of *One Touch of Venus*

Symphony Space, New York
7 October

Mahagony Songspiel

Gotham Chamber Opera, New York
Paul Curran, director; Neal Goren, conductor.
23, 25, 26, 29 October

Suite from *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagony* Kleine Dreigroschenmusik

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra
Eckehard Stier, conductor.
24 October

Weill songs

"Far Away Places"
Carnegie Hall
Patti LuPone, soloist.
7 November

To learn about the many other Weill performances coming up around the world, view the performance calendar at www.kwf.org.

THE LOTTE LENYA COMPETITION *at Fifteen*

On 12 November 1998, seventeen Eastman School of Music students entered a local contest arranged by the Kurt Weill Foundation to celebrate the centenary of Lotte Lenya's birth and the arrival of Weill's holograph scores, on loan from Universal Edition, at Eastman's Sibley Music Library in Rochester, New York. Each singer presented a program that included an opera or operetta aria, two Weill selections, and a musical theater number, in original keys and languages, before judges and a small audience gathered in Eastman's 65-seat Howard Hanson Hall. The top prize was \$1,000.

Fast forward to the 15th Anniversary Lotte Lenya Competition on 13 April 2013: Twelve finalists from four continents, with professional credits ranging from roles on Broadway to the Metropolitan Opera, compete for top prizes of \$15,000, \$10,000 and \$7,500 in Eastman's 450-seat Kilbourn Hall, which is filled to capacity. Two filmmakers document the whole day of finals, capturing the moments that make the Competition so special: die-hard fans lining up an hour early to get the best seats; exceptionally talented young singer-actors from all over the globe performing everything from Mozart, Puccini, and Weill to Guettel, LaChiusa and Miranda; the audience bursting into applause and cheering as contestants complete superbly acted and sung programs; the thrill as the prizes are announced and this year's winners join the roll of Lenya Competition winners, selected for their outstanding vocal and dramatic talent, stage presence, and versatility.

The Lenya Competition has made big strides in fifteen years, and today is one of the Kurt Weill Foundation's most successful and influential programs. It addresses head-on a central element of the Foundation's mission, which states: "Building upon the legacies of both Weill and Lenya, the Kurt Weill Foundation nurtures talent, particularly in the creation, performance, and study of musical theater in its various manifestations and media." With its emphasis on wide-ranging repertoire and the acting of songs within a dramatic context, the Competition works directly to encourage excellence in the performance of lyric theater, in its broadest sense. Envisioning musical theater as a continuum, Weill devoted his career to proving that "the varying categories of musical shows were actually nothing but different ways of mixing the same ingredients" and felt strongly that "the drama should not be sacrificed to the delicate condition of the vocal cords of the prima-donna." Lenya, whose career started as a dancer and chorister in the opera house and ended with a triumphant Broadway run in *Cabaret*, embodied this principle, bringing a standard of honesty and clarity to whatever she performed.

As the Competition has grown, the Board of Trustees has devoted greater resources to it, making the top prizes comparable to those of the foremost vocal competitions. Since 1998, the Kurt Weill Foundation has distributed over half a million dollars to en-

courage and support young singer-actors. Foundation president Kim H. Kowalke observes, "I think the Board finds the Competition so important because few other KWF initiatives so fully reflect the ideals and experience of both Weill and Lenya. The growth of the talent pool, the global interest in the Competition, and the successes of the winners have all generated tremendous enthusiasm."

Beginnings

Kowalke established the Competition with its unique design not only to honor Weill and Lenya but also to address particular issues in the field at the time. "By 1998," he explains, "I had grown frustrated with the phenomenon called 'crossover.' That usually meant opera singers recording the landmarks of the American musical theater, unidiomatically and unconvincingly, more often than not. Opera companies and orchestras were also beginning to mount productions of musical theater as a way of expanding their audiences. Conversely, amplification had made it possible in musical theater to cast principal roles with television and film celebrities who had little training or experience in the genre. So, I hoped in some small way to encourage and nurture the sort of singer-actor who could actually 'cross over' the various boundaries of musical theater and opera. The repertory requirements were designed to foster balanced emphasis on lyrics *and* music, voice *and* acting, opera *and* musical theater. And what better model for such a quest than Weill himself?" Despite minor adjustments to the requirements over the years, Kowalke points out, "The basic philosophy has stayed the same: a winner of the Competition should be able to sing the gamut of musical theater/opera so convincingly that his/her career path is dictated by choices rather than limitations."

Despite humble beginnings, the Competition was on to something. As eligibility was expanded to include a broader group of young artists, the number of participants grew and in 2004, the Competition went fully international. Since then top prizes have gone to finalists from the United States, Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Currently the contest is open to performers ages 19-32, and the top prize is \$15,000. "Although it started as a purely local event," Kowalke says, "I hoped that it would eventually grow into something of much wider import. Even I was surprised at how quickly it evolved into a global competition, which now attracts young professionals from all over the world."

