

Kurt Weill Newsletter

VOLUME 42

NUMBER 2

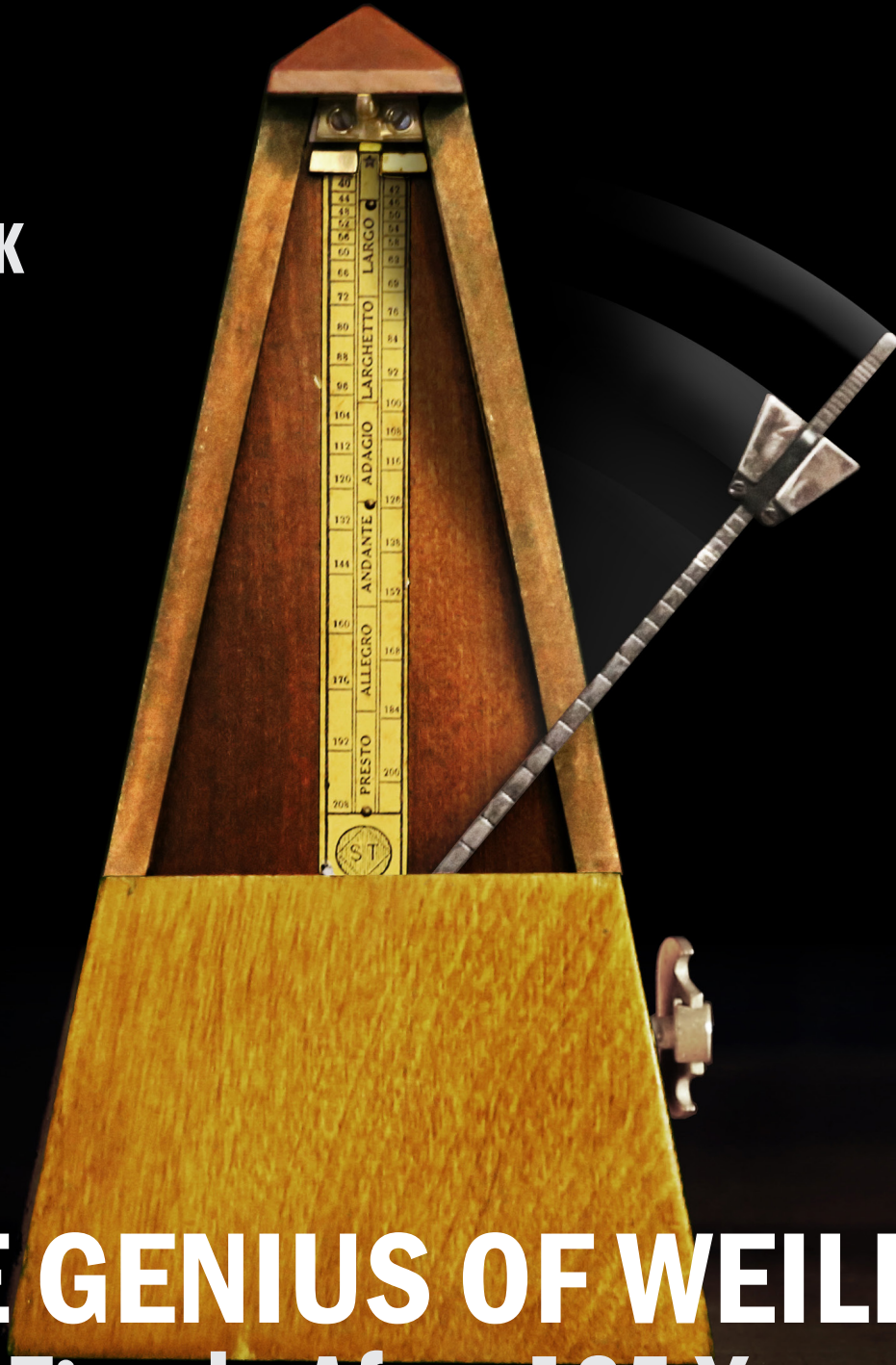
WINTER 2024

**Q: WHY IS
WEILL'S WORK
IMPORTANT
TO YOU?**

LOVE LIFE
REVIVALS IN
LEEDS & NYC

**LATEST
NEWS &
REVIEWS**

THE GENIUS OF WEILL
Still Timely After 125 Years



Kurt Weill Newsletter

VOLUME 42 NUMBER 2 WINTER 2024

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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ON THE COVER: Kurt Weill's own Maelzel metronome used until his death in 1950. It was made in the USA by Seth Thomas Clocks (Thomaston, Connecticut). Seven decades later, it still keeps time and sits atop Weill's Steinway piano at the Kurt Weill Foundation.



PHOTO: MIKE GERARD

Editor's Note



How fitting that two revivals of Weill's most influential and least-understood Broadway show should take place during the year of the 125th anniversary of his birth; a Broadway script doctor could not dream up a better plot twist. We honor the anniversary and revivals in this issue with foretastes of *Love Life* at Opera North in Leeds, U.K., and at City Center Encores! in New York, and with comments on Weill's ever-growing stature as composer and theater artist from a varied selection of contemporary performers.

Observation of the anniversary continues with a look back at two remarkable publications of 2024: Professor Stephen Hinton's *Weills Musiktheater vom Songspiel zur American Opera* (German edition of *Stages of Reform*, published in 2012) and *The Kurt Weill Album* released by Deutsche Grammophon, Joana Mallwitz's premiere recording on the world-famous label with the Konzerthausorchester Berlin. Both have made a splash this year, and we present excerpts from reviews that help explain why.

In addition to our usual news coverage, we are proud to present an interview with the winner of the 2024 Lenya Competition winner, Ana Karneža. We are equally proud to hail the work of designer Mike Gerard, who has undertaken art direction for the entire issue.

Note: due to scheduling shifts, from now on each *Newsletter* will be dated "Winter" or "Summer" rather than "Spring" or "Fall."

Dave Stein

Lotte Lenya THE LENYA COMPETITION YOU Be the Judge!

The Audience Choice Award will be inaugurated at the 2025 Lenya Competition. Following the daytime round of the Finals on Saturday, 3 May in Rochester, NY, all contestants will return to Kilbourn Hall to perform a selection of their choice in a special concert beginning at 7:30 p.m. Audiences in the hall or watching via livestream will be able to vote for their favorite performance and determine who wins the new \$3,000 prize. Lenya Competition fans, it's your turn to be a judge and make your presence felt as never before! For details about the Finals as they emerge, keep an eye on kwf.org/lc/2025-competition.

KEEP THEM COMING

In the last issue, we requested readers' comments about the future of the *Newsletter*—print or online only? We received several eloquent replies in favor of continuing the print edition, and we thank everyone who has responded to date. Before reaching a conclusion, we need to hear from more of our readers. If you have strong feelings, or any feelings at all, please make them known! We plan to make the decision by July 2025, so let us hear from you at newsletter@kwf.org.



Detwiler on Your Wall

Last spring the *Newsletter* alerted readers to the Foundation's collection of 85 paintings by Russell Detwiler, Lotte Lenya's third husband. Images of every work in the collection have now been loaded onto our site at kwf.org/russell-detwiler-paintings. We are offering all paintings for donation to museums and institutions, and for sale to private collectors. We would prefer that interested parties pick up paintings from our office in New York City; donees and purchasers must bear any shipping costs. First come, first served; all sales and transfers are final. If you are interested, know someone who might be, or can suggest destinations for the paintings, please write to wlr@kwf.org. In case of conflict or dispute, the Foundation is the final arbiter.

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Kurt Weill

Still breaking new ground after 125 years

by Kim H. Kowalke

Because Kurt Weill's life precisely spanned the first half of the twentieth century, each anniversary does double duty. In 2025, we observe the 125th of his birth and 75th of his death. Wayposts, marking quarter-century intervals, invite reassessment of Weill's career, legacy, and reception.

By 1925 Weill had completed his three-year course of study in Busoni's masterclass in Berlin. His String Quartet, op. 8; Frauentanz, op. 10; and Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra had secured him international recognition and a place on the roster of Universal Edition. The composer's next quarter century would commence with the premiere of *Der Protagonist*, the first of three collaborations with the foremost German dramatist of the day, Georg Kaiser, which quickly established Weill's reputation as the leading opera composer of his generation in Germany. He celebrated his 27th birthday with the premiere of another one-act opera, *Royal Palace*, at the Berlin State Opera. A few weeks later he met Brecht, composed a *Songspiel* about the mythical city of Mahagonny, and launched a four-year collaboration that would change the musical theater landscape forever.

After fleeing Germany in 1933 and emigrating to the United States in 1935, he composed almost exclusively for the commercial theater, while continuing to challenge generic norms and esthetic boundaries with *Lady in the Dark*, *Street Scene*, and *Love Life*. He intended his one-act *Down in the Valley* for schools and amateur groups; no one thought it would become one of the first operas produced for television in 1950. It achieved the most explosive success of any contemporary opera—3,000 performances in its first three years! The musical tragedy *Lost in the Stars* was still running on Broadway when its composer died of cardiac arrest on 3 April.

Obituaries evinced the bifurcation of his legacy; his surviving European works were all but unperformed and unknown

in America, and vice versa. The next quarter century witnessed a global *Threepenny*-fever that pushed "Mack the Knife" to the top of the charts and prompted rediscovery of the entire Weill/Brecht repertory—*Mahagonny* (both versions), *Happy End*, *Der Jasager*, *The Seven Deadly Sins*—with Lenya's landmark recordings fueling the renaissance.