The Competition gained prestige early on from the support of legendary soprano Teresa Stratas. Despite her doubts about competitions, Stratas embraced the goals of the contest and agreed to be a judge the first year. She became a strong advocate,



judging the Competition nine times and always demanding the best from contestants. The Competition has never had trouble attracting distinguished judges, among them director/producer Harold Prince; conductors Julius Rudel, James Holmes, John Mauceri, Rob Berman, Ted Sperling, and Eric Stern; Broadway and opera performers Victoria Clark, Judy Kaye, Rebecca Luker, Joyce Castle, Lauren Flanigan, Patricia Racette, and Angelina Réaux; composers Jeanine Tesori and William Bolcom; and institutional leaders André Bishop (Lincoln Center Theater), Theodore S. Chapin (Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization), Paulette Haupt (O'Neill Center National Music Theater Conference), and Welz Kauffman (Ravinia Festival). Four of them—Bishop, Clark, Holmes, and Kauffman—are now Trustees of the Foundation.

One of the most enduring achievements of the Lenya Competition is a fulfillment of its primary mission: it serves as a vital learning experience for contestants. It challenges them to expand their horizons in terms of repertoire, style, vocal production, and acting techniques, and pushes them to meet the highest standards of lyric theater performance. As a result, they must develop and refine specific skills: choosing effective repertoire that is age- and type-appropriate; telling a story clearly, knowing what they are trying to communicate at every moment; honing audition skills; and pushing themselves to dig deeper emotionally.

Kowalke emphasizes the importance of this aspect of the Competition: “It’s definitely a learning process, as not many singer-actors are encouraged to explore such a wide range of repertoire. Training for most of them has been compartmentalized: voice/opera *or* musical theater. Undergraduate voice majors at major conservatories may never have the opportunity to gain any stage experience, and opera singers may not acquire skills in basic acting or movement. It’s the first time that many contestants have sung Weill, so that too is a learning experience for them. And because the finals are open to the public, contestants have the opportunity to watch each other and see what kind of performance succeeds. They also can speak with each of the three judges afterward, and semifinalists and finalists are given a video of their auditions so that they can evaluate their own work.”

2005 prizewinner Erik Liberman, who enjoys a steady career performing on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and in regional theaters, attests, “The work ethic I developed for the Competition became the foundation for my career. It forced me to be specific with my acting in ways I hadn’t been before and expanded my range as a singer.” 2004 winner Amy Justman, who just finished an Off-Broadway run as Clara in Sondheim’s *Passion*, concurs: “The Lenya Competition forced me to step up what I was doing in terms of how I approached a song, to let it come more from me and to be more spontaneous in the moment.” And now, she’s passing those lessons on: Justman teaches a master class called ‘The Crossover Connection,’ specifically targeted to classical singers who are interested in performing musical theater.

This type of learning is possible only because of the investment of the Foundation staff and judges in the contestants. Rather than maintaining a cool distance, judges and staff are friendly and supportive, committed to helping performers succeed by advising them on repertoire and providing constructive feedback. As Caitlin Mathes, who won First Prize in 2011 and is currently a Resident Artist with Portland Opera, describes it, “The Lenya Competition is such a warm, encouraging environment. All the stages of the Competition are geared towards helping the performers bring their songs to life, vocally and theatrically.” One vital stage is a coaching session with a distinguished adjudicator/coach immediately following each semi-final audition. For many contestants, this propels a substantial leap forward when they arrive at the finals. “At the semi-finals my judge was Victoria Clark,” said Jacob Keith Watson, who won Second Prize last year. “She gave me tons of wonderful feedback to take my performance to



PHOTO: KATE MELTON

Kim Kowalke (left) with 2009 judges Teresa Stratas, Ted Chapin and Rob Berman.

Impact Through the Years

In fifteen short years, the Lenya Competition has already made a significant impact, most obviously through the success of its winners, who are building careers on Broadway, in national and international theatrical tours, in regional theaters, and in major opera houses all over Europe and the U.S. While the Competition can’t take all the credit, it has often proven a pivotal experience for participants, and its influence has persisted well beyond the distribution of prizes each year. The lessons learned, the exposure to prominent professionals, and the continuing support of the Kurt Weill Foundation have contributed to the advancement of many winners’ careers.

Naturally, the prize money has helped winners by providing them with the means to pay for coaches, classes, travel, and other opportunities, but less tangible benefits—the prestige that comes with winning and the doors it has opened for them—are even more valuable. Megan Marino, who won Third Prize last year, notes that, “Placing in the Lenya Competition gave me the exposure as a versatile and unique performer that I needed to pique the interest of well-respected opera companies and managers. I recently signed with a great American management company and will be making my debut at the Metropolitan Opera this upcoming season, both as a direct result of the Competition!”



an even higher level. From then until the finals, I worked on making my performance as nuanced and specific as possible.”

Often the learning process lasts a year or even longer, as semi-finalists and finalists who stumble their first time out are encouraged to learn from their experience and enter the Competition again. Kowalke explains, “Selecting diverse and appropriate repertory is no easy task, and sometimes contestants don’t get it ‘right’ until a second or third attempt. In the Lenya Competition we see huge changes in contestants from one year to the next as they respond to the challenges.”

This year was a case in point. Doug Carpenter reached the finals in 2012 but didn’t win a prize. Urged to return, he was determined to improve his performance and win. “This year I was a lot more prepared,” Doug said. “I really crafted my set, figuring out what sort of progression would be most effective and show me off in the best way. I got together a group of my friends whom I really respect as artists and teachers and worked through the whole program with them.” Adjudicator/coach Jeanine Tesori mentored Doug at his semi-final audition to make absolutely clear in his last number, “Molasses and Rum” from *1776*, that his character is indicting the North for its role in the slave trade. Tesori had Carpenter present the entire song as a spoken monologue, which helped him clarify the acting beats and the meaning of each phrase.

“Doug walked on with such command and commitment,” said judge Patricia Racette. “He came out and delivered an *experience*, which is different from trying to do it *right*, or trying to impress, or ‘present.’ He demonstrated that he has incredible promise in whatever career he chooses, Broadway or opera.”

Along with the useful skills developed in the Competition, many winners’ careers have advanced because of their exposure to leading professionals as judges, several of whom have recommended them for auditions or even cast them. Analisa Leaming, whose career took off after winning Second Prize in 2007, recalls, “The Lenya Competition was the catalyst for my musical theater career. I had planned to continue my education in opera; however, with the help of judges Ted Chapin and Ted Sperling I began to get big auditions and soon after booked the international tour of *The Sound of Music*. Since then, my ties to the Competition have given me many opportunities in New York and abroad.”

Four-time judge Rob Berman, a Broadway conductor and Music Director of New York City Center *Encores!*, has cast winners in several *Encores!* productions (Justman, Leaming, Jonathan Michie, and Lauren Worsham). “Lenya Competition singers are ideal for *Encores!*,” Berman explains, “because they make a beautiful sound but they also understand how to navigate classic American musical theater repertory. At *Encores!* we strive to balance musical values with dramatic values, and that’s exactly what the Lenya Competition does.” Conductor/director Ted Sperling, who has judged the Competition twice, has also hired winners for various high-profile projects, including Justman, Leaming, and Worsham for *The Mikado* at Carnegie Hall. “All three were impeccably prepared for rehearsals,” he noted, “and brought a

warmth and sense of humor to their performances that were a joy to be around.”

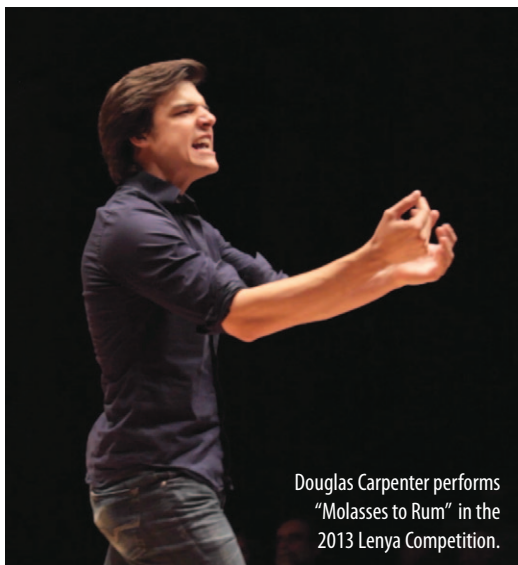
This kind of ongoing interest and investment comes from the Foundation as well. Most recently, the Foundation established a new grant program for past winners, providing financial support for specific career development endeavors. More importantly, the Foundation has consistently promoted past winners by arranging concerts and recommending them for professional opportunities. As early as 2000, Lenya Competition winners were presented in a concert of Weill songs at New York City’s 92nd Street Y, hosted by Teresa Stratas. In 2009, the Foundation recommended six past winners for *Mahagonny Songspiel* at the Ravinia Festival, conducted by James Conlon (Rebecca Jo Loeb, Amy Justman, Paul Corona, Jonathan Michie, James Benjamin Rodgers, and Bray Wilkins). Michie, who also sang in a 2007 all-Weill recital at Spoleto USA, said, “The Weill Foundation has been quite helpful in giving me performance opportunities and career connections. This business is surprisingly small, and my association with the Foundation has definitely opened doors for me.” The youngest First Prize winner (at age 20) in the history of the Competition, Michie has sung leading and featured roles at Los Angeles Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Florida Grand Opera, and Oper Leipzig, where he is currently an ensemble member.