When the Berlin Festival in 1975 included an ambitious Weill retrospective, it coincided with the publication of two paperbacks of writings by and about Weill, as well as an award-winning three-LP Deutsche Grammophon recording of the London Sinfonietta performing seven of Weill's lesser-known European works. In his oft-quoted liner notes, David Drew cautioned, "Let us not, at this particular juncture, worry ourselves about a precise evaluation of Weill's importance or lack of it. Too much has already been spoken and written while so much of his music is waiting to be heard again."

As if heeding that admonition, the next quarter century leading up Weill's centenary in 2000 witnessed performances of much of his oeuvre. The Kurt Weill Edition was just one Foundation initiative intended to make "the two Weills" whole again. Remarkably, during the global centenary celebration every major work was performed, including *Der Weg der Verheißung*, *Die Bürgschaft*, *Der Kuhhandel*, *The Firebrand of Florence*, and *Love Life*. Weill scholarship—biographical, critical, analytical—likewise burgeoned, stimulating numerous conferences, articles, books, exhibitions, documentary films, and radio tributes.

Except during the pandemic disruption, the expansive new vistas visible from the heights of the centenary platform have proven sustainable as we approach the next quarter century in 2025. Weill seems ever more timely, relevant, even prescient. One need look no further than the contents of this *Newsletter* for ample evidence of the range and reach of his legacy.



ARTWORK ON THIS AND FACING PAGE BY MIKE GERARD

We asked: Why is Weill's Work Important to You?

2025 marks the 125th anniversary of Weill's birth and the 75th of his death—an auspicious time to assess his continuing influence on music and theater. We asked a number of prominent younger artists who have performed Weill's work to reflect on why it is important to them in these times and what the future might hold. Their rich palette of replies appears on the following pages.

Why is Kurt Weill's Work Important to You?



Anthony Roth Costanzo, countertenor, General Director and President of Opera Philadelphia

"As an opera singer, I am always thinking about the way our voices can express our identity. Weill creates vehicles for expression like no other—anything is possible: catharsis, introspection, devious elegance, or unhinged explosions. He lays a musical foundation on which we can build not only a unique musical performance, but a singular expression of self. That has helped define how I see the powers my own voice can harness, and I know it will do the same for generations to come."

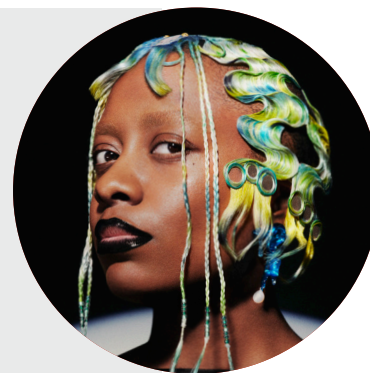
PHOTO: MATTHU PLACEK

Cécile McLorin Salvant, jazz singer

"Kurt Weill's music has had a particularly important place in my performances since I discovered it. What excited me at first was hearing his music through the many incredible and very different voices that interpreted it, from Nina Simone to Louis Armstrong, Ute Lemper, or Bea Arthur. Then there are of course his wonderful collaborators, Bertolt Brecht, Ira Gershwin, Langston Hughes. The lyrics and story are always what I connect with first, and Weill has a way of making lyrics come alive like no other. There is a strangeness, a joy, a humor to his music that brings them forward in a way that I particularly love. His music goes places we don't expect; it is vast, ambitious, challenging, and generous. His music almost forms a genre of its own, and always with an aim to be socially useful. I admire this so much.

"There is still so much more I want to discover and sing of Weill's music and I know it will always be new and eerie and gorgeous."

PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW VILLAGE MANAGEMENT



Ersan Mondtag, director

"Weill and Georg Kaiser wrote *Der Silbersee* at a tipping point in history, and it offers an obvious parallel to the current situation, where extremist right-wing parties are striving for power or are already in government throughout Europe. Drawing on this contemporary relevance, our production moves the events 100 years ahead and integrates a new frame story into the play: a theater group in the year 2033, shortly before an election that fascists are poised to win, searches for interpretations of the work that allow them to address the situation without putting themselves in danger. This parallel version of *Der Silbersee* has become an explosive contemporary play about resistance, civil courage, and the power of art to illuminate historical and political structures. Weill's music is of the utmost importance for the successful transmutation of this multi-layered artistic work into the present. His ingenious synthesis of popular music and classical composition techniques makes it possible to bridge the gap between opera and the general public. As Weill's inspiring and moving sound world characterizes all of his works, this is probably not the last one I will stage."

PHOTO: ANNEMIE AUGUSTIJNS

Joana Mallwitz, conductor

"Weill's sounds not only describe, but ARE an attitude toward life during a time full of ambivalence in the atmosphere of an incredibly fast-moving modern world caught between trauma and foreboding. This very specific combination produced the sound of Berlin which is also the sound of Kurt Weill, as exciting as it is unmistakable—and the fact that we recognize it immediately is the sign of his great mastery. We find this sound in Weill's early works, including both symphonies; he never lost this unique tone. All of his works show a wonderful symbiosis of domesticity and cosmopolitanism, tradition and innovation, depth and popularity, and multi-layered expressiveness across all genres. For me, there was no better place and time than the start of my collaboration with the Berlin Konzerthausorchester to focus on Weill's early works."

PHOTO: SIMA DEHGANI



PHOTO: KIRSTEN NUHOF

Wallis Giunta, mezzo-soprano

"Both as performer and listener, I have always been shattered by Weill's ability to cut directly to that place within us that is raw, vulnerable, and hungry. His music is both devastating and gorgeous. Through my training years I dreamed of one day putting my mark on his vocal repertoire, and felt particularly drawn to *Die sieben Todsünden*.

"Every artist is a thread in the fabric of our society, and we can use our craft to help pull the weave more tightly together, or inspire a strategic unraveling. I believe the arts are inherently political, and creative work does not exist in a vacuum. Weill is one of the most politically charged composers I have encountered; both single songs and even entire shows may address almost every major failing of modern western society. His artistic statements range from the incredibly specific to the broadly universal, and always hit their mark. The collaborators he chose show his compelling need to use his voice for change. The timeless commentary in Weill's compositions will continue to spark critical thought for years to come, and will certainly always light a fire in my artistic soul."

Julia Bullock, soprano

"Weill didn't shy away from approaching the most challenging of human preoccupations. And even found ways to address some of the most frustrating aspects of our behavior with biting humor and fierce wit. For the past fifteen years I've almost unfailingly placed Weill's songs on each recital. Before singing his work, I introduce it with some iteration of what I wrote above. I find myself smiling or even in barked laughter during moments of gripping sadness or anger. And songs that superficially seem more comical can turn into searing social criticism.

"In my free time, I pore over recordings of his operas, theater pieces, and songs. What strikes me is how each artist navigates a distinct interpretive path and approach. Why are so many musicians from varying backgrounds drawn to Weill? Maybe because Weill and his collaborators wrote determined, complicated characters, where nothing was taboo. His musical idiom encourages us all to share and listen to the material in a way that is familiar and personal. The words Weill memorialized through his melodious tunes remain accurate, hyper-present reflections of ourselves, especially while we're entrapped in cyclical patterns of violence against each other.

"Weill's work remains as important as it has ever been, and is classic because it frames and re-frames; it's an invitation to rework that framework. Weill—like all the greats—asks us to recognize our resemblances, bear witness, and manifest some sort of shared, universal landscape."



PHOTO: ALLISON MICHAEL ORENSTEIN



PHOTO: FRIEDRICHPRAETORIUS.COM

Friedrich Praetorius, conductor

"I conducted *Der Silbersee* during my tenure as *Kapellmeister* at the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar. In the musical landscape between the last echoes of high romanticism and the Second Viennese School, Kurt Weill formed his own unmistakable sonic language. Within it he built his own unique harmonic system that underpins the voice leading of his melodies with ever-surprising effects. Those melodies, not quite like any others, remain remarkable because despite their unpredictability they catch on quickly and may even become hits that stay in our ears for generations. Weill's turn toward the popular music of his day never reduces the scores of his operas to mere potpourris. Rather, he develops such popular forms into a new kind of music, which proves fully suitable for opera (by no means a superseded genre). That aspect in particular makes him an important guiding figure now and in the future. His distinctive style continues to enlarge the possibilities of music by showing us yet another way."

Yshani Perinpanayagam, conductor

"Kurt Weill represents everything I strive for as an artist: a politically active jack-of-all-trades, dedicated to storytelling, standing for the marginalized and the power of the arts. By allowing the various aspects of his inner world to mix freely without self-censorship, he created the unique musical identity for which he is still so loved. He was grown across worlds and nations, a German-Jewish man who absorbed American culture without denying any of his identities. In a world where people are connecting more and more with multiple aspects of their heritages, histories, and intersectionality, Weill's music feels as current as ever, particularly *Street Scene*, which I had the privilege of conducting for Paris Opera.

"With antisemitism on the rise globally, and other forms of persecution in fashion, we can look to Weill as inspiration—a universal artist and an ally to oppressed peoples everywhere. Even in the face of opposition or genuine danger, he was dedicated to people and telling their stories to give us listeners both joy and food for thought. An exceptional example to follow, if we choose to accept the challenge."



PHOTO: ROBIN LE BERVET



Weill's anniversary year will produce a slew of significant performances. *Love Life* at Opera North and Encores! (see pp. 10-13) aside, here are some highlights to watch for during the second half of the 2024–25 season:

6 JANUARY

On 6 January 2025, a performance of *Die sieben Todsünden* in Cologne featuring Wallis Giunta as Anna along with Ensemble Modern and conductor HK Gruber—the same lineup that bowled over Carnegie Hall last season (see review in the Spring 2024 *Newsletter*)—will be recorded live, to be issued on Ensemble Modern Media. Giunta and Gruber's recording of the original version of the *Sins* in English with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra awaits release. The Foundation is providing funding for the premiere recording of the fifteen-player version.