The Foundation has also suggested winners for performances of Weill’s music and other Broadway repertory at the annual Kurt Weill Fest in Dessau, Germany. In 2013, seven past winners enchanted audiences in three different concerts in Dessau, led by conductor and four-time Competition judge James Holmes. Holmes and the winners were showered with critical accolades, especially for *Down in the Valley* and the opening concert, *New York, New York*, which ended with five encores and prolonged ovations. Holmes had the highest praise for the performers: “All of the Lenya winners covered themselves in glory, not just with their performances but with their attitude, their preparation, their

friendliness and willingness. They are the greatest credit imaginable to themselves, the Competition, and the Foundation.”

All seven participants in this year’s festival expressed lively gratitude for “the experience of a lifetime” (Leaming). For Jacob Watson, the opportunity had a profound influence: “I have been so overwhelmed and run down by performing in the opera world that I had forgotten about the passion I have for storytelling,” he said. “The opportunity to go to Germany and perform with such talent has ‘relit my fire’ for what I am truly supposed to be doing: musical theater and theater. It was a dream come true.” Watson plans to move to New York in the fall and start auditioning.

Another significant outcome of the Competition has been exposing thousands of young performers to Weill’s music, many for the first time. It has provoked interest in Weill among a new generation of performers and encouraged them to offer sophisticated, nuanced, and idiomatic performances of his work. Some singers report that absorbing Weill in itself makes them better performers. 2012 Second Prize winner Justin Hopkins, whom the



Douglas Carpenter performs “Molasses to Rum” in the 2013 Lenya Competition.

PHOTO: GRANNY CART PRODUCTIONS

PHOTO: ERIN BAIANO



ABOVE: Amy Justman (left) and Lauren Worsham (right) with Kelli O'Hara in *The Mikado* at Carnegie Hall. Worsham: "The Lenya Competition introduced me to many people who have later helped me book gigs. This business is all about who you know, and the Competition gives competitors an edge by introducing them to industry professionals in a performance setting."

Foundation recommended for a recent all-Weill program with Keith Lockhart and the BBC Concert Orchestra, said, "As I perform more Weill, I feel more and more as if it is a home for me. It's difficult material, but the key for me is to recognize and zero in on the marriage of the music with the drama of the text, and give myself over to that. If I try to do just one or the other, I fall flat on my face. In the BBC concert, I gave myself over to the material and it was one of the best times I've had performing in my career."

Along with introducing many remarkable young performers to Weill's music, Kowalke believes that the greatest impact of the Competition has been encouraging a rising generation of young singer-actors to cultivate talents that will allow them to perform a much wider range of repertory than most singers. "More and more, the boundaries between various forms of musical theater are collapsing," he says, "and as opera companies and symphony orchestras embrace this broader repertory, opportunities for performers who really can 'do it all' will only increase."

Two past winners already "doing it all" are Zachary James and Lauren Worsham. Worsham has played Cunegonde in *Candide* with New York City Opera, Olive in the first national tour of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, and Amy in *Where's Charley?* at *Encores!* She sings in a rock band, too. James, who went from playing Lurch in *The Addams Family* on Broadway to Abraham Lincoln in Philip Glass's *The Perfect American* at Teatro Real Madrid, observes, "The full package of acting, singing, being comfortable in your body, and being able to portray a character different from yourself is so important these days in both theater and opera. Opera especially is an ever-evolving art form. Acting—inhabiting character physically, honestly conveying emotion, and telling a compelling story—is becoming just as important as singing."

Looking Ahead

A pioneer from the beginning, the Lenya Competition continues to point forward, responding to shifts in the field and changing requirements for lyric theater performers. When asked if they find the values of the Lenya Competition relevant in their working lives, winners say they find them absolutely essential. 2008



PHOTO: CAROL ROSEGG

ABOVE: Erik Liberman (right) in *LoveMusik* with Michael Cerveris as Weill and Donna Murphy as Lenya. Liberman: "Harold Prince was one of the judges the year I won a prize, and emerged as something of a mentor—and patron saint—to me. Our meeting led to my auditioning for *LoveMusik*, which became my first Broadway show."



PHOTO: COURTESY OF JUSTIN HOPKINS

LEFT: Justin Hopkins (right) with conductor Keith Lockhart after the BBC Concert Orchestra program.

First Prize winner Rebecca Jo Loeb, whose credits include roles at Deutsche Oper Berlin,

Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, and Hamburg Staatsoper, notes, "The higher up I get in my field the more I see how many people have really impeccable acting chops, and that's what sets them apart from the rest." Michael "Tuba" McKinsey, who mainly works in musical theater, lays the reality bare: "Once you get to New York City, everyone sings well! The tricky part is learning how to sing well *and* do all the things the Competition asks you to do." Kyle Barisich, now playing Raoul in the 25th Anniversary Broadway cast of *The Phantom of the Opera*, agrees: "What will always catch someone's attention at an audition are a strong acting choice and deeply felt emotion. It makes the difference every time, and the Lenya Competition for that reason really brings out the best in its participants."