2 MARCH

On Weill's birthday, 2 March, the Kurt Weill Fest Dessau will host a solo recital by the 2024 winner of the Lotte Lenya Competition, Ana Karneža (see p. 22). She will present a varied program, including Weill songs. That evening, Ute Lemper will also perform.

28 MARCH

A new musical featuring Jonathan Groff as Bobby Darin, *Just in Time*, opens on Broadway on 23 April (previews begin 28 March). The show's roots lie in a Lyrics & Lyricists program at the 92nd Street Y conceived by Ted Chapin in 2018. Darin's biggest hit, "Mack the Knife," will be heard multiple times from the stage, most notably in a full performance as the Act I finale, and even during curtain calls. *Just in Time* is directed by Tony Award winner Alex Timbers.

3–6 APRIL

While *Just in Time* previews at Circle in the Square, the original German source of "Mack the Knife" moves into Brooklyn Academy of Music for only four performances, 3–6 April. Barrie Kosky brings his acclaimed Berliner Ensemble production (see review and interview with Kosky in the Fall 2021 *Newsletter*) of *Die Dreigroschenoper* to New York for the first time after guest appearances in Rome, Edinburgh, and Adelaide.

12–21 APRIL

Pina Bausch's legendary choreography for *Die sieben Todsünden*, seen for the first time during the Wuppertaler Tanzwoche in 1976, returns to its original home for eight performances between 12 and 21 April. Jan Michael Horstmann conducts the Wuppertal Symphony. "Fürchtet euch nicht," a selection of Weill's songs created by Bausch as a companion piece, will also be on the bill.

27 APRIL

On 27 April, baritone Roderick Williams performs Weill's *Four Walt Whitman Songs* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vasily Petrenko, sandwiched between *Finlandia* and Shostakovich's Symphony no. 7 ("Leningrad"). Williams, one of the best-known classical singers in Britain, essays Weill's settings of Whitman for the first time.

MAY

For five performances in early May, Teatro La Fenice in Venice will bring Weill's first opera, the one-act *Der Protagonist*, to the stage. The conductor, Markus Stenz, needs no introduction to Weill fans, having conducted an essential recording of *Der Silbersee* for RCA as well as several major productions of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*; Ezio Toffolutti directs.

One legendary Italian theater not enough? Milan's La Scala will bring back a double bill of *Die sieben Todsünden* and *Mahagonny Songspiel* from 2021 with a twist, a twist of *Happy End*, that is. The double bill, originally streamed, was directed by Irina Brook and conducted by Ricardo Chailly; the cast featured 2015 Lenya Competition First Prize winner Lauren Michelle. All three will return in May, with Wallis Giunta taking part as Lilian Holiday, the female lead in *Happy End*.

JULY

Deutsche Oper Berlin is gearing up for a new production of *Aufstieg* in July 2025, its first since Günter Krämer unveiled his staging in 1999. Four years after Barrie Kosky helmed a production at the Komische Oper to wide acclaim, Berlin will see another. The company's website promises that Benedikt von Peter's vision will provide "up-close and personal experience. The action extends from the stage to the foyer of the Deutsche Oper Berlin and all points in between. The audience becomes part of a 3-dimensional entertainment construct that is inexorably morphing into an apocalyptic game." The lead roles are taken by Annette Dasch and Nikolai Schukoff; Stefan Klingele conducts.



FEATURE

Love Life

Two Cities, One High Wire: Weill's musical finds new footing on two continents

For the first time, Weill and Alan Jay Lerner's *Love Life*, subtitled "a vaudeville," will enjoy two productions in the same season. Opera North of Leeds, a company with a long and strong track record presenting both Weill and American musicals, gives three staged concert performances from 16–18 January 2025. Conductor James Holmes, Kurt Weill Lifetime Distinguished Achievement Award recipient, will again team up with director Matthew Eberhardt, who staged *Street Scene* for the company in 2020. BBC Radio 3 will broadcast the performance. A CD release, the first of the entire score of *Love Life*, as presented in the award-winning critical edition, will follow on Capriccio. The production will also be filmed for possible release on a cable platform.

Encores!, that pioneer of staged musicals in concert, whose first season in 1994 included *Lady in the Dark*, offers seven performances in five days, 26–30 March, at New York City Center. Tony Award-winning actress Victoria Clark will direct a cast who are mostly returning from the 2020 COVID-cancelled production, along with music director Rob Berman and choreographer JoAnn Hunter. Starring as Susan and Samuel Cooper are two-time Tony nominee Kate Baldwin and Nicholas Christopher, seen most recently on and off Broadway in *Sweeney Todd*, *Hamilton*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and the title role of *Jelly's Last Jam* at Encores!

Few people have ever had a chance to see *Love Life*, even though it is generally recognized to be the missing link in

Broadway history, the progenitor of the concept musical. It premiered at the 46th Street Theater in October 1948, closing in May 1949 after 252 performances. Starring Ray Middleton and Nanette Fabray (who won the Tony for best actress in a musical), *Love Life* was directed by Elia Kazan, choreographed by Michael Kidd, and designed by Boris Aronson. A musician's union action prevented a cast recording and an ASCAP boycott all but prohibited radio play of the songs from the show.

Never recorded or published, the work remained unperformed until 1987, when the Musical Theatre Program at the University of Michigan mounted it. Three years later, the American Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia produced the first professional revival. Opera North presented the British stage premiere in Leeds in 1996. The German stage premiere occurred in Freiburg in 2017, using, for the first time, performing materials from the award-winning critical edition that finally appeared in print in 2023 (see p. 14). And soon *Love Life* will also be readily available globally for purchase as a 398-page paperback piano-vocal score (the cover art for which appears above).

In the following pages, the creative teams of both upcoming productions give us a preview of their visions for this provocative, entertaining, innovative, and influential work.

Kim H. Kowalke



Opera North

16–18 January 2025

Opera North's creative team: Bringing *Love Life's* dual worlds to life

Compiled from interviews with Matthew Eberhardt (director), James Holmes (conductor), Zahra Mansouri (costume and set designer), and Quirijn de Lang (Samuel Cooper).

KWN: You hear the word “semi-staged” a lot. What is its significance for this production?

ME: We've never done a semi-staged musical before. How do we tell this very complex piece with the limited resources that inevitably come with a semi-staged production?

JH: You can get to the heart of it with fewer resources.

ME: The semi-staging challenges us to be braver in our choices. We don't have the resources to truck in a big house with a nice porch, or a big cityscape, so we have to be lighter and more suggestive. We will lean into the sketch-like mechanism that Lerner and Weill have given us and focus on psychology, asking how do Sam and Susan deal with the pressures of that specific historical moment.

ZM: We're costuming the family in rehearsal blacks. In contrast, the vaudevillians are fully realized and colorful. We are spanning many years of American history, but the love story is the heart of it.

ME: *Love Life* is a study of a relationship, very entertaining and moving. We got interested in “how does the family change?” and that became more important than “how does history change?”

QdL: Sam and Susan are real people who journey through unreal times. The characters are very true, and the emotions felt by married people come through very clearly. I'm really looking forward to working with Stephanie Corley (Susan)—we've already performed two shows together where we've played partners in love and life.

KWN: Can you say more about your ideas for staging?

ME: We want to celebrate the music and the fantastic orchestra at Opera North. We're going to feature the musicians on risers, almost like a big band. The staging will focus on the family and the vaudevillians.

ZM: The risers give us space downstage, and we can home in on different sections of that space to switch between areas. The chorus will help paint the picture—in “Who Is Samuel Cooper,” they'll be clustered like people in the village. On the cruise ship, they'll be scattered up the stairwell and on the steel decks. They give us the geography of the space depending on where they're standing in relation to the orchestra.

ME: We'll have a series of platforms with steps that forms a collection of levels.

ZM: At one point, Susan is inside the house while Sam is on the porch in a rocking chair. We can divide those spaces quite clearly, and our wonderful lighting designer will pick up on that. The apron gives us our vaudeville world.

KWN: Which raises the essential question of the relation between the family sketches and the vaudeville acts.

ME: The stage landscape allows us to juxtapose the beginning of a sketch with the end of an act in interesting ways. The passing of the baton is vital.

JH: The change from sketch to act has to be so clear; it also has to be so immediate. That's absolutely central to *Love Life*.

ME: When Jim and I worked together at the piano, so often we said, “Isn't it right that that the sketch goes straight into the act?” We're not just contrasting them; we're almost sliding them on top of each other.

JH: You do what Weill says in the score. He writes “segue,” and you segue. There will be moments when the audience will applaud, and that's part of the show. But when it says “segue,” I am absolutely looking to go straight on.

KWN: Can you say a bit more about the vaudeville?

ZM: The vaudevillians' costumes will be colorful and historically accurate. The eight Go-Getters (“Progress”), for instance. They're talking about money, the world of oil tycoons and bankers, and we want to give them that kind of richness. Or the Hobo—you can tell he's been a lot of places from his mismatched suit.

QdL: The Hobo has the best song in the piece, well, one of the best. I always knew that I would be involved with “Love Song” in some way. I don't get to sing it, but I'll listen to it every night.

ME: There's an underlying force that is pulling Sam and Susan into the theatrical world of illusion. As the evening continues the sketches and acts start to merge. We will have the same performer playing the Magician (the first vaudeville act) and the Con Man / Interlocutor at the end. He comes on singing their song, “Here I'll Stay,” just after Sam sings “This Is the Life.”

QdL: A fantastic song. So poignant. You can really hear the desperation underneath when he sings, “I'm free!” at the end.

ME: With the Con Man singing “Here I'll Stay,” the dramatic form has been broken—the barrier between sketch and act has disappeared. In the illusion show finale, Sam and Susan are only offered performative choices, their reality has vanished. As she sings “Mr. Right,” Susan is on the verge of disappearing into Vaudeville forever. But Sam pulls her back from the brink and they escape. The tightrope is an act, but it's the most dangerous, and it's their choice to undertake. We're going to have nothing but two ladders leading up to the platforms with a rope stretched between them, and Sam and Susan are going to climb those ladders and face each other. This isn't an illusion. For the metaphor to work, the risk has to be real.

KWN: Final thoughts?

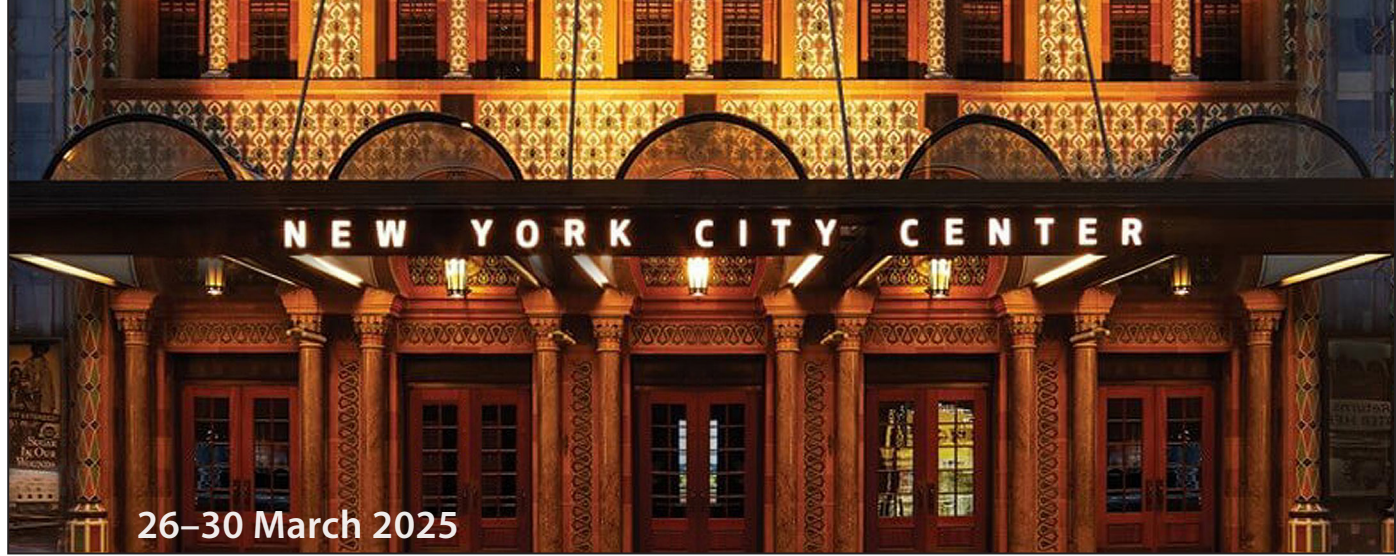
ZM: Our driving force has been to honor the story that has been so carefully composed. In *Love Life*, they were exploring so many different types of music and different cultural references. You've got to lean into that to do the piece justice.

JH: *Love Life* is among the most remarkable of Weill's scores; it's the most complete expression of his love for America and American music.

ME: I hope people will feel that the form of *Love Life* is perfect for exploring the relationship of this couple and don't question why it is structured this way. It's the only way the story could be told.



OPPOSITE: STEPHANIE CORLEY AND QUIRIJN DE LANG AS SUSAN AND SAMUEL COOPER
ARTWORK PROVIDED BY OPERA NORTH
LEFT: DE LANG AT THE THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION NEXT TO THE ORIGINAL WINDOW CARD FROM 1948
PHOTO: MIKE GERARD
ABOVE AND P. 13: HISTORICAL IMAGES COURTESY OF KINGSBRIDGE MEDIA



“Big Enough to Hold All Our Diversity” ENCORES! *Love Life* speaks to America, five years after shutdown

A conversation between Victoria Clark (director) and Rob Berman (conductor), with additional contributions from Tracy Christensen (costumes), Ryan Howell (sets), and JoAnn M. Hunter (choreographer).

VC: It’s thrilling to return to *Love Life*. The last day we were all together was 12 March 2020, when all live performances shut down due to the onslaught of COVID-19. We did our first and only run-through that afternoon. In an instant, all the work we had done for the previous three years evaporated before we even made it to the *Sitzprobe*, technical rehearsals, or performances.

RB: Now we, and America, are five years older. Are you thinking about this project differently?

VC: I still see *Love Life* as two interlocking descending spirals. One spiral tells the story of the Cooper family and a marriage that is strained and eventually broken by the stresses of modern life. The other is the story of the American Dream and how it threatens to undermine us, told through a series of vaudeville acts that serve as socio-political commentary.

As I approach the piece now, I feel more drawn than ever to the Coopers’ story. I don’t see them as just symbolic figures; they are flesh and blood people living in the present day. Weill and Lerner challenge us to see both *life* and *love* as full of nuance; living and loving both require work. How have you changed your thinking, Rob? What do you admire about the score?

RB: In writing a “vaudeville,” Weill drew on so many American idioms: a soft-shoe, a blues, a Tin Pan Alley number, a hoedown, a torch song, and so on. Yet none of it feels generic or pastiche. Things don’t go where you think they are going and there are musical surprises at every turn. My favorite pieces to dig into with a performer are monologues which constantly shift in feeling; in *Love Life*, the alternately heartbreaking and triumphant “This is the Life” is a real tour de force.



The score contains heartfelt sentiment, savvy showmanship, and biting satire. It’s easy to see how it influenced theater artists such as Kander and Ebb or Hal Prince. It’s smart, has a strong point of view, and makes the most of that quintessential American invention, “show-biz.” What speaks to you about the book?

VC: This piece is deeply insightful about marriage, family, our country, and the skill it takes to communicate. *Love Life* exposes in both serious and comic ways how Americans are lured by the shinier thing, and how our own greed and egos take us farther and farther away from the

simple act of listening to one another and tending our relationships. This production gives us an opportunity to explore what it means to be an American, from the vantage of our own diverse backgrounds and stories. How big are our hearts and minds? Big enough to hold all our diversity—race, ideology, culture, class, history? As Americans, how do we weather change, as we are buffeted by social, economic, cultural, environmental, political, technological, and human influences? Like Sam and Susan, can we find a way to talk to each other?

RB: The original creative journey of the show took many twists and turns, with many rewrites between out-of-town tryouts and Broadway. What do you think they were struggling with? I think some of your ideas about the piece are picking up where they left off.

VC: Weill, Lerner, Elia Kazan (director), and Michael Kidd (choreographer) were so ambitious and brave in their construction and interpretation, always testing ideas and changes. They wound up cutting the most heartbreaking scenes and songs about the

marriage; we are restoring them. I believe modern audiences can appreciate that complexity, and those moments are integral to the story.

RB: One adjustment you have made is enlarging the roles of the two Cooper children. What effect will that have?

VC: As we planned in 2020, the Cooper children, Elizabeth and Johnny, will guide the storytelling. They have the most at stake in looking at their parents’ shared history. We are hoping this point of view will provide some structural glue and emotional underpinning. They provide emotional ballast for the comic and absurd moments.

RB: The theme of illusion vs. reality runs through the piece. What do you think Lerner and Weill were getting at with “For that land is a sandy illusion?” in “Here I’ll Stay”?

VC: Perhaps it’s a reminder that the American Dream as we imagine it is really unattainable. Our pre-sculpted ideals about “love” and “life” prevent us from seeing who and what are standing right in front of us, in this present moment.

RB: How about our cast? Nicholas Christopher is our new Sam, and Kate Baldwin returns as Susan.

VC: Nicholas is an incredibly charismatic actor on the brink of major stardom who embodies Sam’s restlessness and drive and takes a nuanced approach to the role. Kate is our modern-day Nanette Fabray, with all her wit, heart, and tremendous skill as a singer and actor. They are the quintessential Sam and Susan.

RB: *Love Life* isn’t a classic or a warhorse; it’s an adventurous, bold experiment of a show. Our challenge is to make the best case for the show today, not as a curiosity or museum piece. I hope more productions will result.

Tracy Christensen, costume designer:

The costume vocabulary will not be literal, but will offer just enough information for the audience to understand the characters and their journey through time. Through color, line and detail, the design will mark historical periods, distinguish between vaudeville and family scenes, and express things about individual characters elegantly and simply with the smallest of gestures.

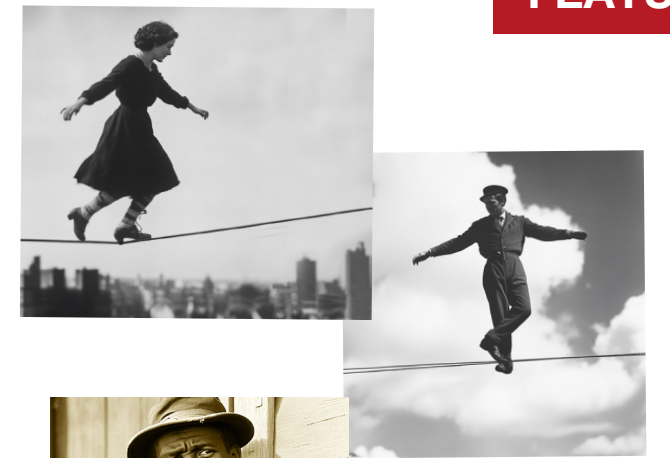
Ryan Howell, set designer:

I was initially intrigued by *Love Life* as the first concept musical, which later musicals drew on almost as a blueprint. I’ve had time away from the piece and see it through a new, family-focused lens; that allows me to be more playful and imaginative, qualities we’re emphasizing through Johnny and Elizabeth. I’ve been inspired by old photos from the vaudeville circuit. When you juxtapose those photos with modern art, it resonates with the timeless story of *Love Life*.