The Lotte Lenya Competition began with the explicit purpose of encouraging a new generation of performers to apply the highest standards of singing and acting to a wide range of theater music. By bridging the gap between opera and musical theater, it promotes the notion that there are fundamental skills that should be developed among all performers of lyric theater, whatever the genre: good storytelling, concrete and specific interpretation of lyrics, ability to inhabit a character, and a deep connection to the material—all while meeting the varied vocal and stylistic demands of the music. When these high standards are met, musical theater becomes more effective and meaningful, and the field can continue to evolve and grow and attract new audiences.

"I think it is monumentally, profoundly important to treat opera and music theater as the total art forms that they are. Yes, it's a different treatment of music from musical theater to opera, but they're both theater. What is transporting about opera, about musical theater, is the connection of words to the vehicle of music. That's what gives us goosebumps and makes us tear up; that's what gives us an experience that changes our lives, even for a moment. And a competition that encourages and rewards that? I think it's fantastic." – Patricia Racette

Reflections on Judging the Lenya Competition

by Ted Chapin

The truth is that when Kim Kowalke first asked me if I would be willing to be one of the judges at the Lotte Lenya Competition, I accepted gladly, as it meant being in a room with Teresa Stratas. I had gotten to know Teresa, ever so slightly, when the New York City Center *Encores!* series began and there was a possibility that she might play Liza Elliott in *Lady in the Dark*. That didn't happen, through no fault of hers, but I liked her right away. I had, of course, been a fan from the days when my father Schuyler Chapin was General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera, but spending a little time with her made me realize the depth of her extraordinary artistry. So I signed on.

Once we were in Rochester and the day-long final round began, I remained in her thrall. Of course I was one of the judges and therefore obliged to form my own opinions, but watching Teresa watch the singers—listening intently, taking it all in, giving the benefit of the doubt—was a master class in itself. I jotted down my impressions, hoping I was somewhere within the ballpark of what my fellow judges were thinking. The deliberations were extraordinary. Yes, there were differing points of view, attributes each of us favored while overlooking certain deficiencies, but when time came for the final judging, there was rarely disagreement.

Now that I have been a judge eight times, I can look back on the experience and say that I have always had a great time. One of the pleasures has been seeing singers who simply weren't ready their first year—a little too inexperienced, a little timid, not properly prepared—come back later and stride on stage with confidence. At one of my first competitions, there was a young man who had begun his career in the seductive employment of the British pop-operas that took over Broadway in the 1980s. The voice was fine, but the personality was absent. He didn't win anything. At the cocktail reception following the competition, Teresa sat him down and told him in no uncertain terms how disappointed she was. Overhearing the beginning of the conversation, I thought she seemed a little harsh. But you know what? The next year he came back and won. That was the essence of passing the torch, of one artist handing down her wisdom to a member of the younger generation.

I have always believed my role as a judge is to encourage. Yes, it is a competition and by the nature of competitions, some win and some lose. And that is fine. Good memories, of course, are more for the winners. I remember the year a German fellow whisked onto the stage with unbridled enthusiasm, as if he had nary a care in the world, and freely knocked selection after selection out of the park. When we presented the first prize to



Judge Ted Chapin congratulates 2009 Second Prize winner Lauren Worsham, joined by (l to r) winners Ginger Costa-Jackson, Yannick Muriel-Noah, and Zachary James.

PHOTO: KATE MEELTON

him, you could have knocked him over with a feather. I think this was his first performance in the U.S., but clearly he had followed closely what was happening on Broadway via the Internet. At the reception he asked me a question about something that had changed on the American Theatre Wing's website. He was connected and intended to stay that way!

One great pleasure I have had, and continue to have, is running into past winners as they proceed with their careers. Some have stopped me on the street to thank me, and I have even been able to steer a few jobs to some who participated, and not always those who won. (My track record is pretty good!)

I think the whole idea of the Lenya Competition is brilliant. Looking for singers who can act, and actors who can sing—that is such a worthy goal. And who better than Lotte Lenya—yes, I saw her put over those songs in *Cabaret*—to be the spiritual guru of a competition aimed at finding a new generation of performers to grace the stages of tomorrow? I have been honored to be a part of the competitions, and I feel that I can pass on at least a little of what I have learned from being in the presence of Teresa Stratas. She certainly taught me how to be a judge!

Learn more about the Lenya Competition
and its winners in a special
15th Anniversary Commemorative Brochure
at kwf.org/LLC, or request a print copy at
newsletter@kwf.org.

HOW TO WIN THE LENYA COMPETITION

What can contestants do to best prepare for the Lenya Competition? We asked a few winners for their advice, and asked judges to tell us what they are looking for in contestants' performances.

Advice from Winners

Amy Justman: Start with variety, to make sure you can show as many different sides of your voice and yourself in your song choices. And although it's a dramatic competition, the voice should be as strong as possible—not everyone who enters is a classically trained singer, but the voice has to be able to serve the songs without any distracting technical issues. Beyond that, it's all about the acting. This is definitely the opposite of a “park-and-bark” competition; the judges want to believe every word you're singing, to feel that there is no separation between you and the song.