JoAnn M. Hunter, choreographer:

The things that appeal to me are the detailed picture of a single relationship over time, and the vaudeville-woven themes—satirical, reflective, or parallel. They allow for freedom in movement. I looked at photos (not videos) of people from different eras and let their postures influence the movements I create. My style must serve the show; it must change as I work.

FACING PAGE TOP PHOTO: VICTORIA HELY-HUTCHINSON
OPPOSITE: (STANDING) RYAN HOWELL, SARA BRIANS, BRANDON BIEBER
(SEATED) TRACY CHRISTENSEN, VICTORIA CLARK, JOANN M. HUNTER,
(LAPTOP) ROB BERMAN “ZOOMING” IN



ARTIST AND FELLOWS NAMED

The Foundation will support a Kurt Weill/Lotte Lenya Artist, a Julius Rudel/Kurt Weill Conducting Fellow, and two Harold Prince/Kurt Weill Directing Fellows for the two productions of *Love Life*:

2012 Lenya prizewinner Justin Hopkins (Weill/Lenya Artist, Opera North) plays the Hobo; Ed Liebrecht (Rudel Conducting Fellow, Opera North) assists James Holmes; Emma Cavage (Prince Directing Fellow, Encores!) serves as assistant director to Victoria Clark; and Noam Shapiro (Prince Directing Fellow) is the Dramaturg for the Encores! production.



2 Major Awards For *Love Life*

One of the most prestigious prizes granted by the American Musicological Society each year is the Claude V. Palisca Award, which honors outstanding scholarly editions or translations. The 2024 Award goes to Joel Galand, editor of *Love Life* for the Kurt Weill Edition—a fitting reward for his prodigious achievement, after a decade of painstaking work locating, compiling, and interpreting a vast range of source material to create a critical edition also designed for performance. The edition will soon be featured in new staged concert productions at Opera North and Encores! (see pp. 9–13). While the score and script, complete in two volumes (1,015 pages), form the centerpiece of the Edition, the voluminous Critical Report (234 pages) that accompanies it tells the tale of Galand's herculean work. Professor of music theory and director of graduate studies in the School of Music at Florida International University, Galand has set new standards and blazed new trails in the rapidly expanding field of editing Broadway musicals.

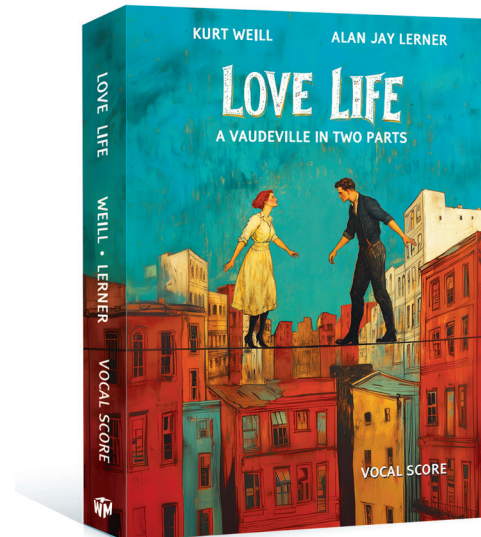
Love Life is the second KWE volume to receive the Palisca Award, the first being Tim Carter's edition of *Johnny Johnson* (2012). The Music Publishers Association of the United States has also singled *Love Life* out for its Paul Revere Award for Graphic Excellence, given annually to newly published scores in various categories. That honor marks the eighth Paul Revere Award for a KWE volume—a remarkable total considering only thirteen have been published to date.

Kurt Weill Edition Publishes *Der Silbersee*

Perhaps no other work better incarnates the fall of a nation than Weill and Georg Kaiser's *Der Silbersee*, composed during—and commenting on—a time of extreme economic despair and political volatility. The date of the triple premiere (18 February 1933) was set before it became clear that the Weimar Republic would be dead by then and Adolf Hitler in power.

Preparing performance materials was a rush job nonetheless. Although Weill had repeatedly asked to proofread both vocal score and full score, he was given no opportunity to do so. Thus the number of errors and discrepancies between vocal score and conductor's score ran into triple digits. After all three productions had closed under duress—the last performance occurred on 2 March 1933, the composer's thirty-third birthday—neither Weill nor Kaiser ever had a chance to revisit, correct, or revise their work, and the rental materials made available after World War II perpetuated the old mistakes.

The latest volume of the Kurt Weill Edition finally presents a corrected version and publishes Weill's full score beautifully engraved for the first time. Elmar Juchem's introductory



Vocal Score Going To Press

Although eight songs from *Love Life* appeared as sheet music for voice and piano during its original Broadway run, no complete vocal score has ever been published. That 75-year drought will end early in 2025. John Baxindine has prepared a piano reduction of Weill's entire orchestral score, as presented in Joel Galand's critical edition, including numbers cut from the original production. The nearly 400-page score will finally make the music of *Love Life* accessible to the global community interested in performing, producing, or studying one of the key works of the American musical theater. *Love Life* will be the first publication of Kurt Weill Music. In North America the vocal score will be distributed by Hal Leonard, the largest print music publisher in the world. Schott Music will make it available in Europe and other territories. The vocal score will also be included in rental packages, along with orchestral parts and the full score, from licensing agents: Musik und Bühne (Wiesbaden) in German-speaking territories and EAMDC (New York) for the rest of the world.

essay offers a riveting account of the trying circumstances of *Der Silbersee's* genesis and premiere as well as an inspiring reception history. Rental materials matching the critical edition have been created and successfully tested in four productions (Antwerp/Ghent, Weimar, Mannheim, and Nancy). The materials are now available for licensing through EAMDC (eamdc.com). A new vocal score corresponding to the Edition is forthcoming from Kurt Weill Music (kurtweillmusic.com).

Kurt Weill Edition, Series I, Volume 9: *Der Silbersee: Ein Wintermärchen* by Georg Kaiser. Music by Kurt Weill. Edited by Elmar Juchem (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, 2024). ISBN 979-8-9902336-0-7. Full score and libretto: 428 p.; Critical report: 57 p.

TOP LEFT: AMERICAN MUSICOLOGICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT GEORGIA COWART CONGRATULATES JOEL GALAND ON RECEIVING THE CLAUDE V. PALISCA AWARD
TOP CENTER: JOEL GALAND
PHOTOS: STEPHEN HINTON



Stratas Earns Hall Of Fame Honor

The great opera singer Teresa Stratas is in the news again, as Opera America has announced that she along with six others will be inducted into the Opera Hall of Fame at a gala dinner on 7 March 2025. The Hall “recognizes the achievements of outstanding living American artists, administrators, and advocates who have strengthened the art form and the field.” Stratas's insistence on dramatic authenticity—not merely singing a role but acting it as well—has undoubtedly revolutionized opera performance. Her advocacy of Weill as performer, eleven-time Lenya Competition judge, and Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award winner needs no elaboration for readers of the *Newsletter*. Congratulations to Ms. Stratas on another richly deserved honor!



Connick Sings Weill At Hollywood Bowl

The multi-talented Harry Connick Jr. headlined this year's Fourth of July celebrations at the Hollywood Bowl, taking the stage for the entire second half of a program dubbed “American Treasures,” backed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Thomas Wilkins. His hour-long set list of standards and original songs included two by Weill, “September Song” and “Lost in the Stars.” For the first, he inserted a virtuosic piano break in the midst of a heartfelt rendition of Maxwell Anderson's lyrics; later he introduced “Lost in the Stars” as “a beautiful Kurt Weill song that is absolutely perfect for tonight.” Complete video available on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=msJD1LEtr2s

Prize-Winning Film Inspired By Threepenny

One of this year's biggest stories in film, Jacques Audiard's *Emilia Pérez* took a Jury Prize at Cannes and created further waves by drawing the Best Actress Award at the French festival, split among the four performers who make up the heart of the cast: Karla Sofía Gascón, Zoe Saldaña, Selena Gomez, and Adriana Paz. The director has revealed that the musical crime drama was inspired by *Die Dreigroschenoper*. He conceived the story first as an opera, with music influenced by Weill, before pursuing a screen version. The Oscar-nominated film began streaming on Netflix on 13 November.

Blitzstein Score Newly Available

Marc Blitzstein's next stage work after *The Cradle Will Rock*, the rarely revived *No for an Answer*, just got much easier to perform. Following a successful production at London's Arcola Theatre last year, the piano score—the show was never orchestrated—has been newly engraved, replacing the old performance material, a multi-generation photocopy of Blitzstein's manuscript. The new score should encourage productions of Blitzstein's tale of resort workers betrayed by their bosses, which boasts such songs as “Purest Kind of a Guy,” “Penny Candy,” “Francie,” and the title number. Contact the Foundation (kwfinfo@kwf.org) about licensing.

Dubois Records Seven Weill Songs

Prolific French tenor Cyrille Dubois, whose recording of Fauré's complete songs won the *Gramophone* Song Award of 2023, is known for both opera and *Lieder*. His latest recording, *Broadway Rhapsody*, recently released on NoMad Music, surveys the music of Weill and George Gershwin, with seven Weill numbers; Dubois is accompanied by pianist Michaël Ertzscheid and the wind quintet Ensemble ArteCombo. The recording is related to a touring show in which Dubois took the lead role; it tells the story of a young French singer visiting a Broadway theater that he has inherited and finding himself immersed in the world of the American stage during the 1930s and 1940s.