Richard Todd Adams: Pick interesting, strong material that allows for the emotion to seep through. Be emotionally open to the material you choose. Don't be afraid to “go there.” Holding back and playing it safe emotionally is not what this Competition is about. I often see people choose material that is pretty and safe, and doesn't really do anything emotionally. That won't get you very far.

Michael McKinsey: The choice of rep is uniquely critical in the Lenya Competition. The judges must *believe* what you are singing about. Be honest with yourself. Not every singer is Tony in *West Side Story* or Rodolfo in *La bohème*. I know I'm not! Have the courage to look at yourself in the mirror and figure out who you truly are. I believe acting boils down to honesty above all else. If you feel yourself doing something phony, the audience will feel it too. That is true in just about all stage singing, and it's certainly no different in the Lenya Competition.

Jonathan Michie: Seek out repertoire that shows who you are now, not who you wish to become. Immediacy with text and language is key, which can be difficult if you're attempting to portray someone vastly different from your age and physical type.

Analisa Leaming: Choose material you *love*! I spent months poring over repertoire before finding the pieces that I wanted to live in for a while. When you make it to the Killbourn Hall stage don't think of it as a competition anymore, but an opportunity to perform in a beautiful space and sing from your soul!

Kyle Barisich: Take risks. Be bold. Only choose music that you are truly in love with. And do what feels right to you. Take all the advice of your teachers and coaches, but ultimately it's just you up on that stage, so you absolutely must be true to your own motivations and impulses and be yourself.

Rebecca Jo Loeb: Pick music that is age-appropriate and try to formulate a program that tells a story within itself. You have four songs (which is a lot), so show everything you've got!

James Benjamin Rodgers: Explore the repertoire and find pieces that speak to you. Work on the material to find what you and most people around you believe is a great performance, then find a way to take it further. When you are performing live in the Competition, if a thought or idea comes to you, have the courage to be spontaneous in your interpretation.

Doug Carpenter: First of all, pick things you're going to sing phenomenally. But even more importantly, it's about telling the story. Spend time with coaches and really work on your selections, making sure you know everything that is happening moment to moment, what every single action is, and who you're singing to. Craft your program and make sure everything is working together to show yourself off as an entire performer—everything you can do.

What the Judges are Looking For

Rob Berman: The Lenya Competition celebrates and rewards performers as much, if not more, for their interpretive and acting abilities as for their vocal and technical abilities. It rewards artists who make the listener lean forward to hear *why* they are singing a song, not just *how* they sound singing it. The contestants who win are the ones who show the most versatility and the most convincing performances in a wide range of styles. Someone who can effectively deliver a wordy Sondheim piece and turn around with a beautifully sung aria will always do well in this competition. The thing I'm looking for is that sweet spot where the vocal ability and the acting ability are happening in equal measure. So whether it's a comedic number, an operatic aria, or a contemporary song, the contestant needs to inhabit the style convincingly and really communicate what the song's about, *truthfully*. That's what this competition's about, and what sets it apart from other competitions.

Teresa Stratas: Ultimately, I'm looking for something that will stir my heart. I want these young singers to be truthful, to strip away artifice. I want them to go away knowing that the most important thing is for them to bring what is special about themselves to their singing.

James Holmes: The first thing I look and listen for in a contestant is a theatrical spark—a way with words, an ability to color the voice, inflect the text, and shape the phrase in a manner that make a character, a dramatic situation immediately vivid—even on a bare stage. No less than Lieder or 'classical' arias, the great music theater songs of Weill, Sondheim, Rodgers, and the rest tend to be miniature one-act dramas; I like to sense that clearly in a performance.

Rebecca Luker: The Lotte Lenya competitor must have it all: acting and singing chops from a wide variety of theatrical and musical realms and also that certain something—charisma, star quality, call it what you will—that puts them above all others.

Ted Sperling: Many, if not all, of the contestants sing beautifully and with great artistry, but it is those special few who can also convey a real sense of character in each selection that stand out. The Competition awards the top prizes to the performers who best integrate acting and singing in their performances.

A New Road: Creating *Die Verheißung*

by Ed Harsh

My first introduction to *Der Weg der Verheißung* and its English language alter ego *The Eternal Road* came early in the 1990s, when I was Managing Editor of the Kurt Weill Edition. Those who knew of *Der Weg* spoke of it in quasi-mythic terms, describing a gargantuan monster of a piece, cursed by its scale and scope. It had simultaneously succeeded and failed in spectacular fashion during its first and only run in 1937, closed by the bankrupt production company after 153 glorious performances in New York. By the late twentieth century, its approach to its Jewish subject matter was perceived to be hopelessly outmoded in the wake of the Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel. The conclusion: *Der Weg* was surely not revivable without major revisions and a herculean commitment of resources.

PHOTO: DIETER WUSCHANSKI

Abraham and Isaac in the 1999 Chemnitz production of *The Eternal Road* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Still, in 1996, responding to the continuing murmurs of fascination from potential performers and producers, my colleagues and I agreed that I should work on reconstituting the materials that would be required for another performance. The scale of the sources was certainly imposing. More than a thousand pages of score mapped out a path through roughly three hours of music, not including extensive spoken dialogue. Nonetheless, the constituent elements did make sense as a unit, and I pieced them together sufficiently to provide the basis for the second staging of *Der Weg*, produced by Oper Chemnitz in 1999 as part of the celebration of Kurt Weill's centenary.

Through the intense experiences of that production, and across nearly twenty years now of living with the work, my focus on its scale has gradually diminished while my estimation of its richness of meaning in cultural, religious, and human terms has steadily increased. Challenges present themselves, but those challenges lead to some of the greatest rewards offered by the work's realization. My belief in the value and power of *Der Weg* drove me to develop *Die Verheißung*, the new concert version recently premiered by the Anhaltisches Theater in Dessau, Germany.

From the start of the project, I remained focused on my principal goal: providing a practical, performable vehicle for the music of *Der Weg* to be widely heard. Because of my view of the indelible and manifold connections between the original work's music and dramaturgy, I saw this goal as inextricably linked with a second: to present in the most distilled and clear form possible the framing narrative provided by Franz Werfel's play, set in the timeless location of a synagogue. The word "frame" conjures up several possible metaphors. One suggests the border around an image. By this way of thinking, Weill's characteristic practice of organizing his music in separate, closed forms suggests the analogy of discrete musical movements as paintings on a gallery wall, the musicalized biblical scenes being the paintings and the spoken synagogue scenes the frames. Following this analogy, the frames are a pleasant addition, a nice way to highlight the images. Removal of the frames might diminish, but would not fatally undermine, our understanding and appreciation of the pictures.

There is evidence that Werfel held something like this perspective. Weill wrote to him in September 1936, when the

composer was in New York attending rehearsals. He had, he said, carefully studied American theater audiences, and added, "I think we should do everything possible to develop the action in the synagogue into a unified, suspenseful drama that begins in the first scene and continues through the entire piece, holding the Bible scenes together more cohesively than at present." Werfel demurred in his response a few days later: "I cannot quite share your view about changing the synagogue action into one uniform gripping drama. Since it was and is our task to let the entire Bible come to life, the balance and the pathos of the giant tableaux would be disturbed in favor of the kind of realistic play one has already seen a hundred times (Eastern pogrom drama).... Do believe me, dear Weill, the essence of our work must be the musical-poetic-optical consecration it needs to invoke if it is to succeed." While Werfel's view suggests a passively framed gallery of biblical tableaux, an alternative metaphor resonates with my own (and perhaps Weill's?) perspective on *Der Weg*: a "frame" as analogous to the structure of beams and girders that hold a building together. Remove the frame and the house comes tumbling down. The kitchen and dining room might still be identifiable in the rubble, but they can no longer serve their purpose.

In my view, the biblical scenes derive their power from their relationship to the synagogue story. Yes, a substantial portion of *Der Weg* is made up of extended, self-contained musical forms. Excerpting them as meaningful independent movements proves difficult, however. One example is the scene involving the backsliding of the wayward Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt.

The centerpiece of the movement is, as Weill described it, a "wild gypsy dance" around the idolatrous golden calf. This is a rousing sequence for chorus that in its elemental energy seems to be easily detachable from the narrative, effective in its own right with no outside reference. Still, Weill opens the number with a quiet choral passage representing angels delivering the Ten Commandments to Moses. Then he weaves that contrasting choral texture into the center of the dance as well, with the rhythm of the dance pulsing underneath the pure and sustained phrases above. The bi-level design of the number is grounded in the preceding dialogue among the congregants of the synagogue,

dialogue involving a dispute over blasphemy and penance. Without the synagogue context, the pairing of angels and dance becomes oddly incongruous, a Technicolor illustration from a child's Bible story book, but with the contrast and layout all wrong.

Der Weg reduced to a series of uprooted scenes becomes a gallery of such oddities, lovely prints of Bible stories to be admired and puzzled over occasionally but then quickly forgotten. The lack of the synagogue context causes problems not only in structural terms but also in terms of changes in the audience's perspective over the intervening decades. Werfel's focus on the "musical-poetic-optic consecration" of bringing the Bible to life (exhibited in full glory by Max Reinhardt's 1937 production) prefigures the biblical epics that came out of Hollywood barely twenty years later. Today, monumental manifestations based on the Bible wage a determined battle with our cultural memory of hit films such as *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur*. It was no surprise that the word "kitsch" found its way into radio and newspaper reviews of the recent Dessau premiere of *Die Verheißung*. The accounts did note the work's success in rising above that unfortunate label, but a sequence of Bible scenes alone would leave the k-word all too easily available as a convenient tool for lazy viewers and commentators.