CYRILLE DUBOIS AND MUSICIANS / NOMAD MUSIC

New Jazz Album Features Weill

In *The Guardian* (1 May 2021), Dave Gelly noted, “I can't think of another alto saxophonist with a sound quite like Sam Braysher's.” The award-winning British jazz musician, known for explorations of the Great American Songbook, has turned his attention to Weill in a new CD, *That's Him*. All tracks but one are Weill songs, including “Here I'll Stay” (*Love Life*)—“a really beautiful song,” according to Braysher—“Liebeslied” (*Dreigroschenoper*), “The Right Guy for Me” (*You and Me*), and “What Good Would the Moon Be?” (*Street Scene*), the last two with vocalist Sara Dowling.



Byström Lights Up Wigmore Hall

Swedish soprano Malin Byström, a mainstay at Covent Garden, Dutch National Opera, Vienna State Opera, and other leading houses, teamed with pianist Magnus Svensson for a recital at London's Wigmore Hall on 30 September. She closed her mostly French program with two of Weill's best-loved French songs, “Je ne t'aime pas” and “Youkali.” Reviewer Keith McDonnell commented, “Here, she shifted from classical precision to the more playful world-weariness of Weill's cabaret style. Byström's ability to switch so effortlessly between styles was impressive confirmation, if that were needed, of her versatility as a performer.”

“Speak Low” Speaks Volumes

Why is “Speak Low” such a popular album title? The latest recording from storied British jazz and blues singer Elaine Delmar, active in show business for seventy years, adopts Weill and Ogden Nash's title and naturally includes the song. A quick browse on Amazon pulls up at least 35 other examples, and that is by no means all of them. Whether the key quality is brevity, soulfulness, or Shakespearean pedigree, artists love to latch onto the name as well as the song. Welcome to the club, Ms. Delmar!



HK GRUBER AND KIRILL GERSTEIN
PHOTO: HILARY SCOTT

Chansonnier Extraordinaire

HK Gruber touched down in Tanglewood on 4 August with pianist Kirill Gerstein, a regular collaborator. The two offered an extensive program of songs by Weill and Hanns Eisler billed as an evening of cabaret music from 1920s Berlin. Many of Weill's songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Happy End* shone forth, but the program broadened out to include "Berlin im Licht," "Zu Potsdam unter den Eichen," "Muschel von Margate," and the Lottery Agent's Tango from *Der Silbersee*. Encores included the non-Weimar but German-themed "Song of the Rhineland" (lyrics by Ira Gershwin) from the film *Where Do We Go from Here?* (1945). Reviewer Steven Ledbetter praised the "tasty performances."



DANIELLE DE NIESE AS ANNA I AND II
PHOTO: ALEX MARKOW

Anna I-II Punch

Count Danielle de Niese as the latest in a long roster of sopranos who have taken up *Die sieben Todsünden*. After a concert performance in London and a staging in Bologna last spring, she portrayed Anna I and Anna II in a fully staged production by Miami's New World Symphony (19–20 October 2024). Directed by Bill Barclay and conducted by Artistic Director Stéphane Denève, the *Sins* formed the second half of a double bill, complementing Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, directed by Yuval Sharon and Alexander Gedeon. Reviewer Sebastian Spreng marveled, "De Niese excelled, mastering every vocal and scenic challenge." De Niese gave yet another concert rendition of the *Sins* in Copenhagen in November—that's performances on four different stages in 2024!



Another Hybrid Genre for Weill

A new graphic novel, *Le feu et la glace* (Fire and Ice), the collaboration of prolific author Jean-Luc Cornette and illustrator Jürg, gives starring roles to Weill, Ira Gershwin, Marlene Dietrich, and related historical figures in a story of a fictional film by G.W. Pabst, shot on shipboard in 1929 as the first sound film made by a European director. Weill not only composes the music for the film, he acts in it, diving overboard and losing his pants and jacket at one point.

Weill's music has appeared in earlier graphic novels. Pascal Blanchet's *Baloney: A Tale in 3 Symphonic Acts*, published originally in French, includes detailed scene-by-scene playlists accompanying the story, mostly of movements from orchestral scores. While the bulk of the selections come from works by Prokofiev and Shostakovich, the first movement of Weill's *Fantaisie symphonique* (Symphony no. 2) is indicated during a crucial scene in Act III.

Perhaps the first allusion to Weill in a graphic novel goes back to a monument of the genre, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*, which depicts a young character reading "Tales of a Black Freighter," an old comic book whose title is derived from "Pirate Jenny" in *The Threepenny Opera*. The feature film based on *Watchmen*, released in 2009, includes the song in its soundtrack. A self-described Brecht fan, Moore revisited *Threepenny* in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* with repeated references to and paraphrases of "Pirate Jenny" and other songs. Such is the profound relevance of Weill's work to the twentieth century that it lives on in several different guises in one of the pre-eminent genres of the twenty-first.

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* 1–12 (issued as a single volume). DC Comics, 2005.

Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Century* (vol. 1-3). Top Shelf Comics, 2012.

Pascal Blanchet, *Baloney: A Tale in 3 Symphonic Acts*. Drawn & Quarterly, 2008.

Jean-Luc Cornette et Jürg, *Le feu et la glace*. Futuropolis, 2024.



FROM LEFT: ROB MCGINNESS,
DANIEL FLEMING, DANIEL SMITH,
JACOB HEACOCK
IN *THE CRADLE WILL ROCK*
PHOTO: BAYOU ELOM

Blitzing the Nation's Capital

The IN Series, the opera company known for "thought, debate, history, and innovation," produced Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* in October 2024 with performances in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Director Shanara Gabrielle described it as "braver than most of the theater we experience today," adding "Though it hits hard, it doesn't alienate people." In a contemporary twist that harmonizes with Blitzstein's left-wing politics, the casting entailed unexpected gender roles: Harriet (originally Harry) Druggist was portrayed by soprano Teresa Ferrara, and transfemme baritone Rob McGinness played Mr. Mister. Reviewer Michael Andor Brodeur of the *Washington Post* gave the staging high marks: "the production keeps intact the wit, urgency, and pugnacious spirit that brought it into being, and affectionately showcases the gifts of an unfairly unsung composer."

Another Blitzstein Find

Marc Blitzstein's large catalogue of works includes several that have never been published or performed, particularly from his early career, including the one-act opera *Parabola and Circula* (1929). The libretto by surrealist poet George Whitsett concerns a number of geometric figures who undermine the love of the title characters, leading ultimately to the death of Circula. Blitzstein was unable to arrange a performance and the work lay forgotten among his papers. The Bauhaus Foundation in Berlin got wind of it and has scheduled a world premiere for September 2025 with the Norrköping Orchestra under the direction of Karl Heinz Steffens. Boosey & Hawkes will generate performing materials and subsequently publish the opera. Berliners already had a taste of *Parabola and Circula* on 17 October, when Noam Heinz and Alma Sadé sang excerpts with piano as part of the Bauhaus 2024 Music festival.

Quais Staged

An adventurous triple bill in November 2024 at London's Royal College of Music presented a pre-Christmas gift to audiences: the staged premiere of *Chansons des quais* (Songs of the Waterfront), a cycle of songs and instrumental numbers from Weill's score for *Marie galante* (1934). The cycle was paired with Britten's *Les illuminations* to open the evening; Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* completed the program. Britten and Weill were linked by a staging device in which the French cabaret artist Mistinguett enacted the solo role in both; in *Chansons des quais* she recalled her glory days as a singer. The performances earned glowing reviews; critic Robert Hugill noted that conductor Michael Rosewell and the orchestra "did Weill proud."



HK GRUBER AND WALLIS GIUNTA
TAKE A BOW AT CARNEGIE HALL
PHOTO: STEPHANIE BERGER

Seven Sins, Fifteen Players, One Recording

The remarkably successful fifteen-player version of *Die sieben Todsünden*, prepared by Christian Muthspiel and HK Gruber, has seen roughly twenty performances since its premiere at the Beethovenfest Bonn in September 2019—at the likes of Carnegie Hall, Royal Opera House, Staatsoper Hamburg, and Opera North. Originally intended as a means to make the work available to smaller venues, the fifteen-player version was a godsend during the pandemic, when theaters scrambled to reduce ensemble sizes. What it doesn't have is a recording, but that changes on 6 January 2025 (see p. 8).

In Memoriam

Barrie Gavin (1935–2024)

The British filmmaker had two significant brushes with Weill, the first in 1977 as director of a German documentary film, *Die Moritat vom unbekanntem Weill*. (The script was co-written by Alexander Goehr, who also passed away this year.) Within a decade, he made an English version for the BBC, *The Ballad of the Unknown Composer*. Only a few years later, Gavin turned his attention to Weill's U.S. years when he directed *I'm a Stranger Here Myself: Kurt Weill in America*, co-written with Kim H. Kowalke. Both films featured interviews and performances and rank among the most distinguished Weill documentaries ever made. Gavin's later work on a seven-part series on BBC Channel 4, *Leaving Home* (1996), a collaboration with Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Symphony, nodded to Weill again in part 5, "The American Way," which features "Lonely House" from *Street Scene* sung by Anthony Rolfe Johnson.

Caterina Valente (1931–2024)

One of Europe's leading young pop stars in the early 1950s, Valente was among the first to record "Die Moritat von Mackie Messer" (Mack the Knife) after World War II, around the same time Louis Armstrong inaugurated it as a jazz standard in the U.S. Decades later, in 1990, she assumed the pioneer's mantle again. At a time when few European singers paid any attention to Weill's American songbook, she offered two all-Weill recitals consisting entirely of his American songs during the epoch-making Kurt Weill Festival in Düsseldorf, working with Roger Kellaway and the WDR Big Band. The second concert, in Cologne, was recorded live and later released on the Bear Family label. At crucial moments, Valente stepped forward to champion Weill's songs in Europe.