A second kind of changed audience perspective emerges from a darker place. If one were selecting tales from the Bible to highlight in the average storybook (or pageant), that of King Zedekiah and his brief, disastrous reign (ending in the destruction of Jerusalem's First Temple) would be an unlikely choice. Its presence at the climax of *Der Weg* seems odd even at first glance. On closer inspection, bemusement becomes something more like revulsion. As many post-war readers of Werfel's text have noted, the treatment of Zedekiah's story in *Der Weg* at least hints that the Jewish people share culpability for their own persecution. Even worse, it hints that only their self-abasement will save the day. Unglossed, these suggestions are still more troubling and offensive now.

In assembling *Die Verheißung*, I was determined to let Kurt Weill speak for himself through his music. I aimed to include all of the principal movements from *Der Weg* and make as few changes or adjustments as possible. This commitment made it impossible to remove the musically very strong Jeremiah-Zedekiah scenes, though the 1937 production made just such a massive cut. The guiding standard of minimal intervention served as a general principle as well. I have no illusions that *Die Verheißung*, or for that matter any version now, can truly "restore the memory of the German-Jewish experience before the outbreak of World War Two," to use Leon Botstein's words describing his hope for adherence to the original trajectory of *Der Weg*. But I bore that thought in mind as an ideal.

I felt that the solution lay in retaining a streamlined version of the synagogue dialogue. The full cast of *Der Weg* features literally dozens of singing and speaking roles, but three characters lie at its heart: the Rabbi; the Thirteen-Year-Old; and an oppositional figure named only "Der Widersprecher" (the Adversary). In

preparing *Die Verheißung*, I condensed the spoken play scenes into a very few lines of dialogue among these three characters. Some of the spoken dialogue is taken directly from the Werfel original, while the rest comes from my own English distillation—translated back into German by Elmar Juchem. (Virtually all of the sung text is Werfel's, and the English version adopts the original translations of Ludwig Lewisohn, William A. Drake, and Charles Alan.)

I believe that the fundamental gesture of *Der Weg* is one of renewal and hope, embodied by the experience of the Thirteen-Year-Old. He travels (and we with him) the long arc of the biblical stories portrayed in music, moving from ignorance to vision. The theme of prophet-as-dreamer suffuses the work. Viewing the entire proceedings—and the ending especially—as the dreams of an inspired, naïve visionary, I felt no need to change the overall framing architecture.

Werfel's creation of the Widersprecher provided an effective means of addressing the challenges to unquestioning faith posed by difficult moments throughout. In the Zedekiah scene, for example, I used the antagonistic voice so aptly crafted by Werfel to express exasperation and anger at the story's implications. An important climax point in the work, this moment of confrontation balances, across the fulcrum of the Temple's destruction, the Thirteen-Year-Old's naïve vision of deliverance from suffering. By augmenting the Widersprecher's role, I could raise questions that now—and probably in the 1930s, too—seem decidedly pertinent. Raise, but not answer. At their heart, such questions may not be resolved, only transformed, in this case through the vision of an innocent but insightful dreamer.

Writing to Lenya in February 1934, very early in the development of *Der Weg*, Weill described his work as a "real oratorio." Before long, and certainly by the premiere three years later, the question of the work's genre would become an insoluble riddle. Similarly, we can use the word "oratorio" now as a neat label to refer to *Die Verheißung*. But given the concert version's unusual juxtaposition of spoken dialogue and drama with songs, arias, choruses and the like, the label should be used with full awareness of its imprecision and uncertainty.

Not uncertain at all is that whatever its genre *Der Weg* dovetails closely with Weill's belief in the social role of art, in the absolute necessity that art generally, and music theater specifically, reach out to broadly-based audiences. To a newspaper reporter who visited him in 1935 as he prepared the orchestration of *Der Weg*, Weill stated this recurring theme of his career, with reference to a better-defined genre: "I try always to create a new idiom to bring opera out of its splendid isolation."

Der Weg was never meant to satisfy those who value in art only complexity of materials and form. The piece operates not through novelty and innovation but through familiarity and recollection. It seeks to build on dreams grounded in memory rather than agitating for dreams floating upwards toward unimagined futures. At its close, it suggests that it is dreamers grounded in the familiar who point the way for us all to move forward to a new day.

"Weill's music for *The Eternal Road*, at once tender and poignant, lyrical and dramatic, seems at times to rise above and dwarf entirely the spectacle itself in spite of its physical opulence and theatrical grandeur.... One wishes, in fact, that the music were presented in concert form as a classic oratorio. One suspects that the biblical pageantry and true symbolism of *The Eternal Road* which the music could thus evoke in the imagination of an audience would far transcend the present spectacle."

—Hermann Liebman, 1937