STREET SCENE

A Mountain Town Revives Weill's Urban Classic



Finding success has been a constant gamble for Central City Opera since its founding, 92 summers ago in the sleepy gold-mining town 38 miles from Denver. Mindful of Oscar Hammerstein's warning—"Opera was a way people lost money"—the company has always relied on familiar hits to spur attendance. So here's a surprise: Kurt Weill's little-known *Street Scene* packed them in for its six performances.

Yes, *Street Scene* was a financial success. But it was more than that. The brilliant production, seen 30 July, showed everyone that Kurt Weill, Elmer Rice, and Langston Hughes created a work of timeless, authentic Americana—one that lives and breathes with freshness and engrossing realism rarely seen on the musical stage. Here was a powerful message to other opera companies to consider revisiting a true national classic. All that's needed is a strong cast, a first-class orchestra, a talented production team—and commitment.

Veteran Central City Opera-goers, such as yours truly, had little trouble recognizing David Harwell's perfect re-creation of a 1940s New York tenement brought back from the company's memorable 1999 staging. His set is so vivid that one instantly felt part of the neighborhood. And thanks to Abigail Hoke-Brady's lighting and Barbara Erin Delo's faithful period costumes, the feel of a typical sweltering New York summer engulfed the crowd. There were no weaknesses anywhere in this revival.

The program named Daniel Pelzig as director/choreographer, as he has often been listed in past Central City productions. *Street Scene* does contain a delightful dance number, "Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed," jitterbugged here with abandon by Lauren Gemilli and Jeffrey Scott Parsons. Beyond that, Pelzig had to work with a cast of 32, plus extras drawn from Central City Opera's apprentice training program and the Colorado Children's Chorale. All those characters navigating a very small stage needed a choreographer more than a director. Pelzig was up to the task.

As he nimbly guided the action, he encouraged each character, no matter how important or unimportant, to show subtle details of their personality. The naturalness of cast members brought an easy, engaging flow to this heterogeneous group of New Yorkers living humdrum lives. Pacing was crucial here, and Pelzig understood the danger of inertia taking over. Naturally, the build-up of tension in Act II leading to murder made critical demands of another sort—and once again, Pelzig was in charge. When Frank (Kevin Burdette) burst on the scene, tragedy struck within seconds. The shock waves were felt everywhere in the house.

There were too many cast members to single out each one. The center of this tragedy is Anna Murrant, here sung and acted with admirable emotional range and an elegantly focused soprano by Katherine Pracht. It would have been easy for her to descend into clichéd self-pity, but she kept her character development under control. Pracht delivered "Somehow I Never Could Believe" with subtlety and beautiful phrasing. Christian Sanders's introspective "Lonely House" likewise hit home. His clear enunciation and warm tenor proved a perfect match for this universal song of loneliness. Other highlights included Burdette's on-point singing of "Let Things Be Like They Always Was" (so timely it's frightening!) and Christie Conover drawing every drop of wistfulness out of Rose's ballad "What Good Would the Moon Be?"

There were fun-filled moments as well. The amusing "Ice Cream Sextet" proved a delight. And those talented young people from the Colorado Children's Chorale sang and scampered about with high energy, making the most of their occasional solos. The one drawback was COVID masks for those not singing solos; it was disappointing to see masked children running around in 1940s New York. The rest of the supporting cast sang and acted with a sense of joy, suggesting close connections to each other and the director.

In the pit, conductor Adam Turner and a superb orchestra added immeasurably to the high spirits of the performance, inspiring the cast—and the audience—to embrace the magical world created by Kurt Weill and his brilliant collaborators.

Marc Shulgold
Denver



TOP LEFT: MRS. MAURRANT (KATHERINE PRACHT) DANCES WITH LIPPO FIORENTINO (BRIAN DOWNEN)
BOTTOM RIGHT: DICK MCGANN (JEFFREY SCOTT PARSONS) AND MAE JONES (LAUREN GEMELLI) IN "MOON-FACED, STARRY-EYED" PHOTOS: AMANDA TIPTON PHOTOGRAPHY

MAHAGONNY

Critics split over Stuttgart's feminist staging



ONSTAGE ORCHESTRA BEHIND FATTY (ELMAR GILBERTSSON)



BILL (BJÖRN BÜRGER)



JENNY (IDA RÄNZLÖV) WITH BEGBICK (ALISA KOLOSOVA)



JIM MAHONEY (KAI KLUGE) IN FOREGROUND

PHOTOS: MARTIN SIGMUND

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny
Staatsoper Stuttgart (May–June 2024)
Director: Ulrike Schwab
Conductor: Cornelius Meister

Bernd Künzig, swr.de

"In Stuttgart the premises of the opera are turned decisively on their heads. The women are pulling the strings and the men get what is coming to them. It is very exciting and stimulating to see the opera reimagined and rethought in this way."

Dominique Adrian, resmusica.com

"We can only applaud Schwab for taking a feminist view, but we can only fault her for transforming the work into empty, mainstream entertainment ..."

Peter Jungblut, br-klassik.de

"Alisa Kolosova plays a relatively good-humored Begbick, the madam and boss of the criminals. As her love-servant Jenny, Ida Ränzlov is self-confident, seductive, and knows every trick. Kai Kluge (Jim Mahoney) comes across as a touch too poetic and melancholy for this crazy daredevil."

Alexander Walther, theaterkompass.de

"The 'fourth wall' is broken by means of a catwalk running into the auditorium; parts of the action take place in the boxes and the mezzanine."

Udo Klebes, onlinemerker.com

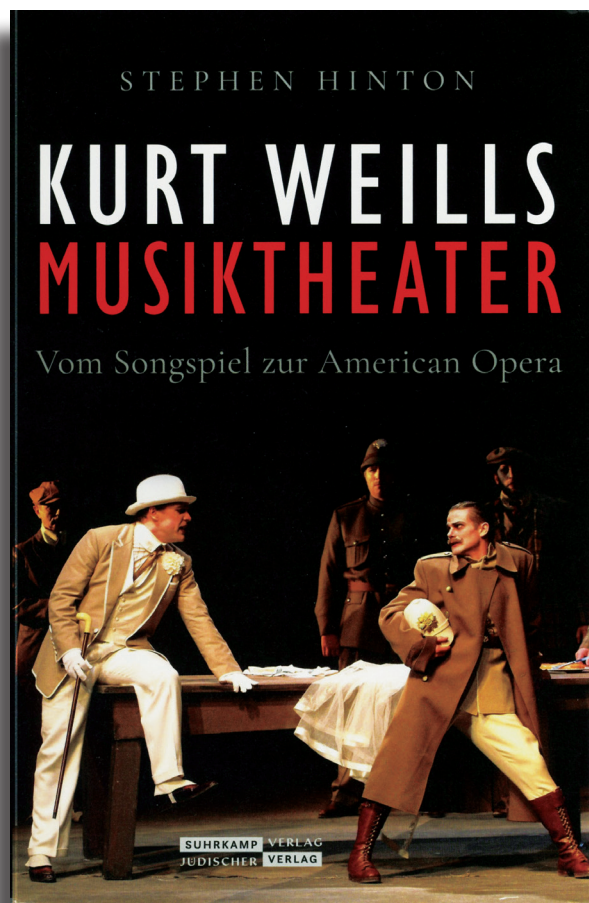
"A reproduction of Michelangelo's Last Judgment covers the entire stage floor, and the wall behind the raised, terrace-like platform where the orchestra sits. The figures in Michelangelo's taboo-breaking, colossal painting are echoed in the ... varied, colorful costumes. That creates the impression that the figures have come to life onstage."

Yehya Alazem, interclassical.com

"Schwab's production is certainly creative, allowing the characters the freedom to blossom ... Visually, however, it is extremely overloaded; there are so many elements, so many colors, and so much that the team wants to show and tell that it somehow feels rather pointless, and there is no clear common line from beginning to end."

THE MANY STAGES OF KURT WEILL:

Stephen Hinton’s groundbreaking 830-page study reveals the unified vision behind the composer’s theatrical works



**Opernwelt magazine’s
Book of the Month
November 2024**

Stephen Hinton, *Kurt Weills Musiktheater vom Songspiel zur American Opera*, translated by Veit Friemert (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 2023).

The German edition of Professor Hinton’s *Weill’s Musical Theater: Stages of Reform* (U. Cal. Press, 2012) is not simply a translation but revised and expanded from the original. It has attracted substantial notice in the German press; we present brief selections from the most significant reviews.

Jürgen Otten, Opernwelt

“For many people Weill is a composer with two identities that can hardly be reconciled: here the creator of *Dreigroschenoper* and *Mahagonny*; over there the ‘American’ Weill, whose powers of innovation declined on Broadway and never recovered their former ‘greatness.’ ... In his essential and exceptionally enlightening study of Weill’s musical theater, Hinton proceeds to close up this breach introduced only after Weill’s death and, above all, refute these received prejudices through argumentation.”

Roland Dippel, Das Orchester

“Finally! a panoramic view of one of the most important twentieth-century composers of musical theater.”

Jakob Hayner, Literarische Welt

“In his sumptuous 830-page biography of Weill’s works, by far the most substantial book of its kind, Stanford Professor Stephen Hinton looks into the ways Weill’s style evolved into a popular strain of modernism.”

Volker Blech, Berliner Morgenpost

“Hinton investigates the entirety of Weill’s [theatrical] output with an eye to Weill’s pleasure in experimentation, both in terms of genre and style, and aims to establish continuities from the earliest through the latest works.”

Nils Grosch, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

“One of the book’s remarkable qualities is the depth and strength of research that it rests on. ... In addition, he has reviewed thoroughly the state of international Weill research, allowing him to make it available to readers who wish to explore further both English and German contributions to the field. It is particularly notable that for all the scholarly precision and carefully chosen language, the book remains an enjoyable read. The explanations are lucid, never getting lost in high-flown language or analytical detail—though the author engages in musical analysis throughout and argues from specific musical examples.”

MALLWITZ MASTERS WEILL: A TRIUMPHANT DEBUT

Critics worldwide hail conductor Joana Mallwitz’s groundbreaking first recording with Berlin’s Konzerthausorchester



**Gramophone
Recording of the Month
September 2024**

**BR-Klassik [Bayerischer Rundfunk]
Album of the Week
4–10 August 2024**

**Limelight magazine
recording of the month
November 2024**

The Kurt Weill Album (Deutsche Grammophon 486 5670)
Symphonie in einem Satz, Fantaisie symphonique, Die sieben Todsünden
Konzerthausorchester Berlin; Joana Mallwitz, conductor
Vocalists: Katharine Mehrling, Simon Bode, Michael Nagl, Michael Porter, Oliver Zwarg

Joshua Barone, The New York Times

“Mallwitz is the real deal: She leads the Konzerthausorchester Berlin here with teeming vitality and brilliantly rendered detail.”

David Gutman, Gramophone

“This Weill collection, polished but never slick, merits the very strongest recommendation.”

Andrew Clements, The Guardian

“The symphonies are muscular and intense, the theatre piece pungent and sardonic; it’s an impressive debut disc.”

David McConnell, Classic Review

“The *Symphonie in einem Satz* is thorny, densely contrapuntal music ... the playing inhabits every stylistic idea Weill stuffed into the score: gently Romantic moments (admittedly rare), answered by white-heat Expressionism, followed by stern neo-Classical passages. Each has suitable coloration, weight, and emotional effect.”

David Gutman, Gramophone

“Mallwitz is ... brisk but never capricious [in the *Fantaisie symphonique*], trumping all comers with a sense of symphonic momentum that does not preclude heartfelt lyricism. The more colourful *batterie* [percussion added by Weill before the world premiere] sets her apart.”

Britt van Klaveren, Het parool

As both Annas, Katharine Mehrling is the star of the show. Her multifaceted voice and acting skills are so penetrating that it feels like a live recording.

Jean-Charles Hoffélé, artalinna.com

Mallwitz couples Mehrling’s wounded voice with a poisonous sound from the orchestra, which is entwined so tightly with the singer that I am already dreaming of an album that gathers a bouquet of Weill’s American songs.

Ingober Waltenberger, onlinemerker.com

Magnificent interpretation, splendid sound engineering, and at a generous 82 minutes, you get more than your money’s worth. This album gets a perfect score!

UP CLOSE WITH Ana!



Ana Karneža, First Prize winner of the 2024 Lenya Competition, stopped by the Kurt Weill Foundation for a chat with Brady Sansone and Kim Kowalke

KK: Welcome, Ana! Great to see you again and have a chance to learn more about your story.

AK: Thank you. It's great to see you both again.

KK: So, tell us about your childhood in Slovenia.

AK: I grew up in a tiny village, Ptujška Gora, with maybe 300 people. I've been singing since I was very young. I'd stand on a table and sing for my family. Eventually my parents got me into singing lessons. The nearby town, maybe triple the size of mine, somehow managed to put together a whole tambura orchestra [Eastern European folk stringed instruments]. When I was ten years old, I got roped into performing with them. I had a good sense of pitch and already enjoyed going on a journey with a song.

KK: How did you end up on "Slovenia's Got Talent"?

AK: When I was 16, I auditioned for the TV show. I sang different songs in each round. I started with a Slovenian song that everybody knows, did "Over the Rainbow" for the semifinals, and then "On My Own" from *Les Mis* for the finals. I came in second. The winner got 50,000 euros. As runner-up I got nothing—well, maybe a little recognition. A few years later I entered another national singing competition and performed on television with a full symphony orchestra. Once again, I came in second.

My singing competition experience was very strange, because they shape your story according to what works best for their audience. They really focused on my disability. If I was doing well, it was because of that. If I wasn't, it was also because of that. They even asked me, "How come you are able to sing?" I didn't like that.

My family and friends joked about me always coming in second. Until the Lenya Competition. Thank you for breaking the curse! My prize was picked up by mainstream national news in Slovenia. I gave a lot of interviews, about the Competition and graduating from Juilliard at the same time.

BS: What led you to Juilliard?

AK: If you had told me ten years ago that I would be going to Juilliard, it wouldn't have been a possibility, not even a dream. I left Slovenia when I was 19 to attend NYU Abu Dhabi and decided to study computer science. I guess I was thinking that this whole performance thing wasn't going to work out. You

know, nice while it lasted, but let's get real. I'd gotten a full ride for NYU, which is one of the most international universities in the world. There were four bedrooms on my floor in the dorm, and each person came from a different continent! That experience really changed me.

BS: But Abu Dhabi is still a long way from Juilliard!

AK: Before my sophomore year I attended an NYU summer program in New York. I enjoyed the pace of it and being able to get around in the city rather easily. I really felt like I fit in. My roommate in the program was an actor, and I helped her practice monologues. She said "Are you sure you're cut out to be a computer scientist? You're actually pretty good at acting!" Two years later she ended up going to Juilliard. And two years after that, I auditioned for Yale, UCSD, Guildhall, and Juilliard. The Juilliard one lasted a full day, with the final callback in front of the whole faculty. I was admitted to three of them, but Juilliard was my first choice, and so in 2020 I became one of eighteen students entering Group 53 here in New York. My favorite roles turned out to be very different: Azdak in *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Anya in *The Cherry Orchard*. I graduated with an MFA last May, and was fortunate to land both an agent and manager.

KK: You have a German debut coming up, right?

AK: Believe it or not, a solo recital at the Kurt Weill Fest Dessau on Weill's 125th birthday on March 2nd! I'm calling it "Women in Cabaret, Chanson, and Jazz." There will maybe be some Piaf, and certainly some Weill.

BS: And what is your dream for the future?

AK: To work in different media, especially when there might be musical opportunities. I hope to make art that can change things. About how we view and treat each other. And expand the possibilities for a person with a disability to play a wide range of characters. I want to see a world where that wouldn't even be a question any more.

BOTH: Hear, hear!

Catch Ana's Finals performance online by searching for **2024 LENYA COMPETITION FINALS** on youtube.com

ABOVE: ANA KARNEŽA AT THE WEILL-LENYA RESEARCH CENTER PHOTO: MIKE GERARD

WEILL AT 125



WEILL'S BROADWAY CAREER

When Weill arrived in New York in September 1935, he was planning a short stay to supervise Max Reinhardt's production of *The Eternal Road* at the Manhattan Opera House. His first experience of a Broadway musical was the dress rehearsal of *Porgy and Bess*. Repeated postponements of the Reinhardt project allowed him to collaborate with Paul Green and the Group Theatre on *Johnny Johnson*, which opened in November 1936. Although it ran only 68 performances, for two weeks in January 1937, Weill had two shows running in New York. He was hooked on writing for the American stage.

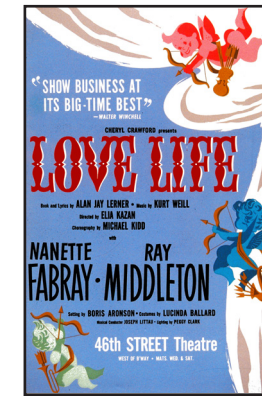
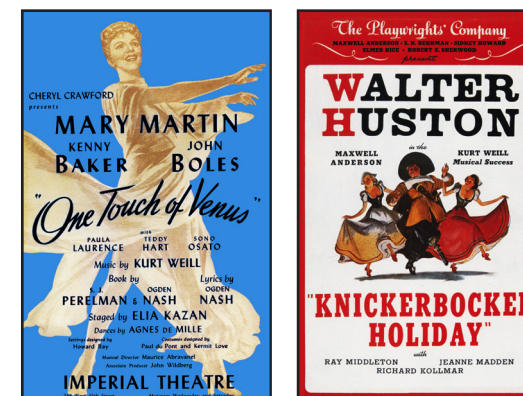
In less than fifteen years he managed to compose seven more groundbreaking and genre-bending works for Broadway. Not all were box-office successes, but at the time of his premature death in 1950 the émigré composer had established himself as the foremost innovator of the American musical, winning the very first Tony Award for outstanding score for *Street Scene* in 1947. Weill had singularly attained stature as "the leading opera composer of his generation in Germany" in his twenties and early thirties and the "most original voice on Broadway" in his forties.

Weill himself was very proud of his Broadway endeavors. He and Lenya hung framed original window cards for each of his shows (seen here to the left) on the wall ascending the steep staircase from the second floor of Brook House to his studio on the third. The cards now share a wall in the hallway leading to the reading room of the Weill-Lenya Research Center—a colorful reminder to any visitor of Weill's extraordinary path along the Great White Way.

It is fitting, then, that during the week leading up to the 75th anniversary of his death on 3 April 2025, he'll be represented on three stages in New York City simultaneously—by his most experimental and influential German and Broadway shows, as well as his biggest hit song, sung in both German and English. (See the back cover for details.)

Kim H. Kowalke

ORIGINAL WINDOW CARDS: LADY IN THE DARK (1941), LOST IN THE STARS (1949), ONE TOUCH OF VENUS (1943), KNICKERBOCKER HOLIDAY (1938), MUCH ADO ABOUT LOVE [THE FIREBRAND OF FLORENCE] (1945), STREET SCENE (1947), LOVE LIFE (1948)



